

HEATHER MARTIN



Almost ten years ago, I began my second career as a high school English teacher. Though the road was certainly not easy, I love looking back and unearthing how it has impacted my teaching.

In 1999, I was a senior in high school, two days away from my 18th birthday when the shooting occurred at Columbine High School on April 20th. After barricading in a small office for three hours, a SWAT group rescued me and the other students. I returned home physically uninjured, but the effects of the trauma I had experienced that day continued to impact me in the following years. While I initially enrolled in college, it wasn't long before I dropped out, unable to cope with constantly being blindsided by triggers, not having others to talk to about my experience, and continuously minimizing my trauma, convincing myself always that someone else had it worse.

For years I worked multiple jobs to try and keep my brain busy, and only found acceptance ten years after the Columbine shooting when I reunited with others from my graduating class. It was there that I discovered that I wasn't alone, and that I was not the only one struggling. I began to find power in sharing my story and in hearing the stories of others. From there, I re-enrolled in college and earned my degree in English and my teaching license.

I love teaching almost as much as I love reading. For so many years I felt lost and disconnected, but in sharing stories I found that I was not alone. This changed the trajectory of my healing, and it is through reading and building relationships that made all the difference for me

I often get asked if I always wanted to be a teacher, but for a long time I didn't truly remember my plans for the future given the trauma I had experienced. However, one year I was flipping through my old senior yearbook and she found a note from my senior English teacher that read: "I hope you major in English -- you would make a terrific teacher. The kids would love you." So, now I answer:

Yes, turns out I did! I just took a few detours.

Currently, I teach seniors and am the yearbook adviser in Aurora, CO as well as a national public speaker who advocates for informed responses to trauma through the lenses of both a teacher and a survivor.

