
Voices



of Columbine

To our readers

By The Denver Post
April 16, 2000

A time to remember, a time to hope. Those are the themes for activities, starting today, marking the first anniversary of the horror of April 20, 1999.

Hope and remembrance also convey the tenor of the Columbine coverage The Denver Post begins today. We offer readers stories in which dozens of people tell us how they have coped, how their lives have changed and what they have gained from loss. And we examine the lessons of Columbine.

We'll someday know what happened in painful, clinical detail, but we may never fully understand why.

Some facts, however, are familiar: On April 20, two teens opened fire, killing 12 of their schoolmates and one teacher, then themselves. Twenty-three students were wounded, some grievously.

This section includes a story about the year-long struggle of one wounded student and his family to find balance. It's about Columbine but also about strength and frailty in all of us. At Denver Post Online - and in a 16-page special section of The Denver Post's print edition - we present the Voices of Columbine - from wounded students to a woman in New Zealand - whose lives were altered by the events of a year ago.

Other sections of today's Post and DPO also look at the aftermath of Columbine.

Remembrance and hope cannot replace what was lost but they embody a community whose pain and courage moves us to tears.

The family of RACHEL SCOTT

By Kevin Simpson
Denver Post Staff Writer



Apr. 16 - Remembrances cling to every corner of Beth Nimmo's ranch-style home. One bedroom has remained untouched since her daughter, 17-year-old Rachel Scott, died on the Columbine lawn. Her son, Craig Scott, 16, still tends deep

emotional wounds after losing his sister and surviving a grisly ordeal in the school library.

And so Beth and her husband, Larry, have decided to sell. They're not just looking for a real estate transaction.

They're reaching for a lifeline.

"You can lose children two ways," Beth says. "Rachel died, but we could lose Craig, too, if he's not restored emotionally.

"Both of them were in the line of fire. Craig's life was spared by God's grace, but in another way he could be destroyed by that day. I'm still fighting for the life of my son." The emotional move beyond Columbine may be years ahead, by Beth's reckoning. This house is still so full of Rachel that progress is difficult.

Her room remains as she left it. Her car, the red '78 Acura that became an impromptu memorial at the high school, still sits in the driveway - left-front tire gone flat, white shoe-polish wishes dissolved by weather into memories.

"We need to make a change, as far as the house is concerned, to give Craig the opportunity to get away from reliving that day," Beth says.

"And I've been restless the last couple of months, too.

"At times, it's very hard to be here." Even so, the idea of packing up the room, putting physical reminders of Rachel into storage, troubles the family - particularly Craig. Moving seems like giving in to the killers.

"He feels the need to prove something - by going to Columbine, by living in this house," Beth says. "But at the same time, he knows he's not getting better, and we need to do something. It wouldn't be failure to get some emotional healing."

Both Craig and his younger brother, Mike, a Columbine freshman, are now home-tutored and will have to repeat much of the last academic year. That's of little concern to Beth, who puts emotional recovery ahead of schoolwork at this point.

In the Nimmo home, that recovery has been pinned to their Christian faith, and the hope that tragedy will not only leave them whole, but stronger.

"I'm banking on this making Craig a man of integrity, someone who has real compassion for humanity that he wouldn't have experienced except by suffering," Beth says. "Some come out better people - not bitter, but better. That's my whole focus - we're going to come out of this stronger, with character and dignity."

Right now, Beth's home is redolent of brownies, homemade treats that she'll soon deliver - along with spaghetti, salad and bread - to the house across the back fence, where Kelly Grizzell struggles to cope with the loss of her daughter, Stephanie Hart.

Stephanie, who last April baked a cake shaped like a floppy hat to honor Rachel, died in the Subway sandwich shop shootings in February. A distraught Kelly almost immediately asked that someone find Beth Nimmo - a woman she'd never formally met, but with whom she now shared the worst kind of pain.

Beth responded then. More important, she wants to be there later.

"When it first happens, you have no way of knowing how you'll be in nine or 10 months," Beth says. "People reached out to help us, but after a period of time, it fades away, and that's when you're faced with



the hardest moments - when the diversions are gone, and you're left with the raw feelings of losing your daughter." Morning is the rawest time.

That was their time together, just Beth and Rachel. Makeup time, an established ritual in the master bathroom. They primped, they chatted, they connected for a few minutes before Rachel zipped off to school and Beth went to work. Morning was their time. Still is. Now, after Larry has gone to work, while the boys sleep in, Beth will slip down to Rachel's room. The faint aroma of her scented candles lingers, and Beth can sense her daughter's presence - "her atmosphere." "I go in there and grieve," Beth says. "I've got that space and time for Rachel and myself." Another reason that moving will be hard.

"Counselors say the second year is harder. The first year you live an illusion, you live in a fog. The second year, reality hits. "You have to make some physical changes."

Last night it was Seattle, coming on the heels of St. Paul and Tampa. Before that it was a small town in Michigan - St. Joseph, maybe? - and before that it was somewhere in Indiana that he can't even remember. Now Darrell Scott is riding to SeaTac airport to catch a flight home to Colorado, where he will repack, recharge and head out to six more cities.

"I'm kind of getting used to being in hotel rooms, waking up to new decor every day," Darrell says.

For him, the legacy of his daughter's death is written on the anonymous faces of the people who pack arenas, school auditoriums and churches across the country to hear him tell Rachel's story. Gleaned from her personal writings, it's a tale of kindness, compassion and spiritual commitment that brought comfort and closure to her immediate family.

Darrell's desire to share her writings and drawings grew into The Columbine Redemption, a nonprofit organization that serves as the umbrella for his speaking engagements - and, to a lesser extent, appearances by other family members.

It launched a grieving father on the road, where the pain of loss is tempered by the poignancy of tear-streaked young faces, deeply touched by Rachel's life and death, who want to make a difference in their schools.

"I have more fulfillment and more joy," says Darrell, "but it's based on the deepest sorrow in my life. There's a mixture of sorrow and joy I can't separate."

While plans for The Columbine Redemption grow in leaps and bounds, Darrell's own life moved forward with his second marriage in January. After the ceremony, the entire wedding party visited Rachel's grave, where Darrell's wife, Sandy, placed her bouquet.

On the road, Rachel's father has testified before Congress, addressed politicians, brushed shoulders with celebrities drawn to the Columbine flame. But amid the blur of travel, Darrell Scott has rediscovered perspective and found meaning.

"I met with the president twice, Elton John, world leaders, entertainers - and all of that is like vanilla," he says. "Before, earlier in my life, that would have been the pinnacle of my existence to meet the people I've met."

"But the truth is, none of that matters." What matters are the minds and hearts he might change.

"All my life, I've felt a sense of purpose and destiny that's not been fulfilled. God's got something he wants me to do - I've had that feeling since I was 18 years old, but I never knew what it was.

"Now I do."

PATTI NIELSON

Mother, Columbine teacher, library survivor

By Susan Besze Wallace
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Patti Nielson had said it more than once: "If I get through this year, I'm going to wonder how I did it."

And that was before two gun-wielding students changed her life. She was raising three children, one still in diapers. She was in the midst of work on a master's degree. She was helping write a new art curriculum. She was teaching three art classes a day.

"Then, April 20, I was hiding in a cupboard, and it changed from how am I doing all this to why am I doing all this. Why do I have to do it all at once? Why can't I just take care of my kids? Nothing mattered but getting out of there and getting back to my children."

That's the reason Josh, 9, Elise, 6, and Mallory, 3, have had their mom at home most of this school year - not because she has fallen apart. The teacher - who was among the first shot, made the initial 911 call from the school library and was huddled in that cupboard, closest to the shooters when they killed themselves - isn't sure when or if she'll return to Columbine. She finished out last year and she taught for the first two months of this school year before taking leave.

