

Columbine suffering seems never-ending

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Oct 22, 1999

LITTLETON, Colo. — Even six months after the massacre at Columbine High School, the suffering just won't end. Carla June Hochhalter, whose daughter was critically wounded in the April attack that left 15 others dead, took her own life Friday.

"This pain and suffering is not fair. We do not understand it," District Attorney Dave Thomas said in a statement Friday. With her daughter making her best progress yet from spinal cord wounds that had left her unable to move, no one could say why Mrs. Hochhalter committed suicide. She left a note, but its contents were withheld by authorities. The Denver Post reported that she apologized to her family. Authorities said Mrs. Hochhalter visited a pawn shop Friday morning in nearby Englewood. She asked to see a .38-caliber handgun, loaded it with ammunition she had brought with her and killed herself with a shot to the head. The clerk had turned his back to fill out required paperwork when Mrs. Hochhalter fired one bullet into a store wall, then fired again into her right temple.

Connie Michalik, whose son Richard Castaldo also was injured in the April 20 shootings, said she became friends with Mrs. Hochhalter while their children went through painful rehabilitation at Craig Hospital. "I thought she was better, especially when Anne Marie moved her legs for the first time last

week," Mrs. Michalik said Friday. "There was something finally, something to look forward to. There were finally happier times." But Mrs. Michalik admitted she also had gone "through my down stage."

The feelings are to be expected, said Harriet Hall, the psychologist in charge of counseling the Columbine victims. She said research has shown that grief can really take hold about six months after a tragedy. "They say some people go through the worst grieving from four to six months. I think you really start noticing the person's missing," said Linda Mauser, whose son, Daniel, was killed at Columbine. Mrs. Michalik said Mrs. Hochhalter may have felt overburdened. "The whole thing was too much for her," she said. "They had to move (because her daughter was paralyzed). She didn't want to move out of the old house. She was settled. Then they had to remodel, live in hotels and I think it was too much for her."

Anne Marie, a senior, is taking a physics class at Columbine while a tutor teaches the rest of her classes at home. She was with her father, Ted Hochhalter, at an elementary school accepting a check from a fund raiser for medical bills when her mother went to the pawn shop, the Post reported. The suicide was the latest shock for students and families in the Littleton area. Jefferson County School District officials planned to have grief counselors available this weekend to help deal with any trauma. A student was arrested this week for allegedly threatening "to finish the job" begun by the two student gunmen. Additionally, CBS-TV was criticized for airing a snippet of the security camera videotape that was taken in the school cafeteria as the massacre unfolded.