

**Sarah Drumm**  
**Feb 2020**

**"Before and after and now"**

I drop off my kid and cry as she walks into the school building made entirely of glass.  
There were more threats today but she insists on going to school.  
It was supposed to happen at 8am so I sit in the parking lot watching the clock... waiting.  
I watch every white male walk past my car with a backpack or a bag and wonder if he is the one.  
When the parking lot finally settles down and 8am has come and gone, I drive away, silent tears etching lines down my cheeks.  
I pray as I drive away this morning.  
I pray to Dolly Parton and her limitless positivity and hope.  
I pray to Dolly Parton, the saint of sad-ass songs and peppy anthems.

It has been more than 20 years since Columbine.  
I was a teacher before Columbine.  
I was a teacher before anyone had ever heard of Littleton.  
Back when trench coats were solely associated with creepy guys in Central Park.

Before Columbine,  
we were used to bomb threats, especially on sunny Friday afternoons.  
They were a fun excuse to get out into the sunshine.  
They happened so often that I was in the habit of grabbing my frisbee alongside my attendance book.  
We played Ultimate on the football field or walked down the red dirt road toward the cottonwood trees.

Then on April 20, 1999  
Columbine happened.  
Everything changed.  
At least I think it did.  
I must have been teaching that day.  
It would have been 9th grade English in my classroom at the end of hall.

I remember "before Columbine" and I remember "after Columbine"  
but I have no recollection of that day.  
Columbine and the immediate days following are gone.  
I wrapped it up tight and stored it somewhere very deep.  
I said no prayers.

Fast forward one year to another school shooting.  
This one across the country in Flint, Michigan.  
Two first-graders got into an argument and the next day Dedrick shot Kayla in the neck.  
She died almost instantly.  
I didn't wrap this one up and put it away.  
I remember every breath and every step I took in the days surrounding.

A few days after Kayla died, I stood on a stage at Arizona State University, looking out into a sea of faces.  
Tone the MC introduced me as "our girl from Flint."  
He asked the crowd to pause and think about the families in Flint touched by the recent tragedy.  
By the time I walked across the wide expanse of the stage, I was quietly crying.  
When I opened my mouth to talk, those tears turned into choking sobs.  
The dam of fear and heartache I had been carrying broke... moments before I took the microphone.

The crowd waited.  
Some shouted positivity toward the stage.  
Tone stood behind me and said, "You got this."  
I soaked up the support, wiped my nose on my shirtsleeve and sniffed loudly into the mike.  
That night, I was performing a sad and somewhat silly poem about the end of a long relationship.  
I borrowed the hook from Big Pun and next thing you know I was singing  
"Little brown hairs everywhere. You nasty, Twin. I don't care."

The crowd went wild  
out of relief more than any pure love for my work.  
That night I prayed to Big Pun to heal the hearts of Flint.  
I could picture the faces of Dedrick and Kayla.  
They looked just like the faces in my own classroom.  
Like Anthony and Evonne and Moises and Angelica, who insisted I call her Angie.  
I prayed to Big Pun to keep them all safe.

Years later, I am still praying.  
I am praying for students across America.  
I pray for my own two children as I drop them off to school each morning.  
That they are whole and healthy when I pick them up.  
That the adults in charge make good choices.  
That the kids who need help are getting it.  
I pray to Childish Gambino.  
I pray to America.

When I am at work and a trainer tells us to practice throwing paper wads or office supplies at someone pointing an automatic weapon,  
I need help pushing back the fears and helplessness that overwhelm me.  
I want to yell at this trainer that he is full of shit and that I am going to quit this job.  
I picture myself throwing this Swingline stapler at him.  
I pray to Milton in the basement.

I try to remember the Gospel according to Dolly.  
"Better get to livin."  
"Find out who you are and do it on purpose."  
"Storms make trees take deeper roots."  
"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."

Today, I drive away from the school made of glass and hope and pray and breath and cry and listen and learn and write and dream.  
And then I wake up and do it all over again.  
In the name of Saint Dolly, Big Pun, Donald Glover and Milton. Amen.