She was emotionally strained. There were flashbacks. But mostly there was a resetting of priorities, she says.

"In some ways I was a magnet to some people, and yet other people felt uncomfortable around me. My situation was unique among the teachers, and I think some people were afraid they'd say the wrong thing.

"I'm not blaming other people," Nielson says. "I wasn't going to know if I could go back unless I tried. I got worked up, frustrated."

She also fell behind on her master's. Focusing was a challenge. She studied post-traumatic stress disorder and reminded herself of the vow she had made in that cupboard.

"I made the decision I wasn't going to be in therapy the rest of my life. And yet, it's not a matter of just snapping out of it."

Fellow students in Nielson's degree program helped, typing papers and encircling her in study groups as a form of encouragement. She had decided she wouldn't graduate in May, but now it looks possible.

"I can see light at the end of the tunnel. I'm doing better concentrating. But I still won't do it if it starts to make me crazy or takes time from my kids. It's easier to have your priorities in order when you are faced with the idea you could die today, and you ask yourself have you done what you really need to do, or are you just flapping your wings?" Nielson has written to most of the families whose kids were killed.

"I'm perfectly willing to talk to any of them. But I don't want to impose. They may be thinking the same thing. I pray they are getting help." When she does visit the school,



Nielson is besieged by students who ask if she's returning. She isn't always sure what to say. She hopes her absence is being seen as running toward her family, not running away from the memories.

Nielson said she's become increasingly cautious, less trusting and more focused on her "real life." She got over the fear of sending her own children to school. But she hasn't yet dealt with the piles of clippings and pictures and correspondence and teddy bears that overtook her living room and now live in her basement. In time, she says.

"When the year 2000 hit, it wasn't like a new year for me," she said. "I haven't been dreading the anniversary. I think I want to have it behind. I'm working to get to April 21. I think that's the start of my new year."

The family of DANIEL MAUSER

By Patricia Callahan

Denver Post Staff Writer



Apr. 16 - It's not that Tom and Linda Mauser dread the anniversary of their son Daniel's death. It's that everybody else is making so much of that day.

"We've already been through Mother's Day, Father's Day, Daniel's 16th birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas. Those were all tough days," Tom says. "I know that anniversaries can be tough. But it's the outside world that makes it tougher on us because it's a date they can relate to.

"They couldn't relate to Daniel's birthday because most of them didn't know when it was. They didn't relate to Christmas

because they're celebrating Christmas themselves and they're not thinking about the fact that Christmas was especially difficult." More than anything, the Mausers want to grieve privately.

Tom, Linda and their daughter, Christie, don't plan to be anywhere near Columbine High School on April 20.

"I get tired of "Oh, there's that mother who lost her child,"- " Linda says. "I'm tired of wearing that identity." Staying out of the public spotlight has been impossible, partly by their own doing.

Tom took a leave of absence from his state transportation job to lobby full time for gun-control causes, a very public job that lands him in the middle of one of the nation's most divisive political battles. It's hard to remain anonymous when President Clinton praises you in his State of the Union address.

"Columbine was something that was known nationwide, and add to that my activism and all of a sudden we're thrown into the lion's den." Just last month, the Mausers took a rejuvenating trip to Guatemala, where many people they met had never heard of Columbine High School.

For seven years, the Mausers have sponsored a girl there named Evi Pineda through the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging. They exchanged letters with Evi and watched her grow up through the pictures mailed a few times a year.

When Daniel was killed, the Mausers wanted a lasting memorial that would help other people. It seemed natural to help Evi's village.

The foundation offered to raise money to build a school in San Ixtan, Guatemala, and dedicate it to Daniel. The Mausers embraced the idea, and the fund-raising began. The goal was to raise \$31,000.

Then the Mausers faced a difficult task - how to tell Evi about Daniel's death. They were writing to a 13-year-old child in a country that only recently ended more than three decades of war. And someone in Guatemala would have to translate their letter into Spanish. The English had to be very basic. "How do you explain, 'This is what happens in America'?" Tom says. He started it as simply as he could: "I am writing you to tell you of something terrible that has happened to our family."

While Tom struggled to explain American school violence, more than \$77,000 in donations poured in from around the world. The foundation not only built the school in Evi's town, it built another school and a library in another town.

When the Mausers arrived in Guatemala, they went to a mass said in Daniel's honor. There, schoolchildren sang to them with such emotion that Linda cried.

"They just sang their hearts out," Linda says. "It was healing." People welcomed them and thanked them everywhere they went. Schoolchildren made them cards. A local woodworker gave the Mausers a carving depicting the Biblical story of Daniel in the lion's den.

The Mausers realized how much they took for granted. Linda remembers watching a woman who sat all day in the hot sun to sell a few melons. Tom remembers watching people carry firewood home to heat their food.

Villagers washed their laundry in the lake. A guard with a semiautomatic weapon protected a hardware store. Even the missionary office was surrounded by gates topped with barbed wire.

"You get humbled by seeing all this poverty," Tom says. "Suddenly, your own adversity is a little more in perspective." A priest introduced the Mausers to classrooms of students who studied at the new school.

"When he told the story of what happened to Daniel, you could tell it was shocking to them," Tom says. "Part of what he told them was that we were making good from bad. He told them it was important not to talk about vengeance. He said this was a very important lesson."



SARAH BAY

Columbine senior

By Janet Bingham
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Sarah Bay thought she had lost the videotape of last year's April 17 prom at Columbine High School. But then, on the first Sunday in April of this year, she found it and felt a tug from the past even at a time when she was discovering inspiration for the future. "That was probably the hardest thing for me, watching the video." There was the image of Rachel Scott, getting ready for the prom, fussing with her boutonniere.

"She thought she was going to stab her date with the needle. She yelled to me, 'Come help!' And then she sort of rolled her eyes and said, 'I'm never going to a dance again.' " Three days later, on April 20, Rachel Scott was one of those killed at Columbine.

Moments like those open up wounds - "We are still recovering."

But Sarah, a senior, has found strength in watching how one of her mother's friends, Susan Curnow and her daughter Nancy, who lost their son and brother, Steven Curnow, are pushing on. And she has found special inspiration in the children of Dunblane, Scotland, where 16 elementary school children and their teacher were massacred in 1996 by a man with a history of unstable behavior.

Sarah and 65 other students in Carol Samson's Advanced Placement English class visited Dunblane during spring break in March.

Before the trip, "it felt like we were alone, that we were kind of on our own as far as dealing with it.

"And then, we went to Dunblane, seeing the little kids who had to go through something so horrible at such a young age. It was so heartbreaking to see 9-year-olds who had gone through something in kindergarten that no kindergartner should ever go through, let alone somebody who is our age. Seeing these kids, seeing how they were coping, kind of helped me cope as well.

"I talked to a girl who had lost her sister, who is our age, and who now is graduating from her high school. And she knew exactly what I was going through as far as losing my friends. It seemed that they were coping, and it kind of gave us hope, at least the group I was with, that we could cope as well, that we could get along with it as well. The kids were just amazing. They gave me a lot of strength, and they gave other people a lot of strength.

"It is said that 'no man is an island' and it really did pertain to what we were talking about with the Dunblane kids, that we weren't alone, that people just like us had gone through the exact same thing half a world away."

STACEY SIMMONS

Columbine Elementary teacher

By Kristen Go
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - When Stacey Simmons accepted her new job teaching at Denver's Columbine Elementary School in June, her family was aghast.

"I told my grandmother I got a job at Columbine and she said, 'Why would you want to go there?' " Simmons says. "I had to tell her 'No, Gram, I'm talking about Columbine Elementary School.' "

Simmons' family lives on the East Coast. She says that ever since the shooting, people who aren't from Colorado automatically have negative thoughts when she mentions the word Columbine.

A teacher for two years and a Colorado resident since 1993, Simmons says the shootings made her rethink what's going on in her students' lives. If one of her third- or fourth-graders seems withdrawn, she'll pull the student aside and maybe call the child's parents.

"I guess the one thing (Columbine) really taught me is to never take for granted your situation."

"Where Columbine happened was a place where there were kids from wealthier families and there seemingly was - on the surface - nothing wrong," she says. "You need to be more perceptive as a person."

LEE ANDRES

Columbine teacher and alumnus

By Sean Kelly
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - "Columbine has always been a great school," says Lee Andres, a 1980 CHS graduate who now teaches there. "It is a school that had one really bad day." Since that day, the school has changed, he says. The lines of communication are more open, there is genuine caring between students and teachers, and people remember to smile more.

"I've never been more proud to be a Columbine graduate. I've never been more proud of the people I work with and the students I teach," says the 37-year-old music teacher. When the shooting began, Andres was teaching a guitar class. His father, Leland, also a teacher, helped him herd hundreds of students to safety through the auditorium. Teaching now, a year later, is still hard. But it's getting better.

"Just coming back every day, being able to work with my father, just helps me to heal, being with my kids."

Andres taught for several years at neighboring Leewood Elementary before returning to teach at Columbine, and he has known many of the students for years.

"What hurts every day is when I see kids like Anne Marie (Hochhalter), Danny (Steepleton), Mike Johnson - kids I've known since first grade, their bodies being violated in this way." But leaving is unthinkable. Andres says he wants to retire as a Columbine High School teacher - a long time from now.

"How could I not come back?" he asks. "To me, that would be like abandoning my home."

BARB LOTZE

Youth ministry director

By Virginia Culver
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - The youth ministry director at Light of the World Catholic Church says the events of last year strengthened her religious faith and that of many she comes in contact with.

"I'm not doing this on my own," Barb Lotze says.

The help she gets is both spiritual and secular.

"Parents are volunteering more and more," says Lotze, whose church a year ago counted 50 members who were Columbine High School students.

"I keep a notebook now on who has volunteered. Everyone's interest is heightened" since Columbine, she says, adding that the number of volunteers has doubled from 50 to 100.

"Usually people volunteer when their kids are young and disappear when the kids get into junior high. Now they're volunteering when their kids are in high school." Her own reaction to Columbine has been a renewed belief in God's grace "to carry us through." "I'm amazed. I'm in awe of God. And I see a deeper spirituality in the kids." she says.

JACK DeVITA

Jefferson County court magistrate

By Howard Pankratz
Denver Post Staff Writer



Apr. 16 - A solid, stocky man, Magistrate Jack DeVita can talk tough to the wayward teenagers who appear in his courtroom.

And 13 months before Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold attacked Columbine High School, DeVita scolded the pair for breaking into a van.

Prosecutors placed the two in a juvenile-diversion program, and by February 1999 they had completed it with glowing reviews.

Ever since, DeVita has dealt with the shock and sadness of the shootings - and the nagging question: Could it have been prevented?

DeVita is convinced the juvenile-justice system, including his role in it, didn't miss any warning signs.

Harris and Klebold spent only five or six minutes in his courtroom, he says.

"I haven't internalized it as a personal mistake," DeVita says.

It would have been nearly impossible to have designed "a net so fine" that would have caught Harris and Klebold before the rampage, he says.

"I don't think I could do it and I don't think the system as it is set up now could have picked these guys out," DeVita says.

"How do you spot a psychopath? They are practiced at deception. That's what they do best. They have a different set of standards. What may be acceptable for you or I, or unacceptable for you or I, is acceptable for them."

Since April 20, DeVita has joined efforts to learn from what happened and prevent similar tragedies. He serves on the Columbine Community Citizens Task Force and chairs its subcommittee on violence prevention.

He and other violence-prevention committee members are encouraged by the work of a group of social scientists who have published a 10-volume series called "BluePrints." The series may have some answers that will prevent future school shootings, DeVita says.

DeVita is convinced that bullying played a role in the Columbine shootings, something that alienated and isolated Harris and Klebold and caused them to seek revenge.

But he is equally convinced that the Internet and a lack of parental oversight further isolated the pair. And violent video games, he says, also played a role.

"To me, seeing that amount of violence is like peeling away layers of an onion," says DeVita. "You finally get down to the point where the kid is so depressed that they don't know where to go or where to turn."

FRANKLIN GRAHAM

Preacher who spoke at the 1999 Littleton memorial service

By Virginia Culver
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Before Columbine, Franklin Graham never was known as a shy preacher. But now, there's a new urgency to his message from the pulpit and greater certainty about the cause of violence.

"We never know the hour or minute when life will be taken from us," says Graham, who spoke in Littleton at the community memorial service the Sunday after the shootings.

At that service, he says, he had "to hold back the tears. The only other service I ever attended that was so moving was the one in Oklahoma City" after the bombing of the federal building there in 1995. Graham's father, evangelist Billy Graham, spoke then. The Columbine experience and his subsequent contact with families of victims haven't changed Graham's preaching, but "given me more urgency to tell people that Jesus Christ died for our sins." Graham says he felt an "awesome responsibility" at the Columbine service "to give people a rope to hold on to." "I had about five or six minutes. The families of the 13 were there looking and the whole world was watching on TV. I just wanted to tell people that there is a God, that he loves us and that he gave his only son 2,000 years ago," Graham says, speaking in an interview from his Boone, N.C., home.

He calls the victims "beautiful, precious kids" and says it "breaks my heart to think of the hatred and venom" in their killers.

People ask Graham if God will forgive Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

"I don't know," he says, "because I don't know what Eric and Dylan said before they died. If they asked for forgiveness, they will be forgiven." He visited the memorial site at Columbine High, where people placed flowers, candles, stuffed animals, pictures and other memorabilia after the tragedy.

"There seemed to be almost a reverence (at the memorial site last year). One note I'll never forget. It looked like it was written by a grade school student. It read, "Dear God, teach me to laugh again."- " Graham says he knows there was criticism after the Columbine service of the stress he put on his evangelical beliefs; many people said the service should have been less sectarian, but Graham says that only a few people complained to him.

The tragedy has strengthened Graham's belief that guns aren't to blame for gun violence. Rather, he says, violent movies, television and video games are to blame.

What is produced by the entertainment industry is "awash in killings, shootings and rapes. We are complete fools if we don't think that today's entertainment has poisoned a generation. I've always believed this but I believe it more now."

AARON WELSH

Columbine class of '99

By Jim Hughes
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Aaron Welsh survived the bloody assault in the library and went on to graduate from Columbine last May.

Now he thinks the library should remain as a symbol of survival, despite a growing movement to demolish and convert it into an atrium.

"I wasn't going to let Eric (Harris) and Dylan (Klebold) beat me that day and I'm just not going to let them beat me down now.

"They wanted to destroy a piece of the school. They wanted notoriety for it, and by destroying the library, that's like making them famous and carrying out what right now they can't do."

For months, 19-year-old Aaron has been outspoken in his opposition to the \$3.1 million project. While Aaron says he remains committed to the issue, he's now focusing most of his efforts on finishing his freshman year of college.

"I've got to get on with my life," he says. "If I don't get through college, I'll be flipping burgers somewhere, and that's not the life I want."

The family of KYLE VELASQUEZ

By Carlos Illescas

Denver Post Staff Writer



Apr. 16 - Albert and Phyllis Velasquez have channeled their grief toward a common goal: demolishing the place where their son Kyle was killed.

"It would be unthinkable to have other children walk into that library," Phyllis says.

