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Three months ago today I raced from my office an hour away from my 7 year olds school after hearing about a shooting. I thought for sure there must be a mistake. Sandy Hook is a small quaint New England town. We moved here 9 years ago from Florida specifically for the schools. The media must be misinformed. But as I tried my hardest to focus on the road in front of me I heard the tragedy unfold through the radio in my car. My heart sank as I learned of the horror that was coming to light. I received a text from a friend on the school's campus that many children had been killed. All of the blood left my body until my husband phoned to tell me our son was safe. Then my mind shifted to the unidentified victims and how their families would soon face the news no parent should ever hear. I learned early on that Dawn Hochsprung and Mary Sherloch, whom my husband and I had both just met with only 18 hours early were dead. Next I was informed that my son's first grade teacher, Victoria Soto was also killed. In mere minutes, the team that had been such an integral part of supporting my son and his needs were wiped out. His cheerleaders, his biggest fans, and his support system, GONE! At first I struggled with how to tell him they were gone. But I didn't have to. He told me. So my 7 year old, who had yet needed to deal with death has now seen it, up close and as dark as it gets. Images that have no doubt been ingrained in his memory and will forever be part of his fabric. I worry for him and for his future because of what he experienced. He had no choice but to witness this carnage. But we DO have a choice. We can choose to stand up and make this a turning point in our history. We CAN choose to honor the 26 victims by demanding change.

Statistics indicate that around 12 weeks after a tragedy of this magnitude, two things happen. For those who have been directly impacted, the fog will slowly start to lift and the deep pain and sorrow will begin to set in. For the rest, the shooting has faded into our countries increasingly violent landscape, just hoping that the next time won't be so bad. The fact that there WILL be a next time should be enough to move us to demand change. We must act NOW.

It seems to me that there are two main issues that need addressing. Comprehensive, up to date, background checks and the restriction of all assault style weapons and high capacity magazines to everyone but the military. In what civilian situation would an assault rifle need to be used. There are NO arguments that can prove the use of these weapons is warranted. Two prominent opinions seemed to have surfaced. Those that are for reinstating the Assault Weapon ban and comprehensive background checks and that of the NRA which is founded on nothing but having the right to own any weapon of choice. No one's second amendment right should trump anyone else's right to their lives. Our failure to stand up to the NRA resulted in 20 children NEVER getting to exercise their own rights. Many believe the government is out to take away our Second Amendment right entirely. And that this entire event was staged in order to do so. Any sane, rational person knows that we will never loose that right and that Sandy Hook DID happen. Frankly it disturbs me deeply that the people of this paranoid mind set are even allowed to own guns.

As long as there are guns there will be gun violence. Most of us have come to terms with that. But we have a responsibility to everyone who has ever died at the end of a gun to make Sandy Hook a watershed moment. I propose we make it harder to obtain a weapon by conducting more comprehensive background checks. By allowing gun retailers access to real time data, so that someone who committed a crime a week ago can't buy a gun tomorrow. Today's technology affords us the ability to share data instantly. We need take advantage of that. The mental health of everyone in the home of a gun owner needs to be taken into account. Gun licenses should be renewed annually because someone's mental status can change. Next a ban on Assault style weapons and high capacity magazines should be passed into law. What use could these weapons and ammunition be to any individual except to inflict the maximum amount of damage in the minimum amount of time. NO ONE can furnish an example of this need. NO ONE!!! I understand this ban would not end violence, but there would be far fewer victims. It is your right to own a weapon, not a killing machine.

I am disgusted that as a country we are allowing the NRA to bully us into submission and move forward as if Sandy Hook had never happened. It did happen. We are all living it. We watched as dozens of tiny coffins drove through our town. We've seen what losing a child or a loved one in such a tragic way can do to a person, to a community. We hold our children tight at night because they can't sleep for fear of this happening again. While we tell them it won't happen again, truth is we can't promise them that. If it could happen here, it can happen ANYWHERE. Unless we do something. We have to do something. I believe that while we do not want this event to define us, it will. We need that definition to be one of change.

Thank you,

Melissa Horan