

# 17 MINUTES

written by  
**SCOTT ORGAN**

directed by  
**MICHAEL COTEY**



**BACKSTAGE** GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at  
**AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

## BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

### 17 MINUTES

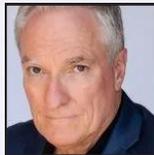
by Scott Organ

Directed by Michael Cotey

#### FEATURING



Audrey Billings\*



Dennis Cockrum\*



Ian Paul Custer\*



Robert N. Isaac



Mackenzie Jones



Editha Rosario-Moore\*

In the aftermath of a school shooting, Sheriff's Deputy Andy Rubens must come to terms with the choices he made during the tragedy. In Scott Organ's spellbinding new play, one man's search for redemption prompts a community to ask – what will we be known for? Talkin' Broadway wrote, "[17 Minutes] accomplishes what theatre does best; it presents this issue not as an emotionally fraught intellectual argument, but as a complicated and compassionate human drama."

*\*Ensemble member of American Blues Theater*

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## DIGITAL LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To create art in a new digital format, we use equipment and high-speed internet not available in many Indigenous communities. This technology, which has now become central to our daily lives, leaves a significant footprint and contributes to changing climates that disproportionately affect Indigenous people. As we make use of this digital format, it is imperative that we recognize the Indigenous Land, regardless of our geographical location. It is land once occupied and inhabited by hundreds of Native tribes. Indigenous people’s homes were unceded by European settlers. The genocide and forced removal of Indigenous people from these lands is a history that must be acknowledged, and the current struggles of Indigenous people must be brought to the forefront, so that their plight is never forgotten.

*This digital land acknowledgment is inspired by the work of producer & artist Adrienne Wong. Learn more [here](#).*

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS



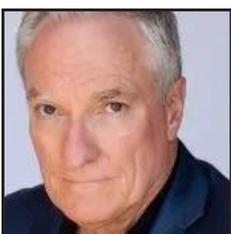
**SCOTT ORGAN** he/him (*playwright*) is a New York city based playwright and screenwriter. His plays have been performed and workshopped throughout the United States, Europe and South America and have been commissioned by The Atlantic Theater Company and developed by theaters including The Barrow Group, The New Group, Page 73, South Coast Rep, and the Gulfshore Playhouse. Scott's plays *17 Minutes* and *The Thing With Feathers* premiered Off-Broadway at The Barrow Group. His play *Phoenix* premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays and was subsequently produced at The Barrow Group and through Rattlestick at Cherry Lane Theater with Julia Stiles. *Phoenix* has been translated into Portuguese, Spanish and French. His writing has been featured in *Arts In The Armed Forces*, performed by Laura Linney and Dianne Wiest. Scott adapted his play *The Thing with Feathers* into the feature film *ROOST*, directed by Amy Redford. Scott is a writer on the short films *Playdate* (TriBeCa Film Festival, London City International Film Festival – 3rd place, Vimeo Staff Pick) *The Board* (TriBeCa Film Festival) and *The One* (Palm Springs International Film Festival.) Scott is an alum of Page 73's Interstate 73 writer's group and a member of the Dramatists Guild.



**MICHAEL COTEY** he/him (*director*) is the producer of #ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence ([www.enoughplays.com](http://www.enoughplays.com)) a ground-breaking campaign of theatre activism for teens to confront the issue gun violence by writing original short plays on the topic and staging readings of those plays in theatres across the country. Readings of #ENOUGH have taken place in over a hundred locations since 2020, including a flagship production at Lincoln Center, and has been featured on PBS NewsHour, NPR, and the BBC. Michael has directed at Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Next Act, First Stage, Northwestern University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Illinois Wesleyan University and Youngblood Theatre. He has also assisted at Goodman Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespeare, Steppenwolf, and Milwaukee Rep, for prominent directors, like Tony Award-winners Mary Zimmerman and Robert Falls. From 2009-2013 he was the Founding Artistic Director of Youngblood Theatre in Milwaukee. Regularly celebrated by the theater community and the press as one of the most exciting new Milwaukee theater ventures in decades, Youngblood provided professional opportunities to early-career emerging artists, introduced the works of provocative new playwrights, and staged theatre in raw found spaces that invoked Milwaukee's storied industrial past. Michael graduated from UW-Milwaukee with a BFA in Acting and from Northwestern University with an MFA in Directing. In 2014 he was named UWM's "Graduate of the Last Decade." [www.michaelcotey.com](http://www.michaelcotey.com)



**AUDREY BILLINGS** she/her (*Samantha Rubens*) is a proud Ensemble member at American Blues Theater. She last appeared at Blues as Mary Bailey (and others) in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* (And in person-Hooray!). She was most recently seen as Emilie in *The Moors* at A Red Orchid Theater. Previous credits include: Christmas Eve in the long-running production of *Avenue Q* at the Mercury Theater, Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Antonia in *Man of La Mancha*, and Hodel in *Fiddler on the Roof*. She has worked at the Paramount Theatre, Marriott Theatre Lincolnshire, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Theatre at the Center, Lookingglass Theatre Company and is a proud member of Actor's Equity.



