

# Portrait of Outcasts Seeking to Stand Out From Other Groups



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**The New York Times/ April 22, 1999**

**L**ITTLETON, Colo. -- Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, students at Columbine High School, worked last Friday making pizzas. On Monday, they went bowling. And on Tuesday, it seems, they committed mass murder.

Nobody had taken the two youths seriously.

They wore long black coats and hung out with a clique of middle-class suburban teen-agers that called itself the trench coat mafia. They lived with the familiar trappings of suburban comfort in a town with glorious views of the Rocky Mountain foothills.

They struck sullen, brooding poses.

They talked about Hitler and wore clothes with German insignia. In February they completed a "diversion program" for first-time juvenile offenders, after their arrest for breaking into a van and stealing electronic equipment, the Jefferson County District Attorney said.

The other students, who came to know Harris and Klebold from mingling in the hallways and the commons, said the two youths had wanted to portray themselves as rebels or villains. But they were mostly viewed as losers.

"They were just a little weird," said Dara Ferguson, a 17-year-old junior and a cheerleader. "They wanted to be different."

Late Tuesday night, after the mass shooting at the high school, agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, acting on a warrant, searched the house where Harris lived at the end of a cul-de-sac in Columbine Knolls. It is an 11-year-old subdivision the family moved to two years ago when Harris's father retired from the military and took a civilian job.

The agents carted away computers, computer printouts, gas cans, boxes of matches, videocassettes and bags of books, including one titled "Doom," after the computer game. Reporters did not see any weapons removed from the house.

On Monday, the Harrises' next-door neighbor, Bill Konen, was in his yard when he heard Klebold drive up and ask Eric Harris, "Do you have a metal baseball bat?"

"For the next 15 minutes, they were breaking bottles in a sack," Konen said, standing in his driveway, near a neighborhood watch association sign. "Apparently, they were making shrapnel. I would never have figured in a million years that bomb-making activities were going on, or any suspicious activities."

Some classmates said Eric Harris was good with computers and apparently maintained a Web site on America Online. Files on the Web site, discovered after the shootings, depicted him as an avid player of Doom and Quake, two popular computer games in which players stalk their opponents through dungeonlike environments and try to kill them with high-powered weapons.

The files on Harris's Doom and Quake exploits contained programs he had written to work with the games, as well as his commentary on them. But despite coming in the context of computer games famous for their realistic violence, these files, scattered with enthusiastic observations and exclamation points, provided a glimpse at a teenager who seemed less angry and morbid than in the other postings attributed to him.

"It took me about 10 hours to finish this level, so send some comments to me once in awhile!" Harris wrote in one file, dated Nov. 26, 1996. His comments accompanied a program that he made available to the public on an Internet site.

Harris was listed as the author on dozens of files known as wads, which allow players to add new levels of their own design to the games. In one file, he thanked Klebold for helping him test his program.

John C. Dvorak, a columnist at PC Magazine who discovered the site through his own Internet sleuthing, said he was struck by the ingenuousness of Harris's writing.

"It's just kidlike," Dvorak said. "That's what's so troubling about it."

The Simon Wiesenthal Institute, a group that monitors hate groups, said today that two of its researchers had come across the Harris Web site several months ago.

"What both people remembered was how we got to that site, which was by looking at various anarchy and bomb-making listings," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the institute.

Rabbi Cooper said there were no threats that merited contacting law-enforcement officials or enough hate language to be listed on the institute's hate site list.

Dylan Klebold's father, Tom, a geologist, and mother, Sue, who works for the Arapahoe County schools, issued a statement today: "We cannot begin to convey our overwhelming sense of sorrow for everyone affected by this tragedy. Our thoughts, prayers and heartfelt apologies go out to the victims, their families, friends and the entire community."

Classmates described Klebold as tall and skinny, with shaggy blond hair. Harris was much shorter and dark-haired. Both favored the all-black attire associated with Goth, the fashion of the mock-Gothic musical subculture known for a fascination with death.

Yet computer games like Doom and the Goth style are popular among even the best-behaved young students.

A photograph of Klebold in the 1998 yearbook is accompanied by a statement. "After going through many experiences in their lives," it read, "oftentimes students have regrets of past actions."

Columbine is regarded as a top-notch school, one of the draws to Littleton. A sheriff's deputy is posted to the school, but students say the officer's duties have mostly centered on catching students who park in faculty lanes.

Athletic prowess was often the way to popularity at Columbine, as at many schools, and students here say Harris and Klebold, who did not play sports, detested athletes.

"The athletes get a lot of attention at school," said Kristin Couris, a 17-year-old junior, who added that the school's closed-circuit television often carried accounts of ball-field heroics. "They didn't like that."

Jeff Matthews, a 16-year-old junior, said Klebold and Harris had turned to the trench coat group because they did not fit with any other group.

"I guess when you have a lack of friends, you feel unwanted," he said.

Sara Schweitzberger, 15, had a gym class with Klebold, and said it was obvious he felt socially ostracized. "He really felt unloved," she said. "He wasn't so bad. He was lonely. I just wish I could give him a hug and tell him that I care."

The trench-coat group, which numbered from 10 to 30 students in a school of nearly 2,000, would usually keep its distance from the other students, often gathering under the steps during lunch time, while everyone else ate at cafeteria tables.

"This is a pretty preppie, conservative school," said Lindsey Jackson, a 17-year-old junior. "Kids wear Abercrombie, Tommy Hilfiger, American Eagle."

But Monica Schuster, a 17-year-old senior, said that she and a companion had double dated with Klebold and a friend of his at the senior prom last Saturday night.

"We had a great time," she said.