

Episode 112-- Remembering Stockton

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SPEAKERS

JJ Janflone, Julie Schardt, Kelly Sampson



JJ Janflone 00:00

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JJ Janflone 00:39

Hey everybody. Welcome back to "Red, Blue and Brady."



JJ Janflone 00:42

As always, I am your host JJ and, of course, I am joined by my co-host the fabulous Kelly Sampson. Now, today we're talking about something really heartbreaking. Before there was Parkland or even Columbine, there was the Cleveland Elementary School. But for many the name of the Stockton, California school is unfamiliar. On January 17, 1989, a former student opened fire on the playground of Cleveland Elementary School. Within just three minutes, the gunman fired 106 rounds from his recently-purchased AK47, killing five students and injuring another 31. The youngest student victim was six; the oldest, nine. One teacher was also injured while trying to get students to safety. While it was not the first school shooting in America, it was sadly one of the first to be featured during the 24-

hour news cycle, bringing the tragedy at Stockton into the living rooms of millions of horrified Americans. All of those who died, and most of those wounded, were Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrants who had arrived in the US as asylum seekers or refugees. Following the murders, many wondered how a man with multiple legal offenses - for things like selling weapons, attempted robbery, and drug possession - could purchase an AK 47, and if his crimes were racially motivated. Outcry and activism after the shooting, also helped lead to the passing of assault weapons laws, at a state and federal level.



JJ Janflone 02:03

Today, Kelly and I are joined by Julie Schardt, a founding member of Cleveland Remembers, a Brady California Chapter member, and a former teacher at Cleveland elementary school. Julie was there that day, and shares with us her memories of what happened, the students that were lost, and what drives her to still be engaged in gun violence prevention work to this day.



JJ Janflone 02:25

Julie, on behalf of Kelly and I want to welcome you. Do you want to go ahead and introduce yourself to our audience?



Julie Schardt 02:31

Yes, I am Julie Schardt. I live in Stockton, California in the Central Valley. And I am a member of Cleveland school Remembers - Brady, which is a local grassroots gun violence prevention organization.



JJ Janflone 02:42

And thank you so much, Julie, for coming on. I think the first question we have to ask is often the hardest question that we have to ask folks who come on, particularly when we're talking to survivors is, you know, can you detail what I'm sure was one of the hardest days of your life? Can you tell us what happened that day at that Stockton Elementary School, what happened that January 17?



03:04

As a member of a close knit group now - because all of the other members of Cleveland

school Remembers have become my, my best friends, my closest friends here - and although we experienced the same thing, we experienced it differently, all of us. And so I certainly respect that. The shooting incident happened at Cleveland Elementary School, here in Stockton, on January 17, as you said 32 years ago, in 1989. And it was a cold, crisp, clear day, and it was on a Tuesday. So we just had a three day weekend, and it was during the lunch recess. At the time, I was teaching second grade, it was my third year teaching. And so my students were at recess all the first to third graders were at their lunch recess, the kindergarten children were up in the cafeteria eating. And it started, for me, when I heard what I thought were firecrackers (which is kind of unusual in January), but that loud sort of piercing but instantaneous sound, you just associate with what you know. My classroom had one door to the outside, and the other door faced in - it wasn't exactly a pod, but we all kind of faced into a room where, um, our reading specialist had her, her table - and it was right next to the kindergarten area. And we shared a table, near a telephone that was on the wall, and my friend Sue Rothman, who was teaching kindergarten at the time, came around the corner. And I was in the classroom with one of my students who whose mom wanted her to stay in because she had a cold, so I kept her inside with me. And then Sue Rothman came up and then she, she ducked down behind the table, it was near the telephone just outside my classroom, and she said, "Oh my god, they're killing our kids." And she had realized that what she had heard was gunfire, because some of the gunshots were coming through the walls into her kindergarten classroom. So all the children's met individually either on the playground or, or at lunch, and it was. And it was then that I realized that something really different and anomalous had happened. And it kind of, I think was shocking, it transported me to a different place. Because what I did was I grabbed the hand of my student, Chandra, who was 8-years-old at the time, and I just kind of stood there, and I headed toward the door for the outside, because I thought a shooter was going to come into the classroom, into our building. And I thought, "Wait, I can't leave my other kids." And I'm not sure exactly what the thought process was. But I took her over to the outside door and then, holding her hand, I came back to the entry, into the pod, and I went back to the door again. It was like I couldn't decide what to do.



JJ Janflone 05:39

Now and you had an aide too, right? It wasn't just, just you in the classroom?