**DENNIS COCKRUM** he/him (*Dan*) is a proud American Blues Theater Ensemble member who joined in 1988. Blues credits: *Bad Moon* by founding member Rick Cleveland, *Desire Under the Elms*, *On the Waterfront*, and *Tobacco Road*. Broadway credits: *Frost/Nixon* by Peter Morgan. Victory Gardens Theater: *Hard Feelings* by Jeffrey Sweet, *The Fifth Sun* by Nicholas Patricca, *The Stick Wife* by Daryl Cloud, *God of Isaac* and *Mr. 80%* by James Sherman. Dennis has appeared in over 100 films and television shows. Film credits: *Uncle Buck*, *Code of Silence*, *The Package*, *Gangster Squad*, *Desperate Measures*, *Hail, Caesar!*, *The Glimmer Man*, and *Downeast*. Television credits (recurring roles): *Uncle Buck*, *King of Queens*, *West Wing*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, *Chicago Med*, and 11 seasons as Terry

Milkovich on *Shameless*.

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS



**IAN PAUL CUSTER** he/him (*Andy Rubens*) is a Chicago actor and musician and a proud Ensemble Member of American Blues Theater. American Blues credits include: *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* (Jeff Award, Best Ensemble, Best Musical – Midsize), *The Columnist*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* (Jeff Nominations for Best Play/Musical of the Year). Chicago credits: *Bad Jews* (Theatre Wit/Royal George), *33 Variations* (Jeff Award– Best Production, Midsize), and *To Master the Art* (TimeLine Theatre), *Annie Bosh is Missing* (Steppenwolf Theatre), *High Holidays* (Goodman Theatre), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Paramount Theatre). Ian has also had the pleasure of working with Porchlight Music Theatre, Marriott Theatre, A Red Orchid Theatre, MPAACT, and Court Theater. Regional credits: *Hero: The Musical* (Asolo Rep Theatre), *Cymbeline* (Notre Dame Shakespeare), *Romeo and Juliet* (Cardinal Stage), *Peter Pan* (360 Entertainment – London, England). Television credits: *Somebody Somewhere*, *APB*, *Empire*, *Chicago Fire*, and *Chicago PD*. Ian received his BFA from The Theatre School at DePaul University.



**ROBERT N. ISAAC** he/him (*Virgil Morris*) has been seen in previous American Blues Theater readings and their arts education initiative *The Lincoln Project*. He has also appeared at Court Theatre, Black Ensemble Theater, Chicago Dramatists, and Halcyon Theatre. Regional credits include productions at Minnesota Fringe Festival, Southern Arena Theatre, Stage One Family Theatre, and many productions at University of Southern Mississippi.



**MACKENZIE JONES** she/her (*Mary*) After recently relocating to Chicago, Mackenzie is thrilled to be making her Chicago debut in *The Room: Reading Series* at American Blues Theater. Favorite recent credits include; New York City: *The Dream: Midsummer* (*Helena*), *Head Over Heels* (*Ensemble*), *Coriolanus* (*Virgilia*), *Monstersongs* (*Siren Sister*). Regional: *Rabbit Hole* (*Becca*), where Mackenzie was honored to win Broadway World's Best Actress in a Play; *A Streetcar Named Desire* (*Stella*), *Constellations* (*Marianne*), *Heathers* (*Heather Chandler*), *Looking Through the Glass* (*The White Queen*), *Macbeth* (*Lady Macbeth*). Film: *Boogiemán*, *A Sacrifice*, *Binge*. Special thanks to Wendy for this wonderful opportunity. Mackenzie looks forward to meeting and working with the Chicago theater community that she has long so admired. Representation: Shirley Hamilton Talent. For further information, [MackenzieRainaJones.com](http://MackenzieRainaJones.com).



