

# Missed Shot

Category: Gun Violence

written by Sarah Liu | June 28, 2022

"You'd better sit down," says the neighbor of a friend, a voice I hardly recognize over the phone. On automatic pilot, I grab the nearest chair.

"Okay."

"S. shot herself."

"What?" Shock throws me off balance, even with four legs and a wooden seat under me.

"S. bought a gun and shot herself last night on the patio outside the kitchen, leaving a trail of notes for B. to find while he was out walking the dog."

I can't keep up with all this information.

Twenty years have passed. I still don't understand.

Yes, I knew that S. suffered from depression. The idea of suicide—an overdose, car exhaust, suffocation—maybe. But a gun? A Zen Buddhist, she practiced in her own meditation hut a few yards up the hill from her house. She also belonged to the Society of Friends (the Quakers), was firmly committed to social and racial justice, volunteered for local organizations as well Amnesty International and the Red Cross, and spent summers at Tich Nacht Hahn's Plum Village in France.

Simultaneously, she engaged in not just Western psychotherapy but whole-hog Freudian psychoanalysis, five days a week on the couch. While aware of transference/countertransference, I didn't know what to say or whom to believe when S. talked about her therapist's infatuation, his denial as the reason he dropped her as a patient. Her husband, B., had a different story: the analyst called him, S. had to stop her harassment, therapy was permanently terminated.

S. asked me for a referral, but I realized she'd given up on talk therapy, wanting only antidepressants.

In the weeks before her suicide, her mood seemed to lift. All the while, she was planning her death, buying the gun, and arranging private, unknown "farewell" meals with each of her friends.

Guns feature prominently in mass shootings, homicides, accidents, and protests. Less so in domestic terrorism, depression, homes, and families. B. has never recovered. He founded a memorial in S.'s name, but no one mentions "suicide" as the cause of death, no one talks about guns.

I feel torn, grief, compassion, guilt at not seeing the signs, yet fury at

the cruelty of her choice: the violence, the paper trail of notes, the aftermath of lives blown apart, some irrevocably.

Call it like it is: a weapon of war, weapon of vengeance, weapon of destruction, weapon of despair. An instrument that carries a bullet to brain, heart, and body, tearing us to pieces.

*Sarah Liu*  
*Berkeley, California*