

**Commentary...**

# Things have changed when it comes to guns in America

By Linda Weber  
Guest Columnist

The issue of gun violence and mass shootings is in full-throated debate once again. Each time this happens I pause to reflect on my own upbringing and my own feelings.

I was born into a gun culture. My father was a gunsmith. I remember sitting at his workbench as he reloaded shells. It was fascinating, learning about primers and powder and wadding and how the whole of it fit together. I remember the molten lead he poured to craft bullets and wonder if the exposure caused his dementia in later years. My memories of my father are nearly all colored by guns, gun activities, gun paraphernalia, gun discussions and stories.

My brothers were never allowed to have BB guns. They were always cautioned with stories of someone who lost an eye from a stray BB. Our safety and the safety of those around us was his first concern. Our family vacations were hunting and camping trips, complete with old and young gathered around the campfire at night swapping stories of the one they shot or the one they missed or the big one with the gigantic rack that was taken down by a single

well-placed shot. The camaraderie was genuine, the laughter infectious and the stories bigger and grander with each telling.

In fourth grade I went on a weekend hunting trip with my dad. We left after he closed the gun store on a Friday evening and drove late into the night. We arrived long after dark and I fell asleep in our tent. Daddy let me sleep as he and the other men made their way out of camp for the morning hunt. One old lady was left behind to get me breakfast and look after me.

It was mid-morning when the first pickups returned to camp. Excitement flared around my father's truck. I rushed to see what all the commotion was about and saw a big black mangy bear stretched out the full length of the truck bed. Daddy stood beside it with a wide, happy grin. The story was that he was on a stand when a big buck appeared at the edge of the clearing. Daddy readied his gun for a shot that would preserve the trophy rack and not do damage to the meat. He focused on the deer, ready to take his shot when something else loomed, a bear chasing the deer. Daddy's shot hit the bear and missed the deer. Everyone hooted and laughed until they doubled over. I took it all in,

proud and excited. My first solo hunting trip and we'd bagged a bear. Daddy cut a long-clawed paw off for me to take to Show-and-Tell.

When I turned 12 I joined the Junior Rifle Club. Daddy was the coach. In the years prior to my joining the club he coached a team of four, including one girl, to the National Junior Rifle Championship. I loved shooting my 22. A member of the Junior NRA, I proudly wore my patch. On my sixteenth birthday Daddy gave me my own Winchester 22 rifle, with Redfield sights and a hand-crafted black walnut stock he made himself. It was a work of his hands and I treasured it, winning first place that year in C Class, Prone and Sitting, at the Oregon State Junior Rifle Championship.

I also remember the anguish he felt when he sold a handgun and the man went home and committed suicide. I remember him telling about refusing to sell a gun to a young man because something "didn't feel right." That young man purchased his gun elsewhere and shot a family member. Daddy grieved over events like this and was jubilant when the federal government enacted the first background check laws in the Gun Control Act of 1968. He was vocally opposed to "machine guns,"

or any high-capacity magazine, or semi-automatics not intended for hunting or sport shooting. AK-47s would not have been on his list of acceptable firearms.

In 2000, when I ran for State Representative, Ginny Burdick promoted a bill for background checks for purchases at gun shows. I was lobbied hard to support that proposal. I went to see my father and discussed it. I wasn't certain where he stood. I shouldn't have been surprised when he came down on the side of background checks for all sales and purchases of guns! I announced my support of Burdick's bill and the NRA ran a mail campaign and two robo-call campaigns against me.

Today I realize how little has been done to stem the tide of mass shootings. I know in my heart my father

would have been opposed to the AK-47 rifle as a sporting gun. I find myself not only opposed to this weapon of mass murder, but unable to any longer reconcile gun ownership. Background checks are a must. It is the least we can do to offer a measure of protection to our children. After ponderous hours of thought I have come to believe that Congress should reinstate the assault rifle ban, institute a waiting period to purchase any gun from any source, conduct deep background checks and license gun-owners. Citizens should put pressure on stores such as Wal-Mart and Bi-Mart to follow the lead of Dick's Sporting Goods and stop selling AK-47s to anyone. When weighing the bottom line consider the cost of a child's life, a child who could grow up to be the next Steve Jobs or Elon Musk.

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