They have designed a special lapel pin, and proceeds from any sales go toward the \$3.1 million project to convert the still-walled-off Columbine library into a glass atrium. The pin is a silver, ribbon-shaped heart with a blue stone symbolizing a tear and etched with the words "Never Forgotten."

"We chose the heart because we carry all the children and (teacher) Dave Sanders in our heart," Phyllis says. "They've all become part of our family."

Kyle - who at 6 feet tall was described as a quiet, unassuming "gentle giant" - had been a Columbine student for fewer than three months when he was killed. He was the first student shot in the library.

At first, Phyllis says, she and her husband felt they "were wandering in a sea of faces." But the other families quickly became a key support system for them.

"The grief and the healing are a very personal journey. I don't think you ever get to the point where you could say, "I'm healed."

"But I think the families coming together as a group, that's given us all something to focus on so we're not so overwhelmed by our grief."

While the family has remained largely out of the limelight, the one exception came in August when Al and Brian Rohrbough, father of slain student Daniel, chopped down two trees planted near the school.

Members of the West Bowles Community Church had planted 15 trees, one for each of the 13 slaying victims and their two suicidal killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

Velasquez and Rohrbough, like many, believed there were only 13 victims. So they sawed down two trees.

Now, with the first anniversary near, emotions are raw for the Velasquez family. Their hearts keep wandering back to last April 20.

"Those are things we've been able to hold at bay until this point," Phyllis says.

The family of ISAIAH SHOELS

By Andrew Guy Jr.

Denver Post Staff Writer



Apr. 16 - Michael and Vonda Shoels are 874 miles away from the pain and the bad memories.

They've escaped the media and Denver-area critics and have managed to carve out a peaceful existence in the Houston suburb of Katy.

But they're also 874 miles away from their son.

Isaiah is buried in Fairmount Cemetery in Denver. No longer are they able to make regular visits to his grave, bring him flowers or just stare at his headstone.

That makes their move bittersweet. They are considering exhuming Isaiah's body and moving it to a cemetery in Texas. Vonda says: "I want his body moved down here so he can be with his family. We miss him. We miss visiting him. We talk about him all the time." Michael is more blunt.

"He ain't fit to be in that prejudiced Colorado soil," he says. "It's going to happen, no matter what it costs." The Shoelses left Denver in January and have no desire to move back. Their four other children attend local Houston schools. They have bought a home. Michael says his record business is up and running again, and he plans to release a CD tribute to Isaiah, who was an 18-year-old Columbine senior, sometime this month.

Vonda has aunts and uncles in Houston, and Michael was born and raised in Amarillo, where he still has relatives.

Vonda says the move south has helped her return to normal, to her pre-Columbine days as simply a mom. The most complicated things she thinks about are if the kids are OK and what to cook for dinner.

Texans rarely recognize the family, and when folks do figure out who they are, "people come up to us and tell us they're sorry and ask how we are. It's nice," Vonda says.

They're happy and comfortable. Houston is a large metropolis of 3.5 million people, making it easy to get lost in the crowd.

"You don't have people on the radio talking about the family, you don't have television cameras in your face all the time, you don't have people looking into your background," Michael says. "It's just a lot easier for us down here." Michael and Vonda say that although they both spent many years in Colorado - Michael moved here in the late 1970s; Vonda was born and raised here - they feel they cannot return.

"It's a different atmosphere down here," Michael says. "We're surrounded by some loving people. In Colorado people acted like we pulled the trigger. Don't get me wrong, there were some loving people in Colorado, but things were just too tense." Things got exceptionally tense last May when the Shoelses filed a wrongful-death law suit against the parents of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. They hired high-profile lawyer Geoffrey Fieger to represent them. The Shoelses were criticized as greedy opportunists on radio talk shows and in letters to the editor. But the Shoelses insist that they're only after the truth.

"A lot of people look at our situation and say, 'Isaiah's dead, you guys should leave it alone and move on,'- " Vonda says. "But it's not that easy." Still, he and Vonda now concede that they were wrong about some things. Last year after the Columbine shootings, Michael and Vonda embarked on a local and national media tour.

They criticized Jefferson County for being racist.

They criticized the United Way and its Healing Fund for not buying them a house.

They asked President Clinton for financial help, and in their letter to him included a veiled reference to Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky: "Mr. President, it was not too long ago that you asked the American people to forgive you. We forgave you. We have high expectations of you." Michael now says the letter to Clinton was an error.

"I think we went where we weren't supposed to go with that," Michael says. "That was a mistake on my behalf, and I admit that. His personal business is his personal business." And Vonda says criticizing Coloradans as racists while she and Michael were speaking in Houston, New York, Michigan, Atlanta and elsewhere wasn't right.

"Well, not everyone in Colorado is like that," Vonda says. "Some people were really nice to us." What they now want most is to take care of their other children: Abubaka, Melissa, Michelle and Anthony, who range in age from 11 to 16. Michael has an older daughter, Makashia, who lives in Denver.

In their quest to speak out against hate and the Columbine shootings, Michael and Vonda ignored their kids, they say.



"When this thing first happened, I was in shock and went around the country speaking out against violence," Michael says. "I didn't give myself any time to grieve. Now I'm going through the grieving process and it's hard. We've been trying to get the kids settled, so we're not actively speaking out anymore. We need time to be a family." Vonda said she thinks about Isaiah every day, but she's trying to move on for the family's sake.

"I will always miss him, but I have to live for the kids that are here," Vonda says.

But not having Isaiah in Texas "is a missing link in this family," Michael says. "People ask if it's getting any better. No, it's not getting any better. I miss him every second, every minute, every hour, every day, every month."

For the anniversary, the Shoelses will be back in Colorado.

The "Today" show will reunite the Shoelses with Craig Scott, the brother of another Columbine victim, Rachel Scott.

In one of the more emotional interviews after Columbine, Scott and the Shoelses talked about their losses. Craig Scott was good friends with Isaiah.

After the interview, the Shoelses will visit Isaiah's grave and return to Texas.

The Shoelses say they hope their move to Texas will allow them to heal.

"I'll never be able to let my guard down again, but I'm more relaxed down here," Michael says. "We're surrounded by family. And to me, that makes all the difference in the world."

MICHELLE TAYLOR

Hospice nurse and Vietnam vet who performed triage at Columbine

By Dan Meyers
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - At the supermarket on a recent evening, Michelle Taylor noticed the teenager bagging her groceries and decided not to ignore him.

"Hi," she said, making eye contact and smiling. "Having a good day?" The kid looked up. Smiled back.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm having a pretty good day." Small stuff, sure.

But since Columbine, Taylor, 53, demands of herself that she make such modest investments. She now attempts to connect with young people "100 percent of the time."

"I try to make a point to acknowledge these kids," says Taylor, mother of two children now in their 20s. "I think you get it back. We're all in it together."

It's a feeling forged in a crisis for which Taylor was singularly and remarkably prepared. She feels that, somehow, she was meant to be near Columbine High on April 20.

Her journey began in Indiana, where Taylor grew up, chose nursing as a career, broke off an engagement in the late 1960s, enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps and signed up for Vietnam.

There, she did triage, the grueling task of evaluating the condition of wounded soldiers as they are brought in, helping identify and treat the most dire cases first. She left after 16 months, eventually moved to Colorado and, nine years ago, became a hospice nurse, caring for people who are dying.

On April 20, oddities in her midday schedule unexpectedly took Taylor to visit a patient on a cul-de-sac by Columbine High School.

She'd barely closed the door behind her when a neighbor, aware of her visit, burst in to say a teenager was lying outside with gunshot wounds.

With only a stethoscope and a blood-pressure cuff for gear, Taylor was about to use skills acquired in a jungle war on the driveway and lawn of a suburban American home.

It all came back to her.

This kid's bleeding fast from the leg - tie a tourniquet with the cord of the stethoscope.