**EDITHA ROSARIO-MOORE** she/her (*Cecilia*) has been a proud Ensemble Member of American Blues Theater since 2001, and currently serves on the Board of Directors. She works as an appellate public defender with the Illinois Office of the State Appellate Defender and adjunct clinical law professor at DePaul. Previously, she worked as a theater artist and educator in Chicago, New York, and New Orleans. Her scholarship explores the relationship between criminal law education and community empowerment.



**SHANDEE VAUGHAN** she/her (*Stage Manager*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and is excited to be working with this incredible team! Blues credits: *Fences*, *Stand Up if You're Here Tonight*, *Roan @ the Gates*, *Five Presidents*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey*, *On Clover Road*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago* (2016 & 2018-2021), *Flyin' West*, *The Buddy Holly Story*, *The Columnist*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Other recent Chicago credits include: *In Every Generation* (Victory Gardens), *Time Is On Our Side* (About Face Theatre), *Deathscribe X* (WildClaw Theatre), *Night in Alachua County* (WildClaw Theatre), and *The Woman in Black* (WildClaw Theatre). Shandee is a production manager and stage manager from Arizona. She is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

# SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

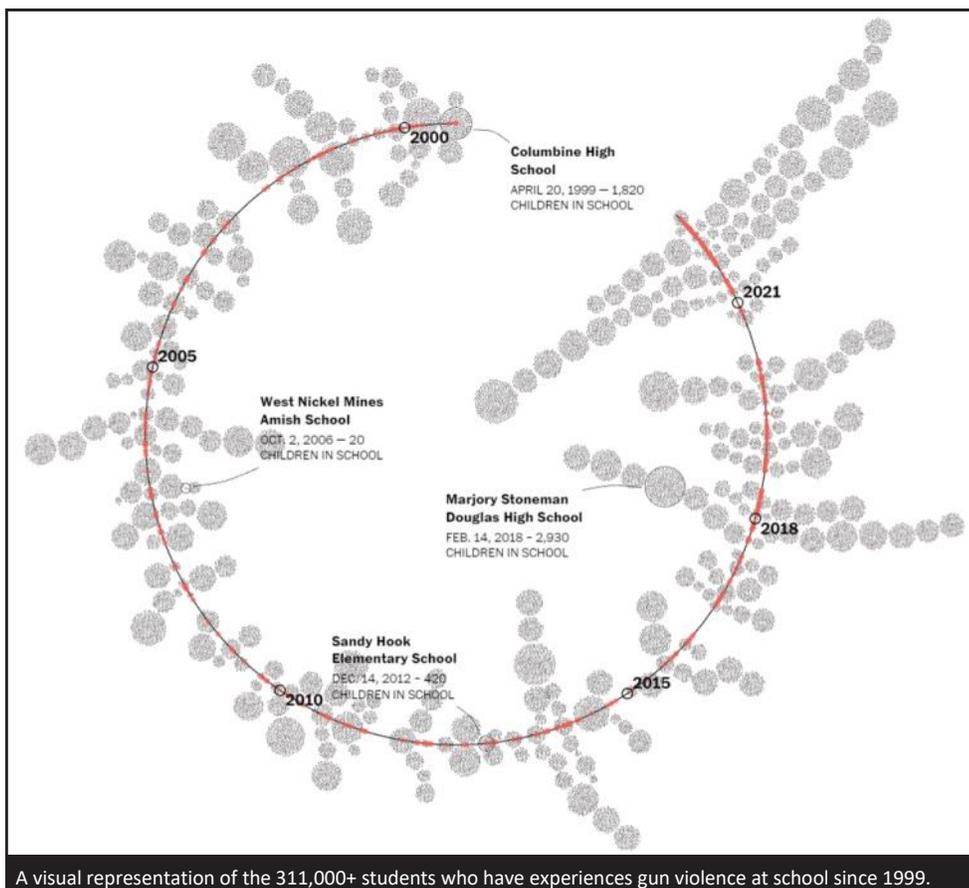
*The Washington Post* tracks how many students have been exposed to gun violence during school hours since the Columbine High massacre in 1999. Below is a look at some of their findings, last updated on May 27, 2022. You can view their full database [here](#).

Beyond the dead and wounded, children who witness the violence or cower behind locked doors to hide from it can be profoundly traumatized.

**More than 311,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine.**

The federal government does not track school shootings, so *The Post* pieced together its numbers from news articles, open-source databases, law enforcement reports and calls to schools and police departments.

While school shootings remain rare, **there were more in 2021 (42) than in any year since at least 1999.** So far this year, there have been at least 24 acts of gun violence on K-12 campuses during the school day.



