

## **Drop Your Guns, Pardner!**

An Open Letter to the National Rifle Association

*By Ron Verzuh*

I don't know what it is that attracts the National Rifle Association to me. The closest I ever came to owning a gun was as a young boy when I had a second-hand BB gun that usually didn't work. So why, decades later, has the NRA decided to target me as a potential member?

I am the most anti-gun person I know and yet I have now received several invitations from America's premier gun lobby to sign up. In one, I could have had a packsack, another offered me a neat blue jacket, and still another would get me a nifty jackknife.

I could subscribe to several glossy magazines, including *American Hunter*, *American Rifleman*, or *Shooting Illustrated*. If I were a "woman gun owner," I could read about shooters like me in *America's 1st Freedom* and learn that "women make the NRA strong."

Flipping through nra.org recently, I learned that Democratic presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg is a bad guy because he says "'Average' Americans shouldn't carry guns." I also learned that the Virginia General Assembly's anti-gun legislation is nothing but a "gun grab" and a "crusade against our gun rights."

And thanks to NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre, I now know that anti-gun laws "would make millions of law abiding Americans less safe and less able to defend themselves and their loved ones." Yeah, right!

I might have been more persuaded if the NRA had offered me what came in the mail from America Remembers, the U.S. Society of Arms and Armour the other day. For a mere \$2,495 I could have my very own John Wayne Tribute Rifle. It even comes with a statement of authenticity. Now that's hard to pass up. The Duke's rifle is way better than the NRA knife for sure.

As I was saying, I'm not a gun owner nor am I in favor of other people having guns. Call me undemocratic, but sometimes we need to temper constitutional rights based on current circumstances. My credo is that where there are guns, there is danger and possible death. I've lost count of how many mass shootings occurred last year alone.

I've also run out of patience with politicians the NRA gun lobby buys off. How many high school kids, synagogue goers, and mall shoppers need to die before the men and women who sit in Congresses and Senates rip up their NRA cards and get to work on real solutions to the gun epidemic?

Now here's where I ensure that I won't be getting that free NRA jackknife or the jacket. Maybe we need a law that restricts everyone, including hunters, from having access to weapons that kill people. Stop their sale and their purchase. If you can't buy them, you can't kill with them.

I know the NRA would have a field day with such a proposal. I might even make it into the next NRA membership invitation package. "Socialist maniac wants government to take away our AR-15s." I can hear the screams now about violating the constitutional right to bear arms. What about the right to public safety and the safety of our schoolchildren?

The NRA can rail all it wants, but there is only one solution to America's gun problem: Get rid of the guns. If we can ban the sale of e-cigarettes to youth, why not stop the sale of guns that will kill them far more quickly?

Here's another proposal that will truly rile the NRA. Ban the sale of ammunition for all automatic weapons available to consumers. Owning such a lethal killing machine would then be worthless. Any bullets on sale at Walmart or any other weapons sales outlet should be confiscated and melted down for peaceful purposes.

Too hardline? I don't think so. No one else has a better, safer idea of how to protect church-goers, theatre patrons, and students. No, I don't think arming teachers, preachers, and movie ushers is a good idea, but I realize that such an attitude immediately cancels out my desirability as a future NRA member.

Let me go back to that rusty old BB gun of mine. When I was about ten, I pulled the gun out of its hiding place in the basement and headed into the back yard. The gun made me feel big and invulnerable. Now I was a true hunter. No more cowboys and Indians. No more GI Joe.

I snuck through the bushes and camouflaged myself under leaves and branches. There I waited for my prey. About fifteen feet away I spied a cute little songbird crouched over its lunch. It was unaware of my presence. I took aim, hoping the gun would fire for a change. BANG! The next thing I knew, the little bird was lying dead on the ground. Immediately I threw down the gun in horror.

Here's the lesson I learned that day: if you pull out a gun it always means that you intend to do harm to someone or something. I swore then that I would follow that rule for the rest of my life.

So the answer to your invitation, NRA, is no. I won't be joining you this year or any other year, and I won't ever vote for anyone who thinks guns are a good thing.

END

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