

Sadness and Triumph Underlie Columbine's Pomp and Circumstance

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MAY 23, 1999

NY Times

The name Jeanna Park rang out today at the commencement ceremonies for Columbine High School. Miss Park stood up carefully and then started to walk toward the outstretched diploma, her gait slowed by a bullet wound in her foot and bullet fragments lodged behind her knee.

With each step, more and more people rose to their feet. By the time the small figure in a blue and silver cap and gown finally clenched her diploma, everyone in the amphitheater was standing and applauding.

As Columbine students and teachers sought to come to grips with the senseless deaths of 15 of their own one month ago, the tragedy charged the traditional graduation ceremony with rare emotion.

Sara Martin, a senior, spoke of a class trip this spring to England where she studied a stained-glass church window that had been taken apart for its protection during World War II.

"Although we have faced disaster of our own, and our window may have been shattered," she said, "we can achieve greater beauty by putting our window back together again. In unity, we must rebuild the Columbine window from which others may draw their inspiration."

But today, in the sun-drenched, outdoor ceremony here, five pieces of that window were missing.

Lauren Townsend, a straight-A student and captain of the girls' varsity volleyball team, was to have been a valedictorian. Miss Townsend, who wanted to be a wildlife biologist in Colorado, was one of two seniors killed by two classmates in the April 20 attack. Today, her diploma was given to her older sister and two older brothers, all Columbine graduates.

Her mother, Dawn Anna Beck, held up Lauren's neatly pressed graduation gown with gold sash and signed to the crowd, "I love you." Overcome by emotion, she and her husband, Bruce, fell into a long embrace with Frank DeAngelis, the school principal.

In another commencement speech, Jennifer Wallick spoke of traveling with Miss Townsend on the class trip to Britain in March, one month before the tragedy. Miss Wallick, a senior, said: "I remember the night in London when

we all sat in our room with Lauren, eating pizza and fixing each other's hair for a night out on the town. We had a terrible case of the giggles, and we laughed until our stomachs hurt."

Another missing senior was Isaiah Shoels, 18, a varsity football player who planned to attend an arts college and become a music producer.

Mr. Shoels, who had impatiently charted the dwindling days to graduation by crossing off dates on a calendar, was buried last month in his gown and mortarboard. His parents, who have already received his diploma, said they could not bear to attend today's ceremony. Witnesses said Mr. Shoels was singled out by his killers because he was black.

Graduation day "is going to be a very bad and sad day for me and my family," Michael Shoels, Isaiah's father, said in an interview on Friday afternoon. "We are going to spend some family time together. It is going to be very tough for me and my family."

Another missing face was that of William David Sanders, the teacher and coach who bled to death in a classroom after directing dozens of students to safety. A familiar presence at Columbine graduations, Mr. Sanders joined the staff 25 years ago, a year after the school opened.

"Their lives were cut down in time too short, their lives were full of courage and hope and enthusiasm," Mr. DeAngelis said. "Each of us will carry the spirit of Isaiah Shoels, of Lauren Townsend, of Dave Sanders into the future."

He then asked for a moment of silence. Across the amphitheater, heads bowed and eyes closed.

"You have had an earth-shattering experience one month before your graduation," Vince Chowdhury, a local school board member, told the graduates. "You have touched the heart of this nation with your strength and bravery. You all have grown from this experience and you will continue to grow."

No mention was made of the other two faces missing from the senior class today: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two boys who committed suicide in the school library after carrying out the massacre.

Their faces peer from the pages of the yearbook, which went to press two months before the shooting, but was released only last week. They were left out of two memorial supplements, one for the yearbook and one for the year-end issue of the school newspaper, The Courier.

On Friday, Lance Kirklin, one of the 23 students wounded in the attack, became the first student to return to the high school, which is still a crime investigation site. Aided by his father, Michael, he helped detectives

reconstruct how he was attacked. In another development in the investigation, detectives have determined that a man on the roof at the time of the attack was not a third gunman, but a maintenance worker.

Today, students seemed determined to return to normal. When friends of the gunmen stepped forward to receive their diplomas, the applause did not vary in volume, and there was no booing.

In addition to Miss Park, two other wounded seniors, Lisa Kreutz and Valeen Schnurr, received their diplomas. Miss Kreutz, who is still in a cast and sling, was wheeled on stage in a wheelchair. Miss Schnurr, who suffered nine wounds, walked in line with the rest of her class. The three girls had all been shot together, huddling under the same table in the school library.

In his last remarks, Mr. DeAngelis, the principal, recalled President Clinton's speech here on Thursday, "As President Clinton stated, when Columbine Class of '99 graduates today, America will be cheering you, and you so deserve it."

Then, as Stephen Cohen, a graduating senior, played guitar, his younger brother, Jonathan, sang "Columbine, Friend of Mine," a ballad written after the tragedy that has come to symbolize this spring of trauma.

At the end, as most of the 437 graduates gathered on the amphitheater lawn to whoop, holler and throw their caps in the air, the family of Lisa Kreutz quietly wheeled her out a side door.