

That Grain Of Sand

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The Newtown Bee

- **Editorial Ink Drops**

“It isn’t the mountains ahead that wears us out. It is the grain of sand in our shoes.” —Anonymous

In the wake of 12/14, Newtown embraced “We Choose Love.” We were a shining example of resiliency and hope. Or so we thought. As the months go by, we should be alert to the grains of sand that wear us out as we journey through our changed landscape. There are indications that some may be feeling the rub of those pebbles.

We struggle as a community to determine the best use of a 2014 gift of \$15 million from General Electric, intended to create a space that would draw all residents together. The space was to provide all of Newtown’s citizens with a communal aspect not currently available in the town. A year-and-a-half and one failed attempt to bring an idea to fruition later, there is no resolution on this issue. That this gift is not enough to create a gathering space for the general population, but must be enhanced to develop something so grand it will elicit a “Wow!” factor is an embarrassment to some residents. To hear that we consider so many millions to be insufficient must be mystifying to cities like Hartford and Bridgeport that could certainly make use of even half that amount. The problem may lie in seeking to find what we do not have while forgetting how very much we do have.

The Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission, charged by the town to determine the what and where of that memorial, has recently suggested that a portion of the High Meadow at Fairfield Hills is the appropriate place for this project. Concerns about the impact on flora and fauna there threaten to pit conservation-minded residents against the population eager to move forward with this memorial. Again, it is a project unresolved, and one that might stagger along for quite a while, if residents on differing sides dig in their heels.

Gun safety advocates and gun rights advocates confront each other on a main artery through Newtown, something that has become an annual event. Brandishing signs — but wisely, not weapons — it is a mainly civil confrontation. It does not, however, seem to move either side to a place where constructive conversation can take place. Meanwhile, sniping on social media platforms does not build a community of change, but rather a changed — and not always for the better — community.

Three years after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, local mental health agencies see a continually increasing number of people seeking care. A sense of discontent rumbles beneath the surface.

In a May 2014 interview with *The Newtown Bee*, trauma specialist Dr Kevin Becker, a Massachusetts psychologist, cautioned against “the disaster after the disaster,” when a traumatized community, rather than coming together, begins to fall apart. This is not an effect that is seen immediately following a tragedy such as that at Sandy Hook Elementary School, but one that claws its way to the light two, three, or five years later, from behind the initial feel-good cohesiveness.

Now, it would seem, is the time for Newtown to beware of the disaster after the disaster.

“It is vital not to lose sight of the sense of community, resources, and support available,” Dr Becker said. “If a ‘new normal’ includes factions that are detrimental, it is not good for recovering, in general.”

We need to listen closely and watch carefully to see that all of Newtown's needs are reasonably met. The march to common ground on many issues will occasionally require us to pause, knock the sand from our shoes, and from our hearts and minds, so we are not worn down before we reach this better place we all are seeking