

ownership, and he gave me a nuanced report on how it feels to be a liberal, environmentalist community activist in a part of Oregon known for its many right-wing, anti-government residents.

"I'm an anomaly," he said. "I am sure there are other closeted people around with my views, but they don't talk about it. I have no problem with universal background checks, and requirements to show competency in handling guns. I think there should be strict rules in how firearms are stored and used."

Dave went on to explain gun culture, as he sees it today, "There is a shift in the culture. It's a different culture. We grew up with firearms. When I was about five years old, I had a pop gun. I aimed my pop gun at my dad - normal kid - and he took it away. You do not point a firearm at a human being for any reason whatsoever."

Dave believes that there are fewer hunters, more broken families, and therefore fewer granddads and dads taking kids out, and fewer hunter safety courses too. The main exposure to firearms is video games and TV shows, which don't give kids any understanding of what weapons are capable of doing. They are not learning - inside the safety of a healthy hunting culture, inside a family - how to use guns safely.

I asked Dave what he hears from gun owners when mass shootings occur. First, he was careful to distinguish hunters and target shooters from the general mass of gun owners, because there are differences. The guys hanging out in gun stores, who collect guns and have them at home for self-defense or a general animosity toward "government" are likely to say some variation on "If there had been someone carrying a gun in the that classroom, it never would have happened!" There is no shortage of anti-gun-control, anti-Obama, anti-government, pro-gun sentiment, according to Dave.

But I was also interested to learn that there aren't as many conversations about guns and gun ownership in the sporting goods world, anymore, because many guns are sold via telemarketers, a fact that I found startling.

Dave quit selling guns a few years ago and, he told me, "It doesn't break my heart." I take this to be for both financial and ethical reasons. Like me, he is concerned about the number of guns, and implied that there is a great naiveté about the magnitude of the problem: "I think there are more guns buried or hidden in Josephine County alone than you can even imagine."

The gun culture is powerful in rural Oregon, and I had to temper my hopes, as I listened to Dave talk about people who hold liberal views: "We're more conscientious about who we talk to, we who hold these views, we don't talk about it. It's kind of a silent society. The culture of people purchasing firearms, as well as the people selling firearms is much more a culture of zealots than it once was. Our small town people were not gun zealots in the past, but many are now."

He also spoke of the way that this zeal plays out in gun stores, where bigger and more powerful guns are favored: "I've seen gun salesmen in gun stores selling a gun that is not a good match, trying to sell people the most powerful gun on the shelf, or selling a woman who wants a handgun for protection a gun that's way too big. That's a problem." Dave relies on what our forefathers had in mind, an informed and an engaged electorate: "I almost want to think that a silent majority is in favor of reasonable gun standards."

I have another friend, Aucha Kameroff, middle-aged now, whom I taught many years ago in rural Alaska, when she was a schoolgirl and I a teacher with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest.

Aucha is a Yup'ik Native Alaskan, an independent, strong woman. Aucha's son Frank died by suicide with a gun; she is raising his three young boys, while working as a regional probation supervisor in Kotzebue on the Bering Sea coast. She hunts and fishes in traditional ways. She has seen the lethal damage that guns can do, very close up, in the tragic numbers of Native suicides and murders. She respects and cares for the weapons that sustain her family and carry on her cultural traditions. She uses them for good, guarding the safety of her young boys, sharing her skills and love of hunting and fishing with them. She knows all there is to know about what guns can do.

Late last fall, I went to two events, both of which lifted my spirits a little. The first was a vigil, held the very night of the day that nine people were murdered at Umpqua Community College. I was deeply touched by the clergy assembled at the entrance of City Hall in Portland. Rabbis, black preachers and a few white Protestants prayed with and for the people of Roseburg. These were city people, not small-town ministers, people who would stand out in Roseburg because of their rabbinical hats and beards or their skin color. They might have hesitated to go there, but they hastened to speak out, to stand with the people of Roseburg, to

lend their gravitas to the tragedy of those lives lost.

A few young students from Umpqua Community College were there as well; one slight young woman stood and spoke at the microphone among these older serious men, in a quavering voice, of her sorrow and her gratitude that the assembled people had come to mourn with her.

The second was a march in my neighborhood, around Peninsula Park and to the elegant pavilion in the sunken rose garden, a march organized by Moms Demand Action, a partner to Everytown for Gun Safety, which was established after the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Their mission statement includes these words: "Moms Demand Action supports the 2nd Amendment, but we believe common-sense solutions can help decrease the escalating epidemic of gun violence that kills too many of our children and loved ones every day."

Moms Demand Action has a campaign called "Wear Orange." They encourage demonstrators and supporters to wear orange to symbolize safety, as hunters do in order to see each other in the woods. This honors hunters, really, because what we all want is just safety, for our children, our friends, our neighbors, and people we like and don't like.

After this demonstration, a bright sea of orange standing out on a gray and rainy day, I posted a note about it on Facebook, to which two old high school friends responded with suspicion. These two men, who are both avid hunters and gun-owners, wondered what this was about. Did this group advocate taking their guns away? Is it anti-hunting?

Because of this smart "Wear Orange" campaign, I was able to give them an answer that made sense to them, that Moms Demand Action does not want to take their hunting rifles away, but wants reasonable controls on assault weapons, to end the relentless series of mass shootings to which we have become accustomed. These men understand hunter orange. They do not want little children gunned down. They did not object to my use of the phrase "gun violence." They want to go back out to the woods to hunt, safely. They seemed to be satisfied with my answer.

It felt like a small victory to me.

*Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, momsdemandaction.org. Moms Demand Action organizes demonstrations and letter-writing campaigns, among other actions. You can connect with the local chapter on the web site. Ceasefire Oregon, www.ceasefireoregon.org/, works to promote reasonable, effective gun laws.*



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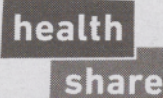
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