

Lights, Camera...No Comment

ALAN PRENDERGAST | APRIL 12, 2001

WESTWORD

David Gelber adjusts his tie. He tugs it left, then right again. It's as if he's trying to get more oxygen without disrobing, as if what's needed right now is a little fresh air, something to cleanse his lungs of the bad odor wafting through the halls of the Jefferson County Justice Center.

"Did you hear that?" he asks, nodding toward Judge Brooke Jackson's courtroom, the scene of a just-completed open-records hearing, during which Gelber and his employer, CBS News, sought to pry loose certain police records dealing with the Columbine shootings. "They don't have it. 'You destroyed it? You *shredded* it?' 'Of course we did.' Of course!"

A restless, peripatetic New Yorker, Gelber is a veteran network newsman with a deep aversion to seafood and bureaucrats. In recent years he's been the executive producer of one-hour documentaries hosted by Ed Bradley that air on *60 Minutes II*, a job that seems to have placed him on a collision course with all manner of fish and petty officialdom. He has produced award-winning programs about poorly regulated psychiatric hospitals, AIDS in Africa, the war in Bosnia, a toxic dump in Louisiana.

For the past five months, Gelber has been spending a lot of time in Denver, asking tough questions about Columbine. It hasn't been easy. In some ways, Bosnia was friendlier, the psych wards more conducive to mental health. Many school and police sources refused to be interviewed about Columbine or, even more maddening, they agreed to a date with Bradley and the cameras, then abruptly canceled. Now Gelber has exactly three weeks until he has to screen his project for CBS executives, and he's still finding out about vital documents that turn out to be missing, hidden -- or destroyed.

Despite the recent wave of copycat shootings, despite nagging questions about the worst school massacre the nation has ever seen, Columbine has become The Story Nobody Wants to Talk About. "This is, without a doubt, the hardest story I have ever done," Gelber says. "You carry the ball three yards, and you get knocked back two."

Heaven knows, I warned the man. I first met Gelber last November, when he contacted me about articles I had written for *Westword* examining the police rescue effort at Columbine. "You're going to get a lot of doors slammed in your face," I told him.

Having done my share of heavy lifting on the subject, I had come to understand why the families who lost children that day are so frustrated with Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone and his merry deputies. The cops said they couldn't answer the families' questions, for fear of compromising their investigation -- then leaked confidential information to *Time* and *Salon*. And then they shut up altogether, citing the wave of lawsuits that resulted from all those unanswered questions: Just what did the school and the police know about Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold before the massacre? Could they have done any more to save lives once the shooting started? What caused this to happen, and how could it be prevented from happening again?

For the most part, the local media stopped asking those questions long ago. They wrapped up their coverage with hefty, colorful "hope-and-healing" packages for the one-year anniversary and then walked away. If the public has learned anything about Columbine since, it's largely been through the efforts of the families themselves, who went to court last spring to force the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office to issue its long-delayed final report on the investigation. Then they persuaded Judge Jackson to release video footage, police dispatch calls and other evidence gathered in the investigation, evidence that contradicted the official version of what happened at Columbine on several key points ("The Lost Command," July 13, 2000).

Last fall, Jackson ordered the release of almost 11,000 pages from the Columbine investigative files, including witness statements, reports by SWAT and emergency rescue personnel, and interviews with the killers' associates and family members. The Denver dailies spent a couple of days pawing through the material, like geezers in raincoats looking for the naughty bits, then went back to sleep. But Gelber and his team were keenly interested in what those documents might contain: They were even more interested in what they didn't contain -- key diagrams, witness interviews and police reports that were referenced in the documents but were nowhere to be found.

And that is how Gelber, associate producer Kyla Dunn and I came to be sitting in Judