

The night before the shooting I couldn't sleep. I woke up at three AM, and then time slowly slipped away to four, then five, then six, as I watched the morning sunlight cast stripes on my wall from the window shades. If I didn't go back to sleep by seven, I told myself, I would walk up to Squirrel Hill and go to Shul.

At 12 PM someone was shaking me, and I heard my name being called, muffled like I was under water, but I could still hear the urgency in the voice. I sat up, and saw my RA standing over me.

"There was a shooting in Squirrel Hill," she said. "A shooting at a Synagogue."

There are no words to describe my feelings then, when I thought of my friends who go with me to Shul every week, when I thought of their bodies and bullets and blood.

"What Synagogue?" I said.

"I don't know," she told me. "There are some people here for you downstairs." With her by my side I sprinted down the hallway. We took the elevator down. I never ride elevators on Shabbat, but I didn't even notice. Instead I was racking my brain, trying to remember which of my friends had mentioned plans to go to Synagogue last night during our Friday night prayers and dinner.

The elevator door opened, and there were my friends. Someone ran at me and wrapped their arms around me, and I looked at their faces one by one, and with a sinking stomach saw who was there and who was not.

We sat in a circle on the floor in front of the elevators, and they told me what had happened. A shooting, at Tree of Life. One of my friends had been in another nearby Synagogue, but when she saw the police cars and bomb squads and endless ambulances, she took a bus back to campus. Another one of my friends was at a different Synagogue. He did not have his phone with him, because he is Shomer Shabbat, so no one knew if he was okay. Everyone else stayed on campus.

Together, we walked to AEPI, the Jewish Fraternity near the center of campus, where the Jewish students were gathering. There was a police car posted outside. We knocked on the door, and someone peered through the shut curtains. "It's us," one of my friends said, and the door opened.

We were met with a sea of blank, hollowed faces. Everyone was there: the religious students, the non-religious, some students I didn't even know were Jewish, some non-Jewish friends there for support. Some people got up from their chairs and silently hugged us. We mingled, exchanging embraces and empty, comforting words. I added each face to my list of people who were safe.

I sat with two friends on the couch at the edge of the room, separated from the clusters of students gathered around the tables, talking and crying. For hours we sat in silence on that couch, staring at the walls, lost in our own thoughts.

Eventually, some students pulled out a board game from the closet, and tried to stave away the fear and horror. The game was quiet, and their sporadic laughter was empty and forced.

One friend needed to get something from her dorm nearby, and I walked with her. While waiting for a gap in the cars to cross the street, I asked the question that had been churning through my mind but I didn't dare to ask: "Did anybody die?"

"Yes," she told me. "Eleven people. More are injured."

"Oh."

Until then, no one had mentioned death. In my mind I had not thought seriously about the possibility that people were dead, except for my initial fears about my friends. After those were assuaged, though, I assumed without thinking that everyone must be okay, because my friends were okay. But I was wrong. People were dead.

When I got back to AEPI I asked my friend to borrow her phone. I had never, not even once in my life, used a phone on Shabbat. Using my friend's facebook account, I texted my best friend, who is not Jewish, and told her I was alive.

I felt sick afterwards. It was Shabbat. A day of rest, a day of peace, of laughter and singing and joy. And it was taken from us.

When Shabbat ended, I retrieved my phone from my apartment. Shabbat in Boston, my hometown, ended a half hour after Shabbat ended in Pittsburgh, so I couldn't call my parents yet. I passed the time by scrolling through text after text from friends and family, answering "Are you safe?" over and over. "Yes, thank God I am safe. Yes, thank God I am safe." I was glad no one had asked if I was okay; I wasn't sure how I would answer that.

Finally I called my mother. She answered on the first ring. She was crying. "I knew you were alive because Lisa saw you on CNN," she told me. I had no idea when I had been on TV, or how. Maybe at the Havdalah ceremony, where there was a man with a large camera videoing us standing in a circle, holding hands and singing the prayer at the conclusion of Shabbat. I thanked God for that small miracle on this horrible, miracle-less day.

The next morning I walked with my best friend to the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial. Hundreds of people spilled from the entrance onto the platform and stairs in front of the building. It was raining, so we both huddled under my small umbrella, and in the sea of people I stood alone and listened to the raindrops hit hundreds of umbrellas in a quiet symphony of mourning.

During the National Anthem I did not cry, but then we sang Hatikvah and I cried for the first time since the shooting. "Od lo avda tikvateinu, hatikvah bat sh'not alpayim," we sang. *Our hope is not yet lost, our hope is two thousand years old.* The voices rose around me, and I was lifted away from the thousands of aching faces, through the raindrops and up into the clouds.

The next morning I went to work at 8 AM. People were jogging on treadmills, stretching, and lifting weights as if everything were normal. I felt sick.

In history class, my first of the morning, my professor spoke about the shooting for a few minutes, offering comforting words. I stared at the wall and ignored him. It was for the other

students, the ones who were able to continue their lives as normal with only a few words of consolation. It was not for me. I was separate from them, other.

Walking to my next class I heard students talking about their lunch plans and their homework and their classes. Some students were laughing. I felt far away, like I was watching everyone on campus go about their lives while I was observing from above, drifting aimlessly like a helium balloon caught in the wind.

On Tuesday night we painted the fence. At midnight, around a hundred students converged on the fence in the middle of campus, wearing old t-shirts and stained pants. Someone had brought paint and brushes, and we painted over the glowing yellow coat with thick swipes of black paint. After the coats of black paint dried we dipped our hands in white paint and then pressed them against the side of the fence, a proud statement: we are here. Somehow speakers appeared, and someone found a playlist of Jewish music. In the dark we laughed and sang along to old songs I hadn't heard for years and I knew that somehow things would be okay.