Como Tú / Like You / Like Me

Richard Blanco - 1968-

(for the D.A.C.A DREAMers and all our nation's immigrants)

... my veins don’t end in me
but in the unanimous blood
of those who struggle for life . . .

... mis venas no terminan en mí
sino en la sange unánime
de los que luchan por la vida . . .

—Roque Dalton, Como tú

Como tú, I question history’s blur in my eyes each time I face a mirror. Like a mirror, I gaze into my palm a wrinkled map I still can’t read, my lifeline an unnamed road I can’t find, can’t trace back to the fork in my parents’ trek that cradled me here. Como tú, I woke up to this dream of a country I didn’t choose, that didn’t choose me—trapped in the nightmare of its hateful glares. Como tú, I’m also from the lakes and farms, waterfalls and prairies of another country I can’t fully claim either. Como tú, I am either a mirage living among these faces and streets that raised me here, or I’m nothing, a memory forgotten by all I was taken from and can’t return to again.

Like memory, at times I wish I could erase the music of my name in Spanish, at times cherish it, and despise my other syllables clashing in English. Como tú, I want to speak of myself in two languages at once. Despite my tongues, no word defines me. Like words, I read my footprints like my past, erased by waves of circumstance, my future uncertain as wind. Like the wind, como tú, I carry songs, howls, whispers, thunder’s growl. Like thunder, I’m a foreign-borne cloud that’s drifted here, I’m lightning, and the balm of rain. Como tú, our blood rains for the dirty thirst of this land. Like thirst, like hunger, we ache with the need to save ourselves, and our country from itself.
Dominique Browning and Eric Klinenberg extol the virtues of living alone. In so doing, Klinenberg correctly points out that living alone is only common in cultures where prosperity makes this arrangement economically feasible. However, this has not slowed arguments that social media is increasingly a part of these same prosperous societies, and that this new tool is responsible for a growing trend of social isolation and loss of intimacy.

Neither living alone nor using social media is socially isolating. In 2011, I was lead author of an article in Information, Communication & Society that found, based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans, that regardless of whether the participants were married or single, those who used social media had more close confidants.

The constant feed from our online social circles is the modern front porch. A recent follow-up study, “Social Networking Sites and Our Lives” (Pew Research Center), found that the average user of a social networking site had more close ties than and was half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American. Additionally, my co-authors and I, in another article published in New Media & Society, found not only that social media users knew people from a greater variety of backgrounds, but also that much of this diversity was a result of people using these technologies who simultaneously spent an impressive amount of time socializing outside of the house.

A number of studies, including my own and those of Matthew Brashears (a sociologist at Cornell), have found that Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago. However, a loss of close friends does not mean a loss of support. Because of cellphones and social media, those we depend on are more accessible today than at any point since we lived in small, village-like settlements.

Social media has made every relationship persistent and pervasive. We no longer lose social ties over our lives; we have Facebook friends forever. The constant feed of status updates and digital photos from our online social circles is the modern front porch. This is why, in “Social Networking Sites and Our Lives,” there was a clear trend for those who used these technologies to receive more social support than other people.

The data backs it up. There is little evidence that social media is responsible for a trend of isolation, or a loss of intimacy and social support.
“You’re like a cartoon character,” he said. “Always wearing the same thing every day.”

He meant it as an intimate observation, the kind you can make only after spending a lot of time getting to know each other. You flip your hair to the right. You only eat ice cream out of mugs. You always wear a black leather jacket. I know you.

And he did know me. Rather, he knew the caricature of me that I had created and meticulously cultivated. The me I broadcast to the world on Instagram and Facebook. The witty, creative me, always detached and never cheesy or needy.

That version of me got her start online as my social media persona, but over time (and I suppose for the sake of consistency), she bled off the screen and overtook my real-life personality, too. And once you master what is essentially an onstage performance of yourself, it can be hard to break character.

There was a time when I allowed myself to be more than what could fit onto a 2-by-4-inch screen. When I wasn’t so self-conscious about how I was seen. When I embraced my contradictions and desires with less fear of embarrassment or rejection.

