



A Life Taken
“He made people feel good,” says Susan Orfanos (right) of son Tel (left), whose jacket she’s wearing. “His smile... We want people to smile and remember Tel.”



A Grieving Mother’s Crusade

AFTER HER SON SURVIVED THE LAS VEGAS MASS SHOOTING ONLY TO DIE IN ANOTHER A YEAR LATER, SUSAN ORFANOS DIDN’T WANT THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS—SHE WANTED GUN CONTROL. NOW SHE’S ON A MISSION

By the time the TV news crew appeared outside Susan Orfanos’s Thousand Oaks, Calif., home last Nov. 8, she was out of miracles—and patience. For “hours and hours” after the 2:15 a.m. phone call about a shooting across town at the Borderline Bar and Grill, Susan, 59, had desperately searched area hospitals for her 27-year-old son Telemachus, who had narrowly escaped death in the mass shooting at a country-music festival in Las Vegas in October 2017. And she had just learned he was among the 12 victims dead inside Borderline. “When the news van pulled up, it was just a visceral reaction,” she recalls. “I walked out and started yelling, ‘I don’t want prayers! I don’t want thoughts! I want gun control!’”

The clip of Susan’s tearful rebuke of do-nothing politicians and the NRA went viral, and an activist was born—one who refuses to be cowed. “I used the term ‘gun control,’ and within hours we were getting threats. My only goal is to stop people from dying from gun violence,” she says.

Since then the insurance-company project manager, her husband, Marc, 63, and their son Ty, 22, have dived into research, written op-eds and



Anguished Plea

“I just couldn’t control my rage,” says Susan of the viral moment (above). “I don’t understand how the right to have a gun supersedes my son’s right to his life.”

lobbied legislators. They want, for starters, federally mandated background checks for all gun sales, Centers for Disease Control research on gun violence (“Why are gun-advocate groups afraid of research?” Susan asks), a tax on guns like that on cigarettes (“Maybe that would slow gun sales,” she says) and a federal ban on extended magazines—like the one on the .45-caliber Glock that killed her son—used to turn handguns into what Susan calls high-capacity “weapons of mass destruction that don’t belong on our streets.”

Susan takes comfort in the last words she shared with Tel, a Navy vet who had been en route to a dinner out with friends at Borderline, where he sometimes worked as a bouncer, when Susan texted him: “Be safe. I love you.” She often worried about him—even more so after he somehow cheated death in Vegas, where 58 fellow concert-goers were fatally gunned down around him. Tel’s ashes now rest in a wooden box on the desk in his bedroom, giving the family strength as they fight to prevent the next gun massacre. “Going in there, I tell him I miss him,” says Susan. “They say gun control is complicated. But it’s life or death—and I choose life.”

By **Sandra Sobieraj Westfall** with reporting by **Christine Pelisek**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: MARC ORFANOS; KABC-TV