

***SHATTERED LIVES -- A special report; Caring Parents, No  
Answers, In Columbine Killers' Pasts***

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The father of one of the boys was asked some years ago to jot down his life's goals in the memory book for his 20th high school reunion. His answer was succinct, straightforward, and, it seemed, not unrealistically ambitious: "Raise two good sons."

The other father prided himself on being his son's soul mate. They had just spent five days visiting the Arizona campus where the teen-ager planned to enroll in the fall, and recently discussed their shared opposition to a bill in the state legislature that would have made it easier to carry concealed weapons.

So, on April 20, when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold stormed into Columbine High School in this Denver suburb and killed 12 classmates and a teacher, then themselves, these men and their wives suffered more than the loss of a child. The boys' bombs and bullets shattered their parents' very view of the world, undermining what had seemed to them and others to be 18 years of responsible child-rearing.

As the nation joined this anonymous bedroom community in horror and sorrow, questions naturally turned to the killers' families for clues about how and why. The authorities revealed that this was no spur-of-the-moment attack; the boys had been plotting their lethal assault in a journal of hatred for a year. And they uncovered signposts of trouble: an arrest for breaking into a van, frightening essays read aloud in classes, an angry Web site spewing recipes for violence.

But more than two months after the killings, the most painful question persists: How could the Harrises and Klebolds not have realized that something, everything, was seriously awry?

"Their life has been forever turned upside down and it will never heal," said Victor Good, whose stepson considered Dylan and Eric his close friends. "They're looking through everything -- 'Was that a sign? Was that a sign? Did I miss something?' They're second-guessing their entire lives."

It is impossible for an outsider to understand the inner workings of any family, and the boys' parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles have all refused to be interviewed. Yet dozens of conversations with neighbors and colleagues, the boys' friends and teachers, distant relatives and acquaintances indicate

that there was a fundamental disconnection between the troubled world of Eric and Dylan and the lives their parents thought they were leading.

The interviews paint a portrait of the Harrises and the Klebolds as caring, conscientious parents who structured their lives around supporting their children -- and who believed, from all accounts, that they were on the right track.

When Wayne Harris, an Air Force pilot, retired six years ago after two decades of base-to-base hopscotch around the country, he and his wife, Kathy, returned to the Denver area, where they had grown up, to rear their two sons near close relatives.

Tom and Sue Klebold, Midwesterners who followed the oil boom west in the 1970's, decided in 1990 to escape the sunken living rooms of the look-alike subdivisions for the red rocks and wild deer of the Rocky Mountain foothills. They bought a breathtaking house that they believed would be "a good influence for their kids, closer to nature and away from the hustle and bustle of the street," said Edie Marks, their real estate agent.

When trouble emerged, the parents reacted: A year ago, the Harrises sent Eric to a psychologist and put him on anti-depressants. If Dylan talked back or stayed out late, the Klebolds grounded him or took away his computer keyboard.

One friend of the boys', Nathan Dykeman, said that after Wayne Harris found a pipe bomb in Eric's closet, he grounded his son, took away his car and computer privileges, and started surprise searches of his room.

But the reins were apparently not tightened enough: the police believe that the two boys continued building bombs in the garage attached to the Harris home, as late as the weekend before the Columbine attack.

Other efforts by the parents appear misguided, as though they were lost in wishful thinking.

Chris Morris, another friend, said the Klebolds were so worried about Dylan's shyness with girls, for example, that they paid him \$250 to attend the Columbine prom so he would have snapshots to look back on later.

And it seems that Eric and Dylan hid their darkest behavior and deadly plot behind facades of stability decorated with future plans.

The outcasts, obsessed with violent video games and intrigued by German rock music and Nazi culture, also had pastimes as wholesome as baseball; they were part of a tight circle of friends, earned top grades, held jobs and looked forward to life after graduation -- factors that no doubt reassured their parents.

In the aftermath of the Littleton shootings, the most vexing question may be not whether the Klebolds and Harrises were caring parents but whether caring is enough. Even if parents attend every Little League game, like Mr. Harris, or ride bikes with the boys, as Mr. Klebold did, do they really know their children? How much does being there matter if a parent fails to -- or refuses to -- see and hear what is actually going on?

"A lot of us are so afraid that if parents can raise a child and this happens to the child, then they can't possibly be good parents," said Carolyn Payne, whose family became friends with the Harrises when they were stationed at the same Air Force bases in Michigan and upstate New York. "But they're just like us."

## The Harrises

### A Military Family Returns to its Roots

Living on military bases, people know one another's business; families get nasty notes if their lawns are not properly trimmed. Former neighbors of the Harrises recalled a quiet, normal family, and said they would have known otherwise.

