An unarmed teacher stops a school shooting

By Steve Thorngate
January 14, 2013

Last week's shooting at a California high school—in which one student was seriously injured but no one was killed—offers an important corrective to a couple of the more toxic arguments that have been floated since the Connecticut shooting.

A teacher—already grazed in the head by a shotgun pellet—ended the California incident with relatively little bloodshed by intervening with the shooter. But, while this brave teacher happens to be male, his actions didn't quite line up with Charlotte Allen's lament that, if only there had been more *men* at the school in Connecticut, maybe they could have tackled the shooter or beat him down or otherwise used their manly manliness to stop him.

Ryan Heber, the California teacher, reacted to the shooting in a different way—one that proved quite effective. He stood between the shooter and his students. Then he talked the shooter into putting down his gun.

Some people want to fight school violence by arming teachers. But what would have happened if this troubled kid with a shotgun walked into a classroom and the teacher responded by heading for the handgun in his desk across the room?

Heber saved his students' lives. And he's a hero to us men who aren't willing to define our masculinity in terms of an instinct and ability to fight back.

Then there's the argument pushed by Mark Rogers: that we need to arm ourselves to stand up to the next mass shooter, whose intent is already in place—and "irreversible." Well, the California shooter's intent wasn't. Heber persuaded him to reverse it.

Obviously, Heber's approach isn't going to work every time; that's what makes it so courageous. But we tend to talk about mass shootings as if the people who decide to do these things have gone permanently round the bend—and the only way to stop them is by returning fire. At a minimum, the California incident demonstrates that this isn't always so.