

# Daughters Of Slain Teacher React To Book By Columbine Shooter's Mom

BY ANDREA DUKAKIS/CPR NEWS

FEB 25, 2016



Coni and Angela Sanders at the CPR studios Thursday, Feb. 25, 2015.

(Hart Van Denburg/CPR News)

Coni and Angela Sanders, whose father Dave Sanders was fatally shot during the 1999 attack at Columbine High School, have different views about the release of Sue Klebold's new book. Klebold, whose son Dylan was one of the Columbine gunmen, wrote a "A Mother's Reckoning" to explore mental health issues.

Coni Sanders has empathy for Sue Klebold and applauds her work in suicide prevention. Angela Sanders thinks the book gives too much attention to the perpetrators of violence -- something she believes can lead to more violence.

Coni and Angela Sanders spoke with Colorado Matters host Ryan Warner. Edited highlights from their conversation are below.

### **How do you both feel about the fact that Sue Klebold has written a book?**

Coni: "My feelings on it were torn because I am really passionate about the no notoriety. You know, let's stop showing pictures and saying the name of mass shooters and try to lessen the sensationalism of it. So my first reaction was, 'Oh my goodness is this going to be another blueprint for mass murder?' ...

"But then there was a piece of me that, once I started hearing it was about mental health, where my heart made a turn and said, 'anything that we can do to identify the risk factors, to get the general public to listen to what those risk factors are is going to be highly beneficial.' But I've heard the boy's name who shot and killed our dad over and over again. And that is really traumatic not only for us, but for, you know the community and specifically Colorado.

Angela: "I wonder why 17 years later. I have not read the book so I can not speak on that. I don't know if I will read the book.

"In the interviews that I have seen and listened to, I feel like they're a really great tribute to Dylan. But for me personally, I don't see anything answered or any way to help people through what's being said. Again, obviously, I'm not a mental health profession, but just, in my listening and my watching, I'm not seeing any "aha" [moments].

Coni: "When I called her after the interview ... and I said what do you think and she said, 'it was a nice tribute to a murderer.' And the one thing that I love is that, you know, we can have such differing opinions on such things. But you know, seeing it from her point of view, I can also see how this was traumatic for other people. Many of our family members have never been heard. And so for people to hear the story of the people that murdered our family members, but our family members are forgotten, is difficult."

### **Klebold said that she thinks of her son's actions as a suicide, as well as murder. She acknowledged that's a controversial viewpoint, maybe one borne of self-preservation. What do you think?**

Coni: "So one of the things that I've spent a lot of time in my profession is you know, having empathy, trying to see the world from other people's perspective. And I understand her need to see it as a suicide.

"I don't know that any human being could manage the guilt and the emotion surrounding the fact that all of these lives have been lost or significantly altered by her son so I think that's a self-protective mechanism. But again, it goes back to that kind of downplaying the murder side of it. But I understand her need to do that. She couldn't process what he had done with each individual person that was harmed."



A boy looks through the fence at the Columbine High School tennis courts in Littleton, Colo., days after the April 20, 1999 shootings.

(AP Photo/Eric Gay)

Angela: "That might be somewhere where my sister and I actually agree. I definitely think that that's probably some self-protection for her.

"And in my opinion, I don't think that she's really fully grasped -- not grasped, I think she knows what happened -- but I don't know that she's ok with it in her head to just say it. ... I'm not anti-Sue Klebold, I couldn't even imagine what this poor woman is going through. And I do feel for her in that aspect. I just feel some frustrations in other places."

**One thing that Sue Klebold says in the book is to "shut up" and listen to your kids? Does that ring true to you?**

Coni: "Yes and I can say that as a parent. My daughter went through some really difficult things and I myself missed some of the signs. And she ended up in trouble.

"It wasn't anything serious, but it was at that moment that I think I realized as a parent, we have an influence on our children, but we're not the only influence. That may be where some of my identifying with Sue Klebold comes from, is that I have been in the

position of that shock that my child could do something like she did and as a parent I didn't know."

### **Does this conversation open up old wounds?**

Angela: "I am in a place in my life where everything is positive and happy because of my career and the things that I do in my life now. So for me, this is very emotional and it's very stressful and it's very hard for me to keep going back and reliving this every time something new comes up. I understand that it's going to happen, but I try and stay away from it as much as I can."

Coni: "This is very hard for me because I work with people convicted of violent crime and I have about 100 clients at a time coming through my agency so when I do things like this, they hear it. Many of them don't know my story. ...

"It's a reopening that will take some time to close. and it is somewhat difficult. I have Sue Klebold's book -- it was by my bed and I woke up looking at a picture of the boy that murdered my father, so that set me back and I had a difficult time.

"And after 17 years, there are times when you can't handle it. You know I called Angela from inside my closet because I was panicking after watching the 20/20 interview."