

Posted by Annalea Ricci

My grandniece, Madison, wrote about the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shootings in Parkland Florida. She and her twin sister are students there. It is something I will share at the Larchmont /Mamaroneck Summit Board in a few days. It brought me to tears. We must put an end to assault rifles in our country!

You know, some people say, "don't worry... it'll never happen to us." The odd thing is, I heard this two days before the shooting. We had just been discussing drills. Our school is required to have a false shooting drill at some point in the year, to practice what we would do in the real thing. The sad thing is, we never even got a practice one. I know I'm supposed to be sharing my reaction with you, but I think it's important to know what we went through before any thoughts or assumptions occur.

I was in Spanish class. Somewhat near the building... but not too close. My friends and I were working on a small project which was due at the end of the period. I remember sometime around 2:30... the fire alarm went off. I thought, "well this can't be right? We just had a fire drill this morning." Hundreds of kids ran out of the Spanish building. I didn't think much of the situation then, but I thought maybe the culinary class downstairs had burned some cookies or something, causing the alarm to go off.

I remember sticking with my two friends. I'm the kind of friend who is very motherly. I watch out for everyone, and make sure everyone is ok. During this drill, I made it my goal to stay with them the whole time. As I rushed down the stairs, towards the entrance of the school, a man I had never seen before grabbed me by the hands, pulled me in and screamed, "RUN TO THE FRONT. GET UNDER THE SEATS. NOW!!!!!" I then felt my legs tremble as I ran down the aisle. My friends right behind me. "Where is Mackenzie?", I thought.

Everyone got down, there were at least 75-100 of us. At this point my mind was blank. You could hear people screaming outside. I immediately took out my phone after this and texted my mom, "Mom, there's a shooter here". I guess that's how the brain works... making assumptions before anything has even been confirmed.

My attention quickly transitioned back to reality... why on earth and I hearing helicopters and gunshots??? I remember rocking myself back and forth, holding my knees to my chest, singing myself the soundtrack of the Greatest Showman.

The moment I saw the swat team, the FBI and the Coral Springs police, I went into absolute shock. They pointed a gun at each of us; and asked us if we knew who Nickolas Cruz was. I hope no one ever has to know what it feels like to have a gun pointed at you. That's when a panic attack started to happen. I get them often. But this is the worst I had it. I remember dragging myself and crawling to my Spanish teacher. My legs no longer seemed to work. We sat together, and I cried and was running out of air. It felt like I was drowning. She kissed me on the forehead and wiped my tears. She told me we would be ok. I didn't want to trust anyone.

I'm sure anyone reading this may cry, but in the moment of an event like this... you literally can't cry. At all. There's nothing. You're like a sponge trying to absorb everything in your surroundings.

It's now been almost 3 weeks since this horrific event. I woke up on the morning of February 15th, to find out my best friend, Cara Loughran, was killed the day before. I don't know where she was shot, and I'm not ready to know yet. Another friend I've known since 4th grade, Jaime Guttenburg, was shot in the back, from what I've heard, her spine was completely shattered. She would have been paralyzed her whole life. They never got to live their lives, never got their first boyfriend, never got to take an AP class, and never got to graduate. I always told my mom I wanted Cara to be my roommate in college. Now that dream is crushed.

I miss them both. Martin Anguiano was in my geography class, Luke Hoyer was in my PE class, and Joaquin Oliver was a familiar face around school. I often referred to him as Zayn Malik from the popular boy band "one direction".

School is hard. It was hard to go back. It was awesome. It was filled with so many emotions, happiness, sadness, nervousness. More than imaginable. Dogs everywhere. Flowers, people, alumni in every part of my eyes.

I've been on the news multiple times, the attention can be unbearable at times. Other times it makes us realize how much my country cares about us. I believe those 17 people died to make this country a better place. We are going to ban assault rifles... although I support the 2nd amendment, we do not need machine guns for

mass murders. I am going to participate in any marches I can. I will not stop fighting. I hope anyone reading this, or listening to this will help along in this fight. And please, keep us all in your prayers.

Thank you all.