

to avoid
talking about
gun control”

“How soon is
too soon to
talk about gun
control?”

“Once again,
now is not the
time to talk

Talk to me: *a four act shot at comedy*

Talk to me: a four act
shot at comedy



Remy Davison

How do you start a conversation no one wants to have?

So he would pound on me really bad, and I would take it year after year, and I would get pretty good at... looking wounded... so he would stop sooner...

But anyway!

one day I was with his cousin Kurt Schultz and Marky Welkirk and a couple of other guys at Kurt Schultz's house in his bedroom,

and we were smoking pot and listening to Pink Floyd

and then the door kicked open,
and it was Dennis,
and he had his father's Luger pistol,
and he turned and he said Smokey... Smookeeyyyy....
and then he SHOT KURT SCHULTZ IN THE HEAD

And Kurt flipped over the chair he was sitting in back like that

and we all totally freaked out

Let me show you an example from playwright Bryn Magnus.

...and I jumped out a window.

And I just felt glass

shattering around me,

and I started running.

Tactics used—

Calling out the game | an explicit acknowledgment of what's making this joke funny or situation ridiculous; a wink and a nod to the audience

Raising the stakes | heightening the current situation, joke, gimmick, etc. in some way, whether that's through increased emotion, increased drama, increased action, or increased absurdity

Act II

Absurdity isn't very uncommon

I'm from suburban Connecticut, a town so quaint that we didn't sell alcohol outside of restaurants until 2010, and where our most attractive tourist attraction is how many colors the leaves turn in the fall. I didn't know anything else until I moved to Pittsburgh in 2015, when at age eighteen I had to learn how to ride a public bus. Where I'm from, the roads don't even have sidewalks.

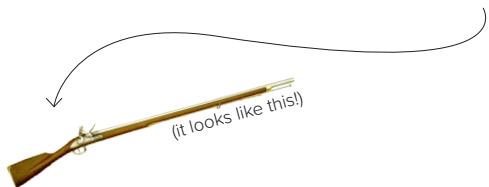
This might sound absurd to you, and today, it sounds absurd to me too, but the thing about absurd things is that, when you're in the thick of them, they don't sound all that strange to you. And, going up to someone and telling them that their truths are ridiculous isn't exactly effective.

In defense of defining a cannon as a firearm:

In the late 18th century, right at the time the 2nd Amendment was written, the most common militia firearm was a Brown Bess musket. Today, a skilled re-enactor with lots of practice can shoot off four shots from a Brown Bess in a minute. That's a shot every fifteen seconds.

A partial list of modern things that take 15 seconds:

1. Ending a relationship with a healthy helping of emojis
2. Swiping by five Tinder profiles that insist that they're mostly on this app as a joke
3. Realizing that the Very Important Work Email you sent had an arregeious spelling error in it
4. Viewing 2-4 Snapchats
5. Googling what a Brown Bess musket looks like



Today, the most popular gun that Americans own is a semi-automatic pistol. It shoots 90 rounds per minute, or a shot every 1.5 seconds.

So I guess, in the context of the 2nd Amendment, a cannon is more of a firearm than a semi-automatic pistol.

Anyway, let's keep going.

SARAH:

So that's OK? I should mention that it is a small cannon. It's as long as a baseball bat and as wide as a coffee can, so it's heavy. 110 pounds. We get to the mountain. My dad takes his gunpowder and other toys out of this adorable wooden box on which he has stenciled Pat G. Vowell Cannonworks. He plunges his homemade bullets into the barrel, points it at an embankment just to be safe, and lights the fuse...

The fuse is lit. This is like a cartoon.

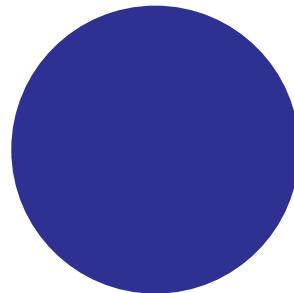
[CANNON FIRES]

Oh my god. Oh, there's smoke everywhere. It's like the Fourth of July.

[SINGING]:

*Oh beauuuuuuuuuutifullllll,
for spaaaaaaaaacious skiiiiies.*

What's that sound?



- Fireworks
- Gunshots
- Not my problem

Figure 1.2: A time-honored tradition.