"You just can't do anything that's aberrant or unlikely without someone finding out about it," said Mark Mayerstein, a retired lieutenant colonel whose family shared a duplex with the Harrises at Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda, Mich. "We never even heard the kids cry."

Mr. Mayerstein's son, Lane, and a third boy played war games with Eric, who lived in Oscoda for two and a half years. "The three of us would be on a mission," Lane said. "We'd be out to destroy this invisible armada."

At Cedar Lake Elementary School in Oscoda, the Harrises stood out because both Wayne, a pilot who trained people to fly the KC-135 refueling plane, and Kathy, a homemaker, attended every school conference. Bonnie Leach, Eric's fifth-grade teacher there, said that she could sense which students would grow up to chase trouble, and that "Eric wasn't one of them."

The Wurtsmith base closed in 1991, sending the Harrises to Plattsburgh, N.Y., where friends and neighbors remembered the boys as Scouts and Little Leaguers, and their parents as being involved in the community and in their children's lives.

When the Plattsburgh base was selected for closing in 1993, Mr. Harris retired as a major and the family moved back home to Denver, where Eric's two sets of grandparents live six blocks apart.

Wayne Nelson Harris and Katherine Ann Pool both grew up in unremarkable homes on modest suburban blocks: his father was a valet at Denver's historic Brown Palace hotel; hers, a World War II veteran, owned a hardware store.

In his 20th reunion book, Wayne cited his father's death of a heart attack when Wayne was 20, as the "low lite [sic] of my life." Kathy's mother, Elaine, is the type of neighbor who brings over cookies whenever she is baking, and Kathy inherited the habit, often sending homemade care packages to her older son and his college roommates.

Once back in Denver, Mr. Harris, whom one acquaintance described as a "Leave it to Beaver dad," began working at a private company that develops flight training simulators. Mrs. Harris took a job at a catering company.

For a while, Eric followed the path set by his brother, Kevin, who was three years older. Kevin was a waiter at a Chili's near Columbine High, Eric a busboy. The younger boy visited the older at the University of Colorado in Boulder for football games.

In high school, Kevin bulked up in the weight room and became a second-string tight end on the football squad. With an A-average and varsity letter jackets, he was admired for his leadership qualities and affable demeanor. "There's no holes in Kevin," said Andy Lowry, Columbine's football coach.

Eric, gawky at 5 foot 9, complained to a co-worker at Blackjack Pizza that he was not as tall as his brother. During his freshman year, Eric wore a flattop and dressed preppy; by last fall, his hair was spiked and the ominous messages on his T-shirts were often covered by a trench coat. He began to abandon baseball and soccer for a computer netherworld and replace his parents' expectations that he would go to college with hopes of enlisting in the Marines.

"I think there was a little sibling rivalry," said Kimberly Howe, the family's dental hygienist.

Always saying "yes, sir" and "no, ma'am," Eric was polite to adults, but showed a darker side at school.

The boy Mr. Good described as "the ultimate little gentleman" began a yearbook message to Nathan Dykeman, Mr. Good's stepson, with the words "Ich Bin Gott," German for "I am God."

"I hate everything unless I say otherwise," Eric wrote. "Hey, don't follow your dreams or goals or any of that, follow your animal instincts, if it moves kill it, if it doesn't, burn it."

## The Klebolds

### A 'Country' House Provides a Haven

Dylan Bennet Klebold grew up in a house without guns, even toy guns.

"Tom was adamant," said Randy DeHoff, a former neighbor, who recalls Mr. Klebold saying ' "We don't need guns in the house; we're not going to play with them.' "

But by grade school, Dylan was already an ace at Nintendo's Iron Tank, "a war game all about shooting people," recalled Kevin Hofstra, a childhood friend. Later, Dylan would make videos of explosions.

The Klebolds had tried to guard against this fascination: When Dylan and a friend brought home violent movies in fourth grade, it prompted a "big conversation," recalled Judy Brown, the other boy's mother. Two years earlier, Mrs. Brown said, she and Sue Klebold had "made a pact" that "we would always tell each other if our kids got into trouble."

Vicki DeHoff, whose daughters splashed in the neighborhood pool with Dylan and his older brother, Byron, back in elementary school days, said Mrs. Klebold was "a better mother than I was."

"Sue was more patient and gentle and kind with her kids than I was able to be," Mrs. DeHoff said.

Susan Frances Klebold was the granddaughter of a Columbus, Ohio, builder and philanthropist, Leo Yassenoff, whose name adorns the local Jewish Community Center. Susan, a talented artist, grew up with an older sister and younger brother in a sumptuous house in Columbus's Bexley neighborhood.

"Susie had this tremendous wit," recalled Susan Cohen, a classmate at the private Columbus School for Girls. "She said her family had taught her to always leave them laughing."

