

WHY I STOPPED GOING TO THE GYM

by Carole F. Stabler

Quilt #2 "The New American Crucifix"

by Nancy Lemke

Resolved, I renew my gym membership at the front desk, make my way to the double doors. and swing them wide with determination, to be confronted by four flat screens directly in front of the ellipticals...Red ribbon news crawls, draped yellow caution tape, uniforms at their grim tasks. Light, sirens, cameras and microphones, thrust in the faces of what should be private spaces.

I can't look.

I cannot not look.

The "anomalies" become more frequent, as does "random," "no threat to the general public." Bouquets wilt in the sun, in the snow...We search for words to reassure our children even as they drill for lockdown, as their teachers, their classrooms, disappear. "Never again!" grows to a chorus of shared lament.

Powers in High Places dither about definitions. Legal or illegal? Open carry or concealed?

When there's a clash of opinions, the Second Amendment subsumes the First Amendment. "How many does it take to make a massacre?" In time, as shocks morphs into scars and scars layer to create calluses, the weight of statistics grows ungraspable. I can't take this aggregate of cause and effect, of grief unloosed and inconsolable.

But here, on this rectangle of cloth and thread, an artist beckons me to consider the particular rather than the whole.

That bright red, again, assails me from across the gallery.

This is what "in guns we trust" has brought to our nation:

two children hang limp, helpless and bleeding, crucified on the silhouette of a firearm. Below, a woman kneels to aid another child, whose blood leaks onto a dark anywhere-background. Dotted by what? Moving closer I discern that the falling shapes are gravestones -so subtle that the eventual recognition jolts me. Two witnesses, a businessman and a cammo/ammo guy in signifier mode, gawp upward, a silhouette of the Capital dome between them, as a bride passes from hand to hand.

"Why all the drama? What's all the fuss?" "It's just an anomaly – got nothing to do with us."