Julie Schardt 05:44

to back up a little bit. My my bilingual aide Saborn Kil had moved here as a refugee from Cambodia. And when she escaped Cambodia, she had to escape going through the killing fields, trying to get to the refugee camps in Thailand. And she and her family had to travel

through the jungle, and she had a six-month-old baby at the time, she was traveling with her, her family, and she had to stay about a mile behind the rest of them because she had a baby, and if the baby cried, it could have brought the attention of the Khmer Rouge to them, and would have killed all of them. So she'd been through some horrible trauma already, and she came back into the classroom just before the students started coming, coming back in. And are you familiar with those little coat closets they have in classrooms where teachers can hang a purse and a coat?



JJ Janflone 06:32

Yeah,



Julie Schardt 06:32

...and things like that, you know. It's maybe five feet tall and about one foot square, and she got into that closet, and she pulled the door closed in front of her. And I can remember seeing her, her beautiful fingers and her fingernails holding the door closed, because she knew what it was even before I did. She knew what the sound of shooting was like. But then after the students came in, you know, she was, you know, she was helping the students to get seated.



JJ Janflone 06:57

And so since the playground was right outside of your classroom, did the students then start coming back in, after the shooting had ended, or...?



Julie Schardt 07:04

Our students started coming into the building. And it was absolutely silent, after however long it took, less than five minutes of the gunshots. It was absolutely silent. And I didn't know until later what had happened. But my, my children started filing quietly into the classroom, which they knew to do, and went right into the, the normal practice we had - which was to sit down on the rug in front of my chair, because I would always read to them when they came in - but this was, this was really a different circumstance. Adrienne Egglund, who is a really good friend of mine, I think, was a kindergarten teacher at the time, and she actually was close to the door to the outside of the playground. And she actually, she had to do some triage with some students to decide, you know, can we move this student inside? Should the students stay here? Can we help the student at all? And she did that because she slipped into that role, having been in the army for two years. As an

officer, that was part of her training. And then my, when my students came in and sat down, I had an idea of what happened because one of my students - when everybody come in - one of my students said, came in and said, teacher, "Oeun is dead" and one was one of my students. And, and I distinctly remember saying, "Oh, you don't know that." And I don't, I don't know what I was thinking about what happened. I couldn't even imagine what it looked like. All I could think about were the children in front of me. And then I sat there and read to the students and I, I was reading the book that we had out that day. And it was a book that my children liked, it was "Two Bad Ants" by Chris Van Allsburg, because I loved his books, and they loved hearing his stories, and I just started reading that book. I mean, it was just like, an ordinary thing. What else could you do? And my students were absolutely silent. It was a wonderful class anyway, but they were just, there was no, no sound from them. Other than just their, their transfixed gaze on me because I was their teacher. And we'd been sitting down, my students were listening for maybe three or four minutes. And one of my other students, poked Maalin (who was a student of mine), in the back, on her hip, and he said, "Teacher, Maalin's bleeding." And I looked, and sure enough, she had been hit with some shrapnel. So my bilingual aide picked up Maalin and took her up to the office. It was shortly after that that principal came over the intercom and wanted us to take roll, and send a roll sheet up to the office, so we could let them know who was in the classroom and who wasn't. Now I had one extra student who had been in my class the year before, but he still was mine in a way, and it was my classroom. He came to he was in third grade at the time. But I had two students who didn't come back inside one was Oeun Lim, and the other one was Tokala Soy. Tokala was severely wounded in her groin, in her hip, and she came back to school about a month later in a wheelchair.



JJ Janflone 09:57

Well, I think so much of this is a shock right, everyone just, sort of, still sitting quietly and reading. And now, you're all still in the classroom when when security shows up, right?



JJ Janflone 10:06

One of the EMTs, I think was a firefighter came into the classroom, and he was this tall presence in a uniform, and I thought he looked sick. He was, he was grey, he was actually grey. And I thought, "This man needs to sit down and have a glass of water." But I think he was reacting to what he had seen and dealt with on the playground, and he was coming around to see how the students and the teachers were doing in the classroom. Then after he checked on us, then he left. And I just remembered the look on his face.

