

# your life

“i was held  
hostage  
in my  
school!”

You think you *know* the people you go to school with. But Kayla's classmate turned an average day into a nightmare! AS TOLD TO Jane bianchi



**T**his fall marks the one-year anniversary of the scariest experience of my life. For me and the 23 students in my sophomore history class at Marinette High School in my small town in Wisconsin, it's the day that Sam—someone we'd gone to school with for six years—came to class with a gun.

Back-to-school is definitely different this year. Everyone now realizes the impact of making stupid jokes, like saying “I'm going to kill you.” Instead, the vibe in the halls is more about kindness—I feel closer to everyone now. People understand if I'm still jumpy when someone drops a weight in the gym and why it gives me the creeps to walk by *that* classroom.

I keep thinking of Sam, with his dark hair and beautiful smile, and will always wonder what made him do something so drastic. Though we weren't close, I'd known him since fifth grade. He was a nice, smart, quiet guy who never seemed sad or angry. He was known for being obsessed with the Packers, fishing, and Boy Scouts. But nobody ever thought that he'd take us hostage.

### TERRIFYING TRAP

It was sixth period, the second to last class of the day, around 2 P.M. We were watching a movie on historical heroes—trying not to fall asleep—when Sam went to the bathroom, saying he felt sick. When he came back, we snapped awake, because he was holding a gun and shot a bullet into our teacher's desk! There was stunned silence. I held my breath and tried not to cry, afraid any sudden move would make him shoot again.

Without saying a word, Sam pulled a stool to the front of the room and faced us, jingling bullets in his pocket to let us know he had more ammo. It felt like an unspoken threat: If you move, I'll shoot you. I wanted to call 911, but Sam commanded us to put our phones in the middle of the room. I had no idea what he wanted from us. So I flipped over the

## Wisconsin Gunman Shoots Himself After Standoff

worksheet on my desk and wrote a letter to my family, saying I love you, in case I died.

Minutes later, Sam asked in a mellow voice, “How's it going, guys?” I thought it was weird that he was asking a casual question in such an intense situation. One brave classmate replied, “Pretty good, you?” That broke the ice. Then we all talked to Sam about the stuff we knew he liked. Our teacher mouthed, “Keep talking.” Anything that kept Sam distracted made us feel safer.

“There was an unspoken threat. If you move, I'll shoot you.”

### GREAT ESCAPE

For the next hour, we eyed Sam's gun and kept the conversation going. After the final bell rang, school officials noticed that my class was missing, and our two principals stepped into the room. But when Sam pointed his gun at them, they left fast, looking pale with fear.

More hours passed, and all we could do was keep chatting. Then Sam let a few students go to the bathroom. Of course, they never came back. As they left, I'd hear voices in the hall yell, “Hands on your head!” I felt hopeful knowing the police were outside, but the rest of us were still trapped—Sam said nobody else could leave.

Around 8 P.M., our conversation with Sam dwindled and he looked bored. Suddenly, he shot my teacher's computer. I jumped back in my chair, and within seconds, a SWAT team knocked down the door and tackled Sam. My heart was pounding with fear, but I felt relieved that someone was saving us! Just before I ran out of the room, I

**aftershocks**  
Following the incident, students cling to each other for support.



heard a gunshot. I thought maybe the SWAT team had shot Sam. But the next morning I found out that Sam had actually shot and killed himself.

It was devastating. We'll never know what made Sam do this. The police didn't find a suicide note, and there were no drugs or alcohol in his system. So it was—and still is—a mystery.

### MOVING FORWARD

My classmates and I weren't the only victims. Sam was a victim, too—just in a different way. He must have been suffering inside. Of course I'm angry that he put my life at risk, but I feel sorry for him. When I get overly anxious, I can see a counselor anytime. I just wish Sam were still here, so he could also get the help he must have needed. 17

## RED FLAGS

What happened to Kayla came out of the blue, but sometimes there are warning signs.

### JOKES THAT SEEM LIKE THREATS

If a student says, “I'll blow up this building,” don't assume that he is kidding.

### BRAGGING ABOUT WEAPONS

Speak up if a guy at school is like, “Check this out!” and points to a knife or gun in his locker.

### UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR

When a classmate isn't acting like himself, don't keep it to yourself.

If you notice any of the above, tell a teacher or administrator ASAP.

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