That one was just hit in the hand and can wait.

Another leg wound. Tie off the bleeding with the cuff.

First there was the one teen, then three, and finally close to two dozen brought out of the school, 10 of them in bad shape.

None of the kids she treated died. It's likely she saved a few.

She had little idea then what had happened at the school, why all those children were brought to her, faces chalky from shock and loss of blood.

That night she was calm, even as she caught up with the day's news. The next day, tears flowed.

And in the months since, Taylor, whose career has been marked by acts of caring, found yet another way to pitch in.

"I'm very aware of the young people. I try to be really in tune, making sure that kids don't feel isolated or anonymous.

"I deal with death and dying on my job. We don't take material things with us. We take interpersonal relationships." Meanwhile, she'll keep making small investments.

Even if it's just chat at the checkout stand.

Some might think her efforts insignificant. But don't tell Michelle Taylor that.

"I think it matters," she says. "If you give a smile, you're going to get a smile. I do think it has to start somewhere."

ALLYSON ALEXANDER

West Indies mother who canceled plans to move to the United States

**By Susan Besze Wallace
Denver Post Staff Writer**

Apr. 16 - There's a 6-year-old boy in Trinidad, West Indies, whose life was changed by the Columbine shootings. And it might be years before he knows.

Shaquille and his mom, Allyson Alexander, were poised to move to the East Coast of the United States. Friends, family and opportunity awaited them. But when a Colorado high school became a death trap last April, Alexander pulled back.

"It scared me, really scared me. Columbine was the last straw. It really messed me up. I know what we could have there, and I know what we have here. So for now, we are here."

In the months following the shooting, it became clear to the 32-year-old Trinidad native that while the tragedy might have canceled one opportunity, it offered a new one.

Alexander is the spiritual orientation director at Valencia Pentecostal Assembly, working with preteens, teens and young adults. "This Cassie Bernall - would I have told someone with a gun to my head that I believed in God?" Alexander wonders.

She began passing Columbine's messages to her young charges, some of whom, she says, didn't know where the United States was, let alone Colorado.

"Even though you feel ostracized, you don't make choices based on that. You must think about consequences. These boys, they were mentioned as nice, now they are remembered as murderous.

"One choice can totally mess you up, I tell them." Alexander went looking for the victims' faces on the Internet, hoping to project their smiles on a church wall to reinforce her teachings. When she read more on each young life, she wept.

"I'm telling my young people, it's not only a gun that can change your life. It's being callous, it's being promiscuous. The best memorial we can do for these kids is learn from what happened, and share it." All is not perfect in Trinidad, where Alexander says the latest scare involves parents beating teachers.

"Here or there, school is more like boot camp, a place where you have to be on your guard all the time."

Alexander was recently named her church's new baptism director. Columbine sidetracked her plans to move, but reinforced her desire to work with young people.

"Were those boys good pretenders or did we miss something? I don't want to miss anything here. These weren't just a few kids in Colorado. They are the world's children, like mine."

CHRIS COLWELL

Denver physician, emergency medicine expert

By Ann Schrader
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Dr. Chris Colwell has talked to about a dozen groups nationwide since the killings.

Each time, he touches quickly on what happened that day, then spells out the lessons that the emergency medical community can learn from the experience.

Not a day goes by, the Denver Health Medical Center doctor says, that he doesn't think about Columbine. Images from the school library, where he pronounced the victims dead, will never be forgotten.

But the pending arrival in June of his first child - a son - has taught the 34-year-old his own lesson: "Life still goes on." "You have to move on and learn what you can," he says.

Since Colwell works in a healing profession, he has found solace in treating trauma victims who end up in Denver Health's emergency room.

He still pulls four stints a week as attending physician in the emergency room, and he frequently handles three or four shooting victims on a Friday or Saturday night. Sometimes a high school trauma patient will bring him back to April 20.

Colwell says he has looked to extract something positive from the Columbine experience, which he calls a "defining moment for prehospital and hospital trauma issues." "Could we have prevented anything like this? We will never be perfectly prepared." But he says there are things that can be done on the street and in the ER to prepare for mass casualty events. For example, if the siege at Columbine had lasted much longer, batteries in the paramedics' radios would have run out. Now, extra batteries and chargers are stocked in an emergency supply trailer.

He also suspects that if there had been more devastation, casualties would have risen as the area's hospitals became inundated. The fact that none of the victims who made it to the hospital died "is a testament to the trauma system in Denver," he says.

Colwell and colleagues at Swedish Medical Center and Centura St. Anthony Central Hospital plan to write a paper on the Columbine trauma response.



The goal is to get the lessons learned into the medical literature, making those lessons widely available to paramedics and emergency medical specialists around the world. Shortly after the shootings, Colwell remarked, "They never taught us this in medical school." But now that is changing.

Some medical schools, including his alma maters, the University of Michigan and Dartmouth, are discussing issues such as losing young trauma patients.

MARY McGLONE

Littleton Public Schools superintendent

By Susan Besze Wallace
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Mary McGlone was on the phone ordering a shirt for her husband when it came time to give her address.

"How are you?" gushed the woman taking her order.

Speaking the word "Littleton" seemed to present the stranger with an invitation to grieve. And for 20 minutes, she did.

"I've gotten used to the sigh and the sad eyes," McGlone says. "What you don't get used to are the what-an-awful-place-that-must-be comments.

"Sometimes it's not worth pointing out that Columbine didn't happen in Littleton, and other times, you have to. It's a line that we walk. We don't own this tragedy like Jeffco does, but we can't ignore it."

McGlone, as the Littleton school district's board president and a mom to two teens, has seen again and again the continuing effects of living in the town most identified with the nation's worst school shooting, even though it didn't happen here.

Residents share churches and workplaces and sports teams - but how much of the grief?

"We can't feel too much, but we can't feel too little. We all know this all could have easily happened here, but we can't presume to know what they're going through."

Among the moments symbolic of the tension: McGlone was helping deal with the school district's mail when someone opened a box to find a teddy bear sent from Oklahoma City bombing victims to a Pennsylvania town devastated by a plane crash to the Columbine community. Many had to catch their breath. And then the bear was sent to Jefferson County, to those it was meant to comfort.

McGlone has heard local kids reply "Denver" when asked where they're from. She has served as a sounding board for other parents questioning school safety. She has helped organize a Littleton task force still grappling with the best ways to reconnect adults with teens. She has seen her town's professional community grow closer, yet still flounder at times with how to help the Columbine area. And she has saved newspaper clippings.

"Maybe it's weird, but this will define for so many kids in the area their high school careers," she says. "I think maybe there will be a time when my kids aren't so busy and they need to look back ...- or when I will."

SHANA MONTROSE

George Washington High School sophomore

By Janet Bingham

Denver Post Staff Writer



Apr. 16 - At first after the shootings, Shana Montrose felt numb, unable to do anything but flip through the channels for news about what happened at Columbine High School.

That night, she couldn't sleep. She took out a notebook and pastels, scribbled the word "hate," and filled the page with dark colors.

Now Shana, 15, is trying to do something about hate.

As she entered her sophomore year at Denver's George Washington High School, she joined SAFE Students, an organization dedicated to reducing gun violence. She proudly wears a Sane Alternatives to the Firearms Epidemic pin on her coat and has gone door to door telling people about gun legislation.

But Shana hasn't stopped there. She can't help thinking, "Legislation controls behavior, but can we legislate morals?" She became a co-host on TeenWebTalk, a Web site that gives teenagers a voice on issues they find important. She talked about teens and violence and a Student Pledge Against Gun Violence. The pledge focuses on individual action: "I will never bring a gun to school; I will never use a gun to settle a dispute. My individual choices and actions, when multiplied by those of young people throughout the country, will make a difference".

