

"I'm Full of Hate and I Love It"

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WESTWORD

A year before the shootings at Columbine High School, Eric David Harris already had the plan worked out in his head.

He knew what time to attack the school in order to kill and maim the most students. He knew where he and fellow gunman Dylan Klebold, alias "V" or "Vodka," would park their bomb-laden cars, what they would wear ("all black"), and how they should act ("very casual and silent") as they hauled bags full of explosives into the cafeteria. And he knew how he wanted it to end.

"Sometime in April [1999] me and V will get revenge and will kick natural selection up a few notches," Harris wrote in his journal on April 26, 1998. "If we have figured out the art of time bombs beforehand, we will set hundreds of them around houses, roads, bridges, buildings and gas stations, anything that will cause damage and chaos...It'll be like the LA riots, the Oklahoma bombing, WWII, Vietnam, [video games] Duke [Nukem] and Doom all mixed together...I want to leave a lasting impression on the world."

Over the next twelve months, Harris refined his plan -- assembling an arsenal of bombs, acquiring guns and ammo, plotting the smallest details with an obsessiveness bordering on mania. He and Klebold never strayed from their course. Never mind that they both were in a juvenile-diversion program throughout 1998 for breaking into a van, or that Harris had been grounded by his parents for months (for drinking and bomb-making, he writes, as well as the van burglary), or that he was also the subject of a police investigation into Internet death threats. Adults were easy to fool, and Harris boasted in his journal of his ability to "BS so fucking well" to con and deceive all the stupid people around him who deserved to die.

"I am higher than you people," he wrote. "If you disagree I would shoot you...some people go through life begging to be shot."

Seized by police from Harris's room hours after the shootings, the killer's journal has been one of the darkest secrets of the Columbine investigation, its public release staunchly opposed by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. Short excerpts dribbled out in briefings given to school administrators and were leaked to Salon.com in 1999. Last year the sheriff's official report quoted a few lines as well, including a statement that no one should be blamed for the massacre but Harris and Klebold -- a plea, in effect, to absolve police and school officials of any responsibility for the tragedy.

But that isn't Harris's primary message. The handwritten pages obtained by *Westword* offer hate, not absolution. They ooze with contempt for cops and other authority figures, people Harris considered embarrassingly easy to dupe, which may be one reason why these writings have been suppressed so long. And they provide glimpses of a teenage terrorist who couldn't wait to carry out his violent fantasies, who was more virulently racist and more acutely psychotic -- batshit mad-dog crazy, in layman's terms -- than previously reported.

They also represent a lost opportunity to have prevented the shootings. Last week U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock threw out lawsuits filed by victims' families who claimed, among other things, that the sheriff's office had failed to adequately investigate death threats Harris made against classmate Brooks Brown. A year before the massacre, Brown's parents, Randy and Judy, had provided Jeffco with copies of pages from Harris's Web site in which he described detonating pipe bombs. The sheriff's office has said it didn't have enough evidence to pursue the matter. Judge Babcock noted that the "vague, rambling rants" on the Web site didn't include a specific threat to attack Columbine.

But the journal was highly specific. Had the police acted on the search-warrant request for Harris's home that an investigator had drafted in response to the Brown complaint, it's likely that officers would have found at least some of these writings, which feature detailed information about guns, explosives and strategy -- information the police didn't discover until they searched Harris's room hours after the massacre. Information they've kept under wraps ever since.

In the spring of 1998, while Randy Brown was trying desperately to get the police to take a closer look at Eric Harris, the precocious lad was hammering out his plans to slaughter Brown's entire family. He wanted NBK -- short for "Natural Born Killers," his name for the coming apocalypse -- to start with a visit to the Brown household. He and Klebold would "take our sweet time pissing on them, spitting on them, and just torturing the hell out of them," he wrote, before heading on to Columbine.

"It's deeply disturbing," says Randy Brown of the journal pages he recently reviewed. "And Sheriff [John] Stone has known about this for more than two years. He knew that Eric wanted to kill my entire family, but he went ahead and treated Brooks like a possible accomplice anyway."

Not all of Harris's meticulous planning came to fruition. The gunmen never mastered the art of the time bomb, and they ultimately decided against wearing the "custom shirts," with matching NBK emblems, that Harris envisioned. (On the day of the attack, Harris wore a T-shirt espousing "Natural Selection"; Klebold's T-shirt bore one word: "Wrath.") Many details, though, including the notion of lobbing bombs and firing at students outside, then heading inside to "pick off fuckers at our will," remained remarkably consistent throughout the months of plotting.

Mixed in with the nitty-gritty preparations for mass murder were grandiose fantasies about how far they could go. Maybe they could "hijack some awesome car" and "start torching houses" with Molotov cocktails. Steal a plane and crash it into New York City. Anything was possible, really; in his own sick head, Harris had transformed his estrangement from his classmates into a smug sense of superiority, which he regarded as both a blessing and a curse:

"I hate this fucking world...You may be saying, 'Well, what makes you so different?' Because I have something only me and V have, SELF AWARENESS...We know what we are to this world and what everyone else is...We know what you think and how you act...This isn't a world any more, it's H.O.E." Hell on Earth.

Although he denounced racism on his Web page, he embraced it proudly in his private journal. "I am one racist motherfucker," he announced. "Fuck the niggers and spics and chinks, unless they are cool, but sometimes they are so fucking retarded." But just because he was a racist didn't mean he discriminated; he also lashed out at "white trash p.o.s [pieces of shit]" who deserved to die, too.

When you came right down to it, everybody deserved to die, except maybe ten people: "If I could nuke the world I would."

