



Americans Against Gun Violence
7862 Winding Way #151
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 668-4160
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

2026 National High School Essay Contest \$1,000 Winner

Adriana Ramirez

R.L. Turner High School, Carrollton, Texas

We Owe It to Our Children to Do Better

When Dr. Michael North talks about losing his daughter Sophie in the 1996 Dunblane school shooting, it's impossible not to feel the pain behind every word. In his speech, he says, "lost my daughter in a school shooting in Dunblane, Scotland, in March 1996," and even though it's just one sentence, it carries the weight of an entire world falling apart. Sophie was only five years old. She was his only child. And in just a few minutes, because a man legally owned four handguns, her life was taken away.

What makes Dr. North's story so powerful is not just the tragedy itself, but what he chose to do afterward. He admits he "knew nothing about guns" and had never been involved in politics or activism. He was just a dad, a scientist, and someone who loved his daughter. But when he realized how easily the shooter got his weapons, he knew something had to change. He said, "No more guns and certainly no more worship of guns," and that became the spark that started a movement across the entire country.

What stands out most is how much of this came from love - not anger, not revenge, but love for Sophie and for every child who deserved to grow up safely. Dr. North and the other families didn't want anyone else to go through what they went through. They pushed for a complete ban on handguns in Great Britain, even when people told them it was impossible or accused them of being "too emotional." But honestly, how could they not be emotional? They had just lost their children. And still, they stayed focused on protecting others.

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Because of their determination, Great Britain passed laws banning civilian handgun ownership. And since then, as Dr. North points out, “there has never been another school shooting.” That fact alone shows how powerful real change can be when people refuse to give up.

Hearing Dr. North talk about the United States makes his message even more heartbreaking. He says he watches American school shootings “in horror,” hoping each time that maybe this will be the moment the country decides to act. Instead, he sees kids practicing lockdown drills and growing up with fear as a normal part of school. He can’t understand why children have to live like that - and honestly, neither can I.

What Dr. North teaches us is that change doesn’t happen by accident. It happens when people decide that protecting children matters more than protecting guns. His story is a reminder that even in the middle of the worst pain imaginable, someone can choose to fight for something better. Sophie’s life was short, but because of her father’s courage, her memory helped save countless others.

Dr. North’s message is simple but powerful: we owe it to our children to do better. And his daughter Sophie - even though she’s gone - continues to inspire that hope.