

guest columnist



A special guest column by student journalist
Taylor Harmon of Bloomington High School South

Be Like Grandma, Give Us Support

I never asked why my Aunt Juli was in a wheelchair, probably because she had used a wheelchair for as long as I'd known her. It wasn't until the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 that my mother decided to tell me the story behind her sister's wheelchair. It turns out that when my aunt was 23, her husband shot her with a handgun intended to keep their family safe. When the police arrived, they found my 3-year-old cousin playing with the gun. After I heard that story, I realized that guns aren't just used in wars. Guns devastate lives much closer to home.

Stories such as these are not uncommon in America. I became involved with Bloomington Students Against Assault Weapons and Students Demand Action following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. After that horrific event, I and many of my peers came to some very clear realizations. One was obvious—that this could happen to any of us at any time. We also recognized that many of us would be able to vote in the spring primaries and in November's general elections. That gives us the power to vote out representatives who are supported by the NRA as well as those who have no intention of changing gun regulations.

We soon came to understand that while many adults and many politicians have proven unwilling to move beyond the "thoughts and prayers" that follow every mass shooting, the youth of this country are quite capable of forcing them to take action—or of taking action ourselves. And that is exactly what we are doing.

We aren't naïve. We are well aware that ridding the United States of all guns is out of the question. We are not trying to deprive anyone of their Second Amendment rights. We are, however, advocating for stricter gun restrictions; more frequent and in-depth screenings of gun buyers; and banning paraphernalia, like bump stocks, that make semi-automatic weapons fully automatic. We feel this is fair because there is simply no case in which a civilian needs to own an assault rifle, for sport or safety.

On March 24, March For Our Lives rallies took place all around the world. Locally, students held one outside the Monroe County Courthouse. One open mic speech, given by a woman who introduced herself as "Grandma," struck me in a way many other speeches didn't. As Grandma looked at the students in the front row, she told us, "Do not give up hope. When I was in high school years ago, I protested the Vietnam War. And we, as students, ended that war. You will be heard."

If I could say one thing to the adults of Bloomington and the United States, I would ask them to be like Grandma. Give us the help and support we are asking for or step aside and let us do it ourselves. Lives depend on it.

Taylor Harmon is a junior at Bloomington High School South, where she is editor of the school newspaper, The Optimist. After graduation, Taylor plans to attend Indiana University where she will continue her journalistic endeavors while studying arts management and musical theater.

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A special guest column by student journalist
Abby Cannon of Bloomington High School North

We Have Passion & Motivation

As I watched coverage of the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which left 14 students like me dead, I could not escape the dark reality that it could have been me and my classmates. Others must have been thinking the same thing. In just one day, the online group chat shared by Bloomington High Schools North and South grew to nearly 100 teenagers, each of us filled with rage and resolve that things had to change, and it was our turn to lead. We no longer felt safe in our schools.

If I can be allowed to speak for my generation, it has become obvious to us that no one is trying to solve the problem of mass school shootings—not the adults guarding our schools and certainly not those with legislative power. But we believe we can. Not only do we have the passion and the motivation, but we have both time and energy on our side. We admit we are only just beginning to learn how to use our collective voice, but we know our votes will soon count. We plan to use them to restore the idea that politicians work for us, that they should reflect our voice and our values. And above all, we value our lives.

Many cynics are convinced the solution to mass shootings is added school security in the form of metal detectors, police officers, or teachers and secretaries armed with guns. These solutions strike me not just as unrealistic, but also harmful. First, they promise a safer environment, when in reality there is no adequate defense against military-style weapons. Second, increasing security in this way would make our schools seem like deten-

tion centers, leading students to see imminent danger where there is none. And these "security solutions" dodge the problem. To say that increased security will solve mass shootings in schools is like offering a Band-Aid for a bullet wound.

In our short lifetimes, my generation has learned about the importance and necessity of social action the hard way, in real-time. We've been witness to the Women's March on Washington and the Charlottesville protests. We've watched the #BlackLivesMatter movement express its vital message through social media. We recognize our connection to the past—to the civil rights movement, the fight for women's equality, the antiwar movement. We hope we continue to reawaken that important paradigm. But what we've learned about activism in school is minor compared to the movement we are building and participating in right now.

Our goal is to achieve a national assault weapons ban, along with stricter, common-sense gun laws. We don't want to take away all guns, we want to eliminate the ones that have the ability to kill 14 high school students in six minutes, or 58 country music lovers in 10 minutes. Assault weapons must go. There is no more time to lose. The time for action is now.

Abby Cannon recently completed her junior year at Bloomington High School North where she was a reporter for Fused Magazine. Next year, Abby will attend The Loomis Chaffee School in Windsor, Connecticut, where she plans to write for the school newspaper.