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Murders ignite her passion

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It was 15 years ago that a shooting death in broad daylight in Chapel Hill turned Lisa Price into The Enemy.

Price and a core of friends had long talked of forming a group to raise awareness about gun violence and push for stronger gun laws.

But the murder of Kristin Lodge-Miller galvanized the community.

"We passed around sign up sheets at the memorial service," Price recalled Wednesday, sitting on the deck of her Chapel Hill home.

That was July 1993. By September, North Carolinians Against Gun Violence had been incorporated.

In the years since, NCGV and Price, as its executive director and spokeswoman, have worked relentlessly for stronger safety laws and against efforts to loosen restrictions on gun ownership. They pushed to keep guns out of the hands of batterers, for instance, and fought efforts to allow concealed weapons in parks. A feather in her cap: the pro-gun group Grass Roots North Carolina describes Price as "the enemy" on its Web site.

But Price is the first to acknowledge that the successes have been limited. They couldn't even get the legislature to approve a study group on gun trafficking, much less a database on gun permits rejected by sheriffs for cause.

One of Price's enduring frustrations has been with the power of the gun lobby and legislators' fear of its influence.

She notes that polls indicate that up to two-thirds of people support "reasonable and effective" gun laws. Unfortunately, "reasonable and effective" is viewed differently by every individual.

It was with a heavy heart that Price learned of the slaying of UNC Student Body President Eve Carson, whom Price and her congressman husband David met at the chancellor's home over Christmas this year.

That the death, so reminiscent of Lodge-Miller's, came at the moment of Price's retirement as executive director of NCGV is hardly lost on Price.

To some, the two violent deaths, bookending 15 years of activism, might suggest the futility of the cause. But neither Price's intensity, nor her idealism, has dulled over time.

For her, Carson's murder is yet another reminder that there is so much more work to be done.

"If these criminals hadn't had guns, this wouldn't have happened," she said simply.

Still, that work will have to be done by others. Price has agreed to coordinate one last annual meeting and fundraiser in May.

After that, she plans to devote more time to family -- particularly a year-old grandson who calls

Price "Gahgah" for Grandma.

In her farewell address to NCGV board members last month, Price said it is her dream the nation will one day rise up against gun violence as it did years ago in the civil rights movement.

But what would it take to prompt such action?

She noted that when a deranged shooter killed 17 people at a schoolyard in Scotland in 1996, Great Britain imposed a ban on handguns. Many will argue about whether such a ban works. But Price pointed out that when a mentally ill man killed 32 at Virginia Tech, there was little more than hand-wringing -- and a push to have psychiatric commitments added to the instant background checks for gun purchases.

"Last year, 30,000 people died from gunshot wounds in America," Price said, turning the question back to me. "How many deaths and injuries will it take?"

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