

OP-ED COLUMNIST

Lessons From Guns and a Goose

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When I travel abroad and talk to foreigners about the American passion for guns, people sometimes express a conclusion that horrifies me: in America, life is cheap.

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Damon Winter/The New York Times

Nicholas D. Kristof

President Obama announced a terrific series of gun-control measures to show that we do indeed hold life dear. But the fate of these proposals ultimately will depend on centrist Americans who are torn. They're troubled by the toll of guns but also think that it's reassuring to have a Glock when you hear a floorboard creak downstairs.

So, to those of you wavering, let me tell you the story of a goose.

I grew up on a farm in Yamhill, Ore., a rural town where nearly every home had guns. My dad gave me a .22 rifle for my 12th birthday, and I then took an N.R.A. safety course.

I understand the heartland's affection for guns, and I share that sense of familiarity. A farm needs a gun or two to deal with coyotes with a fondness for lamb, and, frankly, it's also fun to shoot.

But all those guns didn't make us safer. Take the time we gave a goose to a neighbor.

That goose would wander off to a different neighbor's property and jump into the watering trough for his sheep. The sheep owner was furious that the water would be fouled, and one time he was so fed up he threatened to shoot the goose.

He was probably just making a point, but, since he had a

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