

TV review: Surviving Sandy Hook; DCI Banks



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Lauren Rousseau, a teacher who was killed in the Sandy Hook massacre
BBC

This documentary about the Connecticut school shooting gave a snapshot of America, in light and shade

Surviving Sandy Hook

BBC Two

DCI Banks

ITV

The *This World* documentary **Surviving Sandy Hook** could so easily have been a wallow in grief. Sandy Hook was the elementary school in Connecticut that in December 2012 was the scene of a gun massacre, a pre-Christmas slaughter of the innocents that caused even as accomplished a speaker as President Obama to falter in his address to the nation. Jezza Neumann's subtly brilliant documentary (his second in two days, after *No Place to Call Home* on Tuesday) instead took a snapshot of America, in light and shade.

The shade fell not only on the families of the 20 children and 6 teachers who died. There was the awful guilt of the mother who ran away from the sound of gunfire rather than towards her son, who mercifully survived. There was the callow, unintentional cynicism of her boy who considered school killings a norm and calculated that his own school's notoriety came down to the high number of the children killed and their youth.

Worse was America's unhinged second-hand response. Congress refused to pass the relatively modest gun control legislation proposed by Obama. The gun lobby went into defensive overdrive. Its wilder fringe fell victim to an insulting conspiracy theory. The shooting had never happened. Sandy Hook was a *Wag the Dog* set peopled by actors in the pay of "liberals".

Yet there was light and it was visible from the start in the oration one year on by Scarlett Lewis, whose son Jesse had died. Twenty-seven people had "become angels" that day, she said. The 27th whom she bravely included was Adam Lanza, the 20-year-old killer. She is now campaigning for extra funding for mental health programmes and preaching a message of "nurturing, healing and love" rather than revenge.

Gilles Rousseau, father of Lauren Rousseau, one of the murdered teachers, visited the National Rifle Association convention and spent his time courteously listening to views he could not share. The film had heart-breaking moments — Scarlett Lewis's pleasure in finding a pair of Jesse's unwashed pyjamas under the bunk bed was one — but it was also a testament to American optimism at its best: practical, civilised and determined.

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