

Tour shows prevalence of violence

Writer guides adults through 'culture' of kids

By THOMAS NORD
The Courier-Journal

The barrel of the machine gun felt natural in his hand. With chilling lack of remorse, he squeezed the trigger and sprayed. He sprayed uncon-

sciously, as if he were standing on his front lawn with a garden hose. If there was any trepidation, it quickly faded.

Almost as soon as it started, the killing was done. Jerry Bowles turned away. He was a little ashamed now.

"It's amazing how aggressive you feel," admitted Bowles, a Jefferson County Family Court judge. "Your adrenaline starts to pump."

For Bowles, the taste of blood only cost him a quarter,



Bowles

a novel field trip she believes will show parents, politicians

dropped in a video game aptly titled "Terminator 2."

His immersion into the world of hyperviolence was orchestrated by author Jan Arnow, part of

and educators the violent images kids are being bombarded with these days.

Arnow calls it a "tour of violence." Acting as guide, she wants to hit arcades where such games are played, toy stores where kids get their first taste of violent playthings and emergency rooms where the doctors patch up the wounded results of a violent life.

As if to drive the point home, Arnow conducted her first tour yesterday as reports

trickled in of another school shooting, this time in an Atlanta suburb, this time with six people wounded.

Before that happens here, Arnow wants to get as many people out of their comfort zones and into the places where she says kids are learning violence.

"Adults need to recognize the culture they have created

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BY PAM SPAULDING, THE C-J
Author Jan Arnow read from "Teaching Peace" during her "tour of violence."



BY PAM SPAULDING, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Parents, teachers and politicians toured area neighborhoods with author Jan Arnow yesterday to see the violent images that bombard children daily, from video arcades to toy stores.

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for children," said Arnow, who is trying to raise enough money — \$327,000 — to conduct regular bus tours and develop a network of anti-violence libraries. "It's a pervasive culture of violence that kids today can't get away from."

Four years ago, Arnow's book "Teaching Peace" offered solutions for raising kids in the face of this tide. Arguably, things have only gotten worse since. About the time the book was coming out, Arnow began thinking of ways to get her ideas off the printed page. "We adults have no idea what our children are facing every day," she said.

If people weren't going to go out and see for themselves, Arnow decided that someone would have to take them. Developing an itinerary proved fairly easy.

"Stroll down the aisle of Toys R Us," she said. "There's a frightening array of (make-believe) weapons."

Arnow envisions a three-hour tour of these obvious — and some not-so-obvious — spots around greater Louisville. Yesterday's inaugural field trip was to serve as a prototype, and she invited a small group of local movers and shakers in an unabashed pitch for funding.

"We have all the answers," she told the group of about 15 that spread around a TARC bus donated for the day. "We need action."

Arnow seems to have found a re-

ceptive group.

State Rep. Mary Lou Marzian, D-Louisville, lamented the lack of common-sense advice and training for parents, particularly young parents. Getting a driver's license should be so easy, she said.

"You get more training, and there are more laws governing it (driving) than there are for being a parent," Marzian remarked.

As the bus rattled along, Arnow transformed it into a classroom, offering a lecture on everything from stereotypes to playground bullies — all factors in a child's decision to resort to violence, she said.

But the impact clearly comes from the hands-on nature of the tour. Rather than simply tell parents about video games, Arnow is determined to get them into the arcades.

Which brought Bowles to his first true encounter with "Terminator 2" in a Mall St. Matthews game room.

Frankly, he'd prefer that his 10-year-old son not develop a penchant for them. But he knows that is against the odds.

"It's extremely difficult to limit their access to these types of games," said Bowles, who said a parent can limit his kids' access to the Nintendos and Playstations, but has no control when the kids are at a friend's home or at the mall. "You can't insulate them 24 hours a day."

Moving around the arcade, where ghoulish shoot-em-ups and street-fighting games have long since over-

taken the pinball machine, Bowles said that parents are often ill-equipped to offer to a competing message.

"You don't eliminate these items — it's just not possible," he said. "But we have to work together to help kids process this violence, and understand that it does have consequences. . . . Violence does end a life, as opposed to TV, where they get up and start a new role the next week."

Arnow said shaping an alternative message — not banning or censoring anything — is the key to all this. Mindful of the Constitution, she is against censorship, which has a dangerous tendency to take the good with the bad.

Instead, she advocates talking directly to merchants who profit from violent toys and games. The owners of the toy store, for example, can be encouraged to devote less shelf space to toy guns and emphasize more imaginative playthings.

It is, of course, an uphill crusade. Americans each year spend a lot of money on violent video games, movies, comic books and toys. But Arnow is convinced that many adults simply haven't put it all together yet.

"When I say we are going on a tour of violence, a lot of people think, 'Oh great — we're going to the West End,'" Arnow said, referring to the part of Louisville many equate with crime. "That's just not the case. Violence is in every single community, in every single home."