Face-to-face with violence: Silence no longer an option

I t dawned on me a few days after last week's Las Vegas mass shooting: It's been exactly 30 years since a St. Louis security guard abducted a friend and me at gunpoint.

I will get to that story shortly. More important is the reason I am retelling it. (Some of the details below were first shared in two St. Louis Post-Dispatch articles.)

I just cannot, anymore, be quiet when it comes to stronger gun laws and policies. As a journalist, I always refrained from getting involved in political or social justice organizations to avoid any appearance of my objectivity being compromised.

Five years ago, after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Conn., I wrote how angry I was at myself that as a victim of an abduction at gunpoint 25 years before, I sat in silence all those years. I wrote how I felt I owed it to the 26 victims of Sandy Hook as well as to the thousands of others who die each year in gun-related homicides to become proactive and do what I can to stop this senselessness.

But the truth is, I haven't done much at all. And I suppose I'm not alone, either, because sadly, not a damn thing has changed in terms of gun regulation since all that. And I suppose I'm not alone, either, because sadly, not a damn thing has changed in terms of gun regulation since all that. And I suppose I'm not alone, either, because sadly, not a damn thing has changed in terms of gun regulation since all that.

Since then, the United States has seen more than 1,500 acts of gun violence in which at least four people were wounded or killed, according to the Gun Violence Archive website, which collects gun violence incidents from more than 2,500 media, law enforcement, government and commercial sources.

That's nearly one mass shooting a day over the past five years.

A different meaning to Black Monday

My abduction took place on Black Monday — Oct. 19, 1987 — the day stock markets around the world crashed. A friend and I had attended a party at the downtown Gateway One building for reporters covering the World Series. That year the Cardinals were playing the Minnesota Twins. I had been assigned the “fan beat” by my then-employer, the Post-Dispatch, which entitled me entry to the party.

It was about 10:30 p.m. when we left the building and walked to my car, parked on a nearby street. As soon as we got in, a man rapped on the window and said something was sticking out of the back car door.

Judging by the way he was dressed, I thought he was a police officer. So I unlocked the door. Within seconds, he had climbed into the back seat, cocked the rearview mirror, placed a gun at the nape of my neck and said, “Drive.”

I had no idea where to go.

He wanted money. My friend and I had $8 between us. I offered him the World Series tickets I had gotten. He said he hated baseball. He noticed a ring I was wearing and took it. As he rifled through my purse, he also noticed a couple of credit cards.

“You can get money off of this,” he said.

I had no idea where I could get money off of my Visa card at 10:45 p.m. So I talked him into letting me go to the grocery store and get money using my check-cashing card.

Remember the days of grocery check-cashing cards? I told him I could get $200 from the card, maybe $250.

I drove to the Schnucks near Arsenal and Kingshighway. He had me park on the periphery of the lot and made my friend stay in the car while I went into the store. I took more than five minutes, he said he would kill her.

My mind raced. I had no idea what to do.

Should I get the money first, then try to get help? Should I just get the money, do what he said and hope for the best? My friend had a toddler at home. The consequences of screwing up were overwhelming.

The check-cashing machine made the decision for me. It rejected my requests for both $200 and $250.

Thank goodness there was a woman behind the service counter. I have no recollection of exactly what I said, but she summoned help. One of the store's security guards authorized her to give me the money. I collected the cash and ran out to the parking lot. More than five minutes had gone by.

The details of the rest of the story aren't as important as the ultimate outcome: We got him. By the time I scanned the parking lot for my car — it wasn't where I had left it — the grocery store security guards had intervened and St. Louis police were making the arrest.

However, while I was in the grocery store, he raped my friend. After police were done questioning us, we were driven to Jewish Hospital, where I underwent a lengthy and emotional exam. I sat waiting, watching as her clothes were carried out of the examining room in a plastic bag, trying to figure out what to say to make it better for her.

Guilt. I sure felt that. As bad as the experience was for me, it had to be worse for my friend.

The guy who victimized us was in custody, but another ordeal was just beginning. A grand jury investigation, depositions, a possible trial. Still, all of that paled in comparison to the memories of that night. How do you get over the trauma of having a gun pointed at your head? How do you get over being raped?

The answer, of course, is time, though you never really get over it. Talking about it helped, too, at least for me. My friend and I took advantage of the city’s Victim Services Unit, which provided some counseling and helped us navigate the criminal justice process. Once the security guard went to prison, Victim Services notified us each time he came up for parole, along with the outcome of those hearings.

No question I was one of the lucky ones. I got to keep my friend.

Eventually my friend, who wasn’t quite as fortunate, moved to Seattle and reinvented herself as a life coach, eventually the memory of what happened that night.

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Palestinian families and Israeli families

Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, and Druze for-
equal gender representation in peace Israel and the Palestinians, as well as understand-

The men and women who gathered

I am not against the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that states, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” But I am convinced our forefathers never intended

I think if anyone can do battle with the NRA and the oh, so powerful gun lobby in this country, it is a militia of like-minded mothers who have had enough. And I am hoping that getting involved with the moms group will help take my mind off the fact that after 30 years, the security guard who abducted my friend and me gets out of prison this month. And me gets out of prison this month.

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