



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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2023 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Award Winner

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### **I Don't Want To Die**

Second Grade:

I was seven years old the first time I experienced a real lockdown. As the announcement went off, my teacher directed thirty tiny bodies into the storage room attached to the class. It was dark. I was sitting on the floor. The only light source came from a small window placed too high for anyone to see in or out of. I spent most of my time staring at the window, fantasizing about what could be happening on the other side of it. I don't remember how long we stayed there, only that, to a seven-year-old, it felt like forever.

Seventh Grade:

By the time I entered middle school, I'd undergone so many lockdown drills that every time that static voice came onto the speaker, I assumed it was just that -a drill. As my teacher turned off the lights and locked the doors, the only sound in the room was steady breaths. Then, suddenly, the silence was broken. The door handle began shaking, and hands banged against its frame. We would later learn that the person on the other side of that door was our fellow student. She had gone to the bathroom and, when the announcement sounded, was locked out of the classroom. She didn't know it was a drill. None of us did. So, as panicked tears fell down her face, she continued to frantically hit the door, begging us to let her in. Tears fell down our faces too.

Twelfth Grade:

I was in calculus class, muttering angrily about an integral when a stampede of students ran past the door. Seconds later, our school was sent into lockdown. For the first time in a long time, I didn't pawn this lockdown off as a drill. Still, I tried to

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rationalize it, tried to ignore the flashing lights in my brain that screamed, 'SHOOTING!' Huddled against the wall, I unlocked my phone and typed into Google the name of my high school and the word, "shooting." The results showed news articles of a Californian high school with the same name that had been shot up six days earlier.

It turned out not to be a shooting. But, when I told my dad about it, he sat me down and made me promise that if a shooting ever did occur, I wouldn't stay in the classroom. He made me promise that I would slip out of the room before it was ever locked and run as far away as possible.

While I understand the importance of maintaining order in emergencies, lockdowns do not protect children. Continuous drills put them under psychological stress and normalize gun violence at an early age.

People argue that they need guns to defend themselves. But there's overwhelming evidence that guns in the homes and in the communities of honest, law-abiding Americans are far more likely to be used to harm them than to protect them. And what about the defenseless? What about the children and teachers who can only lock their doors and hope that their police department gives enough of a damn to intervene?

I want to live. I want to learn amongst my friends in school without fear of never coming back.

Please, I don't want to die.