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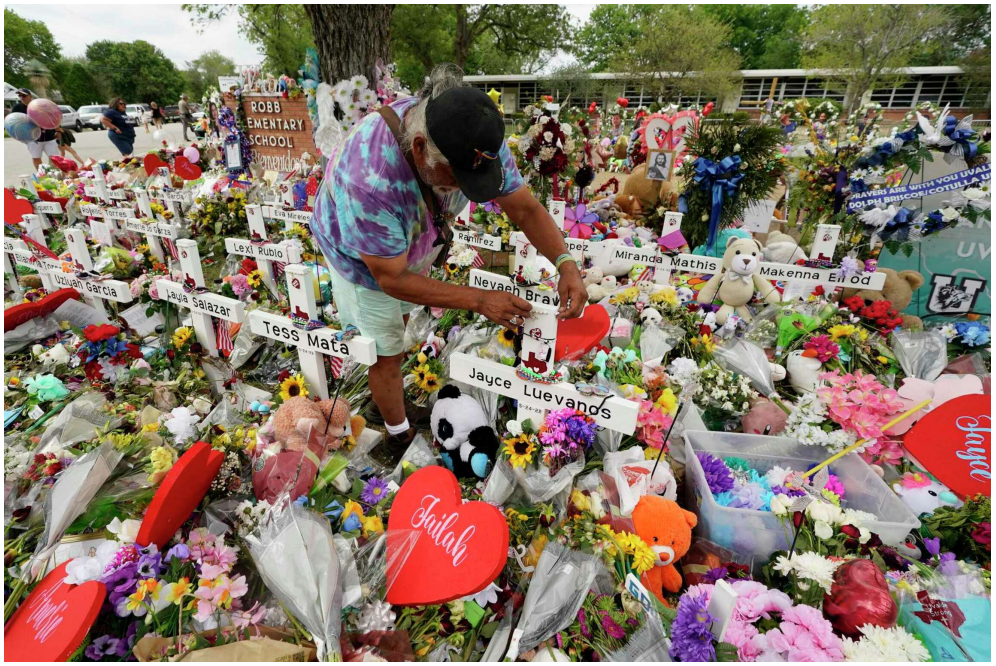
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OPINION

Clack: The fairy tale America tells itself about our gun nightmare

 **Cary Clack, San Antonio Express-News, Express-News Columnist**
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A visitor places bracelets on crosses at a memorial outside Robb Elementary School. We call children angels, but want that to be metaphorical, not celestial. We don't want them to be given angel's wings before they receive their graduation rings as he and others pay their respects to the victims killed in last week's Robb Elementary School shooting, Tuesday, May 31, 2022, in Uvalde, Texas. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)
Eric Gay, STF / Associated Press

Once upon a time, in a land of oak trees and honey, a place once called Encina, there lived princesses and princes who ruled the hearts of that land, which they brightened with the dazzling colors of their joy and laughter.

Once upon a time, like princesses and princes everywhere, there were summer nights when they would gaze upon the glittering sky and sing:

"Twinkle, twinkle little star

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How I wonder what you are

Up above the sky so high

Like a diamond in the sky.”

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Once upon a time, like princesses and princes everywhere, they would go to bed with stuffed animals and fall asleep to fairy tales, which began with “Once upon a time” and ended with “happily ever after.”

Once upon a time, in a land once called Encina but now known as Uvalde, time and “happily ever after” were assumed for princesses and princes, who would grow into their dreams and become queens and kings.

Princesses and princes happily spent their time playing softball and basketball, doing gymnastics, catching footballs from grandfathers, cheerleading, running, swimming, learning dances from TikTok, learning to sew from YouTube, doing photography, singing with fathers, saving money to go to Disney World, watching “Encanto,” enjoying Ariana Grande perform, cheering for the Houston Astros, being with family.

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All while planning to be an artist, a teacher, a marine biologist, a lawyer or a police officer.

Once upon a time, it was all possible. Until time stopped and took away these princesses and princes. Now, there is no happily ever after.

Stuffed animals like the ones they once cuddled populate a memorial in Uvalde's town square, reminding us that this time, a billion loving kisses from their parents and grandparents won't open the eyes of these sleeping beauties.

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Fairy tales are often stories of how to behave. We tell children fairy tales to entertain and educate. But we also tell fairy tales to deceive ourselves, to pretend we're better than we are and we're doing all the things we should be doing. There is no bigger fairy tale we tell ourselves in the United States than that children are our most precious resource and we do all we can to protect them.

Not when the leading cause of death of children in this nation is firearms. Protect the Second Amendment, fine. But protect second graders, and third and fourth graders, and all young people.

Once upon a time, we believed we'd do something more to protect them after we lost so many in Sandy Hook, then Parkland, then Santa Fe. Instead, we watched the repeated assassinations of our youth, as happily ever after, ever after, ever after, ever after was shattered.

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We call children angels, but we want that to be metaphorical. We don't want them to be given angel's wings before they receive their graduation rings, before their time on this Earth has taken flight and they've had the chance to navigate full lives, to have a chance at happily ever after, ever after, ever after.

Once upon a time, in a land of oak trees and honey, a place once called Encina but now known as Uvalde, there lived princesses and princes who ruled the hearts of that land, which they brightened with the dazzling colors of their joy and laughter.

Their names were Navaeh, Jose, Jacklyn, Annabell, Jayce, Makenna, Jailah, Lexi, Tess, Xavier, Amerie, Maranda, Eliahana, Rogelio, Layla, Alithia, Maite, Uziyah, Eliana. Their queen-protectors were named Irma and Eva.

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Then they were gone.

These students and teachers should not have had to die for us to be shaken to our senses, not after the deaths of so many other students and teachers failed to do that.

But now that they're gone, what are the lessons learned? What are we going to do?

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Reach Cary on

Cary Clack was born and raised in San Antonio. In 1995 he was hired full-time as a reporter and columnist. He left the paper to join Joaquin Castro's first congressional campaign, later serving as Rep. Castro's district director. He rejoined the Express-News as a member of the Editorial Board in 2019. In 2017 he was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters.

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