

I have a first-grader

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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Every morning my son goes off to school. He slings a giant shark backpack over his tiny shoulder, and he waves to me as I drive away from the carpool lane.

And every morning as he turns into the school's open door, the same fear catches my heart. *What if that is the last time I see him?*

This is not a normal response, I know. But it is not normal to live in a land where a man murders a classroom of first-graders. And then we do nothing to prevent this from happening again.

It is not normal to live in a land where I need to sit through a safety training, as an employee of a university, to learn what to do in "an active shooter scenario" on campus.

It is not normal to live in a land where my husband lays the newspaper face down on the kitchen counter so the kids cannot read the headlines or see the photos from the latest version of the same school-shooting horror we watch unfold every few months.

I have a first-grader. Sandy Hook stares me in the face every single time the school door swings shut behind him.

I signed onto Facebook the morning after the Oregon school shooting. I was sure I would see the same response I always see after a tragedy like this: *Awful news. Praying for the victims. Never forget. Never again.*

Instead I saw nothing. Not a single post about last Thursday's shooting.

It is no longer A1 news. It simply what happens. *How horrible*, we might think as we shake our heads. *I can't imagine.* And then we move on.

Every week I have friends on social media who post about abortion, poverty, war, capital punishment, the environment, refugees. I am grateful they keep all this

before my eyes. I need to see the images, read the stats, learn what I can do to make a difference.

But no one posts about gun violence. Maybe because no one knows what to do. It is beyond us.

My Uncle Jim was murdered last summer. Shot in the head during a robbery attempt.

I thought I cared about gun violence before. I thought I understood the righteous anger and political frustration. But then it got personal. **It happened to my family.**

Except, do you want to know the irony of learning what it means when violence rips into your safe world and when murder becomes a personal noun? It taught me that this evil was always personal.

I have a first-grader. Do you see?

Saint Benedict taught his monks to “keep death daily before your eyes.” Not because it was morbid or morose, but because it was wise and true. You either walk through this world with eyes open, or you choose to keep them closed.

When my son walks into his school each morning, I choose to keep Sandy Hook before my eyes.

When I read about another murder, I choose to keep my Uncle Jim before my eyes.

When I see the gut-wrenching pictures of parents and college students sobbing in each other’s arms when they are reunited, I choose to keep my school before my eyes.

Because it is all the same story. We either belong to each other or we do not.

In *The Irrational Season*, Madeleine L’Engle writes about a time when her family escaped to their country home in Crosswicks for an idyllic weekend. It had been a difficult week in New York City where they lived, and she sought the solace and peace of a familiar space. She walked to a favorite prayer place on their property, a tree where she had hung a small cross and medieval icon of Mary and Jesus given to her by a religious sister.

But when she neared the tree that afternoon, she found with horror that the icon had been shot and shattered into pieces. And the cross had been ripped from the

tree.

She writes about her anger and nausea and hate at discovering this act of violence. [\(You can read the whole piece here.\)](#) But she ends with this:

The gouge in the tree is beginning to heal, but I will always know that it is there, and it is living witness that love is stronger than hate. Already things have happened which have put this knowledge to the test, and sometimes I have been where I could not go to the rock and see the tangible assurance of the tree's tall strong trunk. But I can turn in my mind's eye and see it, can image the whole chain of events from the cruel destruction of death to the brilliance of new life.

Every single act of violence is a bullet hole through the face of the Christ Child. Do you see it?

If the Christian story matters to you—incarnation and resurrection and forgiveness and salvation—then there is no such thing as other people's children. Or problems. Or violence. It is all personal.

So yes, the lenses we have are our own. This is always the way we see the world and filter the news. I will forever see Sandy Hook in my children. I will forever see my Uncle Jim in the faces of murder victims.

But this is not a selfish view. It is the right-sized window we have to look through. It is the only way we can process the extent of the staggering suffering we see in the world.

By choosing to make it our own.

We must choose to let it in, choose to see the people we love in the faces of the grieving, choose to change something about the way we live so that a better way might be possible. We cannot stay hardened or paralyzed or exhausted. We have to do something.

We can vote, we can give money, we can speak up, we can rally, we can protest, we can start a conversation, we can pray.

Why did that devastating photo of the three year-old washed up on the beach galvanize the world to care about the plight of Syrian refugees? [It was his shoes.](#) The tiny shoes that every parent remembers slipping onto their child's feet.

This is the way we are supposed to learn about love: in widening circles.

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