

NOW YOU *see me* FINDING A STRENGTH



Ysolina shared photos of her and her friends from her school in Florida at their ROTC military ball and her Vista friends out for lunch one day.

In February of 2018, a public high school in Parkland, Florida experienced a traumatic event, a school shooting. One of Vista's students attended that school. **Ysolina Hartzell, 12**, was able to discuss her experience and growth from the moments that changed her life forever, and this is her story.

"It was like a normal Wednesday," explains Ysolina. "Valentine's Day... It was 20 minutes before we were supposed to get out. I remember that because I kept looking at the clock and I just wanted to get out of there." All of a sudden the fire alarm went off. "It was weird for us because 'Oh school is about to end, why are we having a drill that's kind of weird,' but again, everyone really thought 'Culinary, they probably set it off,'" for it was not uncommon for someone to burn something in that class and set off the alarm.

As everyone was leaving the class, Ysolina heard one of her friends scream and she saw one of the security campus security guards pull out his gun and saw him running the other way. A few seconds later she saw students running from the other direction and teachers started yelling for students to get back inside. "I was just pulling my friends from my class back inside. The sad part is that we couldn't hold the door open for long. I remember a couple of my friends and I had to remove my teacher from the door so we could close it and lock it. She really wanted to hold the door open for everyone." They still thought it was a drill and Ysolina held two of her best friends and reassured them that it was going to be fine. "They were planning to have a school shooting drill," explains Ysolina.

"They were going to have someone come on campus and shoot blanks and they wanted to see how we would react, so it was pretty confusing at that point."

She tried contacting her parents, but it was hard to get in touch because of everyone in the school trying to contact their friends and family. "I remember texting all my friends [to make sure everyone was okay], I got a text message from everyone but [my friend] Alaina." She also sent a text to her mom saying "stay safe [and] if something happens look after dad and Sammy." She didn't believe there was really a school shooter until another friend of hers, who had jumped the fence and gotten off of the campus, called her and told her there was a shooter at their school. One of her classmates was able to pull up the live news feed when Ysolina learned who the shooter was she was in disbelief, for she knew him personally. **"It was a dream you wanted to wake up from."**

The next day she saw the list of those who had died that day. Three of her friends were on that list. She now has PTSD, and those first few weeks after the shooting were especially difficult for Ysolina. "I was thinking about giving up, but I guess I just wasn't ready. Something in me that kind of told me that 'You shouldn't do it,' that 'Right now you need to honor your friends and you need to

keep living for them.' They didn't get to live their dreams but if you get to your kind of saying 'Hey, **I'm living my life for you.**'"

After moving to Colorado, she found a new psychologist and began to crack down on her PTSD and mental health. She originally attended Doherty High School, but decided to transfer to Vista after feeling out of place there. Now, she has a supportive friend group here at Vista. "I still have those moments where I feel like I'm back in the situation that I was in Parkland, but because of my friends I don't really stay there for long....[They] really helped me feel like I'm okay, like I'm a normal person now, and that's what I've been wanting to look for. Ysolina decided to share her story as a way to inspire others and show that this was a period of growth for her. This is a part of her story, but it does not define her. "I want to inspire other people, to say you shouldn't give up... you need to keep going because it will get better eventually, it will... but you have to push yourself to make it better. You have to say 'I want to make it better,' and then you have to do it....find a strength to push you through everything.

**I'm still here, and
I'm not giving up."**