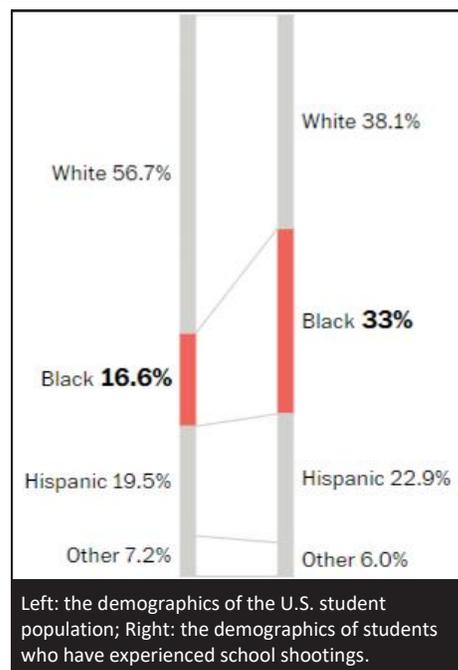
*The Post's* search for more shootings will continue, and it's possible reporters will locate additional incidents from previous years.

Hundreds of outlets cover the deadliest attacks, such as the Feb. 14 rampage at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Fla., where a 19-year-old man with an AR-15 rifle killed 17 people.

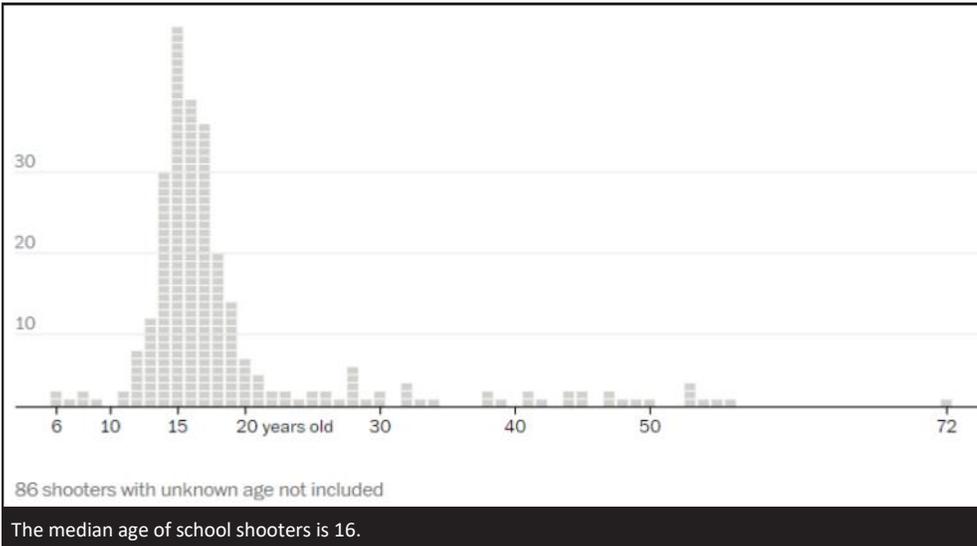
Others are covered by a single newspaper, such as a 2001 shooting at Pearl C. Anderson Middle School in Dallas, where a 14-year-old boy held a revolver to a girl's chest and asked her whether she was "ready to die" before a bullet fired, grazing her hand.

Even as the list of incidents has expanded, however, the trend lines have remained consistent.

Among *The Post's* most important findings: the disproportionate impact of school shootings on children of color. **Black students make up 16.6% of the school population, but they experience school shootings at twice that rate.**



# SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS



In cases where the source of the gun could be determined, more than 85 percent of shooters brought them from their own homes or obtained them from friends or relatives, according to The Post’s analysis.

The ranks of school shooters include a 6-year-old boy, who killed a classmate after saying he didn’t like her, and a 15-year-old girl, who did the same to a friend for rejecting her romantic overtures.

Seven in 10 of them, however, were under the age of 18, which means that — often because of an adult’s negligence — dozens of children had access to deadly weapons.

## ADDITIONAL STATISTICS

The below statistics are from NPR’s “12 Stats to Help Inform the Gun Control Debate,” last updated May 27, 2022. You can read the full article [here](#).

**100**

100 people killed by guns in the U.S., every day

**12**

12 children die every day from gun violence in the U.S.

**950**

950 school shootings since Sandy Hook

**8 mil**

8 million AR-15s and its variations in circulation

**79%**

79% of murders involve a firearm.