She is also writing an essay for a book being put together by the producers of TeenWebTalk on the lack of communication between teens and adults. In it, she reflects on April 20, how the parents of the student gunmen were unaware of the planning that took place in their homes; that it was so easy to hide.

She has set out to raise awareness of teen problems. Recently she wrote a series of articles for her school newspaper on teen suicide - something that has personally affected her. She made a decision to go to an adult to prevent one friend from committing suicide, and she has had other friends who were suicidal. Her interviews focused on three teens who told how they were affected when a friend or acquaintance committed suicide. "People who are suicidal often can't see beyond their pain. They don't think anyone cares about them. I wanted to let people know what suicide does to other people.

"I cannot comprehend how people can take their own lives, let alone the life of someone else. I don't understand how people can hate other people. I can't understand killing.

"I don't like things I don't understand. There's no logic. We search for reasons, for meaning behind tragedy. We want an answer, something logical to cling to. But it's hard to find lessons when there's no rationale.

"It amazes me that it is so easy for one of us to take away another person's life. The only thing I hate is hate itself."

RICHARD CASTALDO

Columbine student left paralyzed by the shootings

By Kevin Simpson

Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - "The hardest thing," Richard Castaldo says, "is to keep your balance around curves." He sits in a brown Chevy van plastered with Led Zeppelin and Doors bumper stickers. Fuzzy dice dangle from the rearview mirror and the odometer reads 1,375 - barely broken in, rarin' to go. Richard turned 18 in September, five months after a barrage of bullets changed his life as he ate lunch on the lawn of Columbine High School. He already had his driver's license.



Now he needs a different one.

The van, equipped with hand controls and a mechanized lift for his wheelchair, rests slightly off-kilter in a handicapped parking space at a strip mall in Parker. Richard leans his left arm, scarred and nerve-damaged by gunfire, nonchalantly out the driver's-side window.

"Richard, I assume?" says Carol, the smiling, middle-aged woman who appears at his door to administer his driving test on March 1.

Richard makes the van rumble to life, and backs carefully out of the parking space. He drives with the measured, careful movements of the novice under scrutiny - flashing his signal lights, coming to complete stops, turning corners slowly.

Paralysis below his chest means he no longer can rely on his trunk muscles for stability in the driver's seat.

"I just have to lean into it a little bit," he says. "It's not too bad." On the return approach to the parking lot, Richard's turn signal blinks to life several hundred feet before the intersection. He maneuvers into a parking spot - no parallel parking on this test, though - and begins the process of shifting to his wheelchair, opening the side doors, operating the lift.

Carol says he's one of the best handicapped drivers she's ever tested. The rest is just paperwork. Does he want to be an organ donor?

"Sure." Richard pays his money, smiles for a photo. The braces he wore for three years are gone. His dark hair, once all wild curls, has been parted down the middle and brushed back. He looks ...- older.

He'll graduate in May with his Columbine class, then take a year off to figure out what to do with the rest of his life. Maybe he'll own a restaurant.

At the moment, he wants to pick up his girlfriend, then his dad and visiting grandfather, and go eat dinner, freely exercising the sacred teen rite of mobility.

"If I want to go somewhere," he says triumphantly, "I get in the van and leave." Richard insists he's dealt with Columbine:

"It's still kind of hard to believe someone could be stupid enough, or angry enough, to do that. I didn't even meet them." And he remains optimistic about the future in general, spinal cord research in particular.

He embraces independence the way his van hugs the road. Solid, stable, moving forward. Balance around curves.

"I always thought it was going to get better," Richard says. "I couldn't imagine it getting much worse."

The father of STEVEN CURNOW

By Susan Besze Wallace
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Steven Curnow stood looking a little cocky, whistle in hand. "You know, Dad," he said to his refereeing buddy, "there's a lot of power in this."

And with that power, Bob Curnow told his only son, "there's a lot of responsibility." The exchange last year meant as much to the elder Curnow as Steven's choosing to follow his example and referee.

Now the words mean even more, as a man copes with a different power and responsibility: being the father of a boy killed in an infamous crime.

"Too many are dead, so how could anything good come of that? But each of us - all of us - have had to find a focus, a commitment, something to fund, something to do," Curnow says. "Maybe people are loving their kids more after this. And that, that is a good thing."

Curnow has chosen a path that immerses him in Steven's memories and peers and pastimes - and the place where he drew his last breath. A week after the shooting, Curnow was back coaching Steven's Colorado Rush soccer team. He still is. He's also still judging debate and speech competitions, some at Columbine, and he tutors at Skinner Middle School.

"I do it for me, because it's who I am," says Curnow, who manages an engineering office.

"But I do it more to encourage the kids, to give them the confidence to deal with life's situations and not pull into a shell. Life and living are about people. I guess I am, too."

Curnow says he was the first person to return to Leawood Elementary April 21, where the day before, hundreds of parents gathered to await news of their children.

Even at 5 a.m. he kept thinking 14-year-old Steven would call to say "Gee, I was at the mall." But he knew that he and his former wife, Susie, had raised their son better.

And perhaps Steven raised his dad a little, too. Weeks before his death, Steven told his father he forgave him for the mistakes that led to his parents' breakup. On the soccer field, Curnow is known as much as cheerleader as coach, and by his precepts: "Did you have fun? Did you learn something? Did you do your best?"

"I've always said kids learn more from losing. They learn how to get back up and get out there. Now, I realize that's me I've been talking to." Some are surprised Curnow can laugh. During one soccer game he joked with Steven's teammates - his pallbearers - about No. 11 coming over the hill from the cemetery "to kick your butt." When one employee got mad at him he told another, "- Someone's already shot my son, what else can be done to me?" - "



done to me?" - "

"Maybe it's a defense mechanism. But this is my new normal. I get frustrated when people want to return to normal, because there's no going back. There's a new normal for us all."

Curnow's new normal includes serving on the state board of Parents of Murdered Children, a group found while surfing Internet sites linked to his son's name. Attending was tough at first.

"I felt I had a big 'C' on my forehead, like the big 'D' I felt I had after the divorce," he says.

"But I also knew from that experience what it was like to be with people who could truly say 'I know how you feel.' As tragic as Columbine is, there are people with just as horrible stories, people waiting on trials, murders with no suspects, even one woman who said the coroner lost the remains of her son."

POMC, Curnow says, helps him remember that his son was the victim, and he is a survivor.

"I can't do anything else for Steven, but if soccer or whatever else I do makes a difference in one kid's life, it will be worth it."

"If there's anything you told your kids you'd do, do it. 'See ya tomorrow' should have a different meaning now."



BILL STUART

Journalist whose depression was set off by Columbine

By Joanne Ostrow
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Channel 4 anchorman Bill Stuart was supposed to go to the dentist, not to work, last April 20. But he was drawn in, and ended up in a struggle with his own demons.

That morning, he'd had a tooth removed.

"I was stretched out on the couch in one of those anesthesia-induced semi-comas, drifting in and out of sleep. My wife comes in and says, 'Looks like something's going on at one of the schools, maybe somebody with a gun.'" Probably not much to it, he thought. The phone rang. It was the station.

He went to work with his mouth full of gauze and stayed on the air for the next eight hours, broadcasting for the hometown a story that gripped the nation.

Sitting in the anchor chair, he watched as cameras captured the reunions of parents and kids released from the school.

"It first hit me, what's going on with those parents whose kids aren't there?" As the father of a high-school-age son, he says, "I got tears in my eyes several times. It was just so sad.

"You try to be this professional straightforward broadcaster but that's not always possible. We're all human beings. We feel bad for other people when bad things happen to them."

The events forced Stuart to recognize and get treatment for a longstanding clinical depression that was coming on for several years but was "set off" by Columbine.