[CANNON FIRES]

God. It was so loud and so painful, I had to touch my head to make sure my skull hadn't cracked open.

I've given this a lot of thought, how to convey the giddiness I felt as the cannon shot off, and I wish there were a more articulate way to say this, but I'm telling you, there isn't. It's just really, really cool.

My dad thought so too. It's also loud, louder than I can possibly convey. Here's something my dad and I share. We're both a little hard of hearing. Me from Aerosmith, him from gunsmith.

[CANNON FIRES]

Man, good shot Dad. Just as I was wondering what was coming over me, two hikers walked by. We forced them to politely laugh at our jokes for a while, and Dad set the cannon off again so they could see how it works.

HIKER:

So you work for the radio, and that's your dad?

SARAH:

Yeah

HIKER:

That's neat.

SARAH:

Then this odd thing happens. When one of the hikers says, that's quite the machine you got there, he isn't talking about the cannon. He's talking about my tape recorder and my long radio microphone. I stare back at him, then I look over at my father's cannon, and down at my microphone, and I think, oh my god, my dad and I are the same person. We're both smart-alecky loners with goofy projects and weird equipment. And since this whole target practice outing was my idea, I was no longer his adversary. I was his accomplice. And what's worse, I was liking it.

I haven't changed my mind about guns. I can get behind the cannon because it is a completely ceremonial object. It's unwieldy and impractical just like everything else I care about in the world. Try to rob a convenience store with this 110-pound Saturday night special, you'll still be dragging it in the door Sunday afternoon.

[CANNON FIRES]

I love noise. I make my living writing about it, and I'm always waiting for that moment in a song when something just flies out of it and explodes in the air. My dad is a one-man garage band, the kind of rock-and-roller who slaves away at his art for no other reason than to make his own sound.

My dad's an artist, a pretty driven idiosyncratic one too, and he's got his last Gesamtkunstwerk all planned out. It's a performance piece. We're all in it, my mom, the loneliest twin in history, and me.

Here's how it goes. When my father dies, take a wild guess what he wants done with his ashes.

Here's a hint: it requires a cannon.



The corrupting liberal influence that my grandparents warned me about.

It happened so fast, my partner and I didn't get a chance to respond. My partner had his gun out. I had my gun out. And this individual just stuck the gun in the window and immediately began shooting, and stuck the gun into my chest repeatedly, several times point blank just stuck it into my chest and fired.

And he's shooting you in the chest.
Were you wearing a bulletproof vest?

Yes, I was wearing a bulletproof vest. And in effect it's like basically someone taking a cannon and putting it in your chest and firing. That's exactly how hard it is. It's like a horse maybe or an elephant kicking you in the chest very hard, very painful.

In my case, the individual, I could never forget his face because his face was closer than yours and mine.

And was he cold and clinical about it, or was he just angry?

Very much so.

He was clinical?

Very cold, very clinical, and just shooting, shooting repeatedly. My partner was shot six times. We screamed and hollered in the car at each other. There was just a lot of screaming and hollering. Some of the things were inaudible. We're going to die. We're going to die.

Help me. Tell my mother I love her. I love you. I told him that I love you, and he told me he loved me.

I felt it took forever. The shooting was like in slow motion. When I look back at it in retrospect, I see things very slowly now.

Basically in '91 my parents and I had gone to eat at a local restaurant on a bright, sunny day like today. We certainly weren't in a dark alley somewhere where we weren't supposed to be.

This is Suzanna Gratia Hupp, a chiropractor in Texas and a gun owner.

And a crowded restaurant- it was payday, and it was the day after Boss' Day, a place that we went all the time. In fact, the manager that day had invited me. We were done eating, and all of a sudden this guy crashes his truck through the window, and we promptly heard gunshots. And when we heard that, your first thought is robbery. It's a crowded place. It's a robbery.

So we immediately drop down. My father and I put the table up in front of us. But about 45 seconds into it, I'm going to say probably six people were killed at that point. He was not spraying bullets. He was simply walking from one person to the other, aiming, and pulling the trigger.

Actually you would have expected it to be pandemonium, but no, it was very quiet, in fact. And you can ask anybody about that particular day. It was oddly quiet. You'd hear an occasional scream or an occasional moan or an occasional instruction shouted, like get down or something like that.

