

UW-Madison: Author, student tell of movement generated by Parkland shooting in Go Big Read event

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MADISON – On Feb. 14, 2018, students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida arose and went to school like it was a normal day. But the day was anything but normal. During fourth period, a 19-year-old former student walked into school and began firing bullets, killing 17 students and teachers.

What happened next was unexpected: Stoneman Douglas students like Jaclyn Corin took matters into their own hands and created the March for Our Lives campaign, a nationwide movement seeking to end gun violence.

Dave Cullen, an American journalist, captured the inspiring story in his 2019 best-selling book, “Parkland: Birth of a Movement.” The book is this year’s choice for Go Big Read, UW-Madison’s common reading program.

Cullen and Corin discuss the book and the March for Our Lives movement in a virtual keynote available Oct. 7.

Corin recalled a key moment on the day after the shooting. “Baking in my fury and sadness, I realized I needed to do something productive with my fear.” She made a Facebook post about the need for gun safety, and that led to her organizing a lobbying trip to the Florida Legislature, which in turn led to organizing the March for Our Lives event in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere.

A new movement had been born, and Corin was one of the leaders. She helped unite more than 2 million people in 900 marches around the world during the 2018 rallies. Corin, a sophomore at Harvard University, is studying government and

global health and remains active planning events for March for Our Lives.

The book is being discussed in nearly 100 UW-Madison courses and groups, as well as in virtual conversations being held by public libraries in Madison and surrounding communities.

“As in past years, this book unites the campus in a shared reading experience,” Chancellor Rebecca Blank says. “This is a compelling story about responding to tragedy with activism and purpose. That has lessons for us about how to respond to other crises, whether a global pandemic or a demand for racial justice.”

Other campus opportunities to discuss Parkland include:

-UW-Madison’s Residential Learning Communities are sponsoring a panel discussion on students as catalysts in long-term change in late October.

-The Chazen Museum of Art is offering Canvas curricular modules intended to build students’ critical thinking skills: “Activism through Art” and “Resiliency and Surviving Trauma.”

-Wisconsin Speech and Debate will be holding a speech competition on the topic to encourage students to generate vigorous discussions and exchanges of diverse ideas

Cullen suffered from PTSD after covering the Columbine High School shooting several years earlier in Colorado, in which 15 were killed. “I said I would never go back right into the scene of a crime of something like this,” he says. But he became invigorated by the movement generated by Parkland students and by their stories. “The morning after Parkland, what was happening was already so amazing.”

“I thank you guys for what you do,” he tells Corin in the video. “It’s your story and you guys made it happen.”

The Go Big Read Program began in 2009 and is sponsored by the Office of the Chancellor. For more information, visit <https://gobigread.wisc.edu>.

Previous Go Big Read books include “The Poison Squad” by Deborah Blum, “The Death and Life of the Great Lakes” by Dan Egan, “Hillbilly Elegy” by J.D. Vance, “Evicted” by Matthew Desmond, “I Am Malala” by Malala Yousafzai and “A Tale for the Time Being” by Ruth Ozeki.