There was a time when I swore in front of my friends and said grace in front of my grandmother. When I wore lipstick after seeing “Clueless,” and sneakers after seeing “Remember the Titans.” When I flipped my hair every way, ate ice cream out of anything, and wore coats of all types and colors.

Since then, I have consolidated that variety — scrubbed it away, really — to emerge as one consistently cool girl: one face, two arms, one black leather jacket.

And so it was a validation of sorts when Joe fell for her, the me in the leather jacket. He was brilliant, the funniest guy in our TV writing program, and my ideal cool counterpart. I could already see us on screen; we made sense.

Best of all, he thought he liked me more than I liked him, and that was perfect too, because it gave me the upper hand. I was above love, above emotional complication, dedicated to higher pursuits.

Periodically Joe would confront me about this imbalance. We would meet at a park on Second Avenue and 10th Street, and he would tell me that I drove him crazy, that he couldn’t be as removed as me.
And, of course, the truth was that I wasn’t removed at all. Over the many months we were together, as we went from being friends to more than friends, I had fallen for him completely. The singular syllable of his name had started to feel permanently tucked between my molars and was always on my mind.

But I was reluctant to change my character midseason and become someone who was more open and, God forbid, earnest about love. He had fallen for the cool, detached me, so that’s who I remained. And he got bored.

That’s the way it goes with half-hour TV shows. Consistency can become boring. The will-they-or-won’t-they characters have to get together, and at that point the show is closing in on its finale. It’s all in the build, and when that becomes tired, the show gets canceled.

Like an allergic reaction to becoming unloved, my Instagram account went into overdrive, all aimed at one audience member: Joe. Through hundreds of screens, I was screaming at him: “I’m here! I’m funny! I’m at that fish taco place I showed you!”

The likes I got from my followers did little to quell my crushing need for Joe’s cyberapproval. “Like me again, like me again,” became my subconscious mantra.

But he didn’t like me, and each time he didn’t, the heartache felt like a warm bullet exploding in my gut. I would lie on the couch and clutch my stomach so tightly it was as if I were trying to expel the shrapnel from my throat. I knew no one else could extract it for me because no one knew it was there.

I was embarrassed for the people I saw who pined publicly on Instagram, but I also envied them. They were showered with support, with reassurance. If they were not completely cured, at least the illness seemed to run a shorter course.

Meanwhile, every time I twisted my spine, I felt that warm bullet scraping my insides. I was scared it might fossilize there and become permanently embedded.

In an effort to self-soothe, I wrote letters to Joe — actual, physical letters, pen to notepad — that felt like some ancient ritual, using my whole hand and not just my thumbs. Staring at his cowlick in class, I would write down everything I wanted: for him to critique my writing, to stroke my hair while we watched “Curb Your Enthusiasm” on his ugly futon, to read his plays and believe I was moving ever closer to his core.

Rather than give him any of these letters, I burned them, trying and failing to cremate that side of myself.

Day by day, hour by hour, my Instagram feed became more manic, nasty and petulant. Posts that were once meant as romantic gestures became tiny, pixelated middle fingers.

Joe began to notice, but instead of magically falling back in love with me, he became hurt and angry. I was inexplicably cold to him, posting photos of parties I threw that he wasn’t invited to, pictures of me abroad where I hadn’t told him I was studying, and pieces of art I made but hadn’t shared with him.

In return, he sent me messages of unvarnished honesty: “Why didn’t you invite me?” “Why are you being like this?”

Oh, it’s just who I am. I am fun, I feel nothing and I have completely forgotten you.

And so it went, and I kept at the beautiful box I was crafting for myself. A shoe box covered in stickers and fake jewels. The kind you would make for a pet parakeet you have to bury. I would dream about Joe at night, and in the morning I would post something silvery and eye catching. It was always just tinfoil, though, not truth. And I prayed no one would notice.

