



*This is a photograph of my great grandfather, Andres Moreno, face down in the dirt with a bullet in the back of his head. It was taken by Edgar Mearns, a U.S. Army surgeon posted at Camp Verde in Arizona. He happened upon this scene soon after my great grandfather was gunned down by a lawyer named Knox Lee, who had been a passenger on the freight wagon Moreno was driving from Globe to Flagstaff in 1887. The photographer, Edgar Mearns, was also a naturalist of some renown whose papers (including this photo) are now in the collection of the Library of Congress.*

### SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES

There's a grave by the side of the highway along the old Crook Trail in northern Arizona. The headstone reads ANDRES MORENO, July 11, 1840 - July 16, 1887, along with the name of a military unit: Company E, 1st Battalion, Arizona Infantry. Moreno had served in the infantry for a year, defending the territory against attacks by Apaches while the regular army was off fighting the Civil War.

But why was his grave located by the side of a road in the middle of nowhere? As it turns out, Moreno did not die in battle. He had been shot in the back of the head by a disgruntled passenger while hauling a wagonload of household goods from Globe, Arizona to Flagstaff. He was buried close to the spot where he had been killed. The trigger-happy passenger was indicted for murder. However, an all-white jury came back with a verdict of involuntary manslaughter. Newspaper accounts did not even identify the victim by name, listing him only as "an old Mexican."

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That “old” Mexican was all of 47, two years younger than my older son is now. He left behind a much younger widow and seven children. One of those children, Agostina, the second oldest, grew up to marry a local businessman in Globe named William Fisk. They were unable to have children of their own but adopted a baby girl when they were well into middle age. That baby girl was my mother, Ysabel Fisk Rennie.

I never knew my great grandfather, nor his widow, nor their daughter, my grandmother Agostina. She died of congestive heart failure in 1933, when my mother was only 15. They belonged to another place and time — the Wild West, as we now call it. Geronimo had surrendered only the year before my great grandfather was murdered. His wife Delfina narrowly escaped being kidnapped as a child by a band of Apaches.

If that was the Wild West, what should we call our present era? That old factory building by the highway in Hartford with the blue onion dome was where they once manufactured the Colt single-action “Peacemaker” revolver, the so-called gun that tamed the West. That pistol, first manufactured in 1873, was capable of firing six bullets without reloading. In our own era, Colt developed the AR-15, a military-style semiautomatic rifle capable of firing 10 rounds in less than a minute.

The AR-15 has become the weapon of choice in mass shootings, including the Sandy Hook massacre a decade ago in Connecticut and the elementary school killings in Uvalde, Texas earlier this year. Only last week a gunman murdered five people and injured 25 at an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs. He was armed with an AR-15 style weapon. This was one of more than 600 mass shootings this year alone, defined as involving four or more killed and wounded other than the shooter.

Does this number surprise you? It did me. Which just goes to show: mass shootings are now so commonplace, they no longer get much attention in the national press, unless they involve children or some other special circumstance.

One difference between these mass shootings and the Wild West is that there are many more victims now, and they are often children. Nowadays we have active shooter drills in our schools because we lack the political will to keep deadly weapons out of the hands of deranged young men.

Our granddaughter Alex, a high school junior, recently told us she had to stand in line for more than an hour to get into her homecoming dance because the kids all had to pass through a metal detector to get in. I asked her if there was a problem with guns in her high school. Alex told us a student had recently been arrested trying to bring a gun into school. This was not to show off to his buddies; he planned to use it. Alex is the great great great granddaughter of Andres Moreno.

What sort of “Peacemaker” is needed today to tame gun violence? Clearly, the solution to a bad guy with a gun is not a good guy with a gun. Two brave Bristol police officers answering a

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domestic disturbance call last month are now dead because they were ambushed by a bad guy with a gun, a semi-automatic. They didn't stand a chance. A lone gunman armed with an AR-15 in Uvalde held off 376 federal, state and local police for more than an hour. Does anyone seriously think arming teachers would make our schools safe?

