

From the Editor's Desk

by Susan Fox



Can a Million Moms Stop Senseless Violence? A Personal Invitation to Mothers Day March

Almost everyone today has a story about how senseless gun violence has touched them. Let me share a California woman's story and then my own. Then I want to tell you about the Million Mom March.

Here's the story of what happened to the California woman on August 10, 1999: 'I'd just gotten my hair cut. I was driving...and had to pull over three times for fire trucks. And I thought, 'That must be one helluva fire.' And I got home and the phone was ringing, and my ex-brother-in-law was saying, 'Did you hear about the shooting?' And I said, 'Where?'

Thus begins the Gail Powers' story, a mother's story, an everyday citizen's story. "My ex-brother-in-law said, 'The Jewish Community Center,' and 'Isn't that where you have Nathan?' I've never experienced that kind of terror and powerlessness in my life. The adrenaline was the only thing that kept me standing. All I could think was, 'Oh please, oh God, oh God, don't let anybody be dead.'" The rest comes in flashes. Driving. Parking. Running. The sounds of the crowd and the helicopters. Hysterical parents on cell phones. The sudden realization that her daughter still needed to be picked up from camp, and who was going to do it? The kind stranger who said, "Would you like to come into my house and use the phone?" And then, like a miracle, the image on the stranger's TV of that now-unforgettable daisy chain of children being led to safety, and in the second batch, Nathan's stunned little face and curly hair.

The rampage of white supremacist Burford Furrow resulted in the wounding of five people at the Jewish Community Center and the shooting death of a nearby postal worker afterward. And those are only the physical casualties. The emotional scars on the children and their parents, teachers and other family members will be

felt for many years to come.

Now, here's my story. Late in the evening of September 15, 1999, I was watching the 11 o'clock news when I saw that a gunman had walked into the middle of a youth rally in a Texas church and killed a group of people, most of them teenagers. I shook my head and remarked to my drowsy partner that senseless violence had reached a new low, killing young people in church.

The next morning my mother called, I was out but she left me a message: "That was Jay's church." My nephew, Jay Fannin, was the youth minister in charge of the service at Wedgewood Baptist Church. Apparently, a Christian rock band had just begun to play when Jay realized that he had forgotten to project the lyrics onto a large screen at the front of the sanctuary. He climbed into the empty balcony. Moments later, an embittered loner, Larry Ashbrook entered with guns and pipe bombs. Jay ran to call 911.

Jay's wife, Nikki, and daughter were in the service. Nikki was the first to encounter the gunman at the door where she was assisting with check in. She was shot at but instead of fleeing, and despite seeing several co-workers shot and killed, she followed Ashbrook into the sanctuary and called to all the teenagers to stay calm and duck under the pews. After killing seven people and wounding seven other, Ashbrook killed himself. He had more than 100 rounds of ammunition still in his pockets.

Over and over, I listened as the networks played Jay's 911 call. I watched him on "Larry King Live" talking about the many more lives that could have been taken, the struggle to cope with the awful sights and sounds, and the responsibility he felt for having organized the rally in the first

place. I listened to Nikki's trembling voice as she led the opening prayer in the National Prayer Service for the victims the following Sunday.

Gail Powers decided to do something with her anger over the August shooting of day care children. She had gone to parents' meetings at the JCC, but everyone was as shell shocked as she was. "It was like, 'We've got to do something, but what can we do?'"

Then her friend Karyn went to Washington, D.C., and came back with a flier for a march by another mom who'd also seen that daisy chain of day care children on TV.

"Tell Congress to GET SERIOUS about Common Sense Gun Legislation," it said. "Mother's Day 2000. The Million Mom March." She signed onto the Web site (www.millionmomsmarch.com), and within days was posting fliers and rattling off the toll-free number—888/989-MOMS. Thus did Gail Powers move from mom to advocate.

I stumbled onto the MMM website while looking for materials for the Winter issue of the FAWL State News in October. I was getting data on work-life balance from Working Mother Magazine's website when I saw a link to MMM's website. Jay's tragedy still fresh as I read the postings of women who were frustrated with the apparent control of the gun lobby in Washington despite the needless killings occurring all over the country.

I signed up immediately. I'm taking my daughters with me because that's how I want to spend Mothers Day 2000. After all, it is my day, isn't it?

I would like to invite anyone who is touched by these stories to come with me. Not just moms, but "honorary moms" and anyone who wants to march with them. Several Florida leaders are going, and if we plan ahead, we can stay in the same hotels and march together. Call me, the Million Mom phone number or check out their Web site to find the local coordinator for travel plans.

I frequently have asked you to call or write me about issues I have written about in the FAWL Journal. Rarely do I get much of a response. This time I want you to know I really mean it. If you care about common sense gun control, come to Washington with me. Write me at SusanFox@macfar.com or call 813/273-4212.