

TEEN SHOOTING SUSPECTS SUBTLY SIGNALLED VIOLENCE TO COME

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SUN-SENTINEL

Something in Dylan Klebold's voice had spooked his mother that morning.

"The goodbye had an edge to it," his mother, Susan Klebold, told a family pastor, describing her son's tone last Tuesday morning as "almost fatalistic."

"She thought, maybe he's in a bad mood," the Rev. Don Marxhausen said. "Maybe he's got a test today or something."

Later that morning, Klebold, 17, and his best friend, Eric Harris, 18, ambushed their classmates and teachers at Columbine High School with a storm of gunfire and pipebombs, taking 13 lives before fatally shooting themselves.

Dylan's father, Thomas Klebold, 52, a former geophysicist who runs a mortgage business from his house, told the pastor he had detected "this slight tension" in his son a few days before the attack. Klebold made a mental note of it and thought he would get back to it, the pastor said.

These were not the only possible signs of the violence to come. As new details of the young men's behavior comes to light, a portrait is emerging of their friendship and of their relationship with their families. It is a portrait littered with contradictions.

Many students in the school have described the young men as being obsessed with Nazi history, and the police now say that the suspects planned the attack for Adolf Hitler's birthday.

Klebold was the great-grandson of a prominent Jewish philanthropist. His father is Lutheran, and for a time, the family attended a church. At Passover this year, the Klebolds had a seder, Marxhausen said, and Dylan asked the traditional four questions at the table.

Acquaintances of the suspects have said that they detested athletes because of the way they were treated by them. But Klebold participated in a baseball fantasy league.

They affected the trappings of Goth culture, wearing black clothing, spouting German phrases and listening to German techno-pop.

While Klebold, 6-foot-4 and lanky, was often outgoing, Harris was much quieter. Other students say Harris often scowled in return to a greeting.

A former teammate of Harris' in youth baseball in Plattsburgh, N.Y., said that young Eric had lacked self-confidence.

"He didn't really like baseball a lot, but said that his dad pushed him to play Little League because every kid in Plattsburgh played it," said the former teammate, Brendon LaPier. "He was the kind of kid who didn't mind being alone, and he spent a lot of time in the dugout."

The Harris family also lived for a time in Oscada, Mich. The Rev. William Stone, a neighbor there, said he recalled Harris putting up a basketball backboard in the driveway and playing ball with Eric and his brother, Kevin, who is two years older. Kevin would go on to play football for the Rebels of Columbine High. He was seen as popular, "just the kind of guy his brother was gunning for," said Steve Berg, a classmate of Eric Harris.

Stone said that the Harris family "cared for each other," and that the parents "seemed to enjoy their children."

The parents of both boys, described by friends as decent and caring people from stable homes, have issued statements of sympathy over the attack. But the authorities have come to the conclusion that the parents should have had some idea of what was going on inside their homes.

Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone said on Saturday that the sawed-off barrel of a shotgun and bomb-making materials were "clearly visible" in the bedroom of one of the gunmen.

The sheriff said the weapons were in places where stuffed animals might be found in the bedrooms of other teen-agers. "The parents should have known," he said.

Marxhausen, one of the clergymen who conducted a private funeral service for Klebold on Saturday, said the young man's father told him he "felt Dylan was his soulmate, and felt that he knew what was going on all the time." The pastor said the elder Klebold had told him, "I thought I was ready to let him go -- he was a finished product."

Most of the young people who knew Klebold and Harris were shocked at the shootings. Some friends, however, say they had heard them make comments about blowing up the school.

"You start to wonder, how could people not have known what was happening?" said Debbie Wilder, 38, who lives a few doors from the Harrises.

On the weekend before the shootings, neighbors said the two young men had made such a ruckus smashing glass in the Harris garage -- making shrapnel for bombs, residents now suspect -- that the noise disturbed children playing in the nearby cul-de-sac.

"You'd like to think you'd be aware that kids are building bombs in your house," Wilder said.

Harris and Klebold had a fondness for role-playing games and the violent computer games Doom and Quake. They were arrested last year for breaking into a car to steal tools, and were placed in a diversion program for juveniles, where they earned high marks in an evaluation for being bright and cooperative.

They were also good students who held jobs and caused no grief to school officials.

Christopher Lau, who owns Blackjack Pizza, where the two young men worked three to five nights a week, said they always showed up on time and worked hard.

"Everybody's looking for answers and looking for answers," Lau said. "There's no clear answers. It's going to haunt us -- it's going to haunt me for the rest of my life."