Wesson: Gun control advocates say women might be safer without a gun. More guns breed more violence, they say, in any hands. And they say handguns are more likely to be used against a family member than against an intruder. Still, for women who feel they have lost male protection and that nothing new has taken it's place, the idea that a gun is an equalizer is an appealing one. I'm Celeste Wesson reporting.

Edwards: Tomorrow, Sara Brady and Handgun Control, Inc. We'll hear from people here in Washington lobbying for handgun restrictions.

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DATE December 13, 1989
TIME 7:08 PM
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

TRANSCRIPT

Noah Adams, anchor:

While most owners of rifles say they keep a gun for hunting or target-shooting, people with handguns say that self-defense is the reason they are armed. Most of the time, people fire their handguns at people they know, at family members, friends, lovers. In one study of shooting deaths, eighty-four percent of the homicides occurred during conflicts in the home.

As part of our series on guns in America, we've been looking at shooting deaths that occurred during a week in November in different parts of the country. Tonight, we focus on a killing in Burlington, Vermont, a domestic dispute that ended in death. Elizabeth Arnold reports.

Elizabeth Arnold reporting:

The body of twenty-three-year-old Robert Bridges was buried in a hole three feet wide and five feet deep, in the Lakeview Cemetery in Burlington, Vermont. There's no gravestone. It was pouring rain when he was buried; the few friends that were there say he didn't have much family, and it was hard for people to get off work in the middle of the afternoon. They say it was sort of a rush job. A few cemetery workers who dug the hole, say they stood next to the mound of dirt during the short ceremony to fill out the crowd.

It's been four weeks since Robert Bridges was buried. The ground is frozen now, and snowdrifts cover some of the gravestones. A pink marble stone is on his left: Williford Lewell, seventy-seven years old, and a fancy grey stone on his right, Anna Wilson, ninety-two years old. You wouldn't know there's a body between the two- there's not much room, but there's a slight bump in the ground a single red carnation frozen in the snow.

A single bullet ended Robert Bridges' life. The medical examiner pulled the bullet out of the body Sunday morning, November 5th, during the autopsy.

Unidentified Authority: He died of a gunshot wound to the abdomen. The bullet passed through his liver, portions of his intestines, and through the aorta, which is the main blood vessel that comes out of theout of the heart.

Arnold: There wasn't anyone pacing in the waiting room or speeding to the hospital when Robert Bridges died. Other than the police, only two people knew he'd been shot: his wife Laurie and her boyfriend Jeff, who pulled the trigger. He was shot with a single bullet from a .22 caliber, semiautomatic

pistol at 7:40 in the morning in a tiny groundfloor apartment, where he discovered his wife sleeping with another man. The state prosecutor says Robert Bridges kicked the door in.

Unidentied State Prosecutor: The boyfriend had a handgun; the boyfriend fired one shot into the abdomen of the estranged husband. The police were called by the woman whose apartment it was. They responded, found the woman and her infant son outside the apartment, and very shortly thereafter, the boyfriend in his underwear with the handgun appeared outside the apartment.

Arnold: It was front-page news in Burlington, where there's a homicide maybe once a year. Burlington is a small university town in Northern Vermont, overlooking Lake Champlain. It's full of fraternity houses and students in big overcoats and L.L. Bean boots. But Robert Bridges and his wife Laurie weren't in that crowd. They didn't go to school; they worked at the mall. He was black and she was white. They had a new baby and they didn't have much money. They weren't getting along. He went to California to find a better job. He came back a few months later, and she had found a boyfriend while he was gone.

Robert Bridges' stepparents live in an old brick apartment building down by the lake, three blocks from where he was shot. They hadn't seen their stepson much, but they'd heard he found a job at Burger King. They sit at their kitchen table watching TV and smoking cigarettes. The heat is cranked up high. Leroy, the stepfather, doesn't say much. His wife Liz says Robert would never have gone to the apartment if he had known about the gun.

Liz Bridges (Stepmother of Victim): He was in California and there was- I'm not sure what happened. All I know is, he was in the wrong place at the right time and got shot in the arm, and he always told us, 'I never want to get shot again. Jesus Christ, that hurt so goddamned bad.' And I said,'Robert, goodness,' you know, 'You're not going to get shot.' Yes, and look what happened to him now.

Arnold: There are paths of footprints in the snow at the Lakeview Cemetery. They make crazy patterns between the rows, circling different graves. There are no footprints back to the mound of dirt and snow where Robert Bridges lies. He's back by the chain link fence that separates the cemetery from the bright blue bleachers of the Burlington High School football field. That's where he went to school for a little while. But the school has no record of Robert Bridges, just an empty folder with a slip of paper in it that says his file was sent to the state hospital. 'Oh, yes,' his real mother says on the phone long distance from California, 'He had some mental problems. I moved him around a lot. When he was a boy he got hit by a car, and wasn't my Robert much after that.'

His friends at the mall didn't know about his time at the state hospital. They work at Dino's Pizza, and they talk about how they don't believe the guy that pulled the trigger did it in self-defense. Robert Bridges wasn't like that, they say. He wasn't violent.

Scotty Cohen puts a few slices in the oven. He says it doesn't seem right.

Scotty Cohen (Friend of Murder Victim): He was shot with a gun, he was murdered. I don't care what else happens; there was his wife, there was his child- it was domestic, plain and simple. If there hadn't been a gun, he'd still be around.

Arnold: Robert Bridges lived by himself in an old double-decker apartment on Lakeview Terrace. It's the only house without a string of blinking Christmas lights or a cardboard Santa in the window. Newspapers and catalogs are piling up by the door. It's right on the lake. The shoreline is covered with ice now, but the waves still roll in. The Lakeview Cemetery is just a few blocks away; it's right on the water too. And just up the hill is the courthouse, where a grand jury will decide this week whether the gun that killed Robert Bridges was fired in self-defense or in a premeditative murder. For National Public Radio, I'm Elizabeth Arnold.

Adams: Federal firarms agents say that increasingly now, criminals in America and especially those in the drug trade can easily buy whatever weapons they want over-the-counter. NPR's John Burnett reports that many Southern states, with their lenient gun laws and proximity to Latin America, have turned into gun supermarkets for both domestic and international firearms smugglers.

John Burnett reporting:

Aaron Sloan knows all about guns: He's carried one since he was fifteen years old, when he began selling drugs in Houston. He's been in prison five different times for narcotics convictions, and he's currently on parole for carrying a concealed weapon. Sloan has obtained guns by every conceivable method; I wanted to know if he had ever used what's called a straw purchaser, where someone without a criminal record walks into a gun store and buys a weapon for him.

Aaron Sloan (Criminal): Of course. Of course I have. Yes, of course I have. I've known people that have went and bought guns, you know, and been- you know, like- 'Stay here,' you know, had a record and go and fill out the federal forms and everything, you know. The last person I know that got arrested, I think he said he bought that gun- two years before they ever realized, you know, that he had bought that gun and he shouldn't have bought that gun.

Burnett: From Dallas to New York, from El Paso to Chihuahua City, Mexico, small and big-time drug traffickers are arming themselves with guns bought in retail stores in the quiet suburbs of Texas cities. These days, criminals want high-capacity assault rifles and large caliber semiautomatic handguns. Jack Calloran [sp] is chief spokesman for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the ATF, which is responsible for enforcing this nation's federal gun laws.

Jack Calloran (Spokesman, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms): There's a lot of money out there on the street, a lot of people involved in drugs. They're generating a lot of cash. They're being more selective in the weapons they buy. As they go for the higher priced- the specialty firearm, they're not going to find that in a burglary. That's not in most homes; that's not commonly out there. So, they almost

have to go to the retailer.

Burnett: Almost no systematic research has been done on interstate gun smuggling. New York City is the only city that regularly traces confiscated weapons. That's because New York, which has restrictive gun licensing laws, is inundated with out-of-state weapons. The main source states are, in descending order, Virginia, Texas, Florida and Ohio. What these states have in common is the lack of a mandatory waiting period to buy a firearm (although Virginia just last month initiated an instant background check), and in the large urban areas, dealers are plentiful and firearms are competitively priced. Authorities say the Dallas to New York connection has grown especially busy in recent years, due in large part to the Jamaican drug gangs that funnel guns from Dallas to gang members in other parts of the country.

New York City is awash in guns. The police recovered an average of forty-five guns a day last year; every patrol officer is required to wear a bullet-proof vest. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms makes a new case almost weekly on someone sneaking guns into the city. Charles Thompson, special ATF agent in charge of the New York office, says most of their gun trafficking cases have a similar profile.

Charles Thompson (Special ATF Agent): An individual or a group of individuals will go to a state which has less restrictive firearms laws, will either pay somebody to go into the store to buy the guns for them or use false ID that they've acquired to purchase guns, and then they just bring them back here to the city and they'll sell them on the streets.

Burnett: In the week of April 19th, 1987, New York police officers began finding the same brand of cheap, easily concealable .25 caliber pistol on several street criminals they arrested in Brooklyn. The police seized eight pistols. Charles Thompson of the ATF says all were traced back to the same gun shop in Texas.

Thompson: It appeared initially that somebody was in a gun-running business. In other words, they were buying fairly inexpensive handguns and selling them to anybody on the street.

Burnett: Those eight handguns sparked a seven-month investigation by the Dallas ATF office that led to a federal indictment of March of last year. Federal agents allege that a Puerto Rican from New York named Eddie Muldanado [sp] and four other suspects bought a total of a hundred and seventy-one guns at three Dallas area gun stores by lying on federal forms. The agents said they loaded them into a 1986 Monte Carlo and drove thirty hours straight to New York. There, they allegedly kept the expensive guns like the Smith and Wesson handguns for themselves, and sold the fifty dollar pistols for three times their value. The .25 caliber semiautomatic handguns made by Raven Arms? were bought at the Gun Gallery in Carrolton, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. The owner is Howard Rosenburg [sp].

Howard Rosenburg (Owner, Gun Gallery): That's it. About a million or so sold, maybe more than that. Some people

legitimately need a self-defense gun and just can't afford a lot of money, and that's one reason they sell.

Burnett: Rosenburg remembered the Muldanado sale because it seemed strange to him. He says Muldanado ordered fifty of the Ravens, then paid for them with ten and twenty dollar bills, which to Rosenburg smelled like drug money. He says he went ahead with the sale because it was legal, but later he notified the ATF. Rosenburg says he does not feel responsible for where a gun ends up after it leaves his shop.

Rosenburg: My business is like any other business. It is a vehicle for me to make a living. I am a professional; my family's been doing it for about fifty years. I take a lot of pride in it. It's no different than selling diamonds or real estate or...maybe a fellow that's in the chemical business that people get cancer from... That just goes along with it. If I had to stand in moral judgment of what people were going to do, I couldn't do it.

Burnett: The pipeline of black market weapons flows south as well. As Florida has become the primary source of guns for Colombia, so Texas is the largest supplier to Mexico. With gun stores illegal in Mexico and gun licenses difficult to come by, Mexicans have for years depended on a steady supply of illegal weapons and ammunition from gun shops in Texas border towns. Federal firearms agents believe the biggest consumers of weapons smuggled into Mexico are the narcotics mafias, the same situation that exists in New York. The ATF says another constant pool of unlawful buyers are middle and low level Mexican police, who must acquire their own service weapons.

Jerry Senior, owner of the El Paso Gun Exchange, says lucrative over-the-counter sales to customers from across the river are a daily temptation.

Jerry Senior (El Paso Gun Exchange): This morning, Richie was offered a hundred dollars to purchase a particular little two hundred dollar handgun. I've had them offer as high as five hundred dollars over for assault guns. Years ago, the guys wanted hunting guns. They wanted .22's.

Burnett: And now?