J

Julie Schardt 10:35

It was after that, that all of us were asked to walk our children up to the multipurpose room. And down in that area, we, the first through third grade teachers, students had - those who could - had come back to the into the classroom, there were some children who were wounded, who were being cared for, in that, in that open area of the of the pod where our reading specialist, Bernice Lee had her table. And Adrienne, and I think a couple of the other teachers were using, probably Patty Doll, who was teaching, I think, first grade at the time, we're using coats to stop the bleeding on some of the children who had been brought inside. But I wasn't aware of this until later, the only thing that I could see was my students as a group. And then when we walked through there, I think the students who had been wounded had been taken up. And I found out later that, you know, helicopters had come, ambulances had come, and the children were being taken to the hospitals. So maybe it was an hour earlier. I don't know how long it was. But our procedure was to walk up the hallway, from the elementary classrooms. And then we actually had to go through another teacher's classroom. He was a third grade teacher, and we walked through his classroom to go to the multipurpose room for lunch - every day, that was the past path that we took. And when I walked out there with my classroom, there were parents on either side of the walkway, and they were parents who were, who were looking for their kids, you know, hoping that they would, they would see their kids coming up the walkway -- and my husband was there.

J

Julie Schardt 12:04

He had had a back surgery, and so he was home. And he came because we just live a few blocks away from the school, and I think he might have heard that a teacher was wounded, and he knew about what had happened on the playground. And so I think he wanted to see me. And I said to him, "Are our kids alright?" because we had three kids who were in various Stockton schools at that time. And that's what, the only thing I could think of was, "if this happened here, what's happening at the other schools?" Then we went into the multi-purpose room, and sat down at tables, and I believe we took roll again. And then the principal came up to me and said, she wanted to talk to me. And she took me to the front of the multipurpose room, by the stage, and she said, "I need to talk to you," and then I said "are my kids alright." And she said, "I don't know about your children." But she said, "I need you to come out on the playground, to see if you can identify this student as your student," Oeun Lim. So by that time, there were, there was nobody else on the playground. There, I think the coats, and some of the play equipment might have still been out there. But it was just Pat Busher, our principal, and me, and a police officer who walked the length of the playground, which was the practically the length of the school because our primary wing was way down at the other end of the building.

J

Julie Schardt 13:27

And there was a child lying on the playground, right near the tetherball. Right near where, usually it was the little girls, who played Chinese jump rope, or Foursquare or something, and I was asked to look at this, at this little girl who had obviously experienced a horrible head wound, and I had to look at her and I had to say, "yes, this is my student Oeun." But I couldn't bring myself to do that. I mean, I looked at her and I saw, she had, she was wearing red shoes, and I knew that Oeun had red shoes, and red is my favorite color. And I remember just seeing those shoes, but it was, I couldn't bring myself to say that this is Oeun, and it was like it was going to be some kind of finality, when, you know, I'm a teacher. You know, and a teacher's call is to keep your kids safe, and then teach the best you can. And the principal, Pat, had to call up my good friend Judy Weldon, who was Oeun's reading teacher to look at Oeun to affirm that it is indeed who was lying there. And it was just -- it's an indescribable experience. I can't imagine what it must be like for parents who have to do something like that.

J

Julie Schardt 14:44

And then it was after that, that the final list was put together, that we had had 30 children wounded, that five children had been killed, and a teacher had been wounded as she was trying to shepherd the students toward safety. And that was when they were, the kids were connected with their, with their families, those who who hadn't been wounded, and who could go home with their parents. And we had, we had, we were given a signup sheet. So when the parents of my students came in, I did check off that this student went to be with his parents, and that student went to be with her parents. And then the parents who came in who, whose children were not in the cafeteria, were taken up to meet with the principal who had to tell them, Tokala's parents found out that their daughter was taken to a hospital in Modesto. I honestly can't remember what the rest of that day was like, it's just kind of a fog. Except I know exactly what I was wearing, and I know I walked home afterwards -- I never wore that dress again. I threw the dress away. And then the rest of the day was kind of a flop. But I learned later, what the experiences were like for, you know, for my colleagues that, you know. Judy was thinking about the fact that she was going to get to go home to her two little girls. And yet, a lot of the parents at our school weren't gonna have their kids at home that night. You know, it was just a, it was a horrific experience.

J

Julie Schardt 16:10

Niki Smith, who is the leader of our Cleveland School Remembers, Brady group, was actually teaching headstart at the church next door, at First Baptist Church, and heard the sirens or the helicopters coming, and things like that. But I didn't know that until I met

her, when we came together as a group. So you know, she'd had a very raw experience that day as well. And there are other things, you know, that I think about that come up about that day. But as I said, I'm, I'm part of a group of - there are 10 of us now - and six of us had the experience that day, and it informs a lot of what we do.



JJ Janflone 16:50

I want to thank you for sharing, because I know - I talk about it on this podcast a lot, but my first career was teaching - and I had, I had middle school and high school kids. Which is a little bit different from elementary, but you do love like, they're yours.



Julie Schardt 17:05

They are.



JJ Janflone 17:05

You love them, remember them, and you take it very personally when when they're hurt. You want to see them, see them grow up. And so that has to be, that had to have been and still is, I'm sure very, very hard for you.



Julie Schardt 17:18

It is, and, and like you said -- you want to see them grow up. And it's always, it's very special for me now - as I've been retired for 10 years, but I'm still in Stockton - and then I'll be someplace, and somebody will come up and say, " Mrs. Scharrts, don't you remember me?" and it would be a student that I had in the past, because they grew up and they look different. I look the same. But then it's wonderful to hear that they grow up and you know, become a part of the community have families (or not), go to school...



JJ Janflone 17:47

Yeah, I get the notices now that they're like, when they're having babies. And I'm like, "You can't! You're fourteen. Like they're, they're forever fourteen, in your brain. And you're like, "that's not, no you're not..." Like, how old can I possibly be that that's what's happening now? And so...the, the other, the other thing that I wanted to bring up that I find so striking is that, I think for a lot of our listeners (we have a lot of younger listeners), that may not realize especially if they grew up as digital natives that, like, in 1989, there weren't cell

phones. So people weren't text messaging or, sort of, immediately calling. You didn't have this information of what was happening immediately. So unless your principal called you over the intercom system, there are just things you didn't know. And that also schooling was much different. So things like your husband could just walk into into school.



Julie Schardt 18:34

Yes.



JJ Janflone 18:35

So I'm wondering for you, like when you were going through your your teacher training and whatnot - so now, now teachers get training on lockdown drills, they get trainings on active shooter situations - had, had you guys ever had a conversation about what to do or...?



Julie Schardt 18:52

Nothing like that. Because it's not something that even entered our, our frame of reference or thoughts. I don't, I don't think anybody had even thought about that, and I know it wasn't the first, but to think about something like that happening, you know, at your school. But none of my teacher training dealt with that. We did have fire drills - stop, drop and roll and things like that - you know, if there's a fire or, you know, where to go if you're on the playground, or where to go if you're in the classroom, to leave the building and things like that. So we were prepared, but nothing like that. But it's different now because I was reading yesterday, the day before, that the congressional staffers who were in the Capitol last week when the incident - insurrection - happened at the Capitol, that a lot of those yellow staffers knew what to do when they were in, I believe it was Speaker Pelosi office, they knew to get under the table. They knew to to block the door. They knew not to say anything, because they'd had that kind of training when they were in school, you know, to protect themselves.



Kelly Sampson 19:57

I also just want to thank you so much for sharing your story, I'm sure it's not easy to go back to it, even after all this time. And I was wondering, you know, to the extent that you'd like to delve into the aftermath, if you could share with us what it was like, in the days and months after the shooting. Because so often, the coverage moves on, but obviously, there's a lot of trauma and healing and loss that, that you suffered.



JJ Janflone 20:24

Yes, it's interesting, because, you know, we've, we've talked about this as a group, and we, we were all professionals, this teaching was our career. We had families. And so, you know, our, our attention was on our families, and just continuing on. But in the immediate aftermath, in the rest of that year, it was really different at school from a normal year. We went back to school the very next day, that was, I don't know there's, we've had some conversation about whether or not that was a good idea, I can't imagine being anyplace else other than with my students. A lot of students didn't come back right away, but a lot of students did. And so, at the same time that you wanted to introduce normality and, and bring back the things that they could count on, you know, you also wanted to listen to what the kids were saying, pay attention to behaviors, acting out or withdrawing, or whatever it was.



Julie Schardt 21:16

Fortunately, we had a lot of support from counselors on campus, and for the students, as well as for the teachers, and I think that helped me because it was such a such an anomaly. Such an unusual thing. It was like you were trying to figure out as you were going along, what would be the best way to respond. You know, that same hallway where I walked up with my children and where my, my colleagues Arienne and Sue, and Patty and Judy, all walked up the hallway, to take our children up to multipurpose room. Within a matter of days, there were cards from all over the world, from Japan, and Germany, and Australia, and we had 1,000 cranes, and that hallway, and every available hall space in that whole school was covered with posters, well wishes, cards, and things like that. So even though we experienced it in our own school family, the world was, was with us and wanted us to know that we weren't alone, and they were wishing us well. And we kept those things up the whole school year.



Julie Schardt 22:21

So, you know, after that the testing regimen did not exist anymore, because how could you test kids who had experienced something like that? You know, who've seen their best friends slaughtered on a playground, or whose families were reliving a trauma? You know, we had a family who, one of the families who had lost children in Cambodia, and lost a child on the playground. They, those families came, came to the United States for safety and for an opportunity for their children. And then to face something else, it really, you know, I think just tore up the wounds all over again. There were some things that came about, you know, like the Assault Weapons Ban and things like that. But one of the things that you started to evolve right away was APSARA, which is the Asian Pacific. And I can't

remember what the acronym stands for. But the Cambodian community, a lot of the families lived in the same area - just a few blocks from Cleveland School - and what happened with this outpouring of support, along came, with it, came a lot of money to the Cambodian community. And so that has evolved and still exists as a place of support. It's a, it's a lovely apartment complex, which was fixed up, it was relandscaped and it's also a center of Cambodian and Southeast Asian culture, with support for finding jobs, for celebrations, and things like that. So there were some some good things that came about after that.



JJ Janflone 23:50

Yeah, I wonder if we - to take a step back - could you talk about the so-called "motive" quote/unquote, for, for the shooting that happened. Because your the school that you taught, and it was primarily like, the children of Vietnamese in Cambodian immigrants, correct? Or, or themselves kids who were refugees and asylum seekers, and this was, this was a hate crime. The school was targeted for that population.



JJ Janflone 24:14

Well, you know, it was. It was in that this person who did this, had a horrible experience as a child, a horrible upbringing, he - there was mental illness, there was drug abuse, he was abused by his parents - and our own principal, Pat Busher said that when she went out onto the playground, and she saw this person lying on the ground because he killed himself, after he, you know, shot our children, and she said she felt the hatred for him. And then afterwards, when she found out what he had gone through, and he'd been a student at our school, maybe for a couple of years up until third grade, and she realized what he had gone through and she said, she said "We failed him." So at the same time, she was hating for what happened, she realized that he was just one, one person who, you know, would perpetrate something like this. But he was, I think, spurred on by the fact that our school had mostly Southeast Asian students. All of my Asian students were born in refugee camps, either in Thailand or the Philippines. And their parents were Cambodian, although I had some Hmong students. And it was later - because we, we kept the Cambodian students kind of together, for English language support purposes, and the Vietnamese students together for language support, and we had bilingual aides - so in that respect, it was a hate crime. Whatever it is that motivates people to do things. But in that respect, I think it was a hate crime. And I think, I think that's the kind of thing that that somehow motivates people, even yet.



Kelly Sampson 25:52

It's pretty devastating to hear you talk about the background of a lot of the students and how they had fled so much, and then came here to be victimized in that way. Yeah - it's just really, really very sad. And I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about how you became the person that you are now? You've mentioned, a few times now, that you've been involved in this group to remember and, and sort of advocate for gun violence, in honor of the memory of the students. So I was wondering how you got involved in activism?



JJ Janflone 26:24

Yes, I'd always been kind of interested in politics from the time I was 12-years-old, and it was my job to give an advocacy speech for John F. Kennedy, in my, what, my seventh grade classroom, whatever it was. And so that kind of action was in the back of my mind, but I, you know, I had, at the time, our children were pretty young, they were in third, sixth and ninth grade or something like that, when the shooting happened. And I was busy with life with teaching it with my family, and wasn't necessarily an activist. But those of us who experienced the shooting together had kind of stayed connected with each other, we would meet maybe once a year for lunch, and just talk about, you know, what our kids were doing, or what we were doing, and pretty much after, well, before we retired, I think we got together once in a while, or we'd see each other in the grocery store. And then after we retired, we had I think, because of our common experience, we never, I don't think we've talked about it that much even get together for lunch. It wasn't as though Oh, do you remember that awful day, it was as if life had evolved, it was always with us, and was always going to be a part of where our hearts were. But it wasn't motivating us to act until December 14 of 2012 when Sandy Hook happened. And you know, we we all saw the same thing on TV. And we saw the pictures of those children that night. And I sat at my dining room table just sobbing, looking at those pictures. And I found out that my friends were doing the same thing. And so we we got together and at su rathmines house, which kind of became a meeting place. And I think it was Judy, who said you shed tears now what are we going to do about it? And we didn't know what to do about it. But we thought we wanted to do something. And so we looked for ways that maybe we could help with gun violence prevention efforts. I think what we want to do is just solve the problem ourselves, you know, because we, you know, we lived in and it was still happening. And, and that's what was really shocking. I mean, every time a school shooting happened, you know, wrenched us, but Sandy Hook was so close to us because of the ages of the of the kids, I think. And so over time, what we did, as we tried to figure out what to do, we found out what other people were doing. And even though we didn't formally affiliate with Brady, until about three years ago, we learned about Brady, the Brady organization right away,