Charles Huelsman, Susan's stepbrother, glimpsed a more melancholy side to her in a dreary painting she did of a girl, mourning, as the chair she was sitting on appeared to melt like candle wax. "It was not one of the paintings she wanted to show to people," Mr. Huelsman said.

While studying art at Ohio State University, Susan met Thomas Ernest Klebold, a sculptor from Toledo, who later became a geophysicist. Tom was a child of tragedy: his mother died when he was 6, his father when he was 12, leaving him to be reared by a half-brother 18 years his senior.

Tom and Sue married in 1971 and soon settled in the Denver suburbs, where Dylan was born. The boys attended confirmation classes at a Lutheran church and observed Jewish rituals at home.

In 1990, the family moved to a dramatic house of gray slate and glass in Deer Creek Canyon, a bargain at \$65,000 because it needed a lot of electrical work, which Mr. Klebold tackled happily.

Dylan's second-floor bedroom had a window seat that was painted black, and a tiny refrigerator stocked with candy bars and Dr. Pepper that had been a 17th birthday gift from his parents, said Devon Adams, 16, a close friend. The boy who nicknamed himself Vodka after his favorite drink had a "Shooters" poster that described how to make cocktails. Friends frequently slept over and joked that the Klebolds' home was their "country house."

But Dylan was "afraid of the cougars who lived up near his house," Devon said, and preferred to play in a friend's pool because the Klebolds' pool often had dead frogs and crows floating in it.

Mr. Klebold swims laps every morning and operates a small real estate business from home. His wife is an employment counselor at a local community college, where she previously worked with disabled students. When both parents had jobs outside the home, Dylan's mother had him ride the bus to the campus after school rather than be on his own, Mrs. Brown said.

Mr. Klebold collects BMW's, buying older ones cheap to fix up for his sons. Friends say he loves to pick apart politics and religion, using a physicist's analytical approach.

Several acquaintances said that, if anything, Mr. Klebold seemed more concerned about Byron's future. Byron had attended a Roman Catholic high school before graduating from Columbine in 1997, and now works at a local car lot. Dylan, his father believed, was a mature young man on the brink of independence.

At a parents' meeting on March 27, Sue Klebold bubbled about Dylan's seemingly bright future, Judy Brown said. Mrs. Klebold told her friend that she had tried to talk her son into attending college closer to home than the University of Arizona, "but he said he was ready."

After the shootings, Mrs. Klebold told her hairdresser, Dee Grant, that the young killer depicted in news reports was not the Dylan she knew. More recently, in letters to the families of their son's victims, the Klebolds attributed the murderous rampage to "a moment of madness."

"We'll never understand why this tragedy happened, or what we might have done to prevent it," they wrote. "We did not see anger or hatred in Dylan until

the last moments of his life, when we watched in helpless horror with the rest of the world."

The Killers

A Secret Plan And Violent Reality

Eric and Dylan marched through the Columbine library methodically, maniacally, shooting all the way and dropping bombs in their wake.

"They were laughing and whooping and hollering about what they did," said Aaron Welsh, a 1999 Columbine graduate who survived by cowering under a table in the library. "One of them said, 'Oh look at this guy's brains and the blood.' "

Their side-by-side suicide an hour later capped a few years of friendship in which the young men had seemed inseparable, lanky Dylan with his wavy blond hair and slight Eric with his awkward half-smile. They worked together at Blackjack Pizza, bowled on the same class team three times a week at 6:15 A.M., shared a cafeteria table every day and sat next to each other in psychology, creative writing and video production.

Most days, Dylan's black BMW, the one in which the police found a bomb the day of the attack, was parked, crookedly, on the Harris cul-de-sac. Arrested as a pair for stealing some tools out of a van last winter, they both pleaded guilty and then car-pooled to weekly sessions in the juvenile diversion program that kept them out of jail.

In the boys' violent death, many see Eric as the leader. He was the author of the journal laying out the deadly plot, the master of the Web site filled with venomous threats. A sarcastic loudmouth, Eric was always the first to volunteer to read his personal essays in class, quick to make fun of a guest speaker; Dylan was shy, usually talking only to Eric in class.

But in life, Eric often copied Dylan, Devon Adams said. Dylan started working at Blackjack, and soon Eric was filling out a job application. Dylan put a sticker on his car showing his devotion to the German band Rammstein, and days later a sticker turned up on Eric's Honda Prelude.

Dylan, Devon said, had not asked a girl on a date since one turned him down freshman or sophomore year; it took Robyn Anderson, the young woman who bought three guns used in the attack, three hours to persuade him to go to the prom with her, just as friends. Eric struck out asking three different girls to the prom, then showed up alone at the all-night casino party afterward.

