

**Letter to the editor in the Washington Post  
Published on August 4, 2021**

Regarding the July 31 Sports article "Nationals continue to deal":

They say baseball is a business, and indeed it is a big business for owners and management. So, they tell me, there's no room for things like loyalty in big business. There seems to be one important aspect of business that the Nationals were overlooking when they held their fire sale at the trade deadline: customer loyalty.

Owners of baseball teams expect and even depend on fan loyalty for ticket and merchandise sales. They expect us to pay hundreds of dollars for jerseys with players' names on them, the players we love, to whom we are loyal, who play for the team we are loyal to. They expect us to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars for tickets every year to see our team. Our team.

Whether owners accept it, we are minor investors in the team. We support them emotionally, we fill the seats, and we give them our hard-earned money to show our loyalty. Sadly, it appears that loyalty is a one-way street in baseball.

Lynda Allen, Fredericksburg, Va.

**Letter to the editor in the Washington Post  
Published on August 31, 2019**

We the Fans of the Washington Nationals, in Order to form a more perfect Team, establish a Winning Record each year, insure fan Tranquility, provide for an unbeatable Defense, promote the team Welfare, and secure the Blessings of a World Series title for the District and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the Washington Nationals.

Article I. Sign Anthony Rendon. Now.

Done in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the Fans of the Washington Nationals present the Thirty-first Day of August in the Year of our Lord two thousand and nineteen.

Lynda Allen, Fredericksburg, Va.

**Letter to the editor in the Washington Post  
Published on December 8, 2013**

Nelson Mandela's passing is a great loss to all those who would live a life of peace. It is also an opportunity to reflect upon his legacy.

While his life leaves us with an example of peace, nonviolence and forgiveness, his greatest legacy to me is one of choice: He taught me that I can choose love over hate and forgiveness over bitterness. Most important, through Mr. Mandela's life, I learned that this is an active choice. That sometimes you have to choose peace even when you feel great anger or frustration. That you can

choose forgiveness, as Mr. Mandela did, even when you have every reason to hold on to your bitterness.

There were moments in his life when Mr. Mandela didn't choose peace over violence. Yet his life will have a lasting legacy of peace because, despite a choice he made yesterday or last year or 10 years ago, he knew that each moment held a new choice, a new opportunity to live in peace, to choose forgiveness, to offer love. Thank you, Mr. Mandela.

Lynda Allen, Fredericksburg

**Letter to the Editor in the Free Lance-Star, Fredericksburg, VA  
January 14, 2011**

We Are All Culpable  
For Christina-Taylor Green:

We teach them to share. We teach them to be kind, their right from their left, play nicely, use good manners, it's not polite to point, take turns.

We teach them to take responsibility. We teach them the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Unless the others are not like you. Unless they don't vote as you do. Unless their skin is a different color from yours. Unless they pray differently from you. Unless they live across some imaginary border from you. Unless they don't agree with you. Unless.

We redefine right and left, until it becomes right and wrong. Pointing, pointing, pointing at who is to blame. Did you ever notice the word "**blame**" **ends with "me"**?

I am to blame. For every choice I made that did not honor what I teach my children. For every choice not made from love. For every time I didn't share or play nicely with others. For every time I judged based on color or creed or doctrine. For every time I was impolite. For every time I didn't wait my turn. For every time I dodged my responsibility for my choices. For every time I was unkind. For every time I forgot that left and right were just directions, not divisions.

For each and every time, I apologize. I should have known better. I should have behaved better. From the deepest place in my heart, from the deepest part of my connection to all humanity, I am sorry that I didn't behave more like an innocent.

I'm sorry I didn't choose from the heart of the child, so that Christina-Taylor Green could live today, now, in a world of peace. I will choose more wisely from this day forth. I will make choices that I know will one day lead to a world she would have been proud to call home.

Lynda Allen  
Fredericksburg

**DEATH OF A TREE BEARING WITNESS Gift-giving, in the The Free Lance-Star,  
Fredericksburg, VA  
July 21, 2009**

RECENTLY, I bore witness to the death of a majestic tree. She was a black locust that graced the corner of Grove and Littlepage. Her fragrant blossoms were a gift each spring. I watched as they cut her down. She seemed quite old though I didn't get to count her rings. Covered in green leaves, she was not dead, but was not at her healthiest, either.