But otherwise it was just completely silent?

Yes. At this point he was about 15 feet from us. He was about 3/4 of his back turned toward me. I had a place to rest my arm. It was a perfect opportunity. And then I realized that a few months earlier I made the stupidest decision of my life. My gun was 100 yards away in my car, completely useless to me, because I had chosen to obey Texas laws.

Well at that point my father began to raise up and say, I got to do something. I got to do something. He's going to kill everybody in here. And my attention turned to him, and I started grabbing him by the shirt and pulling him down.

My partner couldn't get a shot off at a guy on the side because he was, as he explained to me later on, I was busy bouncing up and down in the car back and forth and up and down, that if he'd have shot, he probably would've shot me.

All the strength had been blown out of me, literally. I could no longer struggle or fight with this individual.

And I felt that this is the way I was going to die, and this is how it feels to die.

These things were running through my mind as he was shooting.

But when he saw what he thought was an opportunity, he jumped up and ran at the guy. Well, the guy saw my dad coming. He turned, pulled the trigger, shot my father in the chest.

I stood up and I grabbed my mother by the shirt collar, and I said, come on, come on, we've got to run. We've got to get out of here.

And my feet grew wings, and I was one of the only people out of the front area there to make it out of the back.

to be reckoned with, and many a man and woman crossed the street or walked around the block to keep from having to walk past them.

And I crossed the street also, and there were times that I went out of my way to go to another store rather than walk past a rowdy group of boys who seemed to own the block. On more than one occasion I rounded the corner only to come face to face with the gang. I could feel their eyes on me as I looked straight ahead, hoping none of them would pick a fight.

After having survived growing up in the Bronx, here I was scared to go home and walk down my own block. The solution was simple. I had a gun. I had a gun and an attitude. When I look back on the power the gun had over my personality and my judgment, I am amazed. It didn't happen all at once. The change was subtle. At first I continue to avoid the gang of teenagers. I crossed the street or turned down another block when I saw them.

But slowly, as I carried the gun with me day after day, my attitude began to change. I begin to think, why should I have to walk an extra block? Why should I feel that I have to cross the street or look down when I pass those kids? By the end of two weeks, I had convinced myself that all of the habits I had cultivated to avoid conflict with the gang were unnecessarily conciliatory.

My behavior when I went outside began to change. I stopped going out of my way, or crossing the street, or avoiding eye contact when I passed the gang. In fact, I began to do the opposite. I would choose to go to the grocery store on the side of the street where the gang was gathered. I would walk through them head up, eyes challenging, hand in my coat pocket, finger on the trigger. I was prepared to shoot to kill to defend myself. My rationale was that I was minding my own business, not bothering anyone, but I wasn't going to take any stuff from anyone. If they decided to jump me, well they would get what they deserved.

I was lucky that winter break. The time quickly came for me to go back to college and no member of the gang had felt the need to challenge a strange young man with fire in his eyes and his hand always in his coat pocket. I knew if I continued to carry the gun in the Bronx, it would simply be a matter of time before I was forced to use it. My behavior would become more and more reckless each day. I unloaded the gun, wrapped it in a newspaper, took it to the town dump, and threw it away.

IRA:

Geoffrey Canada says that the kind of fistfights that he grew up with ended in the Bronx in the 1970s. At one point in his book, he's told that one reason for the increase of handguns in the hands of teenagers is because the gun manufacturers, after saturating the market of white males, started to market guns to women and to young people.

GEOFFREY:

It was absolutely – for me it was a devastating discovery, because I was just really mortified to find out that what I considered to be my young people accidentally figuring out how to find these handguns through some hard looking and digging around in the inner cities was actually a marketing campaign that was aimed directly at them. And they started to change the names of handguns to make them more attractive to kids.

IRA:

Names like Viper, you say in the book.

GEOFFREY:

Yes, and they weren't finding these handguns. The handgun manufacturers were finding my kids. And it was not a small campaign. It was funded by millions of dollars.

IRA:

Can you imagine what you would have thought as a kid if when you were seven you would know that someday decades later you would be sitting in a studio? You would be writing a book about how much better it was back then?