Senior: You've got the element that wants the wacko guns, the AK's, you know, the fancy shotguns just made to kill people with.

Burnett: In many instances, middlemen who are U.S. residents buy the guns and ammunition legally, then smuggle them into Mexico to sell at a tremendous markup. Phil Winotsky [sp], special agent in charge of the Houston ATF office which oversees the Texas/Mexico border, says the sticker price of a weapon bought in the U.S. can quadruple when sold on the Mexican black market.

Phil Winotsky (ATF Special Agent): A similar situation exists with the ammunition, and it's even more dramatic. One single bullet that you could buy for a dime in the U.S. on the border itself, once it's crossed the border, could be worth a dollar to a dollar-and-a-half, and once you get through the interior of Mexico or to another foreign country, it could be worth

three-and-a-half to five dollars.

Burnett: The weapon of choice of the Mexican drug merchants appears to be the AK-47, a semiautomatic copy of the classic Chinese military assault rifle. Mexican police encounter them so frequently in drug raids that they've nicknamed them quernos do chivo [sp], or goat horns, because of the rifle's characteristic curved ammunition magazine. The problem has grown so critical in the past year that Mexican border officials have publicly denounced the wave of U.S. weaponry pouring across the Rio Grande. Mexico has also taken its own steps to crack down. Prison sentences for weapons convictions have been tripled, and federal police search vehicles for drugs and guns at checkpoints throughout the country.

Carlos Salas [sp] is the chief federal prosecutor in Ciudad Juarez across the river from El Paso. Juarez is a major transshipment point for Colombian cocaine and Mexican marijuana bound for the United States.

Carlos Salas (Chief Federal Prosecutor, Juarez): Clearly, we are concerned. A short while ago, five days, they shot at us at a checkpoint. And they were all machine guns, AK-47's. The guns came from the United States without any control. The narco trafficker always looks for the most powerful weapon. The Pena Valenzuela [sp] gang, from whom we confiscated airplanes, ranches, clandestine landing strips, we found more than two hundred sticks of dynamite. We found more than twenty machine guns with infrared sights. We found armored cars with modifications so they could fire from inside them. It's a very serious problem.

Burnett: In recent years, a handful of unscrupulous gun dealers in Texas border towns have cashed in on this clandestine market. The most audacious case occurred in Laredo from 1984 to '86. Seven Laredo gun stores helped to smuggle almost twelve thousand weapons into Mexico. The store employees recruited, among others, winos, drug addicts and welfare recipients, and paid them five dollars a piece to sign a federal form. The paperwork was legal, but the weapon was sold to a Mexican national.

A similar case unfolded in El Paso two years ago at a gun store named Sportland Hardware. Assistant U.S. Attorney Deborah Kanoff [sp], who prosecuted the case, says that Sportland used to be the largest gun dealer in West Texas, and now they know why.

Deborah Kanoff (Assistant U.S. Attorney): Not only did they sell a lot of guns, but what we started finding was that when we would pick up a criminal or even someone who was not a criminal, when the Mexican authorities would call us and frustratingly say- because the Mexicans have targeted American weapons as a concern. But what would happen was they'd find these guns either with criminals, drug traffickers or other kinds of criminals, and trace the gun and find out that a substantial number of these guns had been sold at that particular store.

Burnett: Sportland employees would inform a Mexican buyer that the store would be only too happy to sell him a weapon as long as he got a legal U.S. resident to buy it. The law prohibits a dealer from selling a gun if he thinks the buyer intends to hand it over to a convicted felon, a drug addict, a

minor, a mentally unstable person, or in this case, an illegal alien.

This twenty-one-year-old former salesman is now serving three months in an El Paso halfway house as part of his punishment for helping to falsify federal forms. He maintains today that he was duped by the owner into believing it was OK to sell to proxy buyers. He says the store rarely refused a customer, even when the buyer clearly indicated the weapon would be used to break the law.

Unidentified Former Sportland Employee: A couple of them said that they were middlemen buying them for their boss. You know, this one guy- he would buy AK-47's about- just in one shot he'd get about maybe eight to ten, you know, and he'd come back in for more. You know, he'd get clips- you know, you can get clips- like forty-five to fifty rounds, even a seventy-five round one.

Burnett: A seventy-five round clip?

Sportland Employee: Yes.

Burnett: Did you ever get a sense that it was- that these guns were going into the hands of people involved in the drug trade?

Sportland Employee: Yes. You know, there were some instances where they said that it was for that.

Burnett: Gun smuggling has been a chronic problem since 1968, when individual states began legislating their own gun laws, creating the current patchwork of firearms laws in this country. Pro-gun enthusiasts point out that gun control laws have utterly failed to keep weapons out of the hands of criminals. Gun control advocates counter that no one law can be effective until the states adopt uniform controls on guns.

James Wright, a Tulane University sociologist who has written extensively on guns in America, says this type of transaction is among the hardest to regulate.

James Wright (Sociologist): You walk into a gun store, you buy a gun, you're a completely legal owner, you sign all the necessary forms, your background check clears, you walk out with a gun. What you do with it at that point is very hard to control, and if you turn around and give it or sell it to a felon or a drug addict or something like that, well, that's definitely against the law, but who's going to know? Guns are not great big things like cars or houses where it's easy to keep track of the transfer.

Burnett: The federal response to the growing incidence of proxy purchases and gun smuggling has been to beef up enforcement, more agents and more prosecutions. The ATF reports that most gun dealers are responsible, and help the agency track down gun traffickers.

The legislative route is much more controversial. The National Rifle Association fiercely fights any attempt to further regulate gun purchases, even small changes. For instance, as the law now reads, a dealer must notify ATF when a person buys more than two handguns within a five-day period, but it says nothing about multiple purchases of, say, AK-47 assault rifles, a favorite among arms traffickers. Again,

Phil Winotsky, the chief ATF agent for the Texas border.

Winotsky: The assault weapon, which in most cases is a long gun by our definitions, would not be reported on a multiple purchase document, so if we had a combination of both, reports regarding handguns;as well as reports regarding long guns, that certainly would help us.

