

## The Survivors

There are moments in everyone's life where we do something that determines the course of our future. Today at around 10:15 in the morning I had one of these moments. What I did was quite simple actually, I went to the washroom. This may seem ridiculous, but that simple action saved my life.

I have always been a natural at avoiding work whenever possible, and I was not in the mood to complete today's math assignment. One whisper to my teacher of a sore stomach had her insisting that I take a trip to the ladies room. I should have been relieved to get away from that bore of a class, but for some reason that I can't explain, I detected tension in the air. When the bathroom door shut behind me it creaked eerily, unsettling me further. However, for one glorious moment I had peaceful silence.

That's when the first gun shot went off. The sound rang through my ears and vibrated through my body. For a second, I stood still, unable to move and unwilling to believe what I had heard. The second and third shots came right away, shaking me out of my daze. Disbelief was replaced by panic as I raced to lock the bathroom door. My hands were shaking as I tried to blink away my tears. The shots continued like rapid fire and they were followed by screams of terror. I couldn't think straight, all I knew was that the sound of bullets was getting closer to the bathroom, and if I didn't find a way out my blood would soon stain the tiles where I stood.

This was the kind of thing you hear about on the news, but I never thought that it would happen at my own school. Floyd Virginia had always felt safe to me.

My legs crumpled under me and sobs racked my body. I had to make it to the window before it was too late. I dragged my useless body across the floor and used the sink to pull myself up. The window was high, but when I stood on the counter I could reach it. I used all my strength to pull myself onto the window ledge, and without even hesitating, I drove my fist through the glass. Blood coated my hand and dripped onto my t-shirt, but I didn't care. I desperately threw myself off the ledge, causing both my ankles to give out from the impact of the fall, twisting in odd directions. I swallowed my screams of pain as I began to crawl towards a nearby house. As I rounded the corner of the school yard my heart stopped in my chest. The green grass of the soccer field was smeared with the blood of almost 20 students who had been in gym class when the shooter arrived. Their motionless bodies lay under the shadow of the old oak tree where we had once climbed. Horror ripped through me and I collapsed, relinquishing the will to keep moving.

I don't remember anything after that. I woke up a few hours ago at the Floyd general hospital with my mother crying hysterically at my side. Her embrace didn't comfort like it usually did. Her expression displayed her awe in my survival, and her concern for what I had gone through. I begged her to tell me what happened to the other students in my class, but her response devastated me. Only two of my peers were alive, still in critical condition. My heart hurt for them as they too would wake up haunted by their memories.

I knew the faces of the dead would flash across national television screens for a few days before another story would catch the media's attention. Those killed would be mourned for a short time before becoming just another statistic. No one will

mourn for us, the survivors, who kept our lives but lost our innocence. Just a few short hours ago we were in class, laughing with our friends and passing notes. Now we will walk like ghosts through hallways where the blood of our peers was spilled. We will never feel safe again because no matter where we go the sound of gun shots will follow us.

I'm just a kid, only thirteen years old, but this pain will follow me for the rest of my life. Freedom is not being able to bear arms or own a gun, freedom is feeling safe at school.