



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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2023 National High School Essay Contest \$100 Award Winner

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### **Untitled**

I have always had a fascination with my mother's life story: her childhood in Iran, her flight to the US with her family when she was just 16, and my grandparents starting their lives over as refugees. I just never imagined I would feel some of the dread she told me about in my suburban school outside Boston.

One summer day when I was 12, I asked her about her school in Iran. On the first day of middle school, the kids had to line up to be inspected. The oppressive theocracy that still rules today had taken power and the school was encircled with concrete walls. As the students waited and propaganda played over the loudspeakers, a teacher approached my mother because a single piece of hair stuck out from her head covering. As the teacher dragged her away, my future aunt tried to pull her back. "I saw the faces of my classmates staring in dread," my mother told me, "and that made me even more afraid." She was taken to the principal's office where she was screamed at.

That fall, when I began middle school, we had our first lockdown drill. A screechy voice came over the intercom: "An armed intruder has entered the building." Our teacher told us to barricade the door with desks and chairs. Seconds later, our mountain of furniture rattled as a police officer mimicking an intruder tried to force his way in. I got a glimpse of my classmates, flat on the ground, clutching textbooks and staplers to throw at the make-believe intruder. I knew it was all pretend, but my heart was racing.

This was the first of six drills I've done. Each one reminds me of my mother's distant fear and dread. Each one fills me with anger that she escaped a dictatorship only for me to endure these drills in suburban Boston. For the time being, lockdown drills may be the best that a school can do to try to limit the deaths and injuries that occur in an actual school shooting. But each time my classmates and I go through one, I feel a basketful of emotions rattling together: anger, horror, helplessness. Sometimes all I can do is laugh at the ridiculousness

## Sniffles Turn to Snickers

of the “tips” the police offer us. All they can suggest is zig-zagging away from shooters when we truly need meaningful gun reform.

When I go home, I feel renewed anger as I read about the Supreme Court's 2022 *Bruen* decision, in which the majority of justices ruled that New York's requirement for a special permit to carry a concealed handgun violated the Second Amendment. The *Bruen* decision followed the Supreme Court's 2008 *Heller* decision, in which a narrow five to four majority of justices reversed over two centuries of legal precedent, including four prior Supreme Court decisions, in ruling for the first time in U.S. history that the Second Amendment confers any kind of individual right to own a gun. *Heller* and *Bruen* make it impossible to adopt stringent gun control laws in the United States comparable to the laws that have been proved to be effective in other high income democratic countries. These terribly flawed decisions must be overturned.

I'm also angry with the GOP leaders who throw up their hands in response to regular mass shootings and insist, "There's nothing we can do," after many of these same leaders voted to confirm the Supreme Court justices in the *Heller* and *Bruen* majorities, fully knowing that these justices endorsed the gun lobby's fraudulent misrepresentation of the Second Amendment.

Lockdown drills are traumatic, but our society's refusal to enact definitive gun control laws, and the deaths and injuries that are the result of this refusal, are the ultimate trauma. The most significant aspect of these drills – like the regular occurrence of mass shootings, including shootings on school campuses - is that they are uniquely American. For now, some argue that we need lockdown drills, but what we really need is to adopt stringent gun control laws comparable to the laws that have long been in effect in all the other high income democratic countries of the world, if for no other reason, so that students in American schools will not have to continue to try to learn with one eye on the whiteboard and the other on the exit.