

Sometimes a shot will ring out in someone's darkest hours, leaving them laying to watch as their lives flash by, or maybe to fear and ponder the unknown as they slowly die. The shots that ring out are full of hate, fear and neglect, the shooter aiming to kill another person for any reason, from colour and clothes to just looking the wrong way. The scenarios are usually as varied as the victims. In one place, violence strikes down the one who had it coming, while a couple of blocks over, an innocent victim's life can be the one that is affected.

Tracking the disease of gun violence seemed to be easy, as we trace our finger along a blood red line from the most impoverished parts of large cities, where violence seemed to be a response to a life of neglect. You can argue about economics and race issues, but these two excuses were usually a false comfort for the people outside of those neighborhoods. Most thought the violence seemed to only affect the poorer parts of cities, a sense that laid a blanket of complacency in nicer neighborhoods and 'safe' cities, leading people to the mentality of 'not in my backyard'. Violence has always been a part of life, but for most of us, gun violence was far off.

With the popularity of guns and their easy availability, the problem quickly spread like a cancer and has taken many people by surprise, even though it shouldn't have.

Every night on the news, viewers can see pictures of war in far off lands, of bombings and wailing people, torment all too common as we sit and watch. In the movies and on TV, realistic shootings and torturous killings play out as the story sometimes unfolds. Society is use to seeing violence, but when it hits home, it seems like we never saw it coming.

There has been a dramatic rise in the innocent dying from gun violence over the last few years. Governments call it 'collateral damage' when they are at war, trying to detach it from the humane face it resembles. Like the wars in far off lands, the 'collateral damage' seems to be also on our doorstep where we live, albeit in a different guise. Here, armies don't shoot at each other across rubble neighborhoods and across deserted plains. The rise in gun violence in western society affects more than most would think. Most people would think 'really, what are the odds of someone getting killed from a stray bullet'? And up until a few years ago, most people I know couldn't recall one instance of someone getting shot, other than a rumoured gang shooting. But now in 2006, there isn't a lot of people who could say they haven't been affected at all from gun violence.

Getting the microscope out, and going one step further, how about isolating the issue of gun violence to one specific area, like skateboarding. How many skaters have been shot, or shot at? Turns out there have been lots.

Dan Castillo was shot at a high school dance and barely saved by a good friend. While at a house party, Terry Kennedy was hit by a stray bullet that went through his jaw and out the other side. Rick Abiesta was shot and rushed to hospital via helicopter. Erick Ricks was shot at a bus stop in a drive by. These higher profile people are a few that have all been affected by gun violence, and they are probably just the tip of the iceberg, even in the skateboard community. In Vancouver alone, within two years, Lee Matasi and Rachael Davis, two active members of the skateboard community, have been shot and killed, both innocent

victims of gun violence. So now, it seems like the floodgates have opened, and that it is in most peoples back yard.

After tragedies of violence and senseless killings, the people who have been hurt or have lost loved ones are left to pick up the pieces, and to analyse to death what is wrong with society when this kind of wonton violence occurs. Looking back, an obvious question is who in their right mind carries a gun, something that can take a life, and actually think that they are cool for doing so? Who are these people who go to clubs, looking for something to shoot at, something to prove, something to make them a bigger person. Reaching for reason, the easiest thing in the world to do is blame the media, blame music, blame pop-culture; pick a reason, because they're all there. But as we wake up and look at ourselves in the mirror, it seems that maybe almost everyone is to blame, because we eat everything up that we see. We watch the movies where guns make more sounds than dialogue, and we buy the music that glorifies the gun life. Video games are all about killing people, and kids can be accomplished killers before they reach puberty. Gun violence surrounds us, and yet we are surprised when it hits close to home.

Looking even deeper into the two recent Vancouver killings, as we all try to think where everything went wrong and where all this violence came from, we sometimes forget about what happens to the people who don't get the chance to look at themselves in the mirror. About how being alone is the scariest thing in the world when faced with crisis. Imagine, being chased down by someone, getting beat up, and laying there alone, thinking that you're a goner. Somewhere out of the crowd, someone comes to your aid, trying to help you, trying to save you. You might smile at not being alone, but soon your smile would change to horror as the person who came to aid's body slumps and their last breath is stolen as they die there, trying to help you. This is how Rachel Davis died, helping someone else.

Or How about stepping in when someone is acting recklessly and is a danger to everyone around? What about trying to prevent something before it even gets started? How about trying to help and realizing that you're in danger, and imagine trying to get away as someone waves a gun at you and pursues you, cutting you down as you try to get away. This is where Lee Matasi's life ended.

The skateboarding world is small comparatively, but what is surprising is the amounts of deaths and injuries from gun violence that have occurred in our small community. Imagine looking at other walks of life, like musicians, writers, designers, artists, you can pick anything. Each one of them has had high profile deaths and injuries from shootings, some planned, some accidental, but all life shattering. And this is where it gets scary, because it proves that violence has no boundaries. A bullet doesn't care if you're an innocent bystander or a guilty thug. There are no walks of life that are immune to guns and the people who use them, no colours that are safe, no religions that will give you refuge.

Realizing that gun violence affects everybody is part of the healing process. We need, even just as members of the skateboarding community, realize that violence is wrong, carrying guns is wrong. We can't tolerate it, as skaters, as society. It can be possible to be

detached from music and movies that glorify the gun life, just because we see it doesn't mean we have to emulate it.

There's no way society will ever be free from violence, be it gun or otherwise. But as active members of society, especially as skaters, we can try and put an end to the senseless killings through education and the way we live our lives.