

Words can't describe the fear and helplessness we felt on December 14<sup>th</sup> when we learned that the lockdown of Newtown public schools was in fact a result of a shooting at our daughter's school. The gut-wrenching thought that our baby girl, a Sandy Hook Elementary third-grader, could be a victim was unfathomable and at the same time very real. The feelings of helplessness and desperation were beyond description.

Upon arrival at the Sandy Hook firehouse, we encountered numerous friends who informed us that they had in fact seen our daughter alive and well. We were finally reunited with our daughter and embraced her with the most thankful and loving hug imaginable. Unfortunately, for many families, this was not the case.

While we were fortunate enough to return home with our daughter, we are, to this day, left trying to reconcile why and how this could have happened. How could something like this have happened in our town of all places? Beyond the immediate families, there are the students, co-workers, first-responders, family and friends of those involved; literally thousands of people changed forever.

The effects on the families who lost loved ones are evident. There are constant reminders wherever we go. At the same time, there are the silent victims, the children of Sandy Hook Elementary and their siblings and friends. Our older daughter, a seventh grader at Newtown Middle School, is dealing with anxiety. Their lives will never be the same and there is nothing anybody can do to change that. But there is something all of us can do to ensure others do not have to experience the same.

Now is not the time to hide behind doctrines or historical documents. Let common sense prevail. Assault rifles have no place in our society. Do our rights to exist and live in safety not trump the rights of those who feel it is their right to defend themselves against an army? Let the death of the victims of 12/14 not be in vain. Now is the time for change. Now is the time to pay tribute to all lives cut short by senseless violence.

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