Burnett: There are few examples of laws targeting gun-running. In one rare instance in the early 70's, the South Carolina legislature passed a law that prohibited anyone from buying more than one handgun a month. The idea was to cut down on the illegal pistols being shuttled from South Carolina to New York City. Today, New York police say they rarely encounter a gun from South Carolina. Unfortunately, the gun-runners promptly took their business to other states, including Texas.

Tom Manowitz, owner of Target Masters, a gun store in the Dallas suburb of Garland, bristles at the suggestion that Texas gun laws are somehow to blame for the state's reputationo as a wide open supplyhouse for illegal weapons. Manowitz was one of the three gun dealers in the Dallas area involved in the Maldanado case.

Tom Manowitz (Target Master Owner): I think you've got an incorrect phrase when you say the state is the supplier. The state is not the supplier. People who buy guns and determine to use them for illegal purposes are the suppliers. Laws are what honest people obey. Dishonest people could care less how many laws you pass; they're going to do what they want to do.

Burnett: People like Aaron Sloan, the former drug dealer from Houston, don't pay much attention to the gun control debate. He sits in the living room of his Austin duplex where he's out on parole. His strong arms are covered with jailhouse tattoos. I presented Sloan with a hypothetical scavenger hunt. He is a convicted felon. How would he put his hands on a gun in the next half-hour. Sloan smiles, leaves the room, and comes back with a newspaper.

Sloan: Guns and ammo. There's a Rugermany [sp] 14, 230 round magazine, scope, mounted, great condition, four hundred dollars. There's a Browning nine millimeter and an Uzi model B, carbine nine millimeter, $575. It don't make no difference where you're at. If you were in a cave in Alaska, you could find a gun, you know, because you know, if you're doing something illegal, you know it's not no problem to find a gun.

Burnett: That is the challenge of any strategy designed to clamp down on the unlawful flow of weapons. The anti-gun people say more laws; the quarter million firearms dealers in the country say more lawmen. While the dispute rages on, the bloated narcotics industry continues with little difficulty to sate its appetite for ever-higher fire power. This is John Burnett reporting.

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DATE December 14, 1989
TIME 8:40 AM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM Morning Edition

TRANSCRIPT

Bob Edwards, anchor:

Polls say close to eighty percent of the American people favor some kind of restrictions on the sale of handguns and a ban on military style assault weapons. Many states and cities already have enacted laws that would do that, but all attempts to pass similar legislation in Congress have been defeated. As part of our series on guns in America, NPR's Mara Liason reports on the organization pushing hardest for a national handgun legislation: Handgun Control Incorporated.

Mara Liason reporting:

Handgun Control Inc.'s best known spokesperson is Sarah Brady, the wife of Jim Brady, the White House press secretary who was shot and suffered permanent brain damage in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Reagan. Brady travels all around the country telling her story, how her life changed irrevocably on that day in 1981, and how it changed again years later when she saw her son Scott pick up what she thought was a toy gun from the seat of a friend's car. It turned out to be a real gun, a loaded gun. Something snapped in Sarah Brady that day, and she has been a committed advocate for handgun controls ever since.

Sarah Brady (Handgun Advocate): When I got involved in 1985, I started- I'm sure the National Rifle Association thought I was just in for the short-term, and they didn't take me too seriously, that I was a middle-aged housewife who just wanted to do something to make up for her husband having being injured. And that is not the case. I may be middle-aged and I may be a housewife, but I'm not in for the short-term.

Liason: Sarah Brady doesn't want to ban guns; she is adamant about that. What she wants is to get the Brady Bill passed, the bill that would give local law enforcement officials seven days to do a background check on a gun buyer, to find out if he or she is a felon, or a fugitive or underaged, or any of the other types of people federal law already prohibits from buying a gun. Sarah Brady has lobbyed tirelessly for the bill, and this year her partially paralyzed husband Jim Brady gave moving testimony.

Jim Brady (Former White House Speaker): Too many members of Congress have been gutless on this issue. They have closed their eyes to the tragedies like mine, they ignore the statistics. Well, this statistic has decided to break his silence. Those members of Congress who oppose a simple

seven-day waiting period should try being in my wheels just for one day.

Liason: Twenty-three states have some sort of waiting period already; many of them require a wait longer than seven days. The Brady Bill was designed to be as mild as possible, precisely so it could pass Congress, but the Brady Bill hasn't been able to get enough votes. Sarah Brady:

Brady: I think I came in thinking, 'My goodness, this is just common sense. I'm pushing something that is so reasonable, so moderate, so common sense oriented how could it not win?' And I underestimated the NRA.

Liason: The National Rifle Association, the gun lobby: That is Sarah Brady's nemesis, and it is a formidable enemy. The NRA is a huge and efficient organization. Its annual budget is estimated to be as much as eighty million dollars. The NRA has a fat campaign war chest. It can mobilize its hardcore supporters in an instant, generating million of postcards to lawmakers, and it can get a phone bank going that can literally clog the lines in and out of the U.S. Capitol. Up against that is Handgun Control Inc., with a budget of five million dollars and a much smaller staff. Sarah Brady knows that Handgun Control will never be able to order up the kind of grass roots outcry that the NRA can. She says that is because the hardcore NRA voter is a single-issue voter, for the typically handgun control constituent, say a surburban middle class Republican couple, handgun control is just one of many issues they care about and it is rarely at the top of their list. So, Handgun Control tries a different tack. They have formed coalitions with other groups, law enforcement, the American Medical Association, the Bar Association, religious organizations and labor unions, to help with fundraising and networking and lobbying. And as Handgun Control Inc. has slowly grown bigger, they've also gotten smarter. Now, they don't miss a beat when a gun tragedy occurs; they get as many ads as they can afford on the air right away.

Unidentified Announcer: How many times does it have to happen before we do something? A man in Louisville guned down twenty people and killed seven with a military-style assault weapon. Before that, a man in Stockton, California gunned down thirty-four children.