I posted a photo of me standing next to a shirt that said “The World Shook at Adam’s bar mitzvah, 1995,” with a witty caption about simpler times, before global warming. A girl who follows me, with whom I’ve spoken only a handful of times, told me it was so “on brand.”
My brand, specifically: funny, carefree, unromantic, a realist.

I’m like the chief executive of my own company, so I’m familiar with my branding, but its success doesn’t thrill me the way it used to. Instead of feeling validated by her comment, I felt deflated. I barely know this girl, and yet she knows me, knows my “brand,” and I am overwhelmed by the desire to tell her that I am fake, that I am heartbroken.

I can’t say for certain that being more honest with my friends or broadening my “brand” to include a bit of depth, romanticism and pain would have helped. What I can say is that clinging to continuity has made my skin crawl and itch, as if I super-glued a mask over my face. I thought every day about peeling back that mask, but I couldn’t; the girl it represented was everywhere, and I feared that her insides were completely mechanized.

This year, Joe and I are in a class together, and he’s unsettled by my presence. I haven’t spoken to him in forever.

“What’s good, man?” I say with the signature casualness of cartoon me. “It’s been a minute.”

This is not the me who changed her outfit five times before arriving, who coughed repeatedly until her voice had acquired the perfect amount of rasp, who dug into her pores the night before, trying to rid her body of all signs that he was still buried there, thick and toxic under her skin.

If you spend eight years building a house (no matter how uncomfortable or ugly it may be, no matter how impractical or poorly lit), it becomes nearly impossible to knock it down. That is about how long I put into building my social media presence, into becoming the cool girl I showcase on Instagram and Facebook.

I built her without blueprints, not knowing that she would become a wall with no doors. She has stopped me from online dating, because that would mean I care about romance. She has stopped me from wearing pink, because that would mean I’m too feminine. She has stopped me from being publicly heartbroken, from sobbing on the orange subway seats, from showing up on Joe’s doorstep with the letters I wrote, because that would mean I’m not cool.

Most recently, she tried to stop me from writing this essay, from admitting to everyone that I am hurting.

I wrote it anyway, though, and that’s a start.
How do you identify yourself? And, what is the most important part of your identity? Is it your sex, your race or ethnicity, your sexual orientation, your class status, your nationality, your religious affiliation, your age, your physical or cognitive abilities, your political beliefs? Is there one part of your identity that stands out from the rest, or does your identity change depending on who you’re with, what you’re involved in, where you are in your life?

**Key Concepts**

- **Identity** is a socially and historically constructed concept. We learn about our own identity and the identity of others through interactions with family, peers, organizations, institutions, media and other connections we make in our everyday life.
- Key facets of identity—like gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, age and disability—play significant roles in determining how we understand and experience the world, as well as shaping the types of opportunities and challenges we face.
- **Social and cultural identity** is inextricably linked to issues of power, value systems, and ideology.
- The media uses representations—images, words, and characters or personae—to convey specific ideas and values related to culture and identity in society.

**Understanding Identity**

The answers to the questions above clearly depend on many factors. They prod us to think about our identities in singular terms (I am female), but also as multiple and intersecting parts (I am a Latin teenage girl from South Los Angeles). Most importantly, these questions lead us to consider the meaning of identity. Beyond “who am I?” these questions frame our individual identities in a broader social historical context and in relation to other groups. Part of understanding our identity, therefore, means understanding how we fit in (or don’t) with other groups of people. It also means being aware of the fact that some groups have more social, political, and economic power than others.

When we think about identity, we may focus on cultural markers (things like clothing) or biological and physiological markers (things like skin color); however, it’s also important to understand that our identities are comprised of shared ideas, ideologies, biases and ways of seeing the world around us. Our identities, therefore, are socially constructed, and our biological attributes are only one part of who we are.

But, where do these shared values or ideologies come from? Again, the answer is not clear-cut. In many cases, we’ve learned and internalized these values over the course of our lives from family, peers, role models, school, organizations, government, etc. The media also plays a prominent role in creating meaning, shaping our values, defining who we are, and establishing norms. These values are powerful because they generally come from places of power, but also because we internalize them and take them for granted; they seem natural and the way things should be, and in turn, shape the way we see and understand the people, objects, practices, and institutions in our lives.

