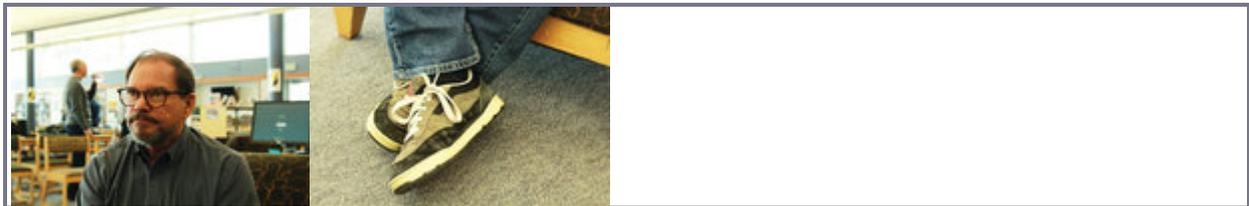


‘I feel like Daniel is walking with me’

Tom Mauser, who lost his son at Columbine, advocates for stricter gun laws



Tom Mauser is the father of Daniel Mauser. He became a gun control activist after the Columbine shooting. PHOTOS BY JOSEPH RIOS



April 9, 2019

David Gilbert

Ask Tom Mauser about his shoes.

Mauser's son Daniel was killed at Columbine High School in 1999. In the years that followed, Mauser became an outspoken advocate for stronger gun laws.

And through every event, every rally, every speech, if you look at Mauser's feet, you'll see the same pair of sneakers.

"These are the shoes Daniel was wearing when he died," Mauser said. "We wear the same size. This way, I feel like Daniel is walking with me."

Before Daniel's death, Mauser said he wasn't much of an activist. He'd write the occasional letter to the editor, he said, but Columbine threw him into the public eye.

Mauser said he was haunted by a brief conversation he had with his son two weeks before he was killed.

"Daniel was on the debate team, and after a conversation with his teammates, he said, 'Dad, did you know there are loopholes in the Brady Bill?' I blew it off and said, 'No, Daniel, I didn't know that.'"

The bill requires background checks for gun sales. The Columbine killers obtained their guns through a friend who bought them at a gun show, according to news reports from the time, circumventing the law.

“I felt I had to act,” Mauser said.

A little more than a week after Daniel’s murder, Mauser attended a protest against the National Rifle Association, which pressed forward with plans to hold its national convention in Denver amid controversy after the shooting.

“I brought a sign with a picture of my son, and 400 fliers to pass out,” Mauser said. “Thousands of people showed up. I had no idea.”

An organizer asked him to speak to the crowd.

“It took me out of my shell,” Mauser said. “I’ve never been the same since.”

Mauser is now a spokesman and board member for Ceasefire Colorado, a group that advocates for stricter gun laws.

“We have to take this seriously,” Mauser said. “We have a shameful level of gun violence in America, and we have to do something about it.”

Closing loopholes in gun-sale laws is a high priority for Mauser, as are universal background checks. Mauser also supports the recently passed “red flag” bill, a controversial measure that would allow judges to order guns taken from people believed to pose a threat to themselves or others. He would also like to see laws that prohibit felons from owning guns extended to people convicted of misdemeanors involving violence.

Mauser said he’s all too familiar with arguments against him from gun rights advocates.

“I love responding to the logic or illogic of my opponents,” Mauser said. “By and large, the majority of Americans support the right to bear arms. But the majority of these people also believe in and accept restrictions. People on the far right will never change their minds, but we need to work on the people in the middle.”

It’s not all about guns, Mauser said. The Columbine tragedy happened because “two mentally disturbed young men weren’t getting the care they needed,” he said.

“They were determined to commit suicide, and determined to take others with them,” Mauser said. “All societies have people who are suicidal. But in America, we seem to have people who want to take others with them, too. That’s what we have to get a handle on. Why do they feel that need?”

Mauser said his heart aches every time he sees yet another mass shooting in the news. He says he flashes back to April 20, 1999, and hurts for the families of victims.

“I would tell the families: The world is not going to understand what you’re going through. Let yourself grieve. But as you move along, never lose sight of what your loved one would want. They wouldn’t want you to be stuck in grief. They’d want to look down from heaven and see you living your life and doing something to honor them.”

For Tom Mauser, honoring his son means he’ll keep walking in Daniel’s shoes.