we went up to a meeting in Sacramento, because Amanda Wilcox hadn't invited us. But most of our efforts were here at home. And we found out that we could not only could we read in the newspaper about what was going on, but we can actually make a difference by calling and writing to legislators. So we started that on a local level, and started trying to think of ways to bring the community in. And as teachers and as elementary school teachers, we thought one way to reach the community would be through art with children because what we It was a natural connection for us to make the children so we thought we could reach the community by doing art within for kids. So we started what we called draw it out. And we went to different events and gave kids an opportunity to make you know what a prayer flag is right. Those prayer flags that you see hanging on people's porches. What we did were wish flags. And we worked with Kristen rennaker, who is a local, I would say an art facilitator for young people. And what we did was we made blocks that kids could print on a budget like a five by seven square of fabric and boy did we spend a lot of time cutting those schools. And then kids would come to these events. And we would ask them, What would you like to see or do to make your your neighborhood a better place, and we just left it wide open. And then they would stamp this this image on a cloth. And it would it was it was a house with a child leaning out a window, it was just an outline of a child with their hands up like this. And there was a speech bubble. So everything from we'd like to have Santa Clauses visit our neighborhood to we wish there wouldn't be so many guns or there were wishes, wishes that had to do with police, with safety, with the environment with people picking up litter. And we did that for a few years with draw it out. And we ended up with, I don't know, maybe 1500 wish flags, which we've shown in various places, which we still have stored someplace. But probably the best thing that happened was that's how Nikki Smith, who I mentioned before, was a kindergarten teacher with headstart at the Baptist Church. She was she found out what we were doing. And because she had taught kindergarten kids, and she was interested in the art component that she associated herself with us. So we had drawn out. And then that led to three art against violence exhibits that we did, starting at a fairly small venue downtown at the Mexican heritage center. And because because it grew, and because there was interest, we found space at our fairgrounds. And Sharon Jarvis, who wasn't a teacher at the time was a retired attorney who was a close friend of mine and said, Hey, I'm interested in what you're doing. And so she and Nikki kind of headed that up and made it a huge event. And we had art from pretty much all over our area, having to do with a response to gun violence. So we were able to reach the community that way and got people to sign petitions and pay attention to our our Facebook page and things like that. And we want to give a plug for what the social medias are so people can find you. Oh, yes, I'd like to do that our Facebook is Cleveland school remembers our Twitter is I believe it's CSR underscore Stockton, and our website is living school members.org. And we are I like to say we I don't have very much to do with dating and upgrading it. But it's it's evolving. So we have a webpage. And that we want to make some of these things

interactive to let people know what's going on here. Partly because we started because of a mass shooting at our school. But we found out that there are shootings that are happening in our community. And I know you asked me before about what's happened with the increased purchase of guns with COVID and things like that. The incidence of shootings and homicides are increasing after they've gone down 40% in the past year. But we also know that guns are responsible for most of the suicides that happen. And so Sue Rothman and Becky Carmen, who are two of my friends, with leading school members have been working diligently on stop suicide, San Joaquin, and as a result of their work, but it started out what we wanted to do was get information to gun dealers just to make them aware or aware of a new relationship between guns and suicides. And what happened was with that effort is that Sue and Becky are Bulldogs when it comes to getting things done. And they had meetings and invited the local mental health organizations. And we found out that as much as they do a good job, they were focusing on suicide in school, which is a really important issue. But we're missing we're missing that demographic of veterans and rural men who complete suicide at a far higher rate. And so as a result of that, they got the mental health community listen and kind of agreed to work on their grant process to get information into the hands, not just of gun dealers. But also we have fliers that are going into the the boxes are being put together for food banks and things like that. They've gone into local politicians, offices, City Council, and put that brochure everywhere. So something that started as a group of women whose hearts were broken because of another mass shooting has really kind of spread out. But one thing we're trying to do now is work with other organizations within our community that are already doing some of this kind of work to work parallel with them to make a difference for gun violence prevention. There's so many different parts to this puzzle that when you you know, when you link it all together, and you like to think you're making a difference that when you see the numbers go up again. What can you do this?



JJ Janflone 34:33

Well, I think in all the activism and what I what I think is so interesting about your group is that even before you're really a formal group, you know, even before you're formally Clevelander members and you're doing all this work that you do now, so many survivors and and former teachers at the Cleveland school, and really fighting for gun violence prevention legislation. And I'm wondering maybe if you could talk a little bit about the local and federal assault weapons ban that you all help pass