Our gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, disability, religion, and age can play a significant role in determining whether or not we have social, political and economic power. While many assume that anyone can accrue social, economic and political power if they have talent, ability, and work hard (the idea of meritocracy), we also need to acknowledge the way historically ingrained prejudices are built into existing institutions and structures, and consider how they create barriers and limit opportunities.

Given the role our identity plays in the way we experience and accrue power, it’s important to understand the potential obstacles, discrimination and oppression that some groups experience over others. For some, the experience of being a particular sex or sexual orientation, from a particular racial or ethnic group or socio-
economic class, involves recurring and even systematic or institutional prejudice. This prejudice can manifest in unequal opportunities, rights, or wages, as well as being stereotyped, marginalized or persecuted.

Intersectionality is a term coined by scholar Kimberle Crenshaw to explain how individual aspects of our identities (our gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) intersect and, in turn, can shape how we’re treated, what kind of education and jobs we get, where we live, what opportunities we’re afforded, and what kind of inequities we may face.


These terms reflect beliefs that posit the superiority of one identity over another: men over women; whites over non-whites; straight over gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender; wealthy over other classes; young over old; able-bodied and mentally fit over disabled and mentally ill. Historically, the terms have been used to call attention to discrimination and bias. They further challenge ideologies that perpetuate hierarchical structures and limit a subordinate group’s opportunities and freedoms. Intersectionality offers us an additional frame to understand the way multiple systems of oppression (ie., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism) intertwine across individuals’ experiences.

Identity and the Media

The media can be both a site of change, but also fundamentally a site that perpetuates ideologies and norms. The media uses representations—images, words, and characters or personae—to convey ideas and values. Media representations, therefore, are not neutral or objective. They are constructed and play an important role in imparting ideology.

One question we might ask, then, is whether media produce ideologies or simply reflect them, mirroring what’s already happening in society. This is another difficult question to answer. The line between mirroring reality and producing reality is difficult to discern. Regardless of where ideologies originate, the media plays a key role in conveying ideas and giving them weight or power.

With the media, we tend to see the same images and representations over and over again. Media rely heavily on genres, conventions and stereotypes. As certain images and representations are repeated, they become familiar and natural. But are these representations really “natural”?

Think about what goes on behind the scenes in fictional media. Screenwriters, directors, casting agents, set and costume designers all make choices that help audiences understand who a character is and what they care about. These behind-the-scenes players use clothing, hair and makeup, the way characters speak, and how they move as shorthand in their storytelling. It’s important to look at these elements of the story, rather than take them for granted. There are also deliberate storytelling choices and frames for non-fiction storytelling (in news, documentary, “reality” programming, and advertising). It’s also important to consider whether or not a characters or representations of particular groups are complex or seem more like caricatures and stereotypes.

Understanding and critically examining the decision-making process behind a piece of media can help us see that media representations are constructed. If identities in the media are constructed, should we accept them at face value? Or can we (should we) question them? And, even change them, and create our own identities?

Read the overviews on gender, race and ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, age and disability to get a better idea of the way values and meanings are specifically tied to each of these individual facets of our identities. The overviews serve as building blocks to frame the media examples on this website. Each media example and the accompanying questions, in turn, prompt you to dig deep and critically think about the way media creates meanings, values, and expectations tied to our identities. After learning how to critically analyze the media, we hope you’ll explore some of the suggestions for making your own media and telling stories about your own identity.
Note that most of the media examples and the overviews are written from an American perspective or vision of the world. Once you familiarize yourself with the critical tools to analyze identity in the media, you can apply your knowledge and approach to any number of examples, including media from across the globe.
“Parkland: A Year After the School Shooting That Was Supposed to Change Everything,” The New York Times, Patricia Mazzei, February 13, 2019

Those at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School knew their lives would be transformed by the massacre. Many had no idea of the many ways that would happen.