They had planned to cut her down years ago, but what they had not planned for was the woman who walked out and said, "No." She was a neighbor of mine and she stopped them from cutting down that tree 10 years ago. Clearly it still had life in it, clearly so did she. She moved away, but thanks to her the tree remained.

I know why they finally decided to cut it down now. Last summer in a thunderstorm one of her trunks broke and landed on the cars parked beside her. That's how I knew that I would not be able to stop them from cutting her down this time. It was for the public good. I wasn't sure what was mine to do then, if I couldn't have my Dr. Seuss "I am the Lorax and I speak for the trees" moment.

I decided to witness for the trees instead. I watched as they cut through what remained of the trunk that had broken last year and then through the other two trunks. It was an awful sound as she cracked under her own weight each time and fell with a crash to the ground. There she lay on the ground as I watched them cut her into smaller and smaller pieces to be carried away. It's possible she was sick or did present a hazard to those who walked or parked near her, but she had also presented many gifts.

She provided a home to birds and squirrels and numerous other creatures. She gave the gifts of beauty and grace and strength. She helped provide the oxygen that I breathe and provided shade in the park where she stood. For my daughters she provided the knowledge that one small voice could make a difference for another living thing, just like that woman had 10 years ago. So I gave her the only gift I could think of in return: I honored her life by witnessing her death.

She witnessed much in her life, too, I'm sure. She may have stood in that spot before my 83-year-old house was built. She witnessed our small town grow all around her and her residents go off to and perhaps not return from several wars. She witnessed children being born and growing up in this neighborhood, from small saplings themselves to adults with children of their own. She witnessed this house being built. I hope she enjoyed the view of it as much as I enjoyed the view of her.

I don't think I was the only witness. As I watched from my home, I saw birds come and land in her branches even as they lay on the ground. I hope it was in farewell and not searching for something they had lost.

It does in a way feel as though I've lost a friend dear to me. I knew my daughters would come home from school and feel the loss of her as well. We will honor her together as best we can. I asked the men who were charged with cutting her down for a small piece of her to keep. They were willing, but found that she was covered in poison ivy. The piece of her that I will keep will be carried in my heart instead. For always will there be that memory of the scent of her hanging bunches of creamy flowers in spring and her feathery, life-giving green leaves in summer.

These are the parts of her that I will carry with me, that will remain though she is gone. I am honored to have been a witness to a small part of her life and to her death. I am humbled by it and filled with sadness and love in equal measure.

Lynda Allen lives in Fredericksburg. She is the author of a collection of poetry, *Rest in the Knowing*.

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Below I've included one of my poems. I chose it because I believe it demonstrates my ability to take a difficult and complex topic like gun violence and help us see the personal and societal consequences. I also believe it helps us face the issue with heart, honesty, compassion, and an eye toward healing.

**Please be aware the subject matter may be difficult to read for those who have experienced gun-related trauma.**

## **Forty-nine**

“The funerals have begun.”  
Forty-nine of them, when all is said, and done.  
Forty-nine of them, so far.  
Forty-nine of them, this time.  
Forty-nine eulogies.  
Forty-nine days filled with the mourning of hundreds of hearts.

As a nation we offer our thoughts and prayers.  
How many prayers exactly, are equivalent to a life?  
How many thoughts to assuage the loss?  
How many empty words falling from the empty mouths and minds  
of politicians and pundits, does it take to fill the void?  
Whose voice will be raised at each funeral for those who no longer have a voice?  
Who will speak forty-nine times for the fallen?  
Who will stand up forty-nine times, or weep forty-nine times,  
or rage, or grieve, or sing songs of praise,  
or scream, “Enough!” forty-nine times?

Who will forgive forty-nine times?  
Jesus said to forgive seventy times seven times.  
Shall we wait then,  
until the body count reaches 490 rather than 49?

And whom shall I forgive?  
The man with the gun in his hand,  
or the one who sold it to him?  
The man with hate in his heart,  
or the one who taught it to him?  
The man filled with self-loathing,  
or the ones that should have loved him?  
The man with a vengeful God as his inspiration,  
or the one who preached to him?  
The one blinded by rage,  
or the ones who blinded him?

How do I even begin to forgive the unforgivable?

The larger question perhaps,  
who and what do I become if I don't,  
if I can't,  
if I won't?  
Without forgiveness I become filled with hate, and fear, and self-loathing, and vengeance, and rage.  
Without forgiveness, I become number fifty.