

Toastmaster's Introduction: It is a *hard* story to tell. It has *hard* facts, and it is a *hard* problem to solve. However, one should not have a hard heart when listening to this speech. With his speech "My Broken Heart", help me welcome Tom Tan.

My Broken Heart

Bang! bang, bang! BANG! (Voice variety).

Today I am going to share with you something that breaks my heart. I don't know how to solve this problem. You can read online posts and news articles for potential solutions. Tonight, I just want to talk about my reactions towards the school shootings and a preliminary research I have done, if it even helps a little. After hearing it, I hope that you will tell me I am not alone.

April 20th, 1999. (PAUSE) I was 15 years old, focusing on exams to finish my last year of secondary school in China. That night, a news clip came up on our 21 inch TV box about a High School shooting somewhere called Columbine Colorado in the United States. When the anchorman reported two students had killed twelve students and a teacher with semi-automatic pistols and shotguns, I was totally shocked - I had never heard of nor could I even imagine students killing that many classmates and teachers like that. I was horrified because the guns in the news clips looked so similar to the plastic guns I played with when I was a child. I was also sad because I felt sympathetic for the victims' parents. I imagined how heart-broken and desperate they must have been, just as my parents would be if any tragedy happened to me! And, then, I did not think much after the news. I thought that school shooting was just a one-off, an unfortunate disaster. The Chinese media did not dwell on the massacre, either. Life continued. Until...

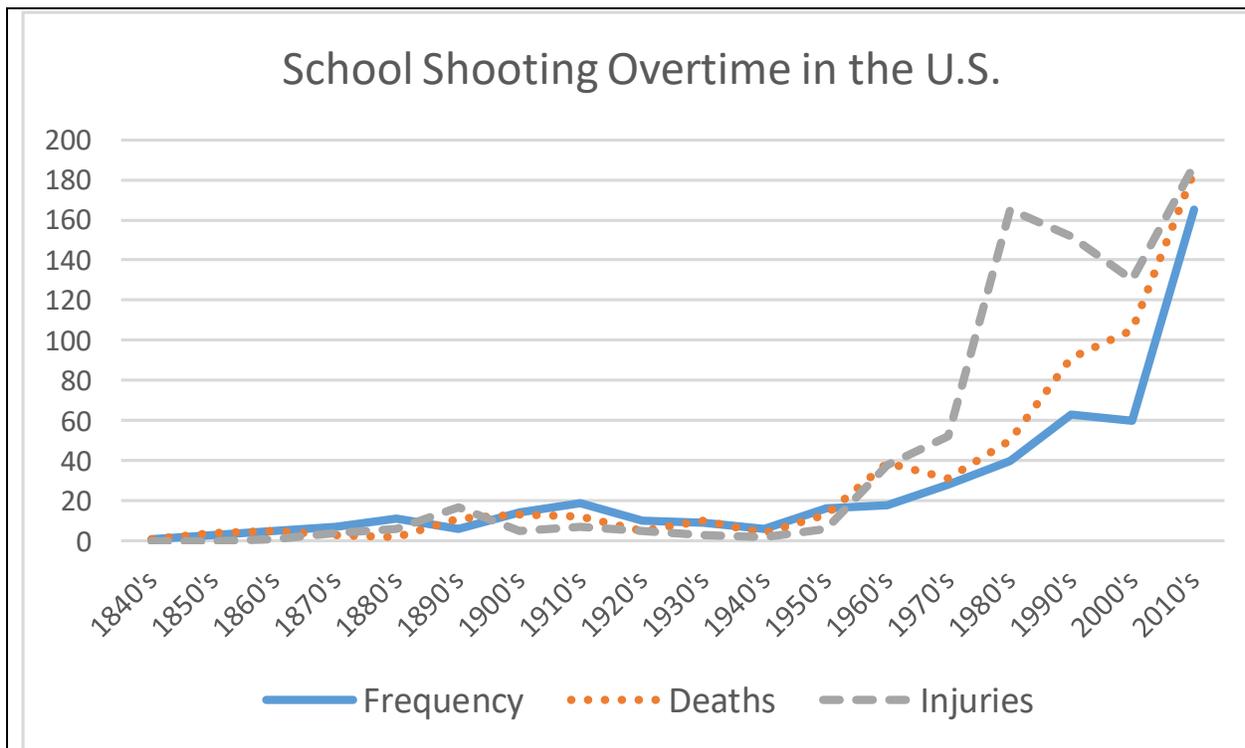
April 16th, 2007. (PAUSE) I was celebrating my last month in college at Columbia University in New York, while anticipating my upcoming graduate program. That day, I heard the news about a Virginia Tech student, who shot 32 people on campus. This news cast a deep chill over me. Unlike Columbine, I felt so close to THIS shooting because I was attending an American college, too. I was also deeply moved by the heroic acts of the professors and the students during the shooting. Professor Liviu Librescu (show pictures on the slide), a Holocaust survivor, held his classroom door closed, allowing most of his students to escape through the windows before dying after being shot m-u-l-t-i-p-l-e times through the door. An ROTC Cadet, Matthew La Porte, charged the perpetrator and died after taking heavy fire to save others' lives.

