

When I first sat down to write this, my brain was a muddled mess – full of any number of thoughts and ideas, facts, statistics and laws, and, worst of all, images. Images of parents standing outside an elementary school waiting for children who would never come home. Portraits of beautiful, smiling, young faces, each with a lifetime ahead of them, surrounded by loving families who would never hold them again. And any time I would try to think about the facts, statistics and laws, it was these very images which would rush in and prevent me from being able to sort through and find the best way to make my point. The best way to demonstrate why I believe it's time for change.

And so, every time I started writing this, I stopped. Until a few days ago, when I sat up in the middle of the night, torn from my sleep, with the sudden and simple understanding that I did not first need to clear these faces from my head in order to get this done. Rather, I needed to think of these lost children, to see their smiles, and to dare to understand, as best as a mere observer can, the pain that these parents and their community have and will experience for the rest of their lives. Only then would I be able to focus on the issue. Because, really, there is only one issue. Children, and the adults who tried to protect them, are dead because it was entirely too easy for one person to get his hands on assault weapons. That's it.

Seven years ago, my husband and I moved our family from the city of Boston to Ridgefield, CT. We left our home, jobs and friends behind in order to raise our children in a safe place. A place where maybe we didn't always need to lock the car when we ran into a store. A place where the kids could run out the front door to play with friends without a parent having to follow. And a place where they could go to school and be safe from physical harm.

And then this unspeakable thing happened in Newtown and we were left with one undeniable truth and one simple question. The truth: As long as the laws stay the same, that safe place does not exist. And the question: What do we do now? Nothing, like after Columbine? More nothing, as we did after Virginia Tech? Still more nothing as was done following Tucson? And Aurora? How is this acceptable? How is more of the same okay? Here's a hint. It is *not* okay.

Let me be clear. I am not looking to take away the rights of homeowners and individuals to defend themselves and their property. I don't want to tell anyone who hunts safely, whether for recreation or to feed their family, that they can't do that. I am looking for reasonable, common-sense laws.

*Nationwide background checks including a mandatory waiting period for all, without exception.

*Registration of all weapons, including those purchased before the new laws have taken effect.

*Limiting ammunition capacity to fewer than 10 rounds, again including those purchased before proposed changes are made.

*And most importantly, a complete ban on assault weapons. Such weapons serve no purpose other than to kill. And they have killed so many. Enough.

In a short period of time, much has changed for our children. There is a degree of innocence lost. They live in a time of lockdowns and security guards. They spend their days with teachers who are likely to always be looking over one shoulder. Despite near paralyzing fear, we sent our children to school on Monday December 17th. I was in my son's school first thing in the morning when all Ridgefield schools

went into lockdown because of a “suspicious individual” near one of our schools. I have witnessed firsthand how different school is for everyone in the building. And I accept that. I accept that changes need to happen. But why should it be only our children and the administrators in the buildings where they spend their days who are forced to change? The answer is that it shouldn’t be.

And what of those facts, statistics and laws which I was so concerned about sorting through before writing this? In the grand scheme of things, when it really comes down to it, they don’t mean a thing if nothing changes. What would mean something is if we finally came together and stopped making it so easy for these tragedies to happen. If we finally said we’ve had enough. And when we close our eyes, and see the faces of the lost innocents, and think about the pain that will forever be part of one small community, at least we can say that we didn’t do NOTHING once again. At least, we can say we did something real and meaningful. Something for the children who are still here, and in the names of the children who will never come home again.

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