



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2020 National High School Essay Contest
First Place Winner (\$3,000 Award)**

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A Shot in the Dark

2012: I'm ten years old. If I had to choose, my favorite Pokemon would have to be Blastoise - WAIT NO! Charizard! I like his wings and horns and claws and teeth and-and-and the way he breathes fire!

Twenty first-graders and six staff members are killed in a mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

2015: I'm thirteen. What Hogwarts house are you? I think I'm a Hufflepuff because I'm loyal and patient and I love honey badgers!

Eight students and a professor are killed in a mass shooting at Umpqua Community College.

2018: I'm sixteen. I think I have a crush on the girl in my Biology class. Too bad we don't have Chemistry together.

Fourteen students and three staff members are killed in a mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School.

My generation grew up in an era of shootings; what started as a travesty that we, the American public, vowed to cease has become mere data: a statistic. It's become procedural, walking into class knowing that nothing - not even tomorrow - is guaranteed, that even at school there are no promises of safety.

I've grown up in a generation of children where our greatest fears aren't tests, but rather forgetting to say goodbye; where every single word said must be thought out since no one knows which words might be our last; where our core curriculum includes learning to cower under counters and calm our classmates' crying; where the stars of the American

flag start to resemble bullet holes instead of a unified nation.

We've forced children to become adults far sooner than they should have to. It's not only terrifying, but it's also disheartening, that even after all the mass shootings, legislation wise, nothing has changed.

Emilie Parker was the happiest first-grader one could imagine; she loved to draw, and her favorite color was pink, which she displayed proudly the morning of December 14, 2012, with her all-pink attire. She would've been twelve years old this year if she wasn't shot by an AR-15 at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The response to this massacre was abysmal. Even after the lives of twenty elementary students were extinguished, over the next year, no new federal gun control laws were enacted, and at the state level, almost twice as many bills were passed to weaken restrictions on gun ownership as to strengthen them.

There's no rational explanation as to why access to a handgun and an assault weapon is a necessary aspect of our society. There was no Second Amendment right for anyone to own such weapons outside of service in a well regulated militia prior to the Supreme Court's rogue 2008 *Heller* decision, in which a narrow 5-4 majority of the Court reversed over two centuries of legal precedent, including four prior Supreme Court decisions. Opponents of regulation argue that owning firearms is inherently American, a part of our national identity; but we're so much more than that, we're a diverse conglomerate of people who'll stand up for what they believe in, against all injustices.

Shot from the muzzle of an AR-15 assault rifle, a round travels an average of 3251 feet per second, which means that it only takes 0.2563 milliseconds for a bullet to pass through a person's body. From a handgun, it takes 0.6864 milliseconds. After the 1996 Port Arthur massacre, it took Australia just 12 days to decide to ban all assault weapons. After the 1996 mass shooting at the elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland, it took Great Britain just under two years to ban all handguns.

How much longer will it take, and how many more innocent lives will be lost, before our country overturns the rogue *Heller* decision and adopts definitive gun control laws, including bans on civilian ownership of handguns and assault weapons?