

“School shooting right now. I’m scared.”

“I love you.” Ethan Clark.

“The sirens are here.”

“I love you.” Abby Turner.

“We heard gunshots and police shouting.”

“I love you.” Henry Van Der Walt.

To Ethan, Abby, Henry, Mia, Nick, Aaliyah, Samantha, and a thousand other victims of school shootings; “I love you” becomes a form of goodbye.

My name is Mira Garcia, and I am a student at Lakeridge High School in Lake Oswego Oregon. I am a sister, a daughter, and a cousin. It was my cousin who fell part of the “I love you” text epidemic.

My cousin, Liliana, was 13 years old attending Stoller Middle School, when a gun threat forced her school into lockdown beginning around 11:00 am, right before lunch. Her and her friends sat in a dark classroom, huddled in a corner, dividing and savoring a granola bar to subdue their hunger. As hours went by, phone batteries depleted, stomachs rumbled, and “I love you” texts gradually increased to worried parents. It wasn’t until 9 pm that disoriented preteens were released into the arms of their families.

Hearing the absolute fear in my aunt’s voice, seeing the hesitance that plagued my cousin before she entered school in the weeks following— the realities of America hit me. Lockdown drills, which had become so normalized in my life that I had enjoyed them as a naptime, now took a serious role. We were practicing how to make ourselves as small as possible to hide from someone whose largest desire was to hurt us. Our teachers were practicing to sacrifice themselves in order to protect us.

No other country has lockdown drills in their schools. No other country has 12 children die a day from gun violence. Sending children to school should have no risk of sending them to the grave. I fear for my cousins, my brother, the 3rd graders I teach piano to, the thousands of those affected by gun violence. I implore Oregon’s legislature to keep guns from getting into the wrong hands by passing Measure 114. I beg you to do your part in saving the lives of children, families, and Americans.