



Americans Against Gun Violence  
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2021 National High School Essay Contest  
\$1,000 Winner

Finn Jacobson

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*Running Laps*

Every morning, I get up at 6:00am and run laps around my high school track. Its a chance to clear my mind, and to reflect, prepare to focus, and watch the sun rise over that place I've always yearned to call home, to feel safe in.

But I just can't.

A year and a month ago our lives changed. For the first time in our lives, my generation was ushered away from the school building. In fear of something we could not see, hear, taste, smell, or touch (and yet was deadly), our safety was in the mind of administrators as schools from coast-to-coast shut down in a day. We lost everything, and yet a year ago, as I departed my school for what would be the last time in a while, I found myself reflecting about all the times I walked into it wondering if I would walk back out.

And then I felt relief.

It was relief over the concept that I would no longer be entering a place that put my life in danger every day. We saw the first March without a school shooting in years, and then the same in April. Suddenly, it had seemed, in attempts to avoid one epidemic, we escaped another along with it.

But even as the COVID-19 pandemic blanketed the nation, 2020 became the deadliest year in U.S. history for gun related deaths, with nearly 44,000 Americans dying of gunshot wounds according to data from the Gun Violence Archive. Our country was divided further as we marched and screamed and wept for justice through the spring and summer, only to barely receive it.

On January 6th, 2021, The students of America switched places with the legislators that swore to protect us. For the first time, we were safe in our homes, watching as their lives were in danger. Suddenly, the images of Sandy Hook, Parkland, Santa Fe, and Umpqua flashed before our eyes as we held our breath in anticipation- waiting to learn what happened. That day, the United States

Legislature experienced for the first time what we have practiced for our entire lives. Now, as the country has begun to open once again, we have already wept at lives lost, our eyes turning to Colorado, Atlanta, and beyond.

Fourteen days from now, I will again walk into that building and wonder whether I will walk back out. But now there is danger coming at me from every corner, and in the darkest corners of my mind I think to myself, "What kills me first? The virus, or guns?"

When the sun rises over the United States of America, she sees us all running laps— living in an endless cycle of despair and strife, unable to escape the threat of gun violence. When the sun rises over all the other economically advanced democratic countries of the world, she sees governments that have taken definitive action to protect their citizens from the threat of gun violence. U.S. legislators have the power to adopt stringent gun control laws in the United States comparable to the laws in other democratic countries - laws that will finally bring us to the finish line. It is long past time that our elected leaders use this power to end our country's vicious cycle of gun violence.