I started to wonder ... what if the perpetrator did not have a gun. (PAUSE) Admittedly, the gunman had a psychological disorder. According to the official report on his motives, I quote, "His thought processes were so distorted that he began arguing to himself that his evil plan was actually doing good. His destructive *fantasy* was now becoming an obsession." (PAUSE) (Use soft voice) Everyone has some fantasies, even obsessions. However, a fantasy does not have to be fulfilled if the cost of its fulfillment is prohibitive. (PAUSE)

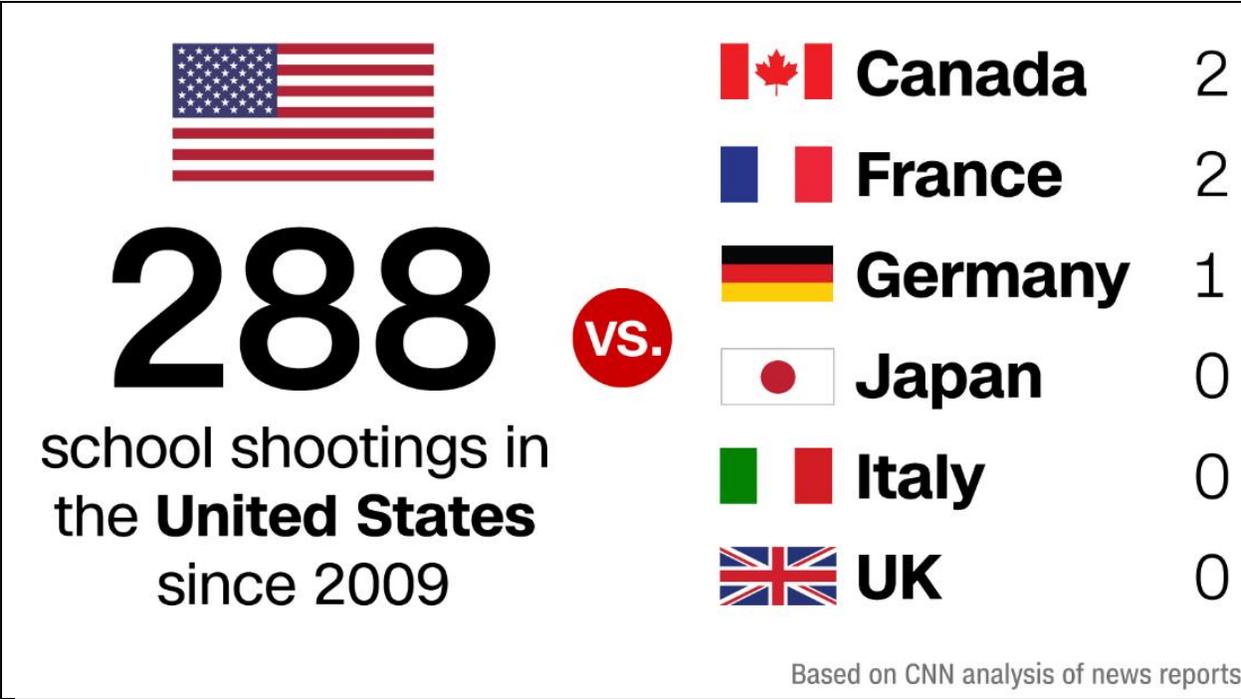
My heart was broken again on December 14, 2012, when a 20-year-old shot 20 angel-like school children between six and seven years old, as well as six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School. It was broken again on February 14, 2018, when a 19-year-old shot 14 high school

students and 3 staff members in Parkland, Florida. And yet again on May 18, 2018, a 17-year-old shot ten high school students in Santa Fe, Texas -- four hours away from Dallas. My heartbreak turned into anger – Are people simply becoming crazier and crazier? Are Americans simply so uniquely dangerous?

In order to understand these questions, I examined all the school shootings in the U.S. history from the 1840s to today, as reported on Wikipedia. This figure shows the number of school shootings, the number of deaths and injuries, respectively. As can be seen, there is a rapidly rising trend of school shooting in the U.S. Since 2010, there have been 165 school shootings and over 180 deaths, averaging close to one shooting every two weeks. Admittedly, the U.S. population has increased tremendously over time. However, all of the school attacks in the populous China left only 34 dead between 2010 and 2018. That is approximately one sixth of that number in the U.S. In addition, the shooters are not simply becoming crazier because the reasons of school shootings are similar throughout the history. They typically include revenge, quarrel, drunkenness, and mental disorders. However, unlike the past, modern shooters started to use larger assault weapons.



This problem is uniquely American. This figure from CNN shows the number of school shootings in the G7 countries since 2009. The U.S. has had 288, a number 57 times as big as the sum of those other countries. Similar to the U.S., though, the motives behind those shootings in Canada, France, and Germany also include revenge and mental disorders.



To conclude, my preliminary analysis seems to suggest that American shooters do not have unique motives or obsessions. Their motives do not change much with time. (PAUSE) The research is cold hard numbers, (soft voice) but the lives lost during the school shootings were real human beings with real flesh and blood, just like you and me. If school shootings also break your heart, then do something about it, whatever you can, no matter how small. Maybe you can call the elected officials. Maybe you can support the organizations that are trying to stop such tragedies from happening again. Please tell me I am not alone.