

DISCOVER

# One Mother's Heartbreaking Mission To End Gun Violence

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LAST UPDATED JUNE 2, 2016, 4:15 PM

PHOTO: COURTESY BARBARA PARKER.

*Barbara Parker, with her daughter, Alison, on Mother's Day 2015.*

**Update:** People across the country are coming together Thursday, June 2, to call for an end to gun-related violence. Refinery29 is on the ground in Chicago and San Francisco, covering events staged as part of [National Gun Violence Awareness Day](#). Ahead, the heartbreaking story of one mother's mission to address the issue.

*This story was originally published on May 6, 2016.*

Over the years, Barbara Parker and her family watched coverage of one tragic mass shooting after another, and wondered why there wasn't more being done to keep guns out of hands of those who shouldn't have them.

"But we didn't get out there and say anything, even after Sandy Hook, and Aurora, [and] Virginia Tech, which was practically in our backyard," Parker told Refinery29 by phone. "It took having a tragedy affect our family."

On August 26, 2015, Parker's daughter Alison was [killed, along with her colleague Adam Ward](#), as they filmed a live segment for the local CBS news affiliate in Roanoke, VA. Their former coworker, Vester Lee Flanagan II, who, in a suicide note, blamed the network where they had worked for perceived slights, opened fire on the two as they interviewed a local Chamber of Commerce member. Both Parker and Ward died at the scene.

In the less than nine months since her daughter was killed, Barbara Parker and her husband Andy have become passionate advocates for gun safety. On Saturday — the day before the first Mother's Day without her daughter — Parker will be in New York City to march with [Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense America](#) to bring attention to the issue of gun violence and remember the loved ones, like Alison, they've lost.

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“It took having a tragedy affect our family. And what we felt like is, we have to speak out now. We don't want other people to go through this.”

BARBARA PARKER

— ” —

Parker's first clue that something was wrong on the morning her daughter died came when she went to go watch the recording of Alison's early morning television segment, as she did every day.

“[She would be on the air at] the crack of dawn. So we would never get up that early,” Parker said.

Instead, she would wait and watch the online version a little bit later. On that morning, she tried to watch the broadcast as usual — but the stream was blank.

“I was up about 7 o'clock, and I would usually watch it online, but there was nothing there,” she said. “I thought the live [broadcast] truck must have been down.”

A few hours later, she learned the truth.

“Your first thought is disbelief. You can't comprehend it happened,” Parker recalled. “And then

the overwhelming grief. And then the more we heard about it, and the more we heard about the person who did this, the angrier we became. And our grief turned into anger.”

“And then you go from there — what can we do to make sure this doesn’t happen to other people?” she said.

For Parker, it’s not about being *against* guns, but rather, *for* what she believes is common-sense safety. She supports measures like conducting universal background checks and research into gun violence to make better decisions about safety, and responsible gun ownership.

“We grew up in Texas,” Parker said. “We’ve known people that were hunters, and we’ve never had a problem with that. We’re not trying to go out and take everybody’s guns away.”

Polls have shown that better gun safety — and particularly backgrounds checks — is a bipartisan issue. A CBS News/*New York Times* poll from October 2015 found that 92% of Americans, including 87% of Republicans, support universal background checks.



PHOTO: COURTESY BARBARA PARKER.

Parker has never seen the video filmed of her daughter’s death. She still avoids watching TV interviews, because of the possibility that the footage will be played. She and her family don’t talk about the man who committed the murder. “We don’t talk about him, we don’t think about him,” she said. “Grief is hard enough.”

Now, Parker is bracing for her first Mother's Day without her daughter.

"I was looking back at pictures of last year's Mother's Day," she said. "That's hard, but even harder than that, even harder than Mother's Day, is the days that Alison and I used to spend together just meeting in Roanoke and having lunch and shopping and having [a] little mother-daughter time, just us. That's the hardest thing."

But when she thinks about her daughter, it's not about how she died. "She was a person I would've wanted to be when I was 24," she said. "She lived life with a vengeance. She packed more into 24 years than most people do in a lifetime."

"That's the thing that helps us live with this," she adds. "There were no regrets."

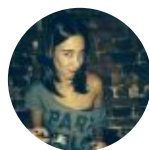
*Refinery29 will livestream Saturday's [Moms Demand Action Brooklyn Bridge March](#) on our [Vote Your Values Facebook page](#). Tune in at 1:30 p.m. to hear the marching mothers and their allies in their own words.*

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MOTHER ALISON PARKER GUN CONTROL INTERVIEW GUN VIOLENCE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON [MAY 6, 2016, 9:30 PM](#)



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**GRINGAO** · 7 May, 2016

That gun control wasn't moving off the shelves, so it's been rebranded as "gun safety." It's old sewage in new cesspits. Anyone else notice they don't use Kate Steinle as a bloody shirt to wave?

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**RFRMAN** · 7 May, 2016

She is not after gun safety she is after gun bans.

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**ROSE528** → [rfrman](#) · 2 Jun, 2016

YES, YES you go women

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**TOM GEORGE** → [rfrman](#) · 4 Jun, 2016

Of course, a standard knee jerk reaction to her loss. If I lost a loved one, I would not be blaming the tool used, but instead - I'd do my best the hunt down the POS and give him a very interesting and painfully long death. I'll take my chances in court!

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**ROSE528** → [rfrman](#) · 4 Jun, 2016

IF the tool wasn't there it wouldn't be used, I hope I'm on the jury

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