**<1%**

Less than 1% of people who defended themselves with their guns in violent crimes

# EXCERPTS FROM “SCOT PETERSON SLEEPS AT NIGHT”

*17 Minutes* is inspired by the story of Scot Peterson — the armed officer at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who stood outside on the day that 17 people were shot to death inside the school. Below are excerpts from the article “Scot Peterson Sleeps At Night” by Eric Barton, which appeared in *Men’s Health* on May 19, 2022. You can read the full piece [here](#).

The whole world saw it: his grainy silhouette standing against a wall in the high school courtyard, behind the white pole. Not moving. Not appearing to do much of anything at all. When they showed it on the networks, they freeze-framed it and drew a circle around him, an armed officer just . . . standing there while those people were getting killed inside.

He’s 59. He mostly does projects around the house these days. Like the shelter for the bear-cub statues, and the outdoor kitchen he built around back. Expanded the front porch. Screened in the back deck. Anything, really, to keep his mind off the shooting and the people who think he’s a coward, and the fact that this fall, he will face the possibility of a trial under an obscure Florida law that hinges on whether he was a caregiver. They’re trying to say he was a caregiver for the more than 3,200 students at Stoneman Douglas, and if they can prove he was—which is a long shot, but still—then he could be charged with felony child neglect and could go to prison for a very long time.

He shifts his weight in the recliner, one of two facing the TV. “I know at the end of the day I have to believe in justice, because I didn’t do anything wrong that day at all,” he says, as if there is nothing else to say. “I sleep at night because I know that. So I believe in the rule of law; I believe in justice. I believe when the facts of what occurred actually come out—”

He cuts himself off, stiffens, locks his eyes on you, then

starts anew: “The families that lost their kids, they’ve never been told the truth of what happened at that shooting.”

There is what Peterson says happened, and there is what layers of investigators and lawyers and witnesses and other cops say should have happened, and it all gets twisted and tangled into what-ifs and contradictions and affirmations we all wish were true, but of course they can’t all be true at once. Peterson says he knows what happened—his legal defense includes pointing out that the Broward County Sheriff’s Office’s active-shooter protocol requires “real-time intelligence” before entering the building, and even then it doesn’t say an officer must enter. He says he knows he did the best he could, knows it better than anything he’s ever known in his life. The reason he knows this, he says, is that he did not, in fact, know what was happening at all.

It goes in circles.

Peterson says that the sound of the gunfire bounced off the buildings, obscuring the location of the shots. He says that even if he’d somehow deduced that the shooting was actually happening inside the 1200 Building, the death toll might not have changed. He says that given when he arrived, he believes the only difference he could have made was engaging Cruz on the third floor, where ten people were shot and six died. But to do that, he would have had to first enter the gigantic building, clear each floor, and quickly and correctly triangulate Cruz’s location



# EXCERPTS FROM “SCOT PETERSON SLEEPS AT NIGHT”

to engage him.

Which he did not try to do.

The MSD Commission disputes Peterson’s version. The commission maintains that Cruz was still on the first floor when Peterson arrived at the 1200 Building at 2:23 p.m. It asserts that there was “overwhelming evidence” that Peterson clearly knew the threat was coming from “within or within the immediate area of” the building. The report also declares that, in the era after the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, it is “well-known” among law enforcement that the response to an active shooter is “to move toward the sound of gunfire and engage the suspect(s).”

In June 2019, Peterson and Lydia drove over to Asheville and caught an Allegiant Airlines flight to Fort Lauderdale, where he attended a hearing as part of an investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, a statewide agency. He was charged and booked for negligence, a misdemeanor related to perjury, and child neglect, citing the law specific to caregivers. He was then released on bail. The trial is scheduled for this fall. Images of Peterson at his arraignment in handcuffs have already been shared widely.

Deep in the MSD Commission report are findings that indicate larger systemic failures that day. Like how one armed officer per campus “is inadequate to ensure a timely and effective response to an active assailant situation” and how Peterson did not have access to a rifle or ballistic vest, which investigators recommended should be made “immediately available” to all school resource officers. The Broward County Sheriff’s Office and the Coral Springs Police, the only agency to receive live updates from 911 operators, were on different law-enforcement radio channels. So even after kids started calling 911 from inside the 1200 Building, their reports of a live shooter weren’t relayed to Peterson.