Liason: But tragedies like the ones in Stockton and Louisville have a limited effect on federal legislation. Pete Shields is Sarah Brady's colleague at Handgun Control.

Pete Shields (Handgun Control): I wan amazed at the Louisville disaster. It got two days play except in Kentucky. It converted a couple of Kentucky legislators but it stopped at the border of Kentucky.

Liason: So, Handgun Control Inc. has had to become more sophisticated about the politics of gun control. At a recent forum in Boston, Pete Shields and Sarah Brady ran up against the whole gamut of problems facing their cause. First, there is the problem making the argument for a seven-day waiting period. The mildness of the Brady Bill, the mildness that was supposed to be its strength, turns out to be a weakness here.

Sarah Brady and Pete Shields admitted to their audience that a waiting period would only stop less than a quarter of U.S. gun crime. The fact that the Brady Bill will only nibble away at violent crime gave some members of the audience, like it does members of Congress, an excuse to say, 'Why bother with a waiting period at all?' And it left others, residents of the inner city who are terrorized by violent crime in their own neighborhoods, unsatisfied and wanting a more comprehensive solution to violence and crimes.

And Pete Shields was forced to confront another problem; the problem of many politicians who might otherwise be on his side. Shields was cornered by Barry Hobbins [sp], a state legislator from Maine, Hobbins is a liberal, he supports gay rights and social service issues, but like other elected officials he is afraid that supporting gun control would be political suicide. Pete Shields tried to convince him that wasn't so.

Shields: You already have a poll in your state, for instance, that eighty-four percent of the public has said that they favor an assault weapons ban.

Barry Hobbins (State Legislator, Maine): It's still a very volatile issue to go out on the forefront on.

Liason: Pete Shields knows that he has to give Barry Hobbins political cover before he will vote for gun control. To do that, Shields needs the lobbyist's secret weapon: detailed polling data. It is the kind of data the NRA has been collecting for years. An NRA lobbyist can walk into a Congress member's office and tell him, based on indepth research in his own district, why it is politically advantageous to vote with the NRA. Shields says Handgun Control is beginning to do this kind of polling too.

Shields: We have to give Barry a story of what's going to happen in his district, a believable story, if he comes out and supports this, and we have to show him where eighty-four percent support this and that they are intense enough about that they are going to stick with it, and they are not going to be weaned away.

Liason: And Handgun Control Inc. is going one step further. Taking a page from the NRA's book, they are getting tougher, targeting politicians who don't agree with them.

Unidentified Announcer: Carol Bentley voted to allow the sale of assault weapons to continue. She was more concerned about the gun lobby than about your safety. Now, Carol Bentley wants to be your state senator. She is asking for your vote on December 5th. Remember the victims of assault weapons. Remember the kids at Stockton, and tell Carol Bentley... tell Carol Bentley no.

Liason: It has taken years of experience and a lot of money to turn Handgun Control Inc. into the kind of formidable lobbying machine that can eventually match the NRA's clout in Washington. Slowly but surely, Sarah Brady says the tide of public opinion is turning, and Handgun Control Inc. is learning how to turn that public opinion into political power. In Washington, I'm Mara Liason.

Edwards: Tomorrow: Mr. Mac. James Leatherwood and his Mac-10 submachine gun advertised as the gun that made the 80's roar. Despite a mountain of government regulation, the Mac-10 still is being made at a ranch in Stevenville, Texas.

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DATE December 15, 1989
TIME 8:41 AM
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM Morning Edition

TRANSCRIPT

Bob Edwards, anchor:

In the 1960's, a stubby black pistol was introduced on the market and sold as a semiautomatic, but easily was converted to a fully automatic weapon. Criminals and gun collectors loved it. The MAC 10 submachine gun became the most notorious and most heavily regulated weapon since the Tommy gun of the 1920's and 30's. Today, the infamous MAC 10 is made at a ranch in Texas. NPR's John Burnett has the final report in our series on guns in America.

John Burnett reporting:

The MAC 10 is brutally utilitarian. Essentially, it's a firing mechanism mounted in a steel box that spits out eighteen .45 caliber rounds per second in its fully automatic version, and it's small enough to fit under a sports jacket.

In the early 80's, the MAC 10 earned an underground reputation as the firearm of choice among cocaine cowboys and right-wing paramilitary groups. Among certain gun critics, such as Josh Sugarman, director of the Firearms Policy Project in Washington, D.C., the MAC came to represent all that was evil about the free availability of assault guns in America.

Josh Sugarman (Director, Firearms Policy Project): Well, the MAC has been described I think quite fairly as the chopper of choice for American drug dealers. It has a threaded barrel; putting a silencer on... It has high capacity, it's incredibly concealable, and it's really cheap, and because of that, they were ideally suited for criminal use.

Burnett: The world headquarters of Military Armaments Corporation, the acronym of MAC, is in a rusting Quonset hut just west of Stevenville, Texas, on remote ranch land once roamed by Comanche Indians. Out here, one has to wonder how sooner the West would have been won had the U.S. Cavalry been armed with MAC 10's.

Jim Leatherwood (Military Armaments Corporation): Do you see those silhouette targets over there at two hundred yards?

Burnett: Yes. (Audio of machine gun fire.)

Jim Leatherwood is the MAC-man. He's tall and folksy, wears a flannel shirt and has a lock of hair drooping over his forehead. Twenty years ago, Leatherwood helped develop this pugnacious little shooting iron that has so alarmed police departments and confounded the gun control movement.

Today, talking to him about the gun he helped bring into the world is like addressing a father who believes his son, the foul-mouthed schoolyard bully, is simply misunderstood.

Leatherwood: I'm not arguing that it's- it has been used in that fashion, but there are probably hundreds if not thousands of times that it's been used, for lack of a better term, in a good capacity, in preventing crimes and whatever, that are not publicized.