Harris uncorked his deepest, most venomous feelings in his journal. At the same time, he tried to strike a master-criminal pose, knowing that cops would be poring over his words some day. The result is a bundle of contradictions -- part Holden Caulfield, part Travis Bickel. He boasts of the "big lies" he's told his parents: "Yeah, I stopped smoking....No, I haven't been making more bombs." The big lie about the van break-in was that he was sorry "for doing it, not for getting caught."

He told quite a few lies about the January 1998 burglary, in which he and Klebold were busted and booked for helping themselves to electronic equipment sitting in a van parked in Deer Creek Canyon. As a requirement of the diversion program, he wrote a respectful letter of apology to the van owner: "My parents and everyone else that knew me was shocked that I did something like that. My parents lost almost all their trust in me and I was grounded for two months...I am truly sorry for what I have done."

He also wrote an essay for his court-ordered anger-management class that dripped similar sentiments: "I am happy to say that with the help of this class, and several other diversion-related experiences, I do want to try to control my anger."

Privately, though, he raged against the injustice of it all: "Isn't America supposed to be the land of the free? How come, if I'm free, I can't deprive a stupid fucking dumbshit from his possessions if he leaves them sitting in the front seat of his fucking van out in plain sight and in the middle of fucking nowhere on a Frifuckingday night. NATURAL SELECTION. Fucker should be shot."

Harris also chose to write about the van break-in for a school assignment; he called it "the most significant event that has changed my life." Although he expresses remorse for his actions, the "lesson" he derives from his arrest is to plan ahead: "That experience showed me that no matter what crime you think of committing, you will get caught, that you must, absolutely must, think things through before you act."

His teacher wrote enthusiastic comments in response to the paper: "You have really learned from this, and it has changed the way you think...I would trust you in a heartbeat."

He fooled his teachers, but not the ladies. Among his other preparations, Harris spent considerable energy in his last few months trying to get laid, with little success. The females he lusted after at Columbine seemed to sense that violence was his girl. One remarkable passage in the journal starts as typical adolescent drooling over babes he'd like to bag, but quickly devolves into an orgy of savagery:

"Who can I trick into my room first? I can sweep someone off their feet, tell them what they want to hear, be all nice and sweet, and then 'fuck 'em like an animal, feel them from the inside,' as [Trent] Reznor said...

"I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to their heart, and yank the fucking blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a wolf, show them who is god. Strangle them, squish their head, bite their temples in the skull, rip off their jaw...the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahhh...so much to do and so little chances."

Showing them who is god began to look easier after they bought firearms at a local gun show in December 1998. "Today was a very important day in the history of R," Harris wrote. "Today along with Vodka and someone who I won't name, we went downtown and purchased the following: a double-barrel 12 ga. shotgun, a pump-action 12 ga. shotgun, a 9mm carbine, 250 9mm rounds, 15 12 ga. slugs, 40

shotgun shells, 2 switchblade knives, and a total of 4 10-round clips for the carbine. We...have...GUNS! We fucking got 'em you sons of bitches!"

"R" probably is short for Reb, Harris's nickname. But it could stand for "revenge" or "Robyn," as in Robyn Anderson, the "someone" Harris wouldn't name -- the eighteen-year-old classmate who served as straw purchaser for the two underage gunmen that day.

The exultation of the shopping spree was clouded by one sad note.

"You know, it's really a shame," Harris continued. "I had a lot of fun at that gun show, I would have loved it if you were there, dad. We would have done some major bonding." But Harris was already in trouble at home for getting caught with a flask of whiskey; his major bonding over the next few months was with bombs and shotguns.

Harris made only one entry in the journal in 1999, two weeks before the attack:

"Months have passed. It's the first Friday night in the final month. Much shit has happened. Vodka has a Tec 9, we test fired all of our babies, we have 6 time clocks ready, 39 crickets, 24 pipe bombs, and the napalm is under construction. Right now I'm trying to get fucked and trying to finish off these time bombs.

"NBK came quick. Why the fuck can't I get any? I mean, I'm nice and considerate and all that shit, but nooooo...The amount of dramatic irony and foreshadowing is fucking amazing. Everything I see and hear I incorporate into NBK somehow...feels like a goddamn movie sometimes...

"I hate you people for leaving me out of so many fun things. And no, don't fucking say, 'Well, that's your fault' because it isn't, you people had my phone #, and I asked and all, but no no no no no don't let the weird looking Eric kid come along, ooh fucking nooo."

That is how the journal ends -- not with the howl of the wolf-god, but the whine of the pathetic geek who can't land a prom date.

And decides everybody deserves to die.

When the first SWAT officers entered the school library almost four hours after the shootings, they found a dozen bodies and one badly wounded girl. The two gunmen were lying in their own blood in a far corner, bombs and guns scattered around them. Klebold was on his back. Harris was crumpled up next to him, leaning against a blood-spattered bookcase.

The top of Harris's head was gone. When the coroner's people moved the body, a "mass of blood" fell out of the open skull and landed on the carpet where Klebold's body had been.

Although questions linger about Klebold's death -- gun in right hand, wound in left temple -- there was no doubt that Harris killed himself. He stuck a shotgun in his mouth and excavated the cranial vault. He blew his brains out.

It was as if, after blaming his misery on "all the fat ugly retarded crippled dumbass stupid fuckheads in the world," the snotty rich toadies and the bitches and the un-self-aware and all the other despised people who needed to be winnowed out, he'd finally elected to deal with the problem at its core.

On a day of obscene horror, it was his one decent act.