“I took a tactical position of cover at the 700 Building,” Peterson says on the first morning we meet. It’s a phrase he uses at least four times in the days we spend together. You see, he says, despite the radio calls about “strange sounds” coming from the 1200 Building, he always thought there was a sniper. “When I heard the gunfire outside, I was like, There’s gunfire outside—sniper fire.”

Peterson never mentioned a sniper in any of the radio

dispatches published in the commission report, and there were no shots hitting the ground around him. He says if you “collectively listen” to his transmissions, “there is no doubt” about what he believed. And he says he told Officer Best to focus on the upper floors of the 1200 Building only after school officials reviewing surveillance footage radioed that to him.

Either way, investigators pointed out that Peterson had his last active-shooter training in April 2016 and “knew through his training that the appropriate response was to seek out the active shooter.” Instead “he remained in a mostly visible position,” the report notes, “which would be an extremely dangerous position if he truly believed there was a sniper.” And he stayed there for 48 minutes total, even after backup arrived and breached the building.

Peterson’s explanation, they concluded, was bullshit.

Judgment of him by much of the public remains devastating and unswerving. Cameron Kasky, a former Parkland student who survived and cofounded March For Our Lives, a movement for more gun control, is the son of a lawyer and a reserve police officer. “He saw danger and ran away,” Kasky says. “He’s an armed agent of the state who colossally failed in his job.” *Bitch-ass Scot Peterson*. That’s what Kasky calls him.

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I ask him, once and for all, if he thinks he could have stopped Nikolas Cruz that day had he entered the 1200 Building. He says, “I go to bed every night knowing I did the best I could with the information I had, which was nothing.”

That’s been the subject of much debate, of course. But it’s what he tells himself, because it’s the kind of thing people need to tell themselves, because the most basic truth is that Scot Peterson didn’t save anyone. There were plenty of reasons Cruz ended up at Stoneman Douglas that day—tragic breakdowns in the way society is supposed to protect itself from such people. But this story really doesn’t start until 2:19 p.m. on February 14, 2018, at which point Scot Peterson was the only real defense for every victim that day. Maybe he couldn’t have saved them all. Maybe he’s not a coward, maybe he is.

There’s one thing he definitely is not: a victim.

# YOUTH ACTIVISTS ASK: **HOW MANY MORE STUDENTS MUST DIE?**

The below is from an Education Week article entitled “A New Generation of Youth Activists Asks a Familiar Question: How Many More Students Must Die?”, originally published on June 11, 2022. You can read the full article on the Education Week website [here](#).

Jecholiah Marriott, 17, stood up and tearfully addressed a large crowd of teachers, students, and local elected officials.

“I should not walk into school stressed that I’m going to be another name. That I won’t get to walk with the rest of my class because I died,” she said at the March for Our Lives rally held here June 11—one of hundreds planned in response to a spate of mass shootings.

“How many March for Our Lives are we going to have ‘til you take me seriously?” asked Marriott.

**“HOW MANY  
‘MARCH FOR OUR LIVES’  
ARE WE GOING TO  
HAVE ‘TIL YOU TAKE  
ME SERIOUSLY?”**

*- Jecholiah Marriott, 17*

The student-led organization formed in 2018 after a gunman took the lives of 17 people at Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, Florida. Weeks after the shooting, the organization brought together thousands of students across the country to lead a march against gun violence.

Four years later, the group is marching once again with the same goal: to invoke change in gun legislation and put an end to gun violence.

Jecholiah was only 12 and in the 7th grade when the Parkland bloodshed happened. She remembers having a strong desire to act when she heard about Parkland, but was told she was too young to march out of school like other students had planned.

Since then, there has been no end to mass shootings—and despite the refrain of “Never Again” that accompanied the 2018 March for Our Lives, they’ve continued to happen in schools, too.

There have been 119 school shootings since 2018, when Education Week began tracking such incidents. There have been 27 school shootings this year, putting it on track to outpace last year, when there were 34—the highest number since the news organization started keeping count.

Jecholiah knows the grim statistics. Now a junior at Cass Technical High School, she found herself heavily involved in planning a memorial for the victims of the shooting at Oxford High School in Oxford, Michigan., last November.

In May, after a gunman took the lives of 21 people at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, she and a group of fellow high school and college students spearheaded the March for Our Lives rally here that brought together hundreds of people.

“Not another name, not another school, and not another person,” she said.

Hafiza Khalique, a junior at Cass Technical High School, who also helped lead the rally, said that four years ago, her sister was involved in organizing the very first March for Our Lives rally in Detroit.