Burnett: A firearms designer named Gordon Ingram created the MAC in 1964 as a compact submachine gun/pistol to replace the Colt .45 holstered by the U.S. military. The MAC never became the standard issue sidearm of the military; instead, the gun became hot among collectors and crooks. Yet, the MAC remains today what it was twenty-five years ago: a combat weapon. The sales literature still describes it as, 'the ideal close-quarters defensive weapon.'

Critics argue that high fire power guns like the MAC were designed as military anti-personnel weapons and have absolutely no sporting purpose in the hands of civilians. Leatherwood, who believes the answer to crime is a well-armed citizenry, begs to disagree.

Leatherwood: I find nothing derogatory by the term 'military weapon.' I think there's a tendency to try to classify some guns- sporting guns are therefore in the same category as golf clubs. And to me, a gun is a gun. It was originally designed to kill people, and modified eventually to kill things and to shoot targets. But guns are guns.

Burnett: His small shop, which smells of oil and cut steel, is crowded with big, clunky machines, and littered everywhere with the half-finished guts of the MAC: barrel nuts, trigger bars, magazine housings, stock rails, frame pins and strap-hangers. The whole operation looks like it could be set up in someone's garage without too much difficulty. Leatherwood admits they only make about a thousand guns a year, and nowadays, most of them are being goldplated and sold to collectors.

Leatherwood still assembles one or two a year for Hollywood studios. Movies and television shows helped create the MAC's macho image, and they continue to be a valuable source of free advertising, from John Wayne's revenge-seeking cop in "McCue" [sp], to drug gang shootouts in "Miami Vice."

Leatherwood: There was an episode with Phillip Michael Thomas down in- on a Caribbean island, in which several people were after him with MAC 10's, and the guns that they were using- I personally built those.

Burnett: Jack Caloran [sp], chief spokesman for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, says the MAC 10 is the first gun to his knowledge whose reputation was established by actors.

Jack Caloran (Chief Spokesman, ATF): The MAC- I don't know. It doesn't have the kind of military history that the Uzi or the AR-15 or other weapons have. It's certainly been popularized in motion pictures and in dramatic performances. It- maybe part of its appeal is that it's such an ugly,

inefficient box.

Burnett: There is another appeal of the MAC: that of the outlaw weapon. For years, part of the gun's allure was that it kept evading government regulation. Buying one became a great way to thumb your nose at the great, gray bureaucracies on the Potomac. In the late 70's and early 80's, before Jim Leatherwood began producing his version of the gun, a couple from Georgia named Sylvia and Wayne Daniels sold thousands of MAC's. The government quickly discovered that the semiautomatic firearms could be easily converted to fully automatic machine guns by any half-competent machinist. Some were converted with only a hammer and screwdriver for a stack of nickels. But as the ATF would reclassify one version of the Daniels' MAC, the couple would alter the weapon slightly and resume production. This cat and mouse game went on for more than seven years, during which time the MAC had many different mutations.

Curtis Bartlett (Gun Expert, ATF): These are some variations of Ingram-type weapons made by various different manufacturers, different sources.

Burnett: Curtis Bartlett, a gun expert with the ATF in its Washington headquarters, pulls out a panel with fifty-seven different MAC's dangling from hooks. Off the record, most ATF agents will say bluntly that the MAC is a piece of junk, especially when assembled from a mail-order kit, which was one of the ways the Daniels tried to outfox the ATF.

Bartlett: You certainly had a lot of them that didn't function in a very predictable manner. They could have run away- pulled the trigger once and it would just, you know, continue to fire. I've seen some of them that would fire without pulling the trigger; just cock it and it would start shooting.

Burnett: Though the Daniels still advertise their MAC as the gun that made the 80's roar, it's not as ferocious as it used to be. In 1986, Congress passed a law that said any combination of parts comprise a machine gun, which effectively scuttled the Daniels' last strategy. Today, two MAC's are left on the market. Both are semiautomatic and neither can be easily converted to full auto, in full compliance to ATF guidelines. The Daniels offer a two hundred dollar gun, the M-11-9, that they claim when the remaining stock is sold off, they're going out of business because of government harrassment and illness. That leaves Jim Leatherwood back at the ranch, which, by the way is where he grew up.

Leatherwood makes a semiautomatic civilian MAC and a full auto version which he sells mainly to police here and overseas. His is four hundred dollars, he says, because he manufactures the original weapon on the original tooling designed by Gordon Ingram. How much longer he'll be at it is anybody's guess. The MAC is listed among the assault weapons that Senator Dennis DeConcini proposes to ban in his bill that comes before Congress in February. But Leatherwood doesn't seem unduly upset by that possibility; he believes that even politicians can come to their senses.

Leatherwood: Because they know the reality. See, we're dealing with realities and we're dealing with perceptions.

The reality is that crimewise, the MAC is such an insignificant part of the crime picture, that it isn't a problem. Assault rifles aren't the problem.

Burnett: While it's true that criminals still favor more easily concealable handguns, the misuse of assault weapons may have attracted enough attention that they will spell the demise of guns like the MAC 10. This is John Burnett reporting.

Edwards: Our series on guns in America was edited by Larry Abramson and Ann Gudenhoff [sp], and produced by Penny Hane [sp].

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PROGRAM All Things Considered STATION WETA Radio NPR Network

DATE December 15, 1989 5:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Efforts to Reduce Shooting Deaths

SCOTT SIMON: While the Stockton, [California] shooting has led to increased efforts to ban certain kinds of guns, gun control remains controversial, and many experts are looking for other ways to reduce shooting deaths.

NPR's Ted Clark reports.

TED CLARK: Because most shooting deaths involve a gun kept in the home, many experts say the best way to reduce the killing is to convince people to keep their guns somewhere else. These experts point to preliminary studies showing that guns kept in the home are more likely to be used in suicides or against family members and friends than against intruders.

But fear of crime runs deep. And in some circumstances, it may well be safer to have a household gun than not to. But never when there are young people around, according to Dr. Catherine Christoffel (?) from Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago. She recently chaired a forum on firearms for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

DR. CATHERINE CHRISTOFFEL: Children cannot be made gun-safe. They are forgetful, impulsive. The temptation of handling a gun is overwhelming. Adolescents can override any safety feature that an adult have, and will find and will load any gun that's in the house.

