

Sam Granillo, Columbine survivor, plans film on long-term trauma of shootings

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WESTWORD

There was a time when you could hardly turn on the TV without seeing the footage over and over: terrified teens fleeing the school with hands in the air, running past the bodies of slain classmates; SWAT teams smashing windows; the badly wounded young man who fell out of the library. Then the world moved on to other horrors.

But for the hundreds of people trapped inside Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, the healing was slow in coming -- if at all.

Sam Granillo was having lunch in the school cafeteria when the shooting started. The seventeen-year-old junior huddled with seventeen other people for three hours in an unlocked kitchen office while Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed a dozen students and a teacher, wounded 21 others, tried to set off propane bombs in the cafeteria, then committed suicide.

Granillo emerged from the ordeal physically unscathed. He went on to film school, to work as a production assistant and other work for crews shooting film projects or reality TV shows. But over the past dozen years he's come to understand how Columbine has altered his life. He still has chronic nightmares, he says -- "chase dreams, dreams where I get trapped somewhere."

As he wrestled with his own long-term trauma from the shootings, Granillo began to reconnect with other alums who were in a similar situation. The funds set aside for victim assistance and counseling following the attack were exhausted long ago, he says, and that got him thinking seriously about putting together a documentary, featuring interviews with other students, teachers, psychologists, police and others

who've been affected by Columbine and their efforts to deal with grief, anger and loss.

"I've been wanting to make a film about it ever since it happened," he says. "It's going to be a journey. I don't know what the solution is, but I want to explore projects that are working."

There is, of course, already a substantial cinematic legacy generated by that infamous day, from Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* to *Thirteen Families*, an impressive recent documentary that focuses on the families of the slain. But Granillo figures there's still much to be said.

"Some of my classmates have never talked about it before," he says. "They're coming forward now. And it's not just students that I plan to talk to."

Granillo has set up a proposal for his film project on Kickstarter, seeking pledges totaling \$75,000 to finance the doc. So far he's raised about a tenth that amount; if he doesn't get the rest by January 1, he won't proceed. "It's an all-or-nothing approach," he explains. "It's all just pledges for now."

If his backers give him a green light, Granillo would like to see the film contribute to the public's understanding of Columbine -- and, perhaps, help some of those scarred by the tragedy find new directions forward. He plans to prepare an animation sequence of his own nightmares, in hopes of letting them go at last.