



Americans Against Gun Violence
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**2019 National High School Essay Contest
Second Place Winner (\$2,500 Award)**

Rhea Jansen

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When the clock struck 10:08 on March 14th, there were shared looks throughout my AP Environmental Science classroom, and with a nod of our heads the five of us stood up and walked out of the school. This came one month after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) mass shooting that resulted in the loss of 17 innocent lives. But the walkout wasn't only to show unity with students at MSD. My tiny school, Freeman High, experienced a similar tragedy five months earlier. It feels strange to say that we were the lucky ones, but after seeing on the news of the MSD mass shooting what could have happened at our high school if the shooter's AR-15 hadn't jammed, leaving him with a handgun as his only functioning firearm, we are the lucky ones. Lucky, compared to the MSD students, even though one student at our school was killed and three others were wounded. And myself, personally lucky, even though I saw the shooter, Caleb, raise his gun and point it at his close friend, Sam. Lucky, even though as I ran for cover, I heard the shot that killed Sam. Lucky, even though whenever I see anyone in a black trench coat, I try to find an exit, and whenever a binder drops, my first reaction is to duck under a desk.

I come from a hunting background and a hunting family, I was raised around guns and shot them myself. But here's the difference. I used a hunting rifle, capable of shooting two shots maximum before reloading. This is the only capacity magazine needed to fill the needs of a regular citizen. Just throughout my short eighteen years, I have seen a growing obsession with military grade weapons. This obsession doesn't stem from appreciation and respect for guns or even a need to have a well regulated militia. It comes from the delusion that military style guns should be fun and used as toys to blast away at targets; or worse yet, to satisfy a warped need for power and control.

Inspired by the Never Again movement, it became my goal to no longer stand on the sidelines and allow nothing to get done. I began to educate myself, learning about the Second Amendment and how we got to this point in America.

The clarification of the Second Amendment after my research made me even more angry about the lack of change in this country. It's appalling how we have gone backwards in the more recent years, rolling back regulations concerning background checks, waiting periods, and even what guns citizens are allowed to purchase. The proposition of stringent gun control does not infringe on the collective Second Amendment right guaranteed to the American people by the Constitution as claimed by the NRA, gun manufacturers, and many politicians, but it allows for growth and progress, just as our founding fathers intended.

Now 18 and able to vote, I look at our country with hope. Hope that my voice can make a difference. Hope that the number of survivors of school shootings who have to comfort and soothe one another over social media won't keep growing as it has during the four years that I've been in high school. And hope that our country comes to the realization that now is the time for reform and change, not thoughts and prayers.