

Community Voices

In the halls of memory: Forum will help vets preserve history

Barbara Bartholomew

Few of us regard ourselves as writers, though all of us carry stories from our past that shape who we become. If you visited the traveling Vietnam wall memorial when it came to Bakersfield, you may have passed several display cases of writings that follow it. This handwritten letter was inside one of them:

Dear David:

Just thought I'd write. When I wrote this letter, I'd never seen a clearer night. The breeze was blowing like the ones you always enjoyed, and the crickets still can sing me off to sleep.

Talked to Kate the other day on the telephone. She said she was doing better, trying to adjust to being alone. She said she's

going to take some classes in the fall, you said you'd take one with her when you got home, as you recall.

Well, mom's been meaning to see you, but the work's just never done, and Dad just sits around and stares. Well, I just know that they're real proud of you, you served your country like

you had to. It'll take a little time, but they'll be there. I guess I'll miss you most of all. You were more than a brother, you were a friend. ...

As a writer and a CSU Bakersfield English professor, I learned long ago that there is no single right way to put your thoughts to paper. Just give yourself the permission to write from the heart, like one brother reaching out to his sibling who never made it back from war. Imperfect writing, like food made from scratch, often produces the best result. The first and hardest step for anyone is to get what is in your mind and spirit down on paper. Editing can always come later.

Beginning Tuesday, the Beale Memorial Library, in partnership with the CSUB Department of English, will offer four free writing workshops specifically for Kern County veterans. The sessions are designed for nonprofessional writers to tell the unique personal stories of their military service. Many veterans don't view the time they spent in the military as having historical significance, but in this workshop, we hope to demonstrate how it does hold importance.

It is not mandatory that workshop participants share their writing or attend every session. However, it is the hope and goal that personal

HOW TO ATTEND

The writing workshops will take place in the second-floor Tejon Room at the Beale Memorial Library, 701 Truxtun Ave. For more information, call the library at **868-0745**.

"A Brief Autobiography," 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 9: In this memoir workshop, veterans will introduce themselves, share their personal and family stories, and may write privately or anonymously.

"The Backdrop of History," 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 23: This workshop will explore veterans' personal narratives for joining the military. We will discuss and write about the political times during which they entered the military.

"The People I Most Remember," 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 7: Memories often contain unexpressed tributes to how others have touched our lives. In this workshop, veterans will write a letter to their most memorable person.

"What I Gained From the Experience," 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 21: In this final workshop, we will pull together the thoughts and lessons learned from this writing series. Writers may choose to contribute copies of these memoirs to a library archive dedicated to military veterans of Kern County.

essays are created to reflect the varieties of backgrounds, diversities, experiences and reflections of the local men and women who have represented Kern County in service to our country.

The Beale Library maintains a room dedicated to local history. Pieces contributed from this workshop, titled "My Military Experience: A Personal Journey," will be placed in a special volume to commemorate the experience narratives of our local armed forces veterans. Those who wish to may write anonymously.

Richard Miller, a 36-year-old former Navy firefighter, is the son of a Vietnam veteran. Prior to leaving the military, Miller served in Iraq and Africa. Now an English major at CSUB, he will be assisting in leading the first workshop on the theme of autobiography.

Barbara Bartholomew is an associate professor of reading and literacy at CSU Bakersfield. Community Voices is an expanded commentary of 650 to 700 words.

Rich Lowry SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

The great gun control fizzle

Rarely has the political class whipped itself into a lather that has abated so quickly. After the Newtown, Conn., massacre, so many invested so much hope in President Barack Obama's pledge to "use whatever power this office holds" to pass new gun control laws.

The president has certainly done his part. He has held rallies. He has used children as props. He has held events with parents of the little victims of Newtown. He has shamed the nation for its alleged forgetfulness over the terrible events of that day.

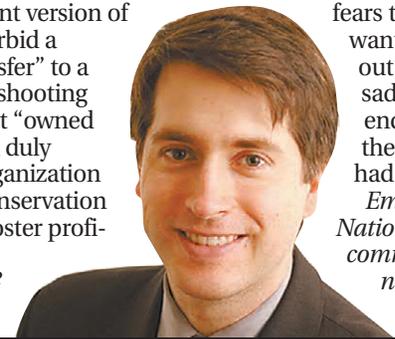
Yet the needle of public opinion is moving the wrong way. CBS News found that support for stricter gun laws dropped from 57 percent to 47 percent, and CNN from 52 percent to 43 percent. The headline on a CNN story on the latest polling was titled "Polls Suggest Congress Might Have Waited Too Long on Gun Control." It has waited all of four months.

But the assault weapons ban has been deep-sixed by Democrats in the Senate. Same with any limit on the size of magazines. The argument now is all about increasing the reach of background checks, although any bill that can pass Congress will be much less extensive than the president or his supporters would like.

The gun control debate has shown the president again to be hopelessly detached as a legislative mechanic and ineffectual as a shaper of public opinion. Before writing rhetorical checks that his own party's majority leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, couldn't cash, the president might have at least consulted with the wily old son of a gun about what was plausible and adjusted accordingly.

It is true that 90 percent of Americans support universal background checks. Who can be against background checks? Heck, even the National Rifle Association wants states to keep more complete records of who is forbidden from purchasing guns.

But it gets complicated quickly when you try to control almost every transfer of a gun. Sen. Chuck Schumer's current version of the bill would forbid a "temporary transfer" to a friend for target shooting if the range is not "owned or occupied by a duly incorporated organization organized for conservation purposes or to foster proficiency in firearms." Got it?



Email Rich Lowry of the National Review at comments.lowry@nationalreview.com.

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Surely, we can figure out a way to do more at gun shows. But despite the obsession with them, gun shows are beside the point. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "In 1997, among state inmates possessing a gun, fewer than 2 percent bought their firearm at a flea market or gun show, about 12 percent from a retail store or pawnshop and 80 percent from family, friends, a street buy or an illegal source."

Gun control always founders on the paradox that it is possible to write new laws for the law-abiding but difficult or impossible to reach criminals who don't care about laws. Michigan has required a permit to purchase a handgun since 1927. The rule has evidently made no impression on those bent on doing harm to others in Detroit or Flint.

The gun control debate has subtly shifted away from Newtown even though the president keeps bringing his case back to that atrocity. Nothing that happened in Newtown had anything to do with background checks. No background-check law will ever prevent someone like Sandy Hook gunman Adam Lanza's mother from buying guns unless the parents of children with autism-like symptoms are to be banned from owning firearms.

The president's push for new gun laws looks, at this juncture, like a complete fizzle. He has failed to sway red-state Democrats and failed to maintain the heightened public support for new gun control laws. The most concrete effect of his advocacy has been, if the anecdotal evidence is to be believed, to stoke increased gun purchases on fears that the government wants to ban guns. He set out to lead a great crusade for gun control and ended up the best friend the gun industry ever had.

HOW TO SUBMIT A LETTER

Letters to the editor should address a **single topic** in no more than **250 words** and be **signed by just one person**; they are **subject to editing** for length and clarity and must include the author's true first and last names, address and telephone number. **The preferred method** of submission is by **email**: opinion@bakersfield.com. Letters also may be **mailed** to Opinion Section, The Bakersfield Californian, P.O. Bin 440, Bakersfield, CA 93302.