"Columbine dragged me down enough that I was finally at a point where my wife said, 'You're going to the doctor.' I may have ended up there anyway; this may have speeded it up a bit.

"I was angry, angry at everything. I was fairly nasty to people. People would take a wide berth around me in the halls."

His doctor put him on medication.

"You don't know how bad you were until you get better. I'm convinced there are a lot of us out there who are untreated and undiagnosed. The medication doesn't make you happy, it makes you normal.

"I get up every morning and along with high blood pressure and cholesterol medication, take my Effexor. I don't miss a day."

He thought about suicide then, and was reminded of those thoughts when shooting victim Anne Marie Hochhalter's mother, Carla, killed herself in October.

"That brought back some really terrible memories. When I saw that story I thought, 'How could she do that and leave her family?' And I thought, 'Stupid, you went through the same thing with depression!' You just sort of lose control of your life."

Stuart was practiced at passing along bad news - plane crashes, hurricanes and so on - from which he kept emotional distance.

"But this, you never could justify, make any sense out of why it happened." Stuart's attitudes toward his profession have changed since the April 20 massacre and the shootings elsewhere that followed it.

"It just keeps happening," he says. "You wonder what's wrong in this country. When you're young you tend to disregard people who blame violence in the media and violent video games. But as you get older you say, maybe there's something to that.

"I have cable television at my desk (and) every so often I'll see these guys machinegunning people casually. I just sit there and I say, 'What does that tell kids?'"



AMBER BURGESS

Columbine graduate and Olympic hopeful

By Mark Kiszla
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - She stood before the aching crowd at the memorial service a year ago and started a chant that 70,000 voices would finish.

"We are ..." said Amber Burgess.

"Columbine!" they answered.

Today, inspired by her Columbine coach, who was killed in the school shootings, she is chasing a dream that's pure gold. Her fondest hope is to make the United States proud at the Olympic Games.

A freshman at the University of Nebraska, the 19-year-old Columbine graduate is majoring in special education. Between classes, she dons a catcher's mask and shin guards to play softball for the Huskers. Her batting average is a sweet .320. Her talent made Amber one of only 35 players invited to the Olympic Trials in September for the 2004 Summer Games in Greece.

"Why do I want to go to the Olympics?" Amber asks. "The appeal is that chance to wear USA across my chest. To hear the National Anthem at the opening ceremonies. To represent my country and be an example. To get the best goose bumps I can imagine in sports." Her inspiration is Dave Sanders, the teacher who sacrificed his own life trying to save his students.

Amber knew him simply as Coach.

"Coach Sanders comes into my mind at the strangest times. When I strike out, when I get frustrated at practice, I remember him saying, "Gosh, this is only a game. Have fun."

"When I step in the batter's box and need a big hit, I think: I'll do it for you, Coach. I'll do it for you."

STEVE DAVIS

Jefferson County sheriff's spokesman

By Peter G. Chronis
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Grueling hours. Blistering criticism. Unforgiving media coverage.

Jefferson County sheriff's spokesman Steve Davis, whose press briefings kept the world informed about the shootings, says it's been an exhausting year.

Davis' department has been criticized by victims' families for withholding information, being insensitive to their pain and for releasing details to reporters before sharing them with relatives of the dead and wounded.

"There's been a lot of criticism. We knew that was going to happen from Day 1.

"There's absolutely no way to get around it," he says. "If you look at the major cases around the country in the last few years, that seems to be standard operating procedure.

"Certainly we're as human as anybody else, and a lot of the time the criticism affects us as it would anyone. But first and foremost, we are in the business of investigating criminal activity. That's what we have to do, and that's what we continue to do."

Investigators have worked 70-, 80-, 90-hour weeks following up leads, interviewing witnesses and compiling the final report, now due out next month. The investigation became the largest criminal probe in Colorado history.

"It's been emotional for a lot of people," Davis says.

It's also been tiresome for Davis to provide information to the worldwide media, whose interest in the story hasn't abated. On several occasions, sheriff's deputies have been summoned to the school to escort reporters off school grounds, he said.

As the department finishes its final report, Davis says officers feel a strong sense of duty "to share what we learned with other departments, because next year we may need information from a department that's handled some kind of situation we haven't."

The family of MATTHEW KECHTER

By Evan Dreyer
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - The tissue box in the Kechter house is covered with dust.

"That's a good sign," Ann Kechter says. "It means we're doing a little better."

Yes, she and husband Joe still cry a lot over the murder of their son, Matt. Like the other day, when Joe found a 30-minute cassette tape with Matt's voice on it in his car. Joe wept all the way home.



But it's no longer like the constant gushing of tears in the days, weeks and months immediately after Matt, 16, was shot in the Columbine High library.

Ann, Joe and their younger son, 13-year-old Adam, are coping the best they can.

"It's still hard. We've really lost that joy to life," Ann, 41, says in a living room punctuated with photos of Matt as a toddler, a young boy and finally a high school football player.

"Moving on? I don't think there's any such thing. We're carrying on. We're redefining our lives and trying to carry on without our oldest son."

With the first anniversary just days away, carrying on has meant many things - including Ann and the mothers of two other victims getting tattoos with columbine flowers.

The Kechters are helping to lead the effort to raise \$3.1 million to convert the school library into an open atrium. They have hobnobbed with John Elway, professional wrestler Mick "Mankind" Foley and philanthropist Sharon Magness. They have met President Clinton and still receive gifts from a couple of Secret Service agents.

They, like the other Columbine victims' families, have become celebrities born of tragedy.

"None of this will ever, ever take the place of Matt," Ann says. "But we've met such amazing people, and we're just ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. It's a strange place to be."



Joe, 42, adds: "And the funny thing is, Matt would have been the one to really enjoy meeting all these people." To this day, they are humbled by the kindness and support of their community, of people "who give from the heart," says Joe, a roofing contractor.

A woman from Lakewood, a complete stranger, has adopted them, sending periodic gifts - a table covering, garden-grown tomatoes, skin lotion, says Ann, a gas-buyer for the Public Service Co.

They will always be touched by Columbine's varsity football team, which won its first state championship in December in honor of No. 70 Matthew Joseph Kechter, who had been a junior-varsity lineman his sophomore year.

Their closest friends have become the families of the other slain children. Nobody else quite understands the profound sadness, the therapeutic need to talk about how their children died and the pain of not yet knowing those details.

Ann lies awake at night imagining Matt's final moments. She cries because, though she still dreams about Matt, she can no longer smell him, even on his bedroom pillow.

"The library will get built and the anniversary will come and go," Ann says. "But we're still going to come home to an empty house without our oldest son. That is our reality. We still don't have Matthew."

And because the media coverage has been relentless, the grieving process is extremely complicated, Ann and Joe say. They've contemplated moving across the county or out of the metro area entirely, in search of a place where it might be easier to grieve privately.

But the support network is so great here that leaving is unlikely. "We've looked for a place where it would hurt less," says Ann, "but it'll hurt no matter where we are." Even the little things can send a jolt of unexpected sorrow through them: changing the answering machine message so it no longer includes Matt's name; naming the people who live in the house on the census form; listing the number of dependents on the income-tax forms.

"I will always have two," Ann says of her children.

Sometimes she wears Matt's clothes. She still has videotapes of Matt that she hasn't watched since last April, holding them in reserve for a day when she can't carry on without them. And every once in a while she'll wake up and, just for a second, forget that the straight-A son who wanted to be an engineer is dead.

But the pain always comes back.

Many days, the pain only gets worse. Ann and Joe can't pick up the newspaper, turn on the TV or flick on the radio without hearing something about Columbine.

And watching action-adventure movies or violent TV shows is impossible.