“I was also very heartbroken after what happened in Parkland,” she said. “And here we are four years later, and the

# YOUTH ACTIVISTS ASK: HOW MANY MORE STUDENTS MUST DIE?

same thing is happening again.”

More than 300 local March for Our Lives events were scheduled for June 11, including one in the District of Columbia that drew a crowd of thousands. For some of its leaders, it was a bitter reunion.

Trevon Bosley is a community activist in Chicago and a member of the B.R.A.V.E. Youth Leaders, a violence prevention group run out of St. Sabina Church in the city. He’s also a board member with the March for Our Lives organization who spoke at the 2018 march, and he returned to Washington for the 2022 event.

He said he’s skeptical that Uvalde will be a turning point in the movement against gun violence. More Republican voters are now voicing support for gun control measures, like red flag laws. But he’s not confident that will translate into legislative action.

Bosley lost his cousin to gun violence in 2005. In 2006, his brother Terrell was shot and killed outside of church while preparing for band rehearsal.

“I’ve been dealing with gun violence since I was 7,” Bosley said. “As far as seeing any changes come into my community anytime soon, it doesn’t seem like it.

“It’s disheartening for sure. I’ve been fighting this fight for a long time now,” he said.

Still, Bosley said he can’t afford to feel hopeless: “This doesn’t stop. My friends are still dying. I can’t sit around and do nothing.”



Pictured: the 2018 March for Our Lives rally in Parkland, FL.

# COPING TIPS FOR TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND DISASTERS

People can experience a wide range of emotions before and after a disaster or traumatic event. There's no right or wrong way to feel. However, it's important to find healthy ways to cope when these events happen. Below is an excerpt from SAMHSA's "Coping Tips for Traumatic Events and Disasters" page. Explore the full article [here](#).

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES

Eating a healthy diet, avoiding the use of drugs and alcohol, and getting regular exercise can reduce stress and anxiety. Activities as simple as taking a walk, stretching, and deep breathing can help relieve stress.

- **Limit your consumption of news.** We live in a society where the news is available to us 24 hours a day via television, radio, and the Internet. The constant replay of news stories about a disaster or traumatic event can increase stress and anxiety and make some people relive the event over and over. Reduce the amount of news you watch and/or listen to, and engage in relaxing activities to help you heal and move on.
- **Get enough "good" sleep.** Some people have difficulty falling asleep after a disaster, or wake up throughout the night. If you have trouble sleeping, only go to bed when you are ready to sleep, avoid using cell phones or laptops in bed, and avoid drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed. If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing what's on your mind in a journal or on a sheet of paper.
- **Establish and maintain a routine.** Try to eat meals at regular times and put yourself on a sleep schedule to ensure an adequate amount of rest. Include a positive or fun activity in your schedule that you can look forward to each day or week. Schedule exercise into your daily routine as well, if possible.
- **Avoid making major life decisions.** Doing things like switching jobs or careers can already be stressful and are even harder to adjust to directly after a disaster.



**Understand there will be changes.** Disasters can destroy homes, schools, and places of business and worship and can disrupt the lives of people living in affected areas for a long time. Sometimes, people lose loved ones or experience injuries, both physical and mental, that may last a lifetime. Some people may also experience a temporary or permanent loss of employment. For children, attending a new or temporary school may result in being separated from peers, or after-school activities may be disrupted.

## GENERAL DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY INFORMATION

- [Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: Managing Stress](#)—This SAMHSA tip sheet gives stress prevention and management tips for dealing with the effects of trauma, mass violence, or terrorism. It lists tips to relieve stress, describes how to know when to seek professional help, and provides accompanying resources. This tip sheet is also [available in Spanish](#).
- [Psychological First Aid](#) (PFA)—Developed jointly by the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the

# COPING TIPS FOR TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND DISASTERS

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, PFA is an evidence-informed modular approach for assisting people in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism: to reduce initial distress, and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning.

- [Be Red Cross Ready: Taking Care of Your Emotional Health after a Disaster](#) —This fact sheet from the American Red Cross explains normal reactions to a disaster, what a survivor can do to cope with these emotions, and where to seek additional help if needed.

