



Never in vain, never again

The loss of his sister motivates Hunter Pollack's call for action

COOPER LOCKETT | *Co-Editor in Chief*

Hunter Pollack was sitting in the middle of his humanities class at Florida State University Feb. when he glanced at his phone and saw a tweet reporting that shots had been fired at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school in Parkland, Fla.

His first thought: text his sister Meadow, a senior at MSD, to ask her if she was okay. He got no response.

He got in his car and drove six hours down the state to get back to Broward County, waiting for news on his sister the whole way. He got home at 2 a.m.. Still no news.

At 2:30 in the morning, detectives arrived at his home and delivered the news.

His sister was dead, shot nine times in cold blood.

As Pollack mourned the loss of his sister, he remembered the kind of person she was.

"She was an extraordinary girl. She was driven, smart, beautiful, she always had your back," he said. "If I needed a ride, she was always there to get me. If I was ever down, she would show me support and pick me back up."

Now Pollack and his family are facing a future without Meadow. And they have a new mission: discover what went wrong leading up to the shooting and make sure it never happens again.

Pollack, who was interviewed by the *Tribal Tribune* by telephone, believes that failed educational programs giving students too many chances contributed to the tragedy, during which 14 students and three staff members were killed by a former Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School student.

Pollack said a nationally piloted school discipline program, implemented in 2013 by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Broward County Superintendent Robert Runcie, is partly to blame.

"They put in place the Promise Program, which gives kids who commit misdemeanors a second chance preventing recidivism. That means that it wants to prevent them from getting arrested again," said Pollack, who said mistakes at the School Board level allowed the eventual shooter to stay out of jail.

"They started letting the program be taken advantage of. Instead of two times, kids were getting in trouble four times and still not being arrested and it just so happened to let my sister's killer slipped through the cracks," Pollack said. "He was bringing bullets to school, threatening to kill kids and threatening to rape girls and he was just a big, big problem and nothing happened."

Pollack said he doesn't blame guns for the death of his sister as much as the failed programs.

"So when people want to blame the guns, this kid should have been arrested or put into disciplinary programs, but it never happened," he said. "The sheriff's office went to him over 30 times {over a six year program} and never arrested him. He killed animals, he put a gun up to his mom's head. It shows that the system failed."

Pollack advises students and parents to learn about their school boards and local officials and hold them accountable.

"That's why I've been so vocal about three things: school safety, local elections and holding people accountable. I advise kids and parents to look into their School Boards, superintendents and school safety guides and make sure that schools are following the guidelines," he said. "What's so important is not to look at who the president is or who the congressman is, or who the senators are, but to look into who your School Board members



Hunter Pollack sits in the car with his sister as he enjoys one of their special moments together. *photo // provided by Hunter Pollack*

are, who your superintendents, mayors and sheriffs are. Looking for [Washington] D.C. to solve all our problems is unrealistic."

Pollack has helped with the passage of new school safety legislation in the state of Florida.

"We signed a bill in Tallahassee [Florida]," he said. "The Stoneman Douglas Safety Act that brings armed guards into school, more funding into school safety and more funding into mental health."

Pollack has become an activist for increased school safety and security, encouraging schools to become more proactive in helping defend against intruders.

"When 9/11 happened, they did flight deck officer training, where pilots can now carry guns if they go through training. But due to TSA doing such excellent jobs, metal detectors, X rays and single point entry, the pilots have not had to use their guns since the program started in 2002," he said. "So I'd like to see schools start limiting their entry points, putting in metal detectors, putting in X ray machines. This isn't going to go away, if we don't do something now these killers are going to keep going into schools and killing children."

He believes that increasing school security including having armed guards and arming some teachers, could be beneficial safety measures.

"They [guards and guns] serve as a deterrent. These school shooters are wussies,"

Pollack said. "If they know someone will shoot back at them, they won't even show up. They'll go somewhere else, they'll go to gun free zone."

"Law enforcement doesn't show up to the scene right away, you saw what happened in Parkland, where the cop hid behind the concrete wall and the other cops didn't show up for another seven or eight minutes while this kid's roaming around shooting people like it's a video game. That's why we need armed guards because law enforcement officers can't be on the scene in 25 seconds to stop a shooting," he said.

Pollack also believes that media coverage of American mass shootings could be causing some of the problems.

"A big thing I talk about is the mainstream media does a poor job of covering mass shootings. These kids go out and kill people because they seek notoriety, they want fame, they want people to know their name and the media gives

them that," he said. "When someone kills they mention his name in every story for months to come, they show his picture, they make these killers famous."

Gun control policy has been a major part of the school safety conversation, but Pollack does not believe it is the primary concern.

"No one wants a sick, deranged monster to ever have access to a firearm," he said. "Do I think that gun control could have stopped him from using an AR-15? Maybe, but would it have stopped him from going into the school and killing kids. Absolutely not."

Pollack said he believes that past gun legislation did not stop school shootings.

"If you look at Columbine in 1999, they were still in the middle of the Assault Weapons ban and it didn't work, They still went in and killed 13 people," he said. "Do you think these gangsters, criminals and monsters will follow the law, or will they break the law like they have been from the beginning of time?"

Pollack believes it is time to put gun control discussion aside, taking a bipartisan approach to school safety.

"Columbine happened, they pushed gun control. Sandy Hook happened, they pushed gun control. Virginia Tech happened, they pushed gun control. Parkland happened and they are still pushing for gun control," he said. "Now it's time to make this a non-partisan issue. Republicans and Democrats both have kids, Make sure there's metal detectors, limited entrances and x ray machines at all schools."

A year of carnage

The *Tribal Tribune* first covered the Las Vegas shooting in October 2017. Since then, the trend hadn't let up. These are some of the more deadly shootings from October 2017 up until August 2018.

2017-2018

10/01 2017	Las Vegas, Nev.: 59 dead, 413 injured. During the Harvest Music Festival, a gunman began shooting from the nearby Mandalay Bay hotel into the concert-going crowd. It is now the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.
11/05 2017	Sutherland Springs, Texas: 27 dead, 20 injured. The gunman began firing outside a church before moving inside. He was shot by Stephen Willeford when he returned outside, but died on the run from authorities.
11/14 2017	Corning, Calif.: Six dead, 12 injured. The gunmen first began shooting at his home and continued across eight different crime scenes on the Rancho Tehama Reserve before being chased down by authorities and then killing himself.
02/14 2018	Parkland, Fla.: Seventeen dead, 17 wounded. The gunman set off a fire alarm and shot randomly as students and teachers left their classrooms. He managed to blend in as a student as they left and was later arrested in a nearby neighborhood.
04/22 2018	Antioch, Tenn.: Four dead, three wounded. The gunman began shooting outside the Waffle House before moving inside. James Shaw Jr. rushed the gunman and wrestled the gun out of his hand. He was arrested the next day.
05/18 2018	Santa Fe, Texas: Ten killed, 13 wounded. The gunman opened fire in the school. The gunman was wounded before surrendering to authorities.
05/18 2018	Orlando, Fla.: Five killed, one wounded. The gunman took four child hostages in an apartment complex. When SWAT teams breached the complex, they found the four kids murdered and the gunman dead by suicide.
08/26 2018	Jacksonville, Fla.: Three dead, nine wounded. The Good Luck Have Fun bar was hosting a Madden NFL 19 tournament. The gunman had lost earlier in the day and shot other gamers at the tournament before killing himself.

■ Tyler Fedor