

## Please Take Away Our Guns—Enough is Enough

By Alec Foster

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The second amendment to the constitution of the United States proposes, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” I think the purpose of this amendment has become lost since it was ratified in 1791, and NRA supporters and supporters of gun rights have become far too attached to the “right to bear Arms” portion. While I believe nothing is wrong with a licensed gun owner, who has passed background checks, to possess a gun and use it for protection, I personally feel that there is no situation where a normal U.S. needs to possess a high capacity assault rifle. We have seen far too many cases in the last two decades alone, where innocent Americans, young and old, have lost their lives due to senseless murders at the hands of these deadly weapons. And I myself know all too well the horror of losing a loved one at the hands of an assault weapon. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1997, my seven-year-old brother, Evan Leigh Foster was murdered at the hands of a MAK 90 assault rifle.

I was just ten months old at the time. An innocent, infant child sitting in the back seat of his mother’s car, next to his loving brother. My mother had taken us to Darby Park in Inglewood, California to pick up my brother’s soccer trophy that evening and sign him up for a basketball league. She had no idea that she would be leaving that park however, as a mother of one child and no longer two.

At this point in time, gang activity in south Los Angeles was still very prevalent. Earlier that evening, a gang shooting had taken place where Blood gang members had shot and killed two rival Crip gang members. Angry and seeking revenge for their fallen brothers, the Crip members “went out looking to kill,” and settled on targeting an innocent man in the Darby Park parking lot whose red Cadillac was the color of the rival gang who had killed their brothers (Abrahamson). This man had no gang affiliation whatsoever. His only “crime” was that his car was red. The man was situated next to the car my mother, brother and I were sitting in, preparing to leave. The three Crip members opened fire in an attempt to kill the man, and in the midst of this my mother attempted to maneuver our car out of the line of fire, but to no avail. My brother Evan was caught in the crossfire and murdered in cold blood.

My ten-month-old self got bullet fragments and shrapnel in my eye, which led to me later having to receive a cornea transplant. It was later reported that the weapon the gunman had used in the murder was a MAK-90 assault rifle, a gun that holds a large capacity magazine and can fire off several rounds at a rapid pace. The gunman apparently had fired 75 rounds of ammunition in my brother’s murder in the span of only a few minutes. The man they were attempting to target, as well as my mother were thankfully unharmed in the shooting, but my brother and I were not as lucky. The four gang members involved with the shooting went into hiding after perpetrating the crime. Three of them were found within a week or two. But the

one who actually fired the assault rifle that murdered my brother was found several months later. All four involved were tried and given life sentences.

Losing a young family member in such a tragic fashion is almost unfathomable and without question is a life altering circumstance. My being only ten months old, at the time of my brother's death, I have no recollection of those events nor any memories of my beloved brother. It is rather difficult to accurately describe how heartbreaking it is for me to say that I don't remember my brother, but that is the reality I live with. I am angry that my brother's life was taken from me. I long to know what it would have been like to grow up with him right beside me. It infuriates me that someone ripped him away from me without my having any say, with the firing of a deadly gun. And each time that I am asked by someone new that I meet, if I am an only child, I can feel the emptiness in my heart--almost like a hole where my brother should be.

Yes, I am upset that a piece of the puzzle of my life is missing, but what really shakes me to my core however, is that these assault rifles are legal to possess and fairly easily accessible to the common person. I believe legislation banning both the possession and sale of these deadly weapons will make our communities and our country as a whole much safer.

In 1994, there was an assault weapons ban passed (a bipartisan ban, might I add) that banned both assault weapons and high capacity magazines. Sadly, this ban lasted only until 2004. However, its impact was very significant. It had an effect "not on the number of shootings but on the lethality of shootings" (Sollenberger). "Between 1982 and 1994 there were three mass shootings that resulted in ten or more deaths, with a total of 58 deaths. Between 1994 and 2004 there was only one such event: Columbine. Thirteen deaths (Sollenberger). In addition, in that decade during the ban the U.S. had **zero** of the ten worst mass shooting in our recent history. And "In the 12 years after the ban was lifted, U.S. mass shootings jumped from about 1.1 per year to 3.5 per year" (Sollenberger). These numbers are significant because they show that the ban helped to save lives. "Just one of those shootings, the massacre in Las Vegas last October, resulted in more deaths than the three major shootings between 1982 and 1992 *combined* (Sollenberger). Those figures are staggering and not only show just how deadly assault weapons are, but just how much safer we can be when they are banned.

There should absolutely be stricter gun laws in this country. America ranks number one in terms of the number of mass shootings that have been perpetrated in this country in the last two decades. This is not a statistic that we should be proud of, nor is it one that should be ignored. And in addition, in majority of these mass shootings, the gun that was used to perpetrate the crime was an AR-15, which is an assault rifle that has the capacity to hold large amounts of ammunition and actually shoot off up to 45 rounds per minute. These guns are designed for combat and are designed to kill, so it is no surprise that they have been the weapon of choice for domestic terrorists with the goal of mowing down innocent lives. I'm not sure how many innocent men, women, and children being buried it's going to take for the American government to wake up, but sadly It is almost as if we as a country have become desensitized to these mass shootings and to the loss of lives.

A large deterrent to actual change being enacted in gun reform is due to the work of the National Rifle Association, better known as the NRA. The NRA is a nonprofit organization that advocates for gun rights, but in addition, they have many American politicians essentially in their pockets. The NRA has donated to many Washington D.C. politicians and in turn, the politicians refuse to pass laws that would potentially make American citizens safer. And this makes many Americans wonder if our government truly values our lives, or if they value more, the money they receive from the profitability of the gun industry. One would hope that our elected officials would take responsibility and make a concerted effort to put an end to these reoccurring tragedies, but time and time again politics and money get in the way of real change.

But enough is enough. I do not want another human being to have to go through what I and my family have had to go through. I do not want to see another innocent child on the news that has been gunned down at the hands of an assault rifle. I do not want another family to have to suffer the sorrows of losing a loved one too soon. I do not want survivors of shootings to have to deal with the posttraumatic stress disorders. I do not want another community to have to grieve and feel unsafe going to church, or going to school, or going to the movies, going to a concert—places where we should not have to worry about being murdered.

America is not a battleground. We do not need military grade weapons in our streets and we especially do not need them in the hands of deranged individuals. We need stricter gun laws, more thorough vetting and background checks of potential gun buyers, and most importantly we need a ban on assault rifles. These killing machines belong in the hands of our military, not civilians. I pray that America as a country wakes up, and that we drive our politicians to act **now**. Because if we allow legislation to remain the same as it is right now, it is only a matter of months, weeks, or even days before we end up with another Charleston church, Pulse Nightclub, Sandy Hook Elementary, Aurora Colorado movie theater, Las Vegas music festival, or Evan Leigh Foster tragedy.

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