

To survive a shooting¹

©2014 Robert Brown Butler

This section from the award-winning *Disaster Handbook* is offered as a public service by the author in hopes that it may save a few lives somewhere someday. You may download it from the book's website, <http://thedisasterhandbook.com>. If you have received a .pdf file of this document from the author or another person, feel free to email it or make copies and share it with your friends. Then maybe together we can quell some of this senseless violence.

In recent years a number of horrific incidents have occurred when one or more deranged gunmen have entered a public place and began shooting innocent citizens. On June 11, 2014, President Barack Obama spoke at the White House about the latest string of senseless shootings that had occurred across America. He said, "Our levels of gun violence are off the charts. We don't have enough tools right now to really make as big a dent as we need to."¹¹³ The next few pages are a tool with which you can make a dent.

One cold morning in December 2012, Adam Lanza took (some reporters said *stole*) a .223-caliber Bushmaster rifle, a 10mm Glock handgun, and a 9mm Sauer handgun from his mother—a gun enthusiast who legally owned at least seven firearms and 1,400 rounds of ammunition—and shot and killed her in their home, then he drove five miles to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, where he fired 156 shots in five minutes and killed 26 people.¹¹⁴

Whatever your opinion is of gun control, it is undebatable that shooters usually go where people are unarmed. If you are disinclined to wear a gun in public where happenstance could put you in the path of a bullet, your first steps toward protecting yourself from such savagery are *prevention* and *preparation*.

Regarding *prevention* ... At the risk of being intrusive, report any strange or obsessive behavior by anyone you know or hear about. Shooters often mention their plans in advance, not so much to brag or show off but to vent their resentments and because they are obsessed with such thoughts. After Adam Lanza's rampage, authorities found in his home several videos relating to previous mass murders and a 4-by-7-foot spreadsheet listing 500 mass murderers and the weapons they used which must have taken him years to compile. It would have been nice if somebody—like the mother he murdered—had reported his aberrant behavior to an authority.

Regarding *preparation* ... In any public area you regularly inhabit, ask the management what lockdown procedures the building has. Note how the doors are locked, where people can quickly hide or escape, how the police would be called, and similar details. In any such place, *know how to escape from where you are in at least two directions*. As you enter a lobby think, "If I hear gunshots where would I go?" Look around. Trace at least two ways you can flee. Premeditate this with every space you pass through. Make it a habit.

If you work in an office, classroom, or other area that has a closeable door to a public area, find a way to keep the door closed even if it has a lock. Since there are many kinds of doors, hopefully the ideas shown in figure 175 will spur your imagination to create a simple, clever constrictor that will stymie a shooter from entering and killing you. An effective item might be lying nearby right now, and all you need to do is be prompted about it and test it to protect yourself.

If the door swings out and has a hydraulic closer arm on top, you may be able to keep the door from opening more than a few inches by fitting a custom-made flange over the arms as appears at **A** at the top of figure 175. I made this for a friend's office; but it might not work if the door is pulled hard (I couldn't test this at my friend's office). It is 5½ inches long, 1¼ inches wide, and 1/8 inch thick. By enlarging the quarter-size photo at **A** 400 percent on a copier you can make your own. First make a pattern out of cardboard, test the pattern for size on the door you are making it for, make any needed adjustments, then trace the pattern on a piece of metal to make the flange. Another way to keep this kind of door from opening more than a few inches is to wrap a belt or purse strap around the closer arm. If the door has no closer arm, you could fit a custom-made stop over the knob as at **B** in figure 175, or slip an umbrella handle or other hooked object over the knob to keep the shooter from opening it from the outside. Even if he blasts away the knob with a few gunshots, this could cause him to waste precious seconds and bullets that may otherwise do far more harm.

If the door swings in, you could wedge a chair or a notched 2 x 4 under the knob, or a door stop under the base. These methods also appear in figure 175.

Test every method in advance to make sure it will work. Other precautions ...

