

Mass shootings. Is There an Answer?  
(that our polarized society can achieve?)

I went to a large high school in Pittsburgh. The same high school that LaVar Arrington attended. It was a city/suburban school. I never saw (or heard of) any weapons being used among the students. It was a long time ago. I graduated in 1960.

I was bullied, but I never, ever, considered using a gun to fight back...and I did fight back. How many of you had those kinds of experiences? Probably quite a few back in those days. Even when I was in dire need of help and very angry about being bullied, I never dreamed of shooting the bully or anyone else. It just wasn't a choice I considered. I'll bet most if not all of you would say the same. So...lets acknowledge that something has really changed in our society...our world. Most of us can probably agree with that.

After those early years I spent time in the Asian jungle (in the 60s) and then administered a program for boys in the juvenile justice system. I dealt with Philly gang kids, many, emotionally disturbed kids mislabeled as "delinquent," and just about every other possibility including one who had murdered his brother. (He did not shoot him). In all those years I saw one knife pulled. That is it. I've not been sheltered, but in today's society it is probably very different.

The U.S. had 48,930-gun deaths in 2022. As of today, the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 2023, the count of mass shootings is 200 this year. That is about 1.5 per day. It is and has been like this for some years now. It looks like the number will be more than 300 in 2023. No other country has more than 10 per year. Also...remember...some years ago we almost had one

in a middle school in Wellsboro. Some kids and teachers made good decisions and only one died instead of many.

There are no single answers to this in a democracy. We can not simply close down our society with threats and remain a free society. There are very free, democratic societies that have succeeded in shutting down the killing. There are some answers out there.

There are a number of threads to this. We must acknowledge it is not just about guns. It is also about our social media, old hatreds, polarized politics, mental health issues, and probably a number of other things. If we really want to change the dynamic in our homeland, we must be willing to work with each other. Can we remain non-tribal in this national crisis and do this? The message to our elected officials must be in one voice and strong.

I will leave you with this. Our youngest son just retired from the air force. In the beginning of his career, he was basically a “tip of the spear” type guy...a war pilot. His first war was the Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia, etc. Yugoslavian break-up. His mission, flying at night in a machine that could see through walls and peoples clothing, was to prevent the ethnic tribes from killing each other. One morning at about 9 AM our time and about 3 AM his, I emailed him and asked him if he thought what the U.S. was doing there was going to work. He had sent me a number of aeriels flown just above the trees, with houses without roofs...all burnt out.

His answer to my question was “Dad, their hatreds are over 1000 years old. Ours are only a couple hundred.