## INCIDENTS OF MASS VIOLENCE: SPECIFIC INFORMATION

- [Coping With Grief After Community Violence](#)—This SAMHSA tip sheet introduces some of the signs of grief and anger after an incident of community violence, provides useful information about how to cope with grief, and offers tips for helping children deal with grief.
- [Incidents of Mass Violence](#)—The SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline supports survivors, family members, responders, and recovery workers who are affected by incidents of mass violence and other disasters. Information on this web page includes a list of risk factors for distress, information on lockdown notices and other warnings, and additional resources for coping.
- [Effects of Traumatic Stress After Mass Violence, Terror, or Disaster](#)—This online article from the National Center for PTSD describes the emotional, cognitive, physical, and interpersonal reactions that disaster survivors may experience and discusses the potentially severe stress symptoms that may lead to lasting posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, or depression. The article also presents information on how survivors can reduce their risk of psychological difficulties and recover from disaster stress.

## ASK FOR HELP

[Warning signs](#) of stress are normal, short-term reactions to life’s unexpected challenges. However, it is important to recognize when you or others experience emotional distress that is persistent and becomes difficult to manage.

- **Find a local support group.** In a group setting led by trained and experienced professionals, people who have shared a similar experience can exchange thoughts, feelings, and ideas on how to get through difficult times. Support groups provide a safe place for people to find comfort in knowing they are not alone.
- **Reach out to family and friends.** Talking to someone you trust about your feelings without fear of judgment may offer some relief. Family and friends can be a great resource for support. Your family and friends may have also survived the disaster and understand the emotions you are experiencing. It’s also a good idea to speak with friends who were not involved, because they can be objective and provide additional support.
- **Speak with a financial adviser.** The loss of a home or job or being unable to work after a disaster can be an overwhelming financial burden people feel they have to struggle with alone. Financial advisers don’t immediately come to mind as a resource after a disaster, but they should be among the first people you call when developing a strategy to rebuild your life. Seeking help from a financial adviser can ease the stress and point you in the direction of other helpful resources or programs tailored to your situation.

If you or your loved ones continue to have feelings of anxiety, fear, and anger for two weeks or more, with no improvement, it’s best to seek professional help. Call or text the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) to locate services and speak with trained crisis counselors who are ready to assist you.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[NAMI CHICAGO](#) – Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. They promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.

[ONE AIM ILLINOIS](#) – Their one aim is to end gun violence in Illinois.

[SANDY HOOK PROMISE](#) – Sandy Hook Promise envisions a future where children are free from shootings and acts of violence in their schools, homes, and communities.

[ABC7'S STOP THE VIOLENCE](#) – ABC7 Chicago created an in-depth collection of local resources that address violence & gun violence.

[MARCH FOR OUR LIVES](#) – Founded by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, this organization harnesses the power of young people across the country to fight for sensible gun violence prevention policies that save lives.

[STUDENTS DEMAND ACTION](#) – A national movement of young activists committed to ending gun violence in their communities.

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## GUN RELATED TRAUMA RESOURCES

For those coping with traumatic grief, PTSD, or another form of gun violence-related trauma, below are some resources that can help provide you with the tools and information that you may need.

[AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION RESOURCES FOR COPING WITH MASS SHOOTINGS](#) – Resources for those who are suffering distress related to mass shootings and gun violence, including information on helping your children manage distress.

[DISASTER DISTRESS HELPLINE](#) – A 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

[EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR GUN VIOLENCE SURVIVORS](#) – A collection of resources and information about coping with traumatic grief, PTSD, children's responses to trauma, and more from Everytown For Gun Safety.

[MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS OF GUN VIOLENCE](#) – A comprehensive collection of resources compiled by Team ENOUGH.



## ABOUT THE ROOM—A READING SERIES

*The Room* is an online reading series that brings original work, plays in-development, and new stories to Chicago audiences. Offering in-depth discussions as well as action steps for patrons that intersect with themes of the plays. *The Room* is a virtual, accessible series on Zoom. [Learn more about The Room.](#)

# ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. **American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.**

We are Chicago's **second-oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater**. As of 2022, our theater and artists received 221 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 40 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs - including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays. Our Arts Education offerings includes acclaimed programming in Chicago Public School classrooms, artist-led instruction for all ages through *Classes for the Masses*, and being a Chicago-anchor for the national *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence* program.

**We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community.** We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries. We donate proceeds from "Pediatric Previews" to Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago *the first city* in all our hearts.**



**AUGUST WILSON'S  
FENCES**

**JULY 1 -  
AUGUST 6**

Tickets at [AmericanBluesTheater.com](https://www.AmericanBluesTheater.com)  
or call (773) 975-8150



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
4809 N RAVENSWOOD, SUITE 221  
CHICAGO, IL 60640  
[AMERICANBLUESTHEATER.COM](http://AMERICANBLUESTHEATER.COM)