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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Ten Years After
- 1 Where's Your Head At?
- 2 ?
- 2 Join Us at The People's Fair
- 2 ASK Day Is Always the First Day of Summer
- 2 Do You Hear Me? Do You Care?
- 3 Laugh, Laugh
- 4 Storyteller

WHERE'S MY NEWSLETTER?

Our apologies for the year gap in Mom Says Newsletters. The editor had health problems and surgery and we had no one with free time to replace her. We all volunteer for multiple causes.

The editor also maintains our web site, www.mmmdenver.org, and will be bringing the information up-to-date soon.

Ten Years After

As an organization, the Moms have refrained from marking any Columbine anniversary. Some of us live in area and we didn't want to use the tragedy for political means. But ten years is a milestone and a time for reflection.

I would like to share my memories of April 20. I attended a service at Light of the World that night. I was in shock looking at all the students....some crying, others expressing joy in seeing that their friends were okay and still others wondering the fate of those of which they hadn't seen or heard. There was no traffic on the streets and Bowles was blocked by flashing police cars by the library near the school. The place where I lived no longer felt safe but rather strange and menacing.

Instead of giving into fear, I vowed that night that my daughter and other young people should feel safe at school and in their neighborhood. But that hasn't happened.

The shootings at Columbine have been replicated many times over in our schools, our homes, our businesses and our streets. What does this say about us and the politicians we elect?

Where's Your Head At?

What was the Colorado Legislature thinking when they passed HB 1180 which would have allowed people with concealed carry weapon licenses to skip the Brady criminal background check at gun stores and at gun shows?

The current CCW law is poorly written and prohibits a centralized database of license holders and sharing of information between issuing and arresting law enforcement. There is no provision for timely retrieval of a revoked permit. A CCW license is good for five years and many changes can occur in a person's life. The break-up of a relationship could lead to a restraining order which would prohibit the purchase of a firearm.

Luckily for the public, Governor Ritter (D) vetoed this bill. The sponsor of the bill, Senator Brody (R), said this was a Second Amendment issue. We say it's a public safety issue. You wouldn't have sex without a condom since you can't tell if a person has a sexually transmitted disease just by looking or talking to them...just like you can't tell if someone is a prohibited firearm purchaser without a background check.

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What causes a run on firearms, especially assault weapons and an increase in NRA membership?

FEAR!!!! The NRA along with right-wing pundits like Glen Beck of Fox News and Lou Dobbs of CNN have been inflaming the masses with irresponsible rhetoric that President Obama and Congressional Democrats are planning to take their guns away. Yep, Glen Beck interviewed NRA president, Wayne LaPierre, on March 18 and; on April 5, a 22 year old man in a bullet-proof vest, met police responding to a domestic disturbance call and killed three policemen. He feared police were there to take away his guns.

Why are Americans so fearful now? We didn't use to be. For example, in the 1938 movie, 'You Can't Take It with You', Jean Arthur's character relates how her father hates when fear is used for commercial purposes to make people buy products they don't need.

Oh, well. We just wish the NRA would have made an effort to save our habeas corpus rights and fight warrantless wiretaps.

Join Us at the People's Fair

We'll have a booth to tell parents about the ASK program, www.paxusa.org. Come by and say hi! The People's Fair will be down in Civic Center Park on June 6 and 7. Hours are 10am - 8pm on Saturday and 10am - 7pm on Sunday. To learn more about the People's Fair, go to www.peoplesfair.com.

ASK Day Is Always The First Day of Summer

The Moms would like you to ask that one question that could save your child's life. Before you send your son, granddaughter, niece to play at another's house, ask if they own a firearm and if it is safely stored. Go to www.mmmdenver.org to find out more about this great program.

Do You Hear Me? Do You Care?

National park rangers and employees are probably asking those questions after Senator Colburn's (R-OK) Amendment to allow firearms in National Parks was attached to the Credit Card Reform bill and passed both the House and Senate. President Obama signed the bill into law over Memorial Day Weekend.

Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, rescinded former President G. W. Bush's order allowing firearms in National Parks. It was under President Reagan that firearms were required to be unloaded and put away, making our National Parks one of the safest places to be.

In fact, www.gunguys.com reports, "In 2007, over 270 million people visited our national parks and there were only nine criminal deaths across the park system. Compare this to what happens outside of our parks.

Do You Hear Me? Do You Care? continued

In 2007, in our country of 300 million people there were over 18,000 homicides, of which almost 13,000 were committed with guns.”

