

## Guns

The ends of the two automatic weapons' barrels appeared as cold steel rings surrounding circles of blackness that hid bullets: agents of destruction that could beckon death in an instant. My alarm spiraled by the sight of two soldiers who laid prone in the sand, holding their weapons steady looking for a reason to unleash death's agents. Their fingers tensed against the smoothness of their triggers. Their safety catches were off and I stared down those barrels in absolute terror.

One instant passed. Two instants passed. More instants passed. I lived to tell my tale. But how many have not?

I survived my encounter with possible death in the Syrian desert, years ago. But many more encounters like mine occur in the US, today. You don't need automatic weapons with large capacity magazines to engender such terror. All it takes is any single gun, one single bullet in the chamber and one single finger on the trigger to create the fear that I felt.

Many are shot and killed without looking down the barrel of their life's terminator. No matter if they were the intended victim or an innocent bystander, the result is the same. Their families and friends are left to grieve and ask unanswerable questions. The pain of their loss flows out in all directions, hurting too many others.

Are guns beneficial or problematic in our civilized society? Obviously, the Founding Fathers had reasons to include the Second Amendment – to have an armed militia and to allow ordinary people the right to bear arms. They were justifiably concerned, at the time, that the British army might try to repossess the Americas. In the last 250 years, those concerns have been laid to rest. Today, many gun owners say that they need a gun to defend against armed terrorists. Nobody can fault them for such a thought, but the reality of the situation is different to how they perceive it. More people in America are shot and killed by US citizens, each year, than have been killed by armed terrorists since the Second Amendment was adopted, over two hundred years ago. Additionally, two of the worst acts of terrorism within the US borders were perpetrated using commercial airplanes and a rental truck. Citizens owning guns cannot stop people from buying airline tickets or from renting trucks.

Whenever massacres, school shootings or church shootings occur, a brief cry for some gun control echoes through much of the population and the halls of power in the capitol. But it is soon lost. Politicians express sympathy, but say it is a time to pay respects to the victims and their loved ones, and not the time to discuss new policy. Isn't it strange that the subject of gun control is not heard again until another tragedy occurs and politician again ask us to pay our respects to the fallen. There is an inference that any discussion about gun control would be too soon after the tragedy, but it is already too late considering all of the shootings that have previously occurred.

The fallen become nothing more than pawns in a political game. Their humanness becomes statistics that can be reviewed, but are all too soon forgotten. These were human beings with lives, families and dreams.

On the opposite side of the debate is the Second Amendment that has become a Holy Cow. It is protected by the NRA and the gun manufacturers. Or are they actually two names for the same special interest group? The Second Amendment is not a Holy Cow: it is a liability in need of updating to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The only "Cow" in this discussion is the shameful behavior of politicians who Cow-ardly protect the gun lobby.

I do not advocate taking away the vast majority of guns. I simply want to see the ban on assault rifles re-instated and some common sense laws around background checks instituted. If a licensed gun enthusiast has one or more guns and knows how to keep them safely, why would they disagree?

Whenever politicians speak about guns, they immediately turn from legislation to require background checks to promising to keep guns out of the hands of those with mental illness. I am appalled by such stupidity. Does anyone have a card certifying that they do not have mental illness? Who will have the courage to define what is meant by the incredibly vague term "mental illness" because they could be held responsible for future massacres. Mental Illness is such a non-descriptive phrase that it is unusable. It is as meaningless as saying I will support somebody because they are musical. What does that really mean?

Also, all medical conditions are considered private information. If anyone thinks that they will enforce legislation that requires people to reveal medical conditions, they will disappear down a deep rabbit hole fighting with advocates for privacy, personal freedom, and other similar issues: never dealing with the actual issue of gun safety. Mental Illness is nothing more than an evocative distraction.

Additionally, if politicians understood the problem, they would know that the vast majority of those who have been diagnosed with a mental illness suffer from depression and / or anxiety. No matter if these people are taking their medications or not, such mentally ill patients are no more likely to fire a gun at other people than citizens who consider themselves to be perfectly healthy and sane. So are we then going to need to restrict those who are banned from owning weapons to those with only certain mental health conditions? Do we then also need to distinguish between those who are medication compliant and those who are not? Welcome to the other rabbit hole that distracts us from dealing with the real issue – the purchasing of weapons.

It has been too many days now, since the horrors of the Parkland school shootings in Florida, without any action. Assuming average daily statistics in the US, over 30 US citizens have died each day by gunshot wounds since that time. Of those 30 plus deaths per day, a significant percentage of them occurred in situations involving domestic violence. If we started with a sensible background check of police reports

relating to domestic violence incidents, some of these murderers would not have been able to purchase their weapons.

Years ago, I did fire hand guns as well as rifles. I know the feeling that people experience when sending a bullet, hopefully, towards an object that can safely absorb the bullet's potentially lethal force. My words do not come from a place of ignorance and fear: they come from a position of experience and thought. I am very aware that I would again sense abject terror, like I experienced in Syria so many years ago, if I realized any being stood in or close to the line of fire while I pulled a trigger. I have come to understand the awesome sense of responsibility associated with handling any firearm.

Stupidity, ignorance, buying political favors as well as bullets can be deadly and destructive, but words can be powerful and more persuasive. Let us not be lead down misleading rabbit holes, but discuss the real facts to find a way to make the streets and homes of this amazing country safe from gun violence, while still allowing citizens, who are capable and responsible, to retain possession of their own guns.