



Americans Against Gun Violence
921 11th Street, Suite 700
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 668-4160
aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

**2020 National High School Essay Contest
\$1,000 Winner**

(Student's name and high school withheld at student's request)

I Miss You

The last day of school before winter break, I wore my favorite Christmas sweater, singing my favorite Christmas songs. When the final bell rang, I went to my friends to give each other hugs and laughs. I immediately noticed someone was missing, and had been missing school for a week now. At the time, I thought nothing of it; it was normal to leave school a week before break. On the way home, I was greeted with hot chocolate and Christmas songs on blast. Everything was good.

At home, I decided to scroll through my Instagram, when suddenly like an ambush, calls and texts flooded my phone. I could barely read my notifications. When I answered a call, another good friend of mine was on the other line, crying. I was confused, it was such a stark contrast to the Christmas mood just a few minutes ago. I asked what was wrong, and she replied with the same message on my unread texts. My friend that had been gone for a week had committed suicide. The next day, I learned that my friend used his father's gun.

Fast forward two years later, and I am buried below books and papers. I am cramming everything about US History before the big AP US History test. In the middle of studying, my phone begins to ding nonstop. I open it to find texts saying an unidentified student will "shoot up the school." I was terrified, the thought of guns taking away another life of a student seemed to manifest itself once again. On my way to school, administration released a statement saying that this was just an "empty threat" and extra police officers were on campus. Regardless, my guard was up during the three hour test. Instead of paying full attention to the college level exam, my mind was running possibilities of where I would hide in case a shooting did occur.

My experiences with gun violence make me no stranger to gun control. Being on the debate team, I have seen the research. There is statistic after statistic showing that guns threaten our society. However, even when presented with facts, politicians blatantly ignore them to cater to their donors. In response to this failure of political leadership within our nation, I fully support the position taken by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

People claim that firearms are not the problem and that mental health is, but it's the extremely high number of privately owned guns in our country that sets the United States apart from other nations with lower rates of gun homicide and gun suicide. As firearms

remain easily accessible to the general public, advancements in mental health care will have little effect in reducing the large number of gun-related deaths and injuries that occur in moments of carelessness, anger, or despair. The experiences of other countries show that with limited firearm access, people refrain from the violent escape firearms offer. Instead, overall rates of homicide and suicide go down. If our country had followed the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics, my friend could have been able to get help with his mental problems, but because of the status quo, Matty never got the chance.