



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 19, 2018

Published in the March 19, 2018 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 34, No. 06

Goodness of America

Heroes of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

On February 14, a day in which most people celebrate love, a great evil took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Seventeen students and teachers lost their lives at the hands of a cowardly gunman who does not deserve to have his name mentioned. And while the entire nation mourns the loss of innocent lives, there were also heroes who emerged that day who deserve recognition.

Among them is Aaron Feis, the school's assistant football coach and security guard, who witnesses say threw himself in front of students to shield them from bullets. Feis died later that day during surgery.

Football coach Willis May told the *Orlando Sentinel* that Feis responded to the initial call on the school's security radio walkie-talkies. May recalls that when someone on the radio suggested the gunshots may have been firecrackers, Feis responded, "No, that is not firecrackers." That was the last the staff on the radio heard from him.

According to the school's spokeswoman, Denise Legtio, Feis died as he lived: "a very kind soul ... a hero." Feis leaves behind a wife and a daughter.

Geography teacher Scott Beigel, 35, opened the door of his classroom to let in a group of students who were attempting to escape the gunman. One student, Kelsey Friend, told *Good Morning America* that the gunman attempted to enter the classroom, but Beigel stood in the gunman's way and attempted to relock the door to the classroom. The gunman shot him dead right on the spot.

"Mr. Beigel was my hero and he still will forever be my hero," high-school freshman Friend told CNN on February 15. "I will never forget the actions that he took for me and for the fellow students of the classroom.... I am alive today because of him."

Students told CNN that an unnamed janitor saved the lives of at least 40 students during the shooting by stopping them after she saw them unknowingly running toward the gunman instead of away from him. Student David Hogg recalled to CNN that the janitor then ushered the students into a culinary classroom for safety.

"Without her, who knows how many of us would have died, 'cause we were easily 100 feet away from the freshman building, and again, we thought this was a drill," Hogg told the ABC13.

"She saved my life, and she saved easily 40 others there," Hogg said.

Colton Haab, a 17-year-old Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps student, jumped into action after hearing gunshots. He told CNN he led over 60 students to safety in a JROTC classroom, where he instructed students to use Kevlar sheets as shelter.

"We took those sheets, and we put them in front of everybody so they weren't seen, because they were behind a solid object and the Kevlar would slow the bullet down," Haab said. "I didn't think it was going to stop it, but it would definitely slow it down to make it from a catastrophic to a lifesaving thing."

Haab told CNN he and a friend were preparing to fight the gunman if he tried to enter the room. "I was a little scared. I was more worried about getting home safe, making sure everybody got home safe," he said. "God forbid, if he did come into the classroom. I didn't want that to happen, but if it did, I would



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try to stop him with another friend of mine that was with us.”

“We grabbed two pieces of two-by-four, a fire extinguisher and a chair,” Haab told Reuters. “We were going to try to stop him with whatever we had.”

Thankfully, the students in the JROTC room did not have to face the gunman.

When asked what was going through his mind during these trying moments, he responded, “I’m thinking about how I’m going to make sure everyone goes home to their parents safely.”

“I want to eventually join the military so that’s just my mindset that I was just going to try to help as many people,” he added. “I just wish I could help more.”

Two teachers are being honored for managing to hide as many children as possible.

Culinary teacher Ashley Kurth, 34, told the Daily Beast that she began grabbing students as they were running out of the freshman building. After approximately 90 seconds of this, she shut the door and got everybody to the storage area and into her office. She managed to hide about 65 students and colleagues.

Another teacher, Melissa Falkowski, somehow managed to hide 19 students in a closet with her, where they remained for 30 minutes until SWAT officers arrived.

“We sort of huddled in the corner for a few minutes and then I made the decision to move everyone to the closet,” she told CNN. “You try to do the best you can for the kids you are supposed to keep safe.”

And while the school’s remaining staff are not named here, it’s important to honor all of those who barricaded their classrooms to protect students during the shooting and tried to keep them calm.

The death toll at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School makes this shooting the third-worst school shooting in recent U.S. history, after Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook. A total of 17 were killed and 15 were injured.

While the victims’ families are struggling with the emotional turmoil the shooting has caused, they will at least be free of the financial struggles that funeral expenses might have created. Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi has announced that her office will pay for the funeral expenses of the victims. “We will pay for the funeral expenses of these poor victims and we’ll do everything we can to help their families. The state of Florida, we will pay for counseling for the surviving victims. We will pay for students who need counseling,” Bondi said during a news conference Wednesday evening.

While the gunman does not deserve the satisfaction of having his name spread across the media, the victims deserve mention: Alyssa Alhadeff, 14; Scott Beigel, 35; Martin Duque Anguiano, 14; Nicholas Dworet, 17; Aaron Feis, 37; Jaime Guttenberg, 14; Christopher Hixon, 49; Luke Hoyer, 15; Cara Loughran, 14; Gina Montalto, 14; Joaquin Oliver, 17; Alaina Petty, 14; Meadow Pollack, 18; Helena Ramsay, 17; Alex Schachter, 14; Carmen Schentrup, 16; and Peter Wang, 15. May God rest your souls and be with your families.

— Raven Clabough



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