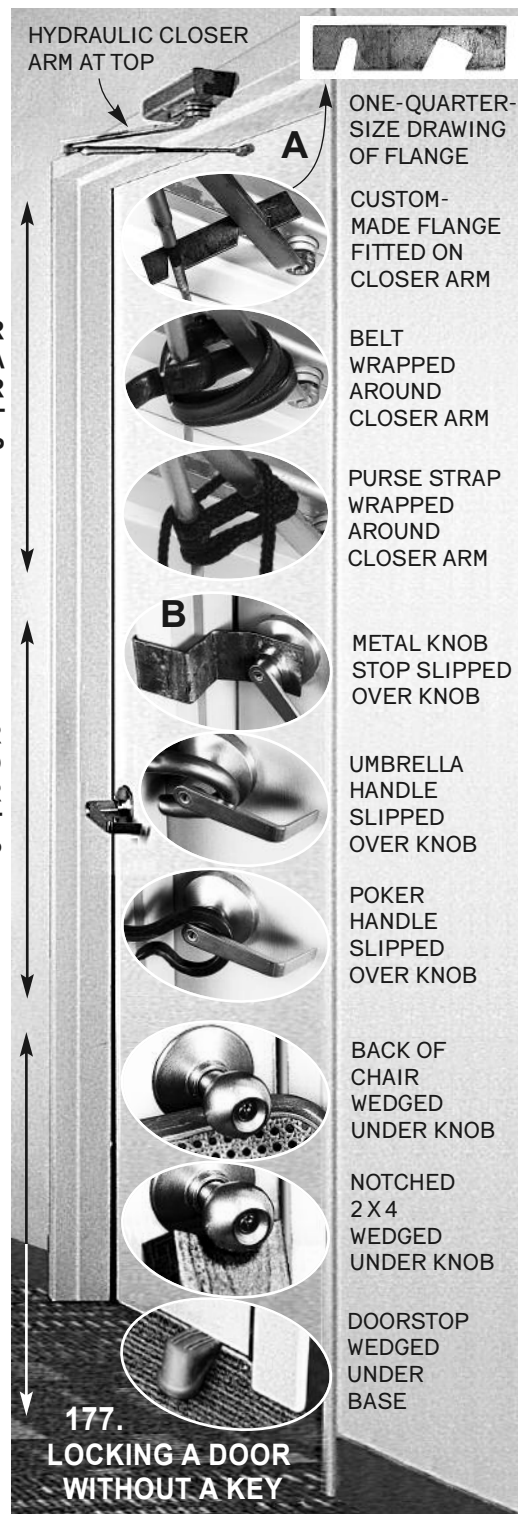
- ☞ In a theater or athletic event, select a seat where you can leave quickly. Within three seats of an aisle is best. Before sitting, trace your path to a safe place in two directions. In a bar or restaurant, try to sit with your back to a wall.
- ☞ At your workplace keep a supply of water, energy bars and other quick foods, first-aid equipment, bathroom bucket, toiletries including toilet paper, and a change of clothes in case you must hide in a safe place for possibly a few hours until the police arrive.

DOOR SWINGS IN
←

DOOR SWINGS OUT
→

DOOR HAS A CLOSER ARM AT TOP

DOOR HAS NO CLOSER ARM AT TOP



- ☞ Some say shine a flashlight in the killer's eyes—but this works only if you have an extremely bright and expensive light (not the \$4.99 kind that appears by the register in a hardware store) and it is dark. In daylight or if any lights are on, a normal flashlight will only create after-image spots in the killer's eyes; and in the dark he can't see you anyway—so why shine a light that shows where you are?
- ☞ Take a class in self-defense or crisis response training program. Visit your town hall and ask if such programs are available in your area.

Now for the tough part. If you hear what sounds like firecrackers or balloons popping somewhere nearby, quickly decide whether to **RUN**, **HIDE**, or **FIGHT**. You have two objectives: (1) Save your life, and (2) Slow the killer so he has less time to shoot others before help arrives.

RUN fast away from the shooter if you safely can. This should be your first option because runners have the highest chance of survival in a shooting.

HIDE if you can't run but can conceal yourself so the shooter can't see you or will have trouble finding you. Hiding includes barricading an entrance so the killer can't see or reach you. Barricade only if you can do so quickly.

FIGHT if the shooter is so close you can't run or hide, or you are responsible for the safety of others less able than you (as in a classroom of children). If you're going to die anyway, do it in a way that will slow the killer as much as you can so he'll have less time to shoot others before the SWAT teams arrive. There's nothing worse you can do than cower in a corner while the killer mows you down with a few quick shots then moves swiftly to the next victim.

These three options are described in greater detail below.

RUN... If you hear shots, quickly determine their direction and flee the other way. *Don't freeze*—this is like signing your death warrant. Also ...

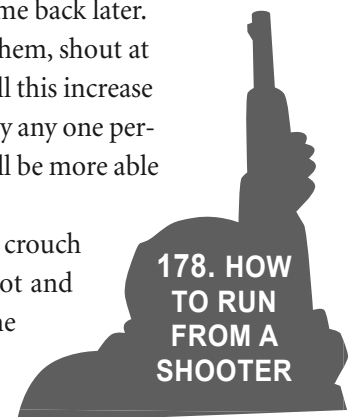
- ☞ *Take nothing with you* but your cellphone if you can snatch it. You can come back later.
- ☞ Bring others if you safely can. If others look disoriented or scared, grab them, shout at them, slap them, whatever it takes, and bring them with you. Not only will this increase their chances of fleeing safely, the more people in your group the less likely any one person will be shot, and if you encounter a shooter your greater numbers will be more able to subdue him. Don't cluster—spread as wide as you can.
- ☞ Run in a random zigzag pattern—not straight or uniformly zigzag—and crouch to reduce your body target. You will decrease your chances of being shot and may increase the time the killer must aim at you which would decrease the time he'd have to shoot others before the police arrive. Crouch low below



BETTER



BAD



any windows you pass so the shooter won't see you and possibly open fire on you.

- ☞ If you see a fire extinguisher and have time to dismount it, create a fog behind you so the shooter can't see you. If you can, spray him in the face then throw the extinguisher at his neck. Don't worry about getting shot if it will happen anyway.
- ☞ If you are in a room with other people at ground level, possibly break a window with a chair and help others outside.
- ☞ Once you are safe call 911 and give the location of the gunfire and any other information you have but make your call short. Warn everyone you see to get away from the building.

