

Columbine killers on tape

Year-old audio holds no clues to future violence

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LITTLETON, Colorado (CNN) -- Among those asking what they could have done to prevent the Columbine High School massacre are the Colorado judge and other legal system personnel fooled by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold last year after the teens sought to clear their records for breaking into a van.

Harris and Klebold came before Jefferson County Magistrate Jack DeVita with their fathers at separate court hearings that lasted about five minutes each.

Listening to audio tapes of those hearings, DeVita now wonders if he missed warning signs of a tragedy ahead.

The seemingly repentant voices he heard in his courtroom on March 25, 1998 were really those of angry madmen who would go on to kill 12 fellow students and a teacher in a gun and bomb rampage before taking their own lives.

Judge questions Harris

"Where do you go to school," DeVita asked Harris.

"Columbine High School," the teen answers.

"And what grade are you in?"

"I'm a junior."

"Now this was the first time you went out and engaged in this kind of activity, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," answers Harris.

"Why don't I believe that?" says DeVita.

Judge questions Klebold

Questioning Klebold, the judge asks: "What kind of grades do you get?"

"C-minus, sir. C-plus, B-minus average."

Addressing the court moments later, Klebold's father says: "This has been a rather traumatic experience, I think. It's probably a good, a good thing, a good experience that he did get caught the first time. As far as I can tell, this was the first time."

"Would he tell you if there were any more?" DeVita wonders.

"Yes, he would, actually."

"It means you got a good relationship?"

"Yes," replies Thomas Klebold.

'They were able to fool everybody'

At the same time they were planning their attack on Columbine, the teens completed 45 hours of community service, received counseling and wrote an apology to the car's owner. Harris received additional counseling in anger management.

Less than three months ago, their court officer recommended that the teens be allowed to complete the program early because of their bright prospects.

Klebold "is intelligent enough to make any dream a reality," the unidentified officer wrote. Harris enjoyed his anger-management counseling and "is a very bright young man who is likely to succeed in life," he wrote.

The diversion officer now feels terrible, said his boss, Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas.

"He's anguishing over what happened here," said Thomas, who believes the officer did the best he could.

"These guys came in and put their best face on," Thomas said. "Most of us in the system wish we were human lie-detectors, but we're not."

In retrospect, DeVita describes Harris and Klebold as "aliens of a different sort. They were able to fool everybody."

"There were no red flags that I saw then," the judge told CNN. "In reviewing the tape, there were none that I see now."

Instead there are only questions.

"There may not be answers," says DeVita. "It'll be a black hole in all our hearts for the rest of our lives."