Getting through Christmas was tolerable only because Ann and Adam decorated the tree with 13 angels (she named each in memory of a slaying victim) and 23 silver bows (one for each of the injured).

Matt's birthday, Feb. 19, was hard, too. The family - including aunts, uncles and cousins - rented a few cabins in Estes Park. They ice-skated, went out to dinner and told stories about Matt. His aunt and uncle baked two cakes - one shaped like a football and the other like a heart with the words, "We love you, Matt." "It was really a celebration of his life," Ann says. On their way home, they stopped by the cemetery. Friends had decorated Matt's grave with giant balloons, ribbons and cards. "It was good to know people still remembered," Joe says. Sports were a bond between Joe and his older son. They played golf together, and Joe was the kind of dad who, for years, rushed home from work to coach Matt's athletic teams. Matt also was a big pro-wrestling fan, and Adam remains so. Among those who've come to the Kechters' side is wrestler Mick Foley.

He calls regularly to talk with Ann, Joe and Adam, and during a February appearance at the Denver Coliseum, he gave the Kechters front-row tickets, invited them backstage, and then ducked out with them for a midnight dinner at Denny's.

He also gave Adam his trademark Mr. Sock-O hand puppet. Adam keeps it in a frame.

Adam, say Ann and Joe, has helped propel the family through the past year.

"That's what motivates us," Ann says. "We have a 13-year-old son who has his whole life ahead of him. We have to be positive and optimistic so we can try to provide him with a future. We can't just quit living. We have a responsibility to him." Part of that responsibility is deciding whether Adam goes to Columbine in the fall. He wants to, and Ann and Joe probably will let him.

Someday, Ann and Joe say, they would like to become foster parents and get involved in violence-prevention programs.

"I feel like I've matured by 25 years and now look at life like I'm an old lady," Ann says. "It's easier to know what's important: loving your children, being a good parent, having a relationship with God." "We'll never be the same," she adds. "But with time and courage, we can be strong again."

KATHY HOFSTRA

Columbine mother

By Emily Narvaes
Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - The e-mail from Kevin Hofstra, a freshman at Yale University, was simple enough.

Mom, I'm going to call you at 10 o'clock tonight 'cause I want to talk to you.

Kathy Hofstra panicked. The Re/Max Realtor canceled her appointment for the evening and waited by the phone in her Columbine Knolls South home.

"I'm thinking, "Oh my goodness, what is this going to be?"- " Hofstra says. "He always just e-mails, so it was real unusual that he was going to call."

Her fears, it turned out, were baseless. Kevin, a 1999 Columbine graduate, just wanted to discuss his test scores.

At the Hofstra house, this is life in the year after Columbine.

Hofstra's brown eyes fill with tears at Hallmark commercials. She bawls when her son makes a soccer goal. She insists her family sit around the table for dinner.

Kevin was not hurt in the shootings. He was in Argentina at an Olympic soccer camp at the time.

But for the 51-year-old Hofstra the Columbine tragedy couldn't get any closer to home.

"Everybody I know lives in this area and goes to that school," Hofstra says, her voice wavering.

It was April 20 and Hofstra had just sunk a putt on the sixth hole of the Meadows at the Fox Hollow Golf Course when friend Linda Sands' cell phone rang. Sands' face turned white.

From Fox Hollow they could hear sirens. Hofstra tried reaching her husband, Littleton's fire marshal, but he was enmeshed in the activity at the school.

"So I just came home and watched it on TV." Media reports about Columbine reached Kevin in Argentina, but he couldn't contact his parents until close to midnight, Hofstra says. Two days later, he was home.

"When he got off that plane, I looked at my husband and said, "Do you think Kevin's going to feel bad when I totally lose it when I see him?" Kevin was the same way. We just hugged.

It was amazing. To see him in the flesh after going through all this."

Hofstra talks to her children often these days. Kristi and her fiance come over for Sunday dinner regularly. Kathy and her husband, Jim, have attended a dozen of their sons' soccer games in New Haven, Conn. For New Year's, the entire family took a cruise.

She takes more family time on evenings and weekends - typically the busiest times for Realtors.

"Before, I'd always feel bad telling people that," she says. "I don't anymore." Prior to Columbine, Hofstra would not have driven Kevin 2,000 miles to college last August. But her attitude has changed.

She thought, "I gotta take my kid there and see him and put him in his room and say goodbye." Hofstra, her daughter and son rented a van and drove straight through.

"We had a really, really good time," she says. "It's a lot of time to talk."

"It was real cute, when we got there at the very end, Kevin goes, "Well, Mom, aren't you glad you had all this quality time with me? Maybe you're not so sad to see me leave now," " says Hofstra, laughing. "You get a little bit on each other's nerves when you're riding in the car all that time."

TED HOCHHALTER

Columbine parent who lost his wife in October

By Kevin Simpson



Denver Post Staff Writer

Apr. 16 - Ted Hochhalter eased into his daughter's wheelchair, as if his own lower body were numb, paralyzed, gone.

He wheeled himself through the house to feel Anne Marie's world - shoes bumping against walls, hands pinched and scraped between the chair and the doorway.

"I can't begin to imagine what she goes through physically and emotionally every day," Hochhalter says. "And I live with her every day." Empathy offered one way to cope with Columbine. But six months after gunshots left 18-year-old Anne Marie paralyzed below the waist, Hochhalter

was tested again.

He lost Carla - his wife for more than 22 years, his best friend for even longer - to suicide. She had been "a rock, a pillar," in the school shooting's immediate aftermath. But chronic depression eventually overcame the 48-year-old former teacher when the long-term implications of Anne Marie's spinal cord injury began to sink in.

His wife's death left Hochhalter, 50, as single parent to Anne Marie and 16-year-old Nathan, aided by a nurturing network of family, church and community.

But certain questions arise and confound him, whether they are profoundly personal or simply commonplace.

They are shopping, and Anne Marie asks his opinion about clothes.

Do these colors go?

Does this style look good?

"I'm not very good at color coordination or mixing and matching styles," Hochhalter admits.

"Those are situations where a mother's touch would be invaluable." But he never asks himself: What would Carla do?

"To my way of thinking, she was irreplaceable," Hochhalter says, "and I don't want to even pretend to be able to do the things she brought to this family. The only thing I can do in those situations is ask for help from the people who knew Carla, respected her and loved her."

Hochhalter's job in emergency management with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, while hardly approximating the crises of single parenthood, did help him plan for the array of challenges - economics, logistics, media - that confronted him over the past year.

Other federal workers continue to donate leave time, freeing him from the workplace to devote himself entirely to his family. People tell him he's strong, but he shakes his head - no stronger than anyone else would be in his situation.

Little things trip him up.

"I look at my daughter and see a tenacious, courageous individual. Same with my son. I know we'll meet every obstacle thrown our way. But the most difficult times are when I'll

walk into a restaurant that Carla and I used to go to. Or I'll see a TV ad, and it will remind me of something she said.

"It's difficult coping with missing her as much as I do." He concentrates on Anne Marie and her steady progress toward independence. He vows to devote more time to Nathan, who like many siblings of Columbine victims has lived in the shadow of more pressing needs. And who looks out for Ted Hochhalter?

"It's not about me," he says.

In his search for understanding, Hochhalter recently took another glimpse of Anne Marie's world. He slid behind the wheel of his daughter's car, a '92 Saturn donated by a friend and equipped with hand-controls. Attempting a stop, he moved the control in the wrong direction.

The car lurched forward.

He stomped on the foot brake, and with crystal clarity he was confronted, again, with his lasting lesson from Columbine.

Take nothing for granted. "I don't think any one of us can grasp the enormity of what happened. People who have lost children come the closest. When you start talking about the word - Columbine - and what it represents in the American lexicon, it's synonymous with sadness. On the other hand, I like to think it's synonymous with hope."