Semi-automatic weapons of the type used to kill the Bristol police officers are outlawed in Connecticut. So gun control alone won't solve the problem. I'm here to preach, not to editorialize. Yet I have a hard time imagining that Jesus of Nazareth would identify as a Second-Amendment Christian if he came back today.

There were no guns in first-century Palestine, of course. The chief weapon of war back then was the sword, and Jesus wanted nothing to do with them. He made his disciples put down their swords when Roman soldiers came to arrest him. "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword," he scolded them.

More than 2700 years ago the Prophet Isaiah had a vision from this morning's Old Testament reading in which nations "shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (A ploughshare, by the way, is the cutting edge of plough, like the blade of a knife.)

We had a demonstration here last month from an organization called Swords into Ploughshares in which guns were forged to make jewelry and garden tools. Jim Curry, retired bishop of Connecticut and co-founder of the group, put his finger on something when he was here. "America doesn't just have a gun problem," he said. "We have a heart problem."

So what will it take to realize Isaiah's vision? Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." By peacemakers, he was not referring to those six-shooters that tamed the West. He was talking about people who've had a change of heart, which is the very meaning of the word repentance. He was talking about people who have found peace in their hearts, who are at peace with themselves, who make peace with others. *Repent*, Jesus said. *My peace I give to you.*

Should we pray for peace? I'm reminded of a story about a rabbi who stood at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and prayed for hours a day, week after week, year after year, and finally somebody asked him, "What are you praying for?" He said, "Peace." The other guy asked, "So how's it going so far?" The rabbi answered, "It's like talking to a stone wall."

Praying for God to impose peace on the world isn't the answer. We need to pray as St. Francis did: *Make me an instrument of thy peace.* We need to become the peace we pray for. We need to be peacemakers and support other peacemakers.

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I would suggest there's a precedent we can follow with an organization called Mothers Against Drunk Driving. They spearheaded an enormous effort to change tolerant social attitudes toward drunk driving a generation ago. And it worked. Highway accidents and deaths caused by drunk drivers have gone way down.

Now we need to do the same thing with gun violence. When enough people decide they are not going to tolerate living in a society racked by gun violence, politicians will get the message. Attitudes will change. You won't hear as much empty talk about stopping gun violence by arming ourselves with even more guns.

Recently I got an e-mail from a distant cousin, previously unknown to me, who sent me a picture of himself and a group of four other cousins, also unknown to me. They were standing around Andres Moreno's tombstone in Arizona. Only it wasn't in the same spot as before. Working with a local historian, these cousins had determined that Andres Moreno was not buried at the original site but rather a short distance away. So they persuaded the Forest Service to move the grave marker.

I got to thinking about those distant cousins I never knew I had. Andres Moreno left seven children behind when he was murdered in 1887. There have been at least five generations of descendants, all of them affected to a greater or lesser degree by this single act of gun violence a very long time ago. A group of distant cousins, all with different last names, were drawn together out of respect for an "old Mexican" they never knew but who is the reason all of them are alive today.

Think of those T-shirts planted on Holy Trinity's front lawn, 76 in all. Each one bore the name of a person who died by gun violence in Connecticut in 2022, not including suicides. Among those victims was one of the ambushed Bristol police officers who left behind a pregnant wife and two small children. Every one of those 76 victims leaves behind family, friends, co-workers, neighbors. In the case of those Bristol police officers, fellow cops from all over the country showed up to pay their respects to a fallen comrade. Widening circles of human connection, like ripples in a pond, that can extend to future generations, as the murder of my great grandfather has demonstrated.

Folks, we don't have to live like this. We don't have to send our kids and grandkids off to schools with metal detectors to stop weapons from coming in. Schools that must hold active shooter drills to keep kids safe. We don't have to arm ourselves with military-grade weapons to defend ourselves against other people armed with military-grade weapons. We don't have to live by the sword and die by the sword. We can beat swords into ploughshares. But it will require a change of heart, individually and collectively, in order to find the peace that passes all understanding.

I'd like to end in prayer, the Prayer of St. Francis:

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Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

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