



Americans Against Gun Violence
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2023 National High School Essay Contest First Place Winner (\$3,000 Award)

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A Typical Day in America

Sitting on the floor of a dark room, your mind tends to wander. You think about the word “lockdown”. You think about the annoyed grumbles from classmates, from teachers, asking why we have to do this. You think about the holes in the curtains where rays of sunlight peak through. You think about what this would be like if it weren’t just a drill.

You think about the fear that would be racing through your veins. You think about how a ray of sunlight is touching your face and you wonder if that would be enough to give you away. You think about the schools on the news where it wasn’t a drill. You wonder if one of those kids might have gotten a text or a phone call or sat where the sun could see them.

You hear whispers and giggling during the drill, but you don’t make a sound. Not this time. You are preparing. In these soft, shadowy moments, you are bracing yourself for tragedy. You remember the notification you got last year, while you sat in your sixth period Spanish class, about the kids at Uvalde. You remember feeling unsurprised, disconnected, faraway for a second before putting your phone away and trying to forget where you were sitting. “Another shooting,” someone said. Another day in America, you heard. You remember that feeling because it wasn’t just that day when you felt it.

You think about how you’re able to keep a straight face until you see a grieving parent on the news. You think about the footage of students running to safety. You think about the fraudulent misrepresentation of the Second Amendment interpretation that seemingly gives you the right to be killed.

You feel those anxious feelings beginning to manifest themselves. You’ve learned how to calm yourself down. You breathe.

You think about “thoughts and prayers.” You think about representatives and

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senators going about their days unaware of you sitting on the floor in the dark. You think about how freeing it must be to be them instead of you. You wonder how they can sleep at night when sometimes you can't. You think about that pit in your stomach, which grows and shrinks in every moment, like a beating heart.

You look around at every face. Solemn faces, smiling faces. You think about the students who are sitting on the floor of every classroom. You think about this tacit acceptance. You think about the mundanity of everyday horror. You think about living in a country where none of this is necessary. You think because that's all you can do now.

When it ends, you stand up. You get up from your place on the floor and get on with your day, get back to normal. You shove the fear down. You occupy yourself with the levity of high-school life, with the carefree moments that have become mottled, marred with fear. You never leave yourself with time to ponder: Why is this our normal?

Maybe you can't bear the answer.