

## Most grown-ups don't need guns

I was going to express some mild outrage this week, about someone who rubbished water divining. Given what's happened, that seems ridiculously trivial.

I'm still in two minds about adding to the tsunami of opinion expressed about Christchurch. Like many, I suspect, I've retreated into some form of shocked thoughtfulness, an odd state in which I can't bring myself to think of anything inconsequential. I can't even play Scrabble on the iPad.

It was strange attending WOMAD on the Saturday after the Friday shootings. Having spent a lifetime reporting the worst sides of people, I couldn't help looking up at the trees behind the main stage, half expecting the glint of sunlight off a gun barrel. When a drone hovered, I wondered about being targeted.

Given sports matches and mosques were shut down everywhere, I wondered briefly why WOMAD continued. The answer was obvious. WOMAD is a celebration of "other" cultures, so continuing was the right message to send to neo-fascist elements who apparently cluster at gun clubs like the killer's Dunedin one.

The connections between this terrible event and social media are now a deep concern for us all. New Plymouth District Councillor Murray Chong was twice outed for Facebook posts with racist undertones prior to the last local body elections. He got in again, has since been outed again. Will sympathisers vote him in for a third term come October?

I loved guns once. As kids, we built wooden replicas for war games, and used shanghais then slug guns to despatch anything that flew. Dad got a .22 and we'd shoot possums out the window of the car on night drives through the Carrington Rd bush.

I was still keen on shooting until something unpleasant happened in my late teens. After my last year at school, I went up to the King Country to stay with a girlfriend on her parents' farm, and one day went out goat-shooting with her father.

It was slaughter. We dropped goats left, right and centre. Sitting targets. Lots of bleating. Kids, nannies, billies killed discriminately from close range, the speed of despatch slowed only by the need to reload.

I recall it to this day, the sudden realisation of senselessness. It made perfect sense to the farmer, of course, because to him goats were a pest. But to me, a townie, it was cruel.

That doesn't make me any kind of saint. I eat meat, been through freezing works, know how chickens are slaughtered to provide some of my evening meals. But it strikes me that once you've grown up, unless you're a farmer with rabbits and possums to keep down, there's little real need to own something that fires missiles.

Many males (and a few women) who regard shooting is a sport will recoil from that view. However, if it's the kind of sport involving the plugging of a bullseye on a card from a distance, then I have no problem with it. It's killing living things for sport that repels me.

The Prime Minister is commended for sticking to her promise.

Less than a week after the shootings, she announced new gun controls, including a ban on military style, semi-automatic guns and assault rifles (including those kinds used in the massacre) and on parts that can convert guns into semi-automatics, as well as high-capacity magazines.

Other measures will include action to prevent gun stockpiling, as well as a gun buyback scheme expected to cost up to \$200 million. These are similar moves to those brought in by Australia within 12 days of the 1996 Port Arthur mass killing which claimed 35.

No debate was needed. We're not America, whose gun lobby holds sway over politicians. Jacinda Ardern had a mandate from most of us to act immediately. New Zealand has been mucking around over gun regulation for decades and has current law you could drive a tank through.

There will be provision for my former girlfriend's father to go out and cull his goat pests, although for all I know his son or grandson has taken over the farm now and might even be farming them.

Fixing the gun laws is at least one good thing to come from a great tragedy. With hindsight's gunsight accuracy, we can some of us claim we knew it would happen one day...but prayed we were wrong.

My hope is the support New Zealand is currently showing for diversity doesn't over time chill back into the reverse.