

Gunshot Victim to M.D.

HIT IN THE THROAT BY A STRAY BULLET AT AGE 17, JOSEPH SAKRAN BECAME A TRAUMA SURGEON TO SAVE OTHER VICTIMS. NOW HE'S WORKING TO STOP THE SHOOTINGS—AND MAKE THE STREETS SAFE *By* CHRISTINE PELISEK



New Purpose
Getting shot “really changes your life,” says Sakran (left, at work, and, inset, age 16, in high school). “I wanted to affect others’ lives.”

Students at Lake Braddock Secondary high school in Burke, Va., were celebrating the first football game of the season on Sept. 23, 1994, when a .38-cal. bullet fired into the crowd by a local gang member hit Joseph Sakran, a 17-year-old senior, in the neck. The shot severed an artery, filling his throat with blood, and ruptured his trachea, paralyzing one of his vocal chords. Even as medical teams on the scene and at the hospital worked frantically to save him, Sakran understood nothing would ever be the same. “I knew if I had a second chance at life,” Sakran says, “I had to really make it into something that would prevent others from having to go through such a traumatic event.”

And he has. As a trauma surgeon and director of emergency general surgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Sakran, 40, saves the lives of hundreds of gunshot victims in Baltimore—but is also focus-

‘My goal is to reduce firearm injury. As a victim who became a [medical] provider, it’s a unique perspective.’

—DR. JOSEPH SAKRAN

ing on preventing gun violence nationwide. He spends weeks each year traveling the country advocating for expanding background checks, closing loopholes that allow people with criminal records to acquire guns and increasing federal funding for firearm-related research. At Johns Hopkins, Sakran is also spearheading research to prove that gun violence—a leading cause of death of Americans under the age of 46—is a growing epidemic and health crisis. “Joe is a very strong voice,” says friend Dr. Patricia Turner, a director at the American College of Surgeons. “He really takes it as a personal duty, a personal mission to do everything that he can to really make a difference in this.”

Sakran, who speaks softly due to the gunshot that pierced his throat, says he keeps the bullet that hit him on his desk at home as a reminder to do everything he can to stop the shootings. “I’ll look at it and I’ll think, ‘This nearly ended my life,’” he says. “But now it’s the inspiration for what I do.” ●