

Pam Aiello – Point of Pride Transcript

[00:00:00] **Pam:** When I started thinking about work that gives me a real sense of pride, well there were many that came to mind. Some because they were just so out of the box creative, some, because a moment in time had been captured so perfectly and some because the collaboration required to get there was amazing. But out of all those meaningful memories, there was one that absolutely stood out for me: the Don't Shoot Campaign.

[00:00:38] **Misty:** Hey there friends. Thanks so much for checking out our Point of Pride series. In celebration of our 40ish anniversary, Simantelites are sharing stories about the work they're most proud of that made a difference for Simantel, the client and perhaps most importantly, themselves. I'm always excited when we get the opportunity to collaborate with local leaders, agencies and organizations to create work that makes a positive impact on the local community.

[00:01:00] So I'm very proud to share this story with you from Senior Communication Strategist, Pam Aiello. Listen, as Pam shares how a campaign Simantel created in collaboration with the city of Peoria touched not only her, but also her teenage daughter.

[00:01:19] **Pam:** My moment of pride at Simantel was our work on the Don't Shoot Campaign, which was aimed at ending gun violence in Peoria. I am a senior communication strategist here at Simantel — emphasis on senior. I've been at Simantel now for almost 25 years, so I've witnessed a lot of work. We've done countless projects that make me very proud to be a Simantelite, but one really hit home in a very unexpected way.

[00:01:51] In 2012, Simantel teamed up with the city of Peoria to help launch a new community effort to end gun violence. The theme of that program was "don't shoot". The program is designed to help reduce gun related crimes and communities, and of course, ultimately save lives. It's based on the book, "Don't Shoot: One Man, a Street Fellowship and the End of Violence in Inner-City America" written by a man named David Kennedy. Deployed in more than 70 cities nationwide, it had never come to a city the size of Peoria.

[00:02:27] The goal of all of the "don't shoot" communication was to raise awareness and create meaningful conversations throughout the community. Actual victims' families appeared in video interviews on the webpage, posters, billboards, bus signs, newspaper ads and even radio and television spots — carrying one very simple, yet powerful message: you're killing me.

[00:02:53] The headline connected with the fact that every gun crime has more than one victim. The emotional impact of the message really struck home for me later that year in December of 2012, school children were shot at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Five years later in a college writing assignment, my daughter Rachel, would remind me how extremely proud I was to work at the agency that produced Don't Shoot Peoria.

[00:03:18] Her assignment was to write an essay that described what the instructor called visual rhetoric, or communication designed to persuade or move people to action. Rachel had been searching for a topic but had found nothing that really sparked her interest until she was waiting for me to get done at work one day at Simantel.

[00:03:40] Here's how her essay began:

[00:03:51] *"I have to confess, my mom's office is the last place I would've guessed that I would find something to write about. Her company is in an older building in downtown Peoria on the river front. Because the building used to be offices over a warehouse, the space is full of eight-by-eight inch rough hewn beams smoothed over time.*

[00:04:12] *They stand like centuries in precise rows, singing to guard the desks around them. As I wait for her to finish her work, I decide to take a look around. I head across the hall and into a large meeting room. As I turn the corner, I am startled by an image with eyes so penetrating, I have to stop and gaze back.*

[00:04:35] *Apparently, the room was recently used for a meeting about a campaign called Don't Shoot Peoria, an effort to gain support of all kinds, to continue work with local law enforcement to stop gun violence. There are multiple visuals around the room that tell a disturbing and deeply moving story."*

[00:04:55] *One of the challenges of working as a writer in marketing and advertising is that knowing the impact of the work is generally short-lived. We learn the results for a timeframe dictated by the project budget, and then we move on. Through my daughter's essay, I had the unique opportunity to understand the impact of a message on the next generation, my next generation. Here's how she described what she saw that day:*

[00:05:27] *"The face on the wall is that of a child. The young girl is lit in a way that casts a pool of light on her face. Her eyes are bottomless pools of dark brown. Her full lips are together in what is almost a pout. Her tightly spun pigtails fall back, making her face even more prominent. The background is dark and shadowed.*