JJ Janflone 35:00

Yeah, and it's because of the mass casualties that can happen with an assault weapon or

any military style weapon or, or ammunition that allows something like this to happen. And so we had, there was a teacher at our school who actually went and testified in Washington, DC when there was conversation about having the the federal assault weapons ban that Dianne Feinstein fostered through there, there was a local ban, that still exists here in California. But it took a lot of a lot of work and a lot of hearings. And I think it was pretty close. The vote was pretty close as far as passing the assault weapons ban, the Federal ban, and then at sunset in 2004. And we haven't been able to get it back again in it, and we're working on it. But the work on that assault weapons ban, I think the publicity that went with it brought a lot of attention to the issue. And at the same time that it was supporting the need for this ban, the NRA was coming out to work against it as much as they could. And they lost that time. But since 2004, when the bill sunset, that it, they've been able to make sure that another assault weapons ban hasn't been passed. And so we need to we need to work on that. But it was it was interesting, because then I don't think any of us before that had paid attention to things that happen in our lives being somehow connected to some kind of legislation, because it was so raw and so important for us, I think we learn then that you push hard enough and speak out loudly enough, maybe it'll make a difference. And so we did learn that sometimes you need well defined laws to identify an issue and try to make sure that what prompted it doesn't happen again.



JJ Janflone 36:38

Because I will say the young for listeners who who are unfamiliar with this, the man who did the shooting had had numerous arrests and whatnot, and did not have very clear documentation. You know, he was fine with a bunch of false papers and things like that. But he was able to walk into a store and walk out



36:58

with a with an assault weapon the same



JJ Janflone 37:00

the same day and the same interaction. So there were a lot of things I highly recommend. I'll link an article that was done that sort of I think gives a lot of good background from what we've talked about today.



JJ Janflone 37:10

But that is a gun that should never been should have been sold. So that is I agree.



JJ Janflone 37:14

Yeah. And because there we didn't have. Well, he did I think he had to wait, what 15 days for one of his handguns, or something like that,



JJ Janflone 37:22

yes, but not for what he



JJ Janflone 37:24

used in the app, what he used, what he used. And, you know, we still, I know, Nevada passed a bill but then you go to Arizona or other nearby states and and go to a gun show and purchase any of these. And then there's the issue of ghost guns and things like that. And that's for another discussion to



Kelly Sampson 37:43

one of the things that I find really interesting hearing your story at the school and then also your experience as an activist in a time when we still see school shootings is in recent years. So many of these shootings end up becoming like a one word sort of, signifier of the need to do something. So Parkland, Columbine, then cook. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about why Cleveland or you know, Stockton and its legacy have been somewhat left out of that conversation, and has in many ways been forgotten, despite the fact that there were young children who were shot and killed at their school,



JJ Janflone 38:24

I think because it was the first major shooting of modern times. I mean, the first incident of the school shooting was way back in the 1700s. And they have happened. We were in the news for a while, because because of the mash cat mass casualties, and then it was a few years until another shooting happened. And it's like, those are clumped together. I'm not really sure why Cleveland is kind of forgotten. Except is it that we only last five children is there an only in front of that. And when you think about, you can't put an N only with a

number because these are these were our children. They were their parents, children, they were a part of our community. So you know, every single one of them should still be remembered. And it's it's something we think about every time that there's a list, but it doesn't, it doesn't really come up. And I don't know why that's the case. But if you talk to us, or if you talk to anybody else, we found that, for example, on our Facebook page, as the posts have been updated, we've had people comment on some of the posts, because everybody who was here at that time remembers where they were and how they were impacted. And it's something like this touches people for the rest of their lives. I don't know, we we wish that our kids were still part of the story, but they're definitely part of that long, awful line of the mass shootings for us. So I guess my point in telling you that is every time a child is killed at school, that that should be a part of the story. Because we know that stories motivate people, they move people to act. I saw the look on Senator Joe Manchin face when some of the Sandy Hook parents were walking in and talking to him about what had happened and wanted him to support a background check bill, you know, so people are really moved by that in our own Congressman, when we were part of one of the Brady meetings in Washington, DC when we had a Lobby Day, and we went into congressman McNerney, his office, and Judy put forward on his table, the pictures of our students, and he, he had known what had happened, but he was we were supposed to get 15 minutes of his time, and he ended up talking to us for probably an hour, you know, so. So it's, I don't want to say that we need to use these children, but I think we do. You know, if they were killed in an incident like this, then they need to be part of the messaging to try to make changes here.



