

GUNSTORIES Life-Changing Experiences with Guns

FOREWORD

This is an extraordinary book.

In *Gunstories*, S. Beth Atkin has given us a great gift and provided a great service. She does not indict or advocate; this is a book about guns, and kids and guns, but despite the political and cultural passions these matters invariably provoke, those looking for sharp and simple perspectives, or for clear heroes and villains, will not find them. She does not prescribe or proscribe; those looking for the laws and the policies that will fix these problems, or for the granite political and moral convictions that might lead us to those laws and those policies, will not find them either. *Gunstories* is eloquently about – matters that nearly always breed polarization. But Atkin has not given us an anti-gun book, or a pro-gun book. As an author and photographer, she has done something far more difficult and far more valuable.

In *Gunstories*, Atkin bears witness. And because she has done so, she allows us to bear witness with her. Through her pen and her lens, the young people in these pages give us their stories, and what they have made of their stories. What comes through bears the unmistakable stamp of authenticity. We talk a great deal about kids; we talk a great deal about guns; we talk a great deal about kids and guns. We do not, however, listen very much. But Atkin has listened, long and deeply.

What she has heard is electrifying. There are many of the same strains that we find in adult debates about guns, and adult debates about kids and guns. There are those for whom guns and gun culture have been resonant of strength and maturity and responsibility, and those for whom guns and gun culture have been resonant of death, injury, fear, and destruction. We even see many of the same particulars that have come to occupy the deeply grooved pathways of the adult debate: about the meaning of the 2nd Amendment, about

the safety or danger of having guns in the home, about how to allocate responsibility for the use of guns in crime to the gun or to the criminal, and all the rest.

To these young people, though, these are not arid abstractions. *Gunstories* shows with crystalline clarity the enormity of the stakes for these young people, and the seriousness with which they have tried to deal with, understand, and learn from their circumstances and experiences. Their everyday, matter-of-fact courage and steadfastness are inspiring - and heartbreaking. Their intelligence and insight are impressive – and humbling. Their stories are riveting – and compel respect.

Young people reading *Gunstories* who are unfamiliar with these issues will get the best possible introduction and those who are familiar with these issues will learn that they are not alone. Adults, whatever their experience and perspective, will learn a great deal. If they are like me, they will also feel that the fact that young people are forced to deal with these issues is, for the adults in their lives and in the life of their country, deeply shameful. We should not need *Gunstories*. But since we really do, we are very fortunate that S. Beth Atkin has given it to us.

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