Having grown up in Littleton, Dylan had more close friends, but Eric, who complained about his new home to friends back in upstate New York, attracted more attention. He glared at people in the hallways, got into fist

fighters with athletes, criticized Columbine and its Rebels, even as he insisted that everyone call him by the nickname Reb.

While Dylan worked in the sound booth for school plays, Eric's only sign of school spirit was collaborating on videos for morning announcements, like the one where the two boys spelled out RNN, for Rebel News Network, in lighter fluid in a grassy park and then set it aflame.

"He wasn't a Columbine Rebel," Devon said of Eric, "He was just a rebel."

When the boys were arrested for the van break-in, Dylan was the first to confess, but Eric told investigators it was his friend's idea. The magistrate who took the teen-agers' guilty pleas doubted that it was their first criminal activity, but said they seemed to have appropriate curfews and household responsibilities.

"We're glad he got caught the first time," Wayne Harris told the judge. "We haven't had any indication of other prior problems."

For more than a year before his death, Eric had been seeing a therapist, first every other week, then once a month. He was taking Luvox, an anti-depressant, and traces were found in his body, the coroner said.

"The whole family knew that he was having some mental problems and getting counseling," said the Rev. Kenneth Biel, who said Eric's aunt, Sandra Birks, discussed it with him.

At Columbine, a school of nearly 2,000 students where pictures of All-America athletes lined the halls, Eric and Dylan found their niche outside in the smoking pit. They performed well in classes, but were far on the outskirts of the social scene.

Expert computer programmers who configured games like Doom to their own specifications, the two were once suspended for hacking into the school mainframe. But the boys also helped maintain Columbine's Linux server, and taught classmates how to download from the Internet.

In retrospect, perhaps nothing is more eerie than their on-line personae. Dylan's member profile on America Online said he "never will" marry but listed a hobby of "chasing the ladies (with guns)." His motto: "death will take us so don't fight it." Eric's screen name, Rebdomine, played off the Latin for "lord" and his Web site was overflowing with profanity and wild threats against everyone and everything he did not like.

"WHAT I DON'T DO I DON'T LIKE," said a poem on the page. "WHAT I DON'T LIKE I WASTE."

At school, Dylan and Eric both wrote "stuff about killing students and teachers, blowing up the classroom," said Rebecca Hein, who was in their creative writing class.

About a month before the shootings, school officials said, a teacher spoke to Mrs. Klebold and Dylan's guidance counselor about a violent essay he had written. Dylan, who had also written a research paper admiring Charles Manson, replied that it was just a story.

Eric, whose wit and writing style was admired by his peers, chose guns and war as frequent topics. His memoir was of fake Army battles with his older brother; when the assignment was to imagine yourself as an inanimate object, Eric chose a bullet, flying through the barrel.

"It was more violent than what anybody else wrote," Ms. Hein said, "but it was hilarious."

Five days before the shooting, Eric's hopes of becoming a Marine were undone after his parents told a recruiter about the Luvox, which disqualified him. The Marine recruiter who visited the Harris home declined to discuss the matter, as did the family's lawyer. Friends said that Eric was crushed by the news, and had been growing increasingly depressed as graduation neared.

"Everybody was leaving him behind," explained Nathan Dykeman, who has moved to Florida to attend school. "Everybody had thought for a couple of months that Eric's mood was decreasing."

Still, both boys were making plans: Sarah Davis, 18, a friend of Eric from Plattsburgh, said he was planning to visit her this summer on a cross-country road trip. And Devon Adams had a date to see the film "The Matrix" with Dylan and another friend on Wednesday evening, April 21.

The next morning, Susan Klebold noticed a "fatalistic tone" when he said goodbye before going to school, she later told a minister.

The morning of the shooting, Nathan Dykeman found it odd that his two friends skipped bowling class. When he heard that the gunmen inside the school were wearing trench coats, Nathan called the Klebolds. Tom Klebold checked his son's bedroom -- Dylan's duster was not in the closet.

Mr. Klebold quickly called the police to offer his assistance. He was too late.

"He said, 'I can't even speak,' " Nathan's mother, Julie Good, recalled of her conversation with the killer's father that day. " 'I don't know what to say.' "

On the morning after the killings, Wayne Harris phoned the family dentist. Eric had an appointment on June 30. He needed to cancel it.

Only later would Mr. Harris crumble in devastation.

"That feeling inside where you feel dead, too," explained Derek Holliday, 20, a close friend of Kevin Harris who has visited the family several times since the shooting. "Pain, just pain."

The week after the shooting, Tom Klebold was filled with rage.

"He was angry about being detained at his home when he wanted to go intervene at the high school," said Edgar Berg, a former colleague. "He was angry about the availability of guns. He was angry about the access to weird images and videos.

"He was angry because he'd lost what he described as his best friend."