CLARK: Not surprisingly, the National Rifle Association takes a different approach. The NRA supports ownership of guns in the home. The NRA believes it is possible to keep household guns away from kids who shouldn't have them. And it believes the

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best way to reduce shooting deaths is safety training, especially for parents.

Tracy Martin of the NRA's Education and Training Division:

TRACY MARTIN: We address our concerns specifically to adults and tell them that, yes, you do own a gun, you have a responsibility to use it safely, and you have a responsibility to store it safely.

CLARK: Martin says the NRA's safety programs have made a measurable difference.

MARTIN: In the past 20 years, accidental firearms fatalities have decreased 52 percent, while the population has risen 20 percent and gun ownership has more than doubled.

CLARK: This year the NRA designed a gun safety program for elementary schools, and it's put ads like this on TV:

WOMAN: Kids, I want you to listen to this. Guns aren't toys. So if you find a gun, leave it alone. Don't touch it. Tell an adult. See, a real gun is not a toy. So if you find a gun, leave it alone. Don't touch it. Tell an adult.

Okay, now. We're going to this all together one more time. If you find a gun...

CLARK: The trouble with that ad is it never tells kids why they shouldn't touch guns. It never says guns can hurt you, according to Dennis Smith of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence.

DENNIS SMITH: We've been dealing with pediatricians and other people that have been very eager to get that word across to young kids that guns can hurt them. Just simply telling a kid that don't touch a gun doesn't work. It's like telling kids not to take drugs without telling them why.

CLARK: The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence also has an educational program, launched in pilot project form this week in the Miami school system. While the NRA does not want to be associated with the message that guns maim and kill, the Center does. Part of its project is a video for teenagers.

[Gunshot and sirens]

GIRL: She's dead.

MAN: She's dead?

GIRL: Yes. My mommy's dead. Oh my God!

MAN: Accident after accident. Unnecessary death...

CLARK: Dennis Smith says the video incorporates the messages shown by research to have the greatest impact on teenagers.

SMITH: If you're shot by somebody, these are the types of things you probably will no longer be able to do, you know. And we show the kids the struggle of their daily life. You know, they can't go out and hang out with their buddies anymore. Many people can't play sports, they can't dance. They can't do all of these things.

CLARK: Another message in the video that's known to affect teenagers deeply is the suffering their families would go through after their death.

CHILD: I miss playing with him. And when there's holidays, I just think he's there.

CHILD: Well, I [unintelligible]. And I miss him very much. I loved him. And I wish he was back.

CLARK: There's another effort to reduce gun deaths that's picking up speed: increased liability suits. For example, the Center has just formed a Legal Action Project to help the victims of gun violence sue gun owners or gun manufacturers whose negligence leads to shootings. Director Dennis Hennigan says the Legal Action Project will also sue irresponsible gun dealers.

DENNIS HENNIGAN: The idea is, change the behavior of gun dealers, so that they will adhere to the highest standards of care with respect to the general public. And that's what the general public should expect.

CLARK: The National Rifle Association is cool to this approach, insisting that most gun dealers are responsible, and calling suits against manufacturers "back-door gun-banning."

Another way to possibly reduce gun deaths is to change the way guns are portrayed on television and the movies. The NRA says there's too much gun violence on TV. The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence will soon open a Hollywood office to try to persuade producers to reduce gun violence, or at least to portray it more realistically.

But this effort won't be easy, according to Peggy Charren, Director of Action for Children's Television. It's hard

to regulate violence on TV without threatening free speech in general, she says. Instead, she calls for more parent vigilance about what kids watch and increased diversity in programming.

PEGGY CHARREN: In my brief, we don't burn the books we don't like. We just make sure the librarian orders enough different kinds of books so we can ignore what we don't like.

One of the problems with violent television is that there isn't enough other kinds of television to turn on.

CLARK: Finally, some experts propose more research into gun design to make guns safer. For example, triggers that require more strength than a preschooler can muster.

There's no simple way to reduce gun deaths in America. It requires many different approaches, from gun design to education. Also needed are improved suicide prevention and family counseling, more drug and alcohol treatment, and, in the end, less poverty and less despair.

This is Ted Clark in Washington.

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TRANSCRIPT

DATE December 15, 1989
TIME 5:00PM
STATION National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

Mora Lyleson host:

Last week's massacre of fourteen women at the University of Montreal has left many people wondering how such a brutal act could have happened.

The shooting deaths were all the more shocking because they occurred in a country where gun-related violence is relatively uncommon. While Canada has ten-times fewer the number of people than the United States, the number of people killed by firearms in Canada is one hundred-times less. A similar disparity, though not quite as wide, exists between the cities of Vancouver, British Columbia and Seattle, Washington. As part of our series this week on guns and gun control we paid a visit to Vancouver and Seattle.

Comparing two communities, even in the same country, is an exercise fraught with problems. Still, Seattle and Vancouver seem to have plenty in common. Both are port cities with similar geographies and climate, education levels, and employment rates. But as Stephen Smith reports, Seattle is a much more dangerous place to live.

Stephen Smith reporting: The Central District is one of Seattle's toughest inner city neighborhoods. Children playing on the streets must navigate between drug dealers and drunks as they and their families try to make a normal life in an increasingly violent community. Guns are a prominent part of that social equation. The number of illegal weapons seized by the Seattle police annually quadrupled during the 1980's. Last year the police netted some four thousand guns.

Former Seattle policeman Chuck Pillan says that like many American cities there is growing gang activity in Seattle, and the gangs seem too willing to use their guns.

Chuck Pillan (Seattle Policeman): I was twenty-three years in the quote, "ghettos", of the city of Seattle and I never had blood on my hands. Now we've got ten and twelve-year-old kids on our streets with occasionally their hands on fully automatic weapons -- certainly assault weapons -- that have no

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sense of restraint. They have learned, they have been conditioned to think: you've got a gun you shoot it. Bang, bang, bang.

