

'High Hopes' for Future Cut Down in Colo.

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LITTLETON, Colo., April 21 – The bullets hit a math whiz and a wrestler, debate team members and an aspiring gymnast, a beloved teacher and a gregarious student known in the halls as "the little guy." The jocks and the brains, the goofy freshmen and the cocky seniors, the slackers and the stars – practically everyone was in the line of fire when Columbine High School erupted into bloody chaos on Tuesday.

Not all the names and conditions of the victims cut down in the massacre were known today. But as hundreds of their parents and classmates held an anguished daylong vigil around the sprawling campus – waiting for the bodies finally to be removed – they drew a diverse portrait of the dead and wounded.

Most were leaders and strivers whose teenage lives were just coming into bloom. Some were seniors counting out their final glory days before graduation and the start of new challenges in college. Others were faculty members reporting for what began as just another day of duty in jobs that they loved.

"The thing about a school like this," said Jennifer Pierce, a Columbine student, "is that no matter where those guys fired, they would have hit someone who had high hopes for the future."

By the time the torrent of shooting had ended, Dave Sanders, a veteran business teacher and a coach of girls' sports teams at Columbine, lay dying in a classroom, with massive gunshot wounds. Some students tried for hours to stanch his bleeding with the T-shirts that they had been wearing; others knelt down and showed him family photographs from his wallet.

Anne Marie Hochhalter, 17, a member of the school's marching band and symphony, had been shot in the chest.

Danny Steepleton, 17, an honor student who ran on the cross-country team, had been shot in the leg.

Patrick Ireland – "that dude always totally aced his trigonometry tests," in the words of his classmate Landon Jones – had been shot twice in the head.

Makai Hall, a junior who friends said loved the adventure of rock-climbing on weekends, had been hit with shrapnel from a pipe bomb.



Littleton High School sophomores Alli McClintock, left, and Ally Packer, right, visit a flower memorial near Columbine High School on Wednesday. (Susan Biddle — The Washington Post)

And Isaiah Shoels, a buoyant 18-year-old senior hardly more than five feet tall, had been shot dead.

"He was so full of life, and he got along with everyone," said Ashley Prinzi, a classmate. "He was so small, I don't even know how all the bullets got him."

"He'd always try to lift you up," said Stephanie Fredericksen, a freshman who rode the bus to Columbine with him. She recalled a time once after school when she and a friend were visibly upset about a guy. "And he came up and said, 'Oh, girls, cheer up. Things won't stay bad; things always get better.'"

Harold Berry, a longtime family friend who was at the Shoels home tonight, said Isaiah had suffered from heart problems since birth and this month had been hospitalized for five days. Monday was his first day back at school.

Berry also said that Shoels, one of a small number of African American students at Columbine, "was being racially abused" by a few students who were part of the group known as the Trenchcoat Mafia, which included the two assailants. Berry said that within the past month, Shoels's 15-year-old sister "went to a school official to say there was a problem . . . with some of the students acting racially toward him. They didn't act on it. They just ignored her plea."

Others families were grieving, as well. Tonight, the family of Rachel Joy Scott issued a statement remembering the junior as a popular young woman with a zest for music, drama and photography. She was a "dedicated Christian" who longed to travel abroad to "share her faith," her family said.

Scott's 16-year-old brother, Craig, a Columbine student, too, "witnessed the horror and carnage firsthand as several friends were murdered before his eyes," the family said in its statement. "It never was important to Rachel what people looked like," her brother recalled. "She always looked on the inside. She wasn't fake and didn't put on a show."

From morning to night, students from Columbine and from across metropolitan Denver streamed to the school's grounds to mourn the victims – at least the ones they knew had been shot.

"We still don't know what happened to a lot of people," said Sarah DeBoer, 16, who narrowly escaped the gunfire as she fled the school. "I can't stand it."

Many students placed small bouquets at a makeshift memorial site beneath a tree, and others stood together in long silent embraces, their bodies convulsing with grief. Some students said they had not slept since the shooting. Others wondered if they could ever return to class.

"Just to even think we'd have to walk through hallways where you know so many people were laying dead – it might be too much to take," said Lindsey Neam, 17, a junior whose

eyes were soaked with tears. "The school will look the same, but now everything about it will always be different."

The news that Sanders had been a victim seemed to hit students particularly hard. As one began to describe him to reporters today, another student overheard and gasped, "Not Mr. Sanders, no!"

Some students said that when the shooting began, Sanders was rushing around the school's cafeteria, ordering students to get beneath the tables.

"Coach Sanders came in and said, 'Everybody get down! Get down!' He was telling everyone to stay away from the windows," said Brittany Davies, 15, a sophomore. "We could hear the gunman coming in. I knew he [Sanders] would get hurt because he was making sure everyone else was safe."

At first, students who were witnesses to the shooting said that they thought the two assailants were hunting for specific targets – namely athletes – but then realized they were firing at anyone.

Corey Depooter, 17, on duty as a library volunteer, was hit, and so was Brian Anderson, a junior who is a member of a campus leadership club called Family, Career and Community Leaders of America.

Many of the victims were described today as honor roll students involved in extracurricular activities, which are common at Columbine. When the school recently posted openings for 15 "peer counselors," who assist classmates with bad attitudes or poor grades, more than 50 students showed up to apply for the jobs.

"It's kind of expected for everyone here to get involved in something," said Kayle Boyle, 16.

After the shooting, victims were taken to area hospitals where most remained today. Among them, Valeen Schnurr, 18, suffered shrapnel and bullet wounds and was listed in stable condition. Hochhalter was listed in critical condition. Sean Graves, 15, underwent surgery Tuesday night and he, too, was listed in critical condition. Ireland's wound to the head has left him with severe weakness on the right side of his body, doctors said.

Richard Castaldo, 17, was listed in serious condition after being shot five times. "It is just unbelievable that this could happen," said Castaldo's half-brother, Michelac, 17, as he left the hospital today. Michelac, who does not attend Columbine, said he spoke briefly to his brother, who seemed to follow his conversation but said nothing.

The rampage occurred at one of the most festive times of the year at Columbine. The senior class had just had its prom this past weekend, and it seemed like the entire school had

turned out for the after-prom party on campus – an event filled with music and games and designed to keep teenagers out of trouble on the streets.

Today, students recalled seeing many of the victims there, having the time of their lives.

"They were just beginning to taste the future," Jennifer Pierce said, "and now they don't have one."

Staff writers Michael A. Fletcher and Daniel DeLuc contributed to this report.