

## KATHLEEN CLIFTON AND FRIENDS

This is my friend Kathleen Clifton—or, at least, this is what I imagine Kathleen would do if a shooter entered her room. (By the way,) Kathleen was Teacher of the Year, clearly for a reason. She teaches Child Development, which is a mix of preschool kids and high school kids, whom she mentors as their teachers. She is also a motivational running coach. And the kids *love* her.

In fact, it was Kathleen who gave me the pep talk the morning I tore my ACL. The conversation went something like this. Me: “Kathleen, I got a big game tonight. The other team is the Ocean Township High School varsity soccer team that graduated last year. We beat them by one goal last time.” (This is over at Goodsports in Wall.) This is Kathleen:

(Lean in on elbow.)

“You wanna win? You wanna win?! You make those motherfuckers beat you. You don’t beat yourself. I don’t want you coming in tomorrow morning, ‘Oh, we beat ourselves.’” I walk in three days later with an immobilizer on my knee and crutches. Kathleen: “So, I guess you didn’t win.” Mostly true story. Anyway, that’s the kind of person Kathleen is. So, a shooter walks into her class, I imagine he’s in for something like this.

(Lean in on elbow.)

“A machine gun? Are you kidding me? Are you fucking kidding me? You don’t have a grenade? Real good. Real thought out. Real effort. You’re probably gonna want me to give you an A, right? I’m not giving you an A. This is garbage.

You’re gonna kill little kids? (Clap.) Big man! Good job. (Point with two fingers.) Real proud of you.

Oh, oh, you're gonna tell your mommy? (Finger pinch.) You want their snacks too? You want a juice box?

Don't cry. Don't cry. There's no crying in here.

(Wag finger.)

You're big enough to come in here with an automatic rifle, you're old enough not to cry. Okay?

I don't wanna hear it.

Oh, what? You're gonna say, Mrs. Clifton was mean? You gonna tell your therapist? You wanna go talk to your guidance counselor?

You know what?, go home. Get out of here. I got nothing else to say to you. You, you, you, you make me sick.

(Wave with back of hand.)

Gimme that.”

And she would toss the gun on her desk and would go right back to teaching. And the high school kids would be like, “Yo, Mrs. Clifton, how did you just do that? You had that kid crying!”

And Kathleen would be like, “What? He's a kid. Just like any other kid. All kids are scared of the same stuff. Everybody wants to be liked. Everybody wants to feel safe. That's our job. That's what you're here to learn. To figure out how to help these kids...Okay. Who's

presenting their lesson today? And don't forget, I've got a gun on my desk now, and I'm not afraid to use it."

Then there's Regina Luisi. She's this real tiny thing. English teacher. Says that if the shooter breaks the glass pane in the door and reaches in for the handle, she would cut his hand off with a machete...I guess she has a machete secreted in her room by the door.

One sensible thing—and this is real—one of the football coaches was in my room during a live lockdown and evacuation drill—with police and people yelling in the hallway and fake blood and the whole shebang—big mother fucker—he moved a cabinet in front of the door—of *all* the people who might stand a chance, this guy looks like a marine—he blocks the door and hides. No heroics—just the football mentality of “you *hold* them at 14, and we'll score *more* than 14.” It is a winning philosophy, but it assumes casualty.

Perhaps this says something. About the reality and fantasy teachers have. That *I* have. Of the situation.

Thanks for letting me use your stories.