

DAWN AND MARY

Early one morning several teachers and staffers at a grade school are in a meeting. The meeting goes for about five minutes when the teachers and the staffers hear a chilling sound in the hallway. *We heard pop pop pop*, said one of the staffers later.

Most of the teachers and the staffers dove under the table. That is the reasonable thing to do and that is what they were trained to do and that is what they did.

But two of the staffers jumped, or leapt, or lunged out of their chairs, and ran toward the bullets. *Jumped* or *leapt* or *lunged* — which word you use depends on which news account of that morning you read. But the words all point in the same direction — toward the bullets.

One of the staffers was the principal. Her name was Dawn. She had two daughters. Her husband had proposed to her five times before she said yes and finally she said yes and they had been married for ten years. They had a cabin on a lake. She liked to get down on her knees to work with the littlest kids in her school.

The other staffer was named Mary. She had two daughters. She was a crazy football fan. She had been married for thirty

years. They had a cabin on a lake. She loved to go to the theater. She was going to retire in one year. She liked to get down on her knees to work in her garden.

The principal told the teachers and the staffers to lock the door behind her and the other staffer and the teachers and the staffers did that. Then Dawn and Mary ran out into the hall.

You and I have been in that hallway. You and I spent years in that hallway. It's friendly and echoing and when someone



opens the doors at the end of the hallway a wind comes and flutters through all the kids' paintings and posters on the tile walls. Some of the tiles are clay self-portraits by kindergarten kids. Their sculptures were baked in a kiln and glued to the walls and every year there are more portraits, and pretty soon every tile on these walls will have a kid's face, and won't that be cool?

The two women jumped, or leapt, or lunged, toward the bullets. Every fiber in their bodies, bodies descended from millions of years of bodies leaping away from danger, must have wanted to dive under the table. That's what you are supposed to do. That's what you are trained to do. That's how you live another day. That's how you stay alive to paint with the littlest kids and work in the garden and hug your daughters and drive off laughing to your cabin on the lake.

But they leapt for the door, and the principal said *lock the door after us*, and they lunged right at the boy with the rifle.

The next time someone says the word *hero* to you, you say this: There once were two women. One was named Dawn and the other was named Mary. They both had two daughters. They both loved to kneel down to care for small holy beings. They leapt out of their chairs and they ran right at the boy with the rifle, and if we ever forget their names, if we ever forget the wind in that hallway, if we ever forget what they did, if we ever forget how there is something in us beyond sense and reason that snarls at death and runs roaring at it to defend children, if we ever forget that all children are our children, then we are fools who allowed memory to be murdered too, and what good are we then? *What good are we then?* □

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