The National Parks Conservation Association issued a statement saying, “This amendment had no hearing or review, and will increase the risk of poaching, vandalism of historic park treasures, and threats to park visitors and staff.”

www.npca.org/media_center/press_releases/2009/guns_in_parks_statement.html

Both U.S. Senators and all of our Representatives with the exception of Rep. Polis (D) who was absent voted for this amendment. When called, Sen. Udall (D) had issued no statement. Sen. Bennet’s (D) office indicated national parks are under state jurisdiction and, as thus, should fall under a state’s gun laws as the reason for supporting the bill. Strange logic since the budget for these parks come from the Fed. Besides, what happens when a national park or monument span more than one state—like Yellowstone? Who has jurisdiction under your logic, Senator?

Laugh, Laugh

Former 2008 Presidential candidate, Mitt Romney (R) spoke at this year’s NRA annual convention in Phoenix. The former gun control advocate began his speech by saying, “It’s good to be with members of the National Rifle Association -- people who believe that the principles and protections and rights of the Constitution are more than history: that today as in the past, they drive our prosperity, ensure our safety, and protect our freedoms.”

It seems so funny to me...expect it really isn’t. It’s difficult to come to terms that our elected officials have no courage. The Republicans take their marching orders from the NRA and the Democrats have made the mistake of listening to former President Clinton’s explanation that gun control was the reason for their 2000 presidential election loss. The reason couldn’t have been an intern named Monica, could it Mr. Clinton?

Dorothy Samuels disproves this conventional wisdom in an article, “The Deadly Myth of Gun Control in Electoral Politics”, published in the New York Times on May 9. It’s a must read! Send a copy to all of your elected officials. Go to www.nytimes.com/2009/05/09/opinion/09sat4.html

Storyteller

Heidi Yewman is a 1986 graduate of Columbine High School. Her book about the impact of gun violence "Beyond the Bullet: Personal Stories of Gun Violence Aftermath," came out on April 10 (www.beyondthebulletbook.com). She lives in Vancouver, Washington.

Heidi’s letter reflecting on the 10 year anniversary of Columbine to the Denver Post is reprinted here with her permission.

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I wasn't in the library or the cafeteria. I didn't hear the screams or the pop of the guns. I was, however, profoundly affected by what happened at Columbine High School on that horrible day in April 1999.

It wasn't that I had studied in that library, or eaten in that cafeteria, or that most of the teachers teaching that day once taught me 13 years earlier. It was that I simply couldn't fathom something so evil happening in a place that had always been so safe for me.

I remember sitting at Dave Sanders' funeral. He was the sole teacher who died that day, killed while saving lives during the rampage. In the 1980s he had coached me, taught me, and touched my life. His senseless death was devastating. And it changed me.

Sitting on a hard wooden pew at a crowded funeral service a few days after the shooting, I vowed to do everything I could to prevent this from happening again. I had no idea the power that vow would have on my life.

I obsessively collected information about the shooting – trying to make sense of the senseless. I was struck by the differing reactions of the victims' families. Some sued everyone; some became gun control advocates; some found God; some hid from public view; and others seemed to melt away into their anguish. It seemed all the families wanted their child's life to matter – and not be forgotten.

A year later at the Million Mom March in Washington, D.C., I looked out over a sea of more than 750,000 people, many of whom wore T-shirts or held posters of their loved ones – birth dates, death dates, loving memories, smiling faces.

The sheer number of stories was overwhelming – and it is - each year guns kill 30,000 people in America. All those people have mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, and friends.

I thought about the pain in their eyes. How do you get through the day after something like that happens? How does it feel to wear that shirt or hold that poster? How do you deal with the effects of such tragedy 5 months, 5 years, or 5 decades later? This was more than Columbine; this was an ongoing national epidemic.

So I started looking for that pain; unfortunately, it was all too easy to find. Since 2003, I've talked to dozens of people about such heartbreaking details. Each interview was so intense and so emotional that afterward I often pulled my car to the side of the road and just sobbed, overwhelmed by their pain.

Their stories are seared into my mind. Lonnie who survived being shot in the head 4 times by a disturbed boyfriend, talked about pretending to be dead for 7 hours while she bled and waited to be rescued. John, whose 12-year-old daughter Shanelle was shot in the face by a neighbor, talked about driving to the hospital not knowing if he would see her alive or dead.

Kari, whose husband used his hunting gun to take his life, talked about how she had to teach her only child not to be embarrassed by how her dad died. And Sandie, whose 19-year-old son Josh was killed along with 6 others at a party, showed me how she sprays Josh's cologne in his room every day so she can close her eyes and hug his bedspread, feeling his presence.

What I've learned is that listening matters; that the human spirit is an amazing thing. I've learned that when it comes to gun deaths – no matter what your opinion or politics – pain is pain and loss is loss. And evil happens even in "safe" places.

I wasn't in the library or the cafeteria at Columbine. I can't imagine how the people I talked to felt on their worst day. But what I can do is tell their stories, small snapshots of anguish – because it helps them.

I knew it would. What I didn't know is that it would help me, too.