[00:05:49] *The overall tone is sadness — deep sadness. It's interesting how the lack of an obvious emotion, such as tears, makes the images' impact raw and haunting. The headline reads "you're killing me". My immediate response is one of aggression. I think to myself, who is killing you? Who would harm a hair on your head?*

[00:06:13] *Just point me in the right direction of those jerks... and the copy below the image catches my attention. It's about gun violence right here in Peoria. I wonder if I am the primary target audience, but I'm not in a gang, I don't hang with anyone who owns a gun. Then I read the final line of text positioned over the spackled red texture of a spray of blood: Gun crimes destroy communities. Take a stand now.*

[00:06:43] *I am part of the community. This message is intended for me and anyone who can recognize, I guess, the innocence of a child. I think that's the focal point of the persuasive strategy: position, innocence and criminal violence and direct contrast to each other. Huh? It's working".*

[00:07:09] *As I continue to read Rachel's descriptions of the elements of the campaign, it was so very clear that all the thinking that Jake Beyhl and our creative team had put into the visualization of the campaign, at its inception was still impactful years later, on a younger audience with a different point of view.*

[00:07:32] *Here's how Rachel described additional pieces of that campaign:*

[00:07:37] *"On the center wall, there is another poster. This one is blood red with translucent white type. The visual stirs images of blood and bandages, especially when it is in the contacts of all the other visuals in the room. The large type reads "687 shots fired".*

[00:07:57] *My immediate response is to look back at that little girl and think" how many little girls, how many children, how many daddies didn't come home?". Not only do these straightforward numbers trigger an emotional connection to the victims, they also trigger questions in my mind, the mind of the audience about the scope of gun violence here in Peoria. Below the red and white poster is a large photograph of a billboard.*

[00:08:27] *The face of a young woman gazes out from her view above the city scape. Again, the large headline, "you're killing me". It's interesting how this new image triggers thoughts of multiple generations that are being impacted by gun violence. I don't know why I didn't notice it before, but*

it is suddenly clear to me that the don't shoot peoria.com logo is also treated to send a message beyond the words themselves.

[00:08:55] *The "o" in "don't" is actually a spatter of blood in the shape of a bullet hole, or what I think is a bullet hole. It is at that moment that I am persuaded to take my phone out of my pocket and visit the website. There, I find more faces treated in the same way as those in the room with me.*

[00:09:18] *On the website, they're not just faces, they are stories. These visuals are not actors or models, they are the people living with the results of gun violence.*

[00:09:27] *I wonder, as I'm watching what impact these stories could have on people who run with guns. I hope it is some fraction of the impact they have on me. As I walk back to check on my mom, it strikes me how rhetoric of all kinds is really cumulative.*

[00:09:47] *I'm not sure what messages I have seen in the past related to gun violence, but I'm sure that I had some perceptions in my mind before I ever saw that little girl staring out at me from that poster. The "don't shoot" messages latched on to what was already there and motivated me to take one small action by visiting the website.*

[00:10:10] *Who knows? Maybe it will grow to be more than that."*

[00:10:19] *I must tell you, it's hard to unravel the pride of that moment. Being proud of the campaign and the impact of the message. Being so proud of my daughter for being able to articulate what she saw, what it meant to her and sadly what it continues to mean to all of us. While Peoria still battles gun violence, there have been improvements.*

[00:10:48] *A program to introduce those who use guns with victims of gun violence does continue to see progress in Peoria. I can tell you with certainty, I am incredibly proud of the work we do here at Simantel for our clients and our communities. And I have had the very rare opportunity to see how it endures. That's why I chose this campaign as my moment of pride.*

[00:11:23] *Misty: It's sad that anti-gun violence campaigns are needed to raise awareness on the tragic impact on the lives of those beyond the victims, but I'm extremely proud of the opportunity to collaborate with the city of Peoria on the Don't Shoot campaign. Hearing the impact of the message on a young person even years after seeing it is gratifying.*

[00:11:41] *Thank you, Pam, for sharing this as your point in pride and for sharing your daughter's moving essay.*