JJ Janflone 40:54

And there names shouldn't be forgotten. No. I always wonder to what is it like for usually when you see other school shootings in the news now that it's been three decades since the shooting at Cleveland, what what is it like for you, when you see these shootings happening again,



Julie Schardt 41:12

the kids say that we've become inured, because it's still shocking. But I'll tell you, as soon as the COVID lockdowns happened, and kids couldn't go to school anymore, one of the first things I thought was good, there's not going to be any school shootings. While we have this lockdown. In effect, one of my friends, one of my claims, school members, friends, Barbara sarcone, and I were were talking about the fact that life goes on. But when an incident happens, a school shooting you you kind of relive your experience or even something like what happened in Washington, DC last week, it was, it was a completely different thing. But it's like, you have these nerve endings that are, you know,

ready to receive an assault, when somebody else goes through something like that, the fear because of guns and weapons and things like that. But even though it's still really shocking every time a school shooting happens, I guess I have to say, I'm not surprised. And there's things that we could do about it. But it's not surprising. It's awful to hear about them. But they keep happening until I honestly don't know what else we can do. You know, I'm hopeful with this new Congress that some legislation will happen. But then there's been this proliferation of gun purchases. And, you know, we know as Brady, that when you have a firearm, if you if you're getting it for protection, chances are somebody in your own house is going to use it. And I think it might relate to the increase in the shootings in our own in our own community,



Kelly Sampson 42:36

you decided so profound about your experience that you went through at the school, sort of leaving your nerve endings exposed, and therefore being re traumatized by a lot of different sorts of things. And I don't know, I think that just illustrates really well, the fact that these incidents don't just stop when the headlines do, and that they impact people for the rest of their lives.



JJ Janflone 42:58

You know, and before we say goodbye, I would love to if we could have, maybe you give some advice to folks who want to get involved in activism to who, you know, after listening to this podcast, are, you know, heartbroken about the children lost, but also really want to get engaged and preventing future tragedies from happening.



Julie Schardt 43:16

You know, you, I think you you try to find some like minded people, and don't think you can do everything by yourself. But the most important thing is in every city, every community, there's going to be somebody who's interested in doing something about this. And if you were lucky enough to live someplace like Stockton, there are groups that are working on it, so that you don't have to do everything on your own. But also don't hesitate to reach out to the smaller chapters, because our experiences maybe the mistakes we've made, as well as the successes that we've had, we would be happy to share it with with anybody. And it would be the same with all the other Brady chapters throughout the US, I think, and thank you for this opportunity. It's a it's actually energizing to talk about it because I'm ready to I'm ready to get back to work.



JJ Janflone 44:03

And now we turn to her unbelievable, but this story unfortunately takes place and when we call County, Maryland, and sadly also involves a fire. A 52 year old man was at home he was attempting to put his loaded gun away in a carrying case when it unintentionally went off. Now unfortunately, this happens all too often as we now know. This is one of the reasons why you should always store your firearms unloaded. Now, what complicated matters was that the man was standing in his house trailer next to a 30 pound propane tank, so the bullet from his gun struck the tank, which immediately ignited the home in flames. Now this man and his adult son who were both in the trailer were burned but were able to make it out of their home okay. Fire Marshals also say that both men are expected to make a full recovery, but the trailer was a complete loss. The fire itself was so large that it took 28 firefighters to put it out. So you know, lesson learned hopefully, keep your firearms away from propane tanks and all other flammable substances. This week's news update starts off with some news about one of our frequent discussion topics, the NRA. On Friday, the National Rifle Association announced it was going to be a filing for bankruptcy, and B would be leaving the state of New York for Texas. Now, the NRA has long been based out of Fairfax, Virginia and has operated as a New York registered nonprofit since its founding in 1871. This news comes just five months after New York State Attorney General Letitia James filed a civil suit seeks to dissolve the NRA due to members of his executive team allegedly using millions of NRA dollars for lavish personal expenses. You can learn more about that at [dissolve.com](https://www.dissolve.com) which also includes links to the podcast that we did on that very same topic. And other news, while the US Capitol building has always had metal detectors for guests to walk through, following the January 6 insurrectionists. Attack on the Capitol, there have been some changes, namely, there are now also metal detectors located outside the house for lawmakers and their aides. Now we'll have to walk through these before entering the house of representatives chamber. It is important to remember that members of Congress are allowed to store firearms in their offices. Initially, some members of Congress refused to go through the sectors leading House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to propose a new rule or members who do not follow the new protocols may be fined \$5,000 for the first time offense and \$10,000 for a second time offense, though this measure isn't going to be voted on until January 21. Hey, I'm sure at the podcast. Listeners cannot get in touch with us here at Red Balloon Brady via phone or text message. Simply call or text us 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever. As always, I love hearing from all of you out there. Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's life saving work in Congress, sports and communities across the country is made possible. Thanks to you. For more information on Brady, for how to get involved in the fight against gun violence. Please like and subscribe to the podcast. Get in touch with us at [Brady united.org](https://bradyunited.org) or on social media buzz. Be brave. And remember, take action not sides.

