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Four Freedoms Column

Freedom from Fear is something I didn't appreciate until it was gone.

That's the nature of security. The privilege is ingrained into you. It is like the blood in your veins, vital but barely thought about.

For many people raised in our society, extreme fear is experienced only indirectly. You taste it while watching horror films or tragic documentaries. You see it on the news. You can try on others' shoes, but you can't actually put yourself there.

This is progress. This is what the Four Freedoms initiative, led by the Roosevelts, has worked to achieve for nearly 80 years. However, we haven't completed this mission. Now more than ever, this freedom is essential.

When I was barely thirteen years old, there was a mass shooting at the elementary school in my American hometown. Twenty six children and educators were torn away from us. Their stories and faces still haunt me. These were my neighbors and my former teachers. My precious childhood memories from those school halls were blood-stained; my childhood itself was shattered.

Normal life becomes a fantasy after experiencing such devastation at a young age. From that point onwards, my life has mainly been focused on picking up the pieces.

I spent years too paranoid to go to the movies due to the violent content and the echoes of the Aurora cinema shooting. I endured grocery trips with panic attacks because I mistook someone dropping a can as a gunshot. I devoted countless class periods mapping out the best response if a shooter would burst through the door.

If I hadn't moved to the Netherlands, far from my gun-violence-ridden country, I believe I would still hold on to these patterns. Fear had become normal for me until I realized that it was not a normal way to live.

Liberation from fear is part of why I am grateful to live in the Netherlands.

This freedom is the reason why I stand up against gun violence. It is why I advocate so strongly for those who suffer, no matter the context.

I have slowly regained a sense of security in the seven years since the shooting. But I am one of the lucky ones. As time goes by and issues like gun violence, war, and sickness proliferate the world, Freedom from Fear is increasingly critical, yet increasingly rare.

In an ideal world, we will arrive at the point of privilege where security can be taken for granted, and we will rely on the Four Freedoms initiative to remind us to be grateful. For now, we will continue our fight for a better tomorrow.