PARKLAND, Fla. — The name “Parkland” has become a shorthand for the tragedy that many hoped would mark the beginning of the end of school massacres.

But ask the survivors of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in more quiet moments about the awful year since last Feb. 14, and they tell you a different, more personal story. About innocence lost. Dreams undone. Grief delayed.

There’s the boy who took five bullets to protect his classmates. A hero, the headlines proclaimed. He wanted to be a professional soccer player. “Now I don’t do anything,” he said.

There’s the young woman who tells people about her best friend, because if she calls him her boyfriend, it doesn’t seem sufficient to convey what they were. Soul mate: That’s what he’d told her she was to him. Told her before he died.

And there are the famous faces, the students everyone thinks they know, who on a recent morning stood at a nearby elementary school where a local charity quietly unveiled a mural, the last of 17 community service projects created to honor each of the victims. David Hogg, the one who went on CNN and dared adults to act like one, lay on a basketball court and painted in a hibiscus flower. Emma González, the one who “called B.S.” on politicians who weren’t serious about gun control, crouched barefoot before the wall, cut out a paper stencil and sang along to the Beatles’ song, “Here Comes The Sun.”

To think of them, and of this upscale suburban high school, as mere symbols of tragedy ignores the complicated tapestry of sadness, fear and defiance that is now forever part of it — and will be long after the last of these students graduate.

In a series of interviews, nine members of the Stoneman Douglas community — students, parents, police, teachers — reflected on the past 12 months.

They did not want to relive that day. They did not want to argue about politics. They did not want to talk about the gunman’s pending trial for capital murder.

This is what they wanted to do: mourn.

In all the activity of the past year, the March for Our Lives rally in Washington, the tour across the country registering voters, the investigations, the hearings, finishing senior year, getting into college — some said they hadn’t had time to take the measure of what they had lost. As Jammal Lemy, 21, a Stoneman Douglas alumnus-turned-activist explained it, “We just had so much going on.”

These are their stories, in their own words.

Anthony Borges, 16

The five bullet wounds he took as he barricaded a classroom door to protect other students have healed, remarkably. But his recovery is far from over. And the prospect of being asked to testify in court looms in the future.

I haven’t gone back to school because I haven’t seen a change. The security failed. They need to put in metal detectors. I am being home-schooled. But I would like to go to another school someday.
People ask me what happened, what made me do what I did. I say I have always been strong.

The best moment for me was when I was able to walk by myself. The doctor told me, “You can walk a little now, without crutches.” So one day I was home and thought, “O.K., I can do this.” I stood up and started limping. I walked into a room and my grandpa and my grandma and my mom and dad were there, and they burst out crying.

I was proud of myself. I had thought maybe I wouldn’t walk again. But I went to physical therapy every day. Now I just have to get my strength back. I can’t even lift weights yet.

My life is not normal. It will never be like before. I used to get out of school and go play soccer. All I wanted was to play soccer professionally. I played forward. Now I don’t do anything.

Today I gave a deposition in the criminal case. The defense attorneys asked me about the death penalty. I said I’m against it. I’ve always thought that, because that is a capital sin. I am not God to take someone’s life.

Anna Crean, 16

Now a sophomore, she was inside the freshman building where the shooting took place. Her lab partner, Alyssa Alhadeff, was killed. So were two of her creative-writing classmates. During the interview, loud squawks from birds flying overhead made her jumpy.

When I was in seventh grade, a teacher told us Parkland was a bubble. She said, “Someday, something bad’s going to happen here, and the bubble’s going to burst.” I remember I kept thinking about that afterward. Like, wow, she was right. I don’t feel safe anywhere anymore.

I have PTSD. The hardest part are sudden noises. Fourth of July, I was at camp, and I wasn’t expecting fireworks to go off, but they did. I had a panic attack. In school, a few freshmen have tried to pull pranks on us. They drop textbooks and film our reactions. We have monthly code-red drills. I’ve skipped probably three of them. It’s a constant reminder, every time, of the shooting.