HIDE ... If you hear the shooter approach and can't escape but he can't see you, crouch low behind a desk, under a table, in a closet, or other dark place and remain completely quiet—no whimpering, weeping, or heavy breathing that could betray your location. If you have time do the following:

- ☞ If you are in a room with a door, lock it if you can. If you have a doorstop, hardback chair, notched 2 x 4 of the right height, or any of the other earlier-mentioned door braces; or if any desks, file cabinets, or other heavy furnishings are near the door, slide them behind the door. Keep well to the side in case the killer tries to blast away the knob or shoot you through the door.
- ☞ Turn off the lights, close any curtains or blinds, silence your cellphone, and make the room look as if no one is there. It will be harder for the killer to see you, he'll be more afraid to enter, or he may think no one is there. Even if he does enter, it will be harder for him to find anyone. The longer he lingers the better.
- ☞ Call 911 if you can. Use a land line if possible so police can trace where you are.
- ☞ Arm yourself with sharply pointed or clublike weapons—pencils, pens, scissors, umbrella, cane, a piece of broken glass you can brandish, cup of hot coffee, a coat or jacket you can throw

in the shooter's face.

- ☞ Stay close to the floor to offer the smallest target. If you haven't barricaded the door, lie on the floor against the back of the door to keep it closed.
- ☞ Wait until help arrives, even if it takes hours.

Here are a few tactics that saved some lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School ...

- ☞ When the shooting began someone in the main office turned on the public address system so everyone could hear gunshots over the intercom, which "saved a lot of people."

- ☞ A six-year-old girl, the sole survivor in a class of 18, hid in a corner of her classroom's bathroom and played dead until the police found her.

- ☞ A school nurse hid under a desk in her office. The door opened and under her desk she saw Lanza's boots and legs facing her 20 feet away. He stood there a few seconds, then turned and left.

- ☞ A first-grade teacher hid 14 students in a bathroom, told them to be completely quiet, and barricaded the door. A piece of black construction paper covered a small window in the door of the classroom outside. When Landa walked past the door he apparently believed the room was vacant because the door was closed and the window was covered.

- ☞ Two librarians hid 18 children in a part of the library that is used for lockdowns in practice drills, then barricaded the door with a filing cabinet and led the

children into a storeroom.

- ☞ A music teacher barricaded her fourth-graders in a small supply closet moments before Lanza pounded on the door and yelled, "Let me in!" When he heard nothing he left.
- ☞ A nurse hid in a first-aid supply closet for three hours before she believed it was safe to leave.

FIGHT ... If you come face to face with the shooter and are sure you will be shot, fight for your life. Even if you die, any way you can slow the killer may reduce the number he kills before the SWAT teams arrive.

Here's something to remember if you're ever shot. If the bullet misses your brain or your spinal cord, if you are aggressive as you are hit you will likely experience shock for about two seconds *then you will feel no pain as you reflexively attack the killer*, because your instincts are programmed this way. You may be mortally wounded, and may bleed to death in twenty seconds—but by then you might subdue the shooter and keep him from killing others. If your reaction is fear, when the shots are fired you will cower and fall.¹¹⁵

- ☞ Attack the shooter with any weapon you can find—pencils, pens, scissors, piece of broken glass, umbrella, books and chairs and other objects you can throw. If you have a bladed instrument slice him across the forehead if you can—his eyes will quickly fill with blood and he won't be able to see. Some say kick him in the crotch—but unlike what Hollywood scripts say, unless you score a really hard direct hit the assailant will only become more enraged. Stab him in the face, spray a fire extinguisher in his eyes, claw his face with your nails and gouge his eyes, grab the arm that holds the gun, throw a coat in his face, tackle him and hold onto his legs, if he wears a hood grab it and pull it over his face. Butt him with your head and fight fiercely with both arms because while he holds the gun he has only one arm to ward you off. If you're lucky his gun may jam or run out of bullets—then *he* is the defenseless one!
- ☞ If others are with you, *everyone attack the killer at the same time!* He may shoot one or two of you which will be less than if you do nothing—but one of you may be able to tackle him while others stomp on his face and arms and someone grabs the gun.

Finally ... When the police arrive, do not run to them, as they might think you're a threat. Walk alertly with your arms held wide and your hands open, or place your hands on your head. Tell them everything you know. Do quickly what they order you to do.

If you want to learn how to protect yourself from other disasters, visit the *Disaster Handbook's* website at <http://thedisasterhandbook.com>, or look at the book on Amazon.com.

1. Much of this section's text is from <http://www.wikihow.com/Survive-a-School-or-Workplace-Shooting>. 2. "Obama Speaks of Frustrations After Oregon Shooting", Mark Landler and Lee van der Loo (*The New York Times*, Jun 11, 2014), page A12. 3. The information about the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre is from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting. 4. The information about how a person reacts to a bullet wound is from an issue of *Handguns* magazine that I read in the early 1990s.