Smith: Some people in the central district are getting guns to protect themselves. A song titled "Hip Hop Soldier" by a Seattle rap musician was a local hit last year. It offers this advice: "Stay away from drugs and crime, but buy yourself a gun".

(Audio: a line from the rap song)

This rap musician, known as Sir Mix-A-Lot, says law-abiding black people in ghettos like the Central District must protect themselves against criminals, because the police won't do it for them.

Sir Mix-A-Lot (Rap Musician): If your house is getting robbed and you call the police they might get there an hour later. If there is no way to defend yourself than the criminals just win. And it's something that I feel pretty strongly about. We've been robbed a few times and since we've had guns in the house we haven't been robbed.

Smith: The fact is though that most people in the Central District are either unwilling or uninterested in living in armed life, and won't buy a gun.

(Audio: a gun salesman discussing weapons to a customer)

Those who do purchase a hand gun in Washington must wait five days and pass a background check. Children and many convicted felons are precluded from owning a hand gun.

One of the busiest gun shops in Seattle is called Butch's Guns. Store manager Butch Hullit Jr. believes tougher gun restrictions in the city would do little but penalize the people who use guns for fun. And Hullit says that while a growing number of his customers want guns for protection, most people buy guns because they enjoy sport shooting.

Butch Hullit (Butch's Guns store manager): If you've done any shooting at all you will understand what it feels like to stand there and pop off five, six rounds at your target. That is nice and relaxing. And it is. I don't look at it any differently than me going playing raquetball, as to go down to the gun club and go shooting.

Smith: Across the border three hours north of Seattle, the members of this gun club in Vancouver also enjoy shooting for recreation. But in Canada gun laws are far more restrictive -- especially for hand guns. Canadians must first get permission to buy a hand gun, which is fairly rare, and then get a permit to transfer their hand guns to the shooting range.

Unlike many gun enthusiasts in the United States, Bert Wilson says that few of his fellow club members in Vancouver mind the government restrictions. Wilson believes limiting the way people may carry their guns limits the potential for violence.

Bert Wilson (Vancouver gun club member): I think you are asking for trouble when you allow people to carry guns anytime, anywhere, anyplace. We all know there are times when there is too much drinking, there are arguments and there are confrontations when these guns can be used to carry out their emotions.

Smith: This intersection, Cordoba and Main, in East Vancouver is at the hub of Vancouver's drug dealing and prostitution. In fact, it's known as one of the roughest urban neighborhoods in all of Canada. Gun violence would be a frightening routine in a similar U.S. neighborhood, but people in East Vancouver say that there are very few guns on the street.

Community activist Jim Green heads a citizen's group trying to make the neighborhood safer.

Jim Green (Community Activist): I've lived down here since 1971. I've never seen anyone with a gun. I've never heard anyone suggest that they want a gun, or that they have any use for it. I mean, even if we do have crime -- and right outside this window I can watch drug deals all day -- I don't know of one soul that has ever mentioned having a gun.

Now, I know that people have other things, like I have a little baseball bat at home in case anyone were to break in, but I would never think about getting a gun.

Smith: Penalties for illegal gun use are higher in Vancouver. But while tougher gun controls may be one reason that there are fewer fire arms in Canada, criminologist Neil Boyd, of Vancouver's Son and Fraser University, says in his country there is a fundamentally different attitude about guns than in the United States. Boyd traces that attitude back to the settlers.

Neil Boyd (Criminologist): Canada has been founded on a deference to authority, which has its own costs, and I think the American tradition is one of violence. That was what accompanied the birth of America and it has been an important part of American culture. We are simply a more civilized country than you are.

Smith: At Vancouver's East Side police precinct a staff sergeant, aptly names Bob Law, says the social disregard for guns in Canada even extends to the criminals.

Bob Law (Vancouver Police Officer): Even if you are a crook, at some point in time you were brain washed in this country - half of the criminal element doesn't want anything to do with

it. I'll peddle my drugs, I'll run my girls in the street, I'll do the burglary, but I don't want that gun. I don't want that gun.

Smith: The difference in gun violence between Seattle and Vancouver was studied recently between public health officials in both cities. Their controversial report found that a resident of Seattle was seven times more likely to be assaulted by someone with a fire arm than a resident of Vancouver. And five times more likely to be murdered with a hand gun. The study was published last year in the New England Journal of Medicine.

One of the authors, Dr. James Ferrece of the University of British Columbia, says that from a strict public health standpoint Seattle needs tougher hand gun restrictions.

Dr. James Ferrece (University of British Columbia): Firearms are inherently the most dangerous weapon available to a criminal. And if you were to abolish the availability of firearms criminals would still use weapons. But it's much easier medically to treat someone with a stab wound than it is to treat someone with a firearm injury. That's the bottom line.

Smith: The study had problems, and the doctors pointed to some of them. It was hard to accurately determine the availability of guns. Drug activity in the two cities appear to be different. And the general findings in Seattle and Vancouver may not extend to other cities.

Gun control opponents in the United States, like the National Rifle Association, sharply attacked the study. And criminologist Gary Kleck of Florida State University, a leading researcher on the gun issue, dismissed the the study altogether.

Gary Kleck (Criminologist at Florida State University): Their research was worthless. There isn't a legitimate gun control expert in the country who regarded it as legitimate research.

There were only two cities studied -- one Canadian, one U.S. There is literally thousands of differences across cities that could account for violence rates, and these authors just arbitrarily seized upon gun levels and gun control levels as what caused the difference. It's the sort of research that never should have seen the light of day.

Smith: Whether or not the study was valid, many Canadians shake their heads at the number of people shot each year in the United States. Our countries share a common language, a roughly similar ancestry, and a border thousands of miles long. But Canadians, like Vancouver police sergeant Bob Law, are not willing to share our tolerance for guns and violence.