Me and my three best friends, we’re the only ones that understand each other. One day they released a bunch of video footage from the shooting. We watched it together. Every time something gets put out there, people get very upset, but people need to see it.

The March for Our Lives in Washington was probably one of the coolest experiences of my life. We met Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi. I got to make a bunch of new friends. I wish I had never had those opportunities, though.

Since the shooting, Parkland student activists have been on the road registering voters and talking about all forms of gun violence.

We’re not all loud activists. A lot of us want to go back and finish our high school career the best we can. For college, I want to go to Ireland, where my parents are from, because I just don’t want to do four more years of schooling here. I really don’t like how divided this country is. In Ireland, there’s no guns.

Lt. Nicholas Mazzei, 46, and Capt. Brad Mock, 43

The Coral Springs police officers — who have been friends for more than 25 years — were among the first emergency personnel to enter the freshman building. Their counterparts at the Broward Sheriff’s Office were criticized for failing to try to confront the gunman.

LIEUTENANT MAZZEI: What we had to walk into, what we lived through, what we saw — it was overwhelming. When you’re in there, you don’t realize the magnitude of it. Then, obviously, sleep became an issue. I went to go fishing, and it was too much down time. I just remember a lot of sighing that day.
There was a day of healing at the park for emergency medical workers and families. They had questions for us that they could not answer: “Who was the last person to see my loved one?”

CAPTAIN MOCK: It helped me, having conversations with kids and teachers that I couldn’t have in the building.

LIEUTENANT MAZZEI: Not a single day goes by that you don’t think of some aspect of that day. I didn’t drive by the school for a while after.

CAPTAIN MOCK: I graduated from Douglas, class of ’93. Wow, I have so many great memories there. You look at it different now.

LIEUTENANT MAZZEI: We went to a sergeant’s house to hang out. We just sat there and talked about it for hours, about what people saw, so the wives and husbands could understand everything. Many of us thought we were getting into a gunfight and weren’t sure we were all coming out.

The funerals were tough. Two, three a day. One thing I was really impressed by was when the kids did the walkouts.

CAPTAIN MOCK: The work never stopped. We never got that break to reflect. But there were many venues for people to get things off their chest. We’ve had meetings, depositions and hearings. In the end, the entire truth is coming out.

Jammal Lemy, 21

The 2017 Stoneman Douglas graduate co-founded the March for Our Lives organization after the shooting, though he is not among the group’s well-known leaders. He left college to help with merchandising, but became the organization’s creative director after he designed a T-shirt that could be scanned with a cellphone to register someone to vote.

I still haven’t grieved. We just had so much going on. I don’t want to think of the day my life changed. Thursday is going to be like a train: It’s all going to hit.

When you’re on the road, people look at you like a leader. It’s physically exhausting, and you don’t want to burn out. We toured 60-plus cities in 60 days. We’ve seen the high and low of America. It forces a lot of soul-searching. Almost every day I think to myself, “Wow, look where we’ve come.” It was my first time being away from my family for an extended period of time. Before, I had been on an airplane maybe three times.

I created T-shirts with QR codes for people to register to vote. We told people we want all the kids in the country to be wearing these shirts, and we had people tell us, “You can’t. You’ve got to have realistic hopes and dreams.” Well, we have lofty goals! I was at a concert, and I saw a random person wearing this T-shirt. Those are the small victories. We had the largest youth turnout in 25 years — but it was still only 31 percent.

I left college because you have to choose what’s more important. I want to use my talents and abilities to change the world somehow. That’s what I want to be remembered for, more than a grade-point average.

Tori Gonzalez, 18

She’s a senior whose boyfriend, Joaquin Oliver, known as Guac, was killed in the shooting, months before he was expected to graduate. Only in December did she take what she considered the first step toward healing: planting a memorial garden at the school to commemorate the lives lost. She keeps the flowers Joaquin gave her last Valentine’s Day—his “last act of love,” she calls them— in a vase.

After graduation, I’m taking a gap year. I need a break. I am looking to volunteer abroad. I might go to Africa — I was supposed to go with Joaquin. I just want to get out of here for a while.
His best friend took me to prom. They totally ruined it: In the middle of the party, they played a slide show of the seniors who would have been there. You could see everyone fall to the ground and cry. That kind of scarred me. At the beginning of this school year, I didn’t talk to anyone. One time, this girl was just staring at me. Nobody knows what to say. It is so uncomfortable.

I’m wearing his sweatshirt. I wear it all the time. I’m going to sound really cheesy, but from the moment we met I knew I was going to spend my life with him. He was never my boyfriend. He said, “I hope you know you’re not my girlfriend. You’re my soul mate.” I know I’m just a kid and kids don’t know any better, but that was the purest form of love that there is. I’m so thankful that I had that, even if it was for such a short time.

Last year I was very sick at this time, and Joaquin was like, “I really hope you feel better by Valentine’s Day.” That day was the first day I went back to school. I’m really glad that I saw him that morning. That morning was probably the best day that we had together.

Manuel Oliver, 51, and Patricia Oliver, 52

Like many other parents, Joaquin Oliver’s mother and father have become dedicated activists since their son’s death. One of them was elected to the local school board. While the families don’t all share the same political views, they stay in touch and occasionally meet, knowing they are bound by the pain of losing a child.

MR. OLIVER: We have a lot of sad moments that we keep for ourselves. People don’t know that I cry a lot. I sometimes find myself lost in life. And then I end up understanding that my son is not going to be back — as much as I cry, that’s not going to happen.

Everything that I see in the house relates to Joaquin. But I also miss my grown-up son, the one I will never have — the one that will go to college, get married, have kids. As a father, you have dreams. You see yourself as an old person, hanging out with your kids. That is not something that I can do anymore.

What happened to Joaquin happens every single day. This is not about Joaquin only. This is not about Parkland only. This is not about Florida only.

MS. OLIVER: There is no rule to follow. There is no book to read. Sometimes you have the best attitude, and other days you have to just get through it, and at the end of the day, you’re just destroyed. To deal with my emptiness, I watch videos. I look at pictures. It helps me, seeing Joaquin alive — smiling, joking, talking.

I feel Joaquin every single second. It was kind of raining a little while ago and I said, “Don’t worry, it’s not going to rain. Because Joaquin is going to take care of it.” And he answered, because look, it’s sunny again.

Today I met a girl who was in his classroom that day. I hadn’t had a chance to talk to her before, and at least now I know that they didn’t close the door on him. Because that was one of my concerns: that one of the screams they heard in the moment was him saying, “Help! Help!” But she told me no. That brings me peace of mind.

Sarah Lerner, 38

An English and journalism teacher and yearbook adviser at Stoneman Douglas, she compiled stories from shooting survivors into a book. Two of her students, Jaime Guttenberg and Meadow Pollack, were killed.

I went to the cemetery on Sunday. The first place I went to was Meadow. I just got out of the car, and I lost it. I was ugly crying. I apologized for what happened to her. I told Jaime that my daughter, Hannah, dedicates her competitive dances to her.

On Rosh Hashana I asked my rabbi if it would be O.K. to say Kaddish, the memorial prayer. I didn’t want to be disrespectful to those whose immediate family member had died. He’s like, “Of course it’s appropriate, Sarah. They
meant so much to you.” It was just so awful, to say it for people who shouldn’t have gone so young and shouldn’t have
gone that way.

Last night I got a call from a former student. It was almost 11 and she texted me, “Are you up?” She’s isolated because
she’s far from home, and she hasn’t had a second to stop and process. She calls me “Mom.” That’s the relationship I
have with these kids.

I can’t see myself teaching anywhere else. I feel safe at school. But it’s going to be a very heavy few days. On Thursday,
I’m going to get a massage and get my nails done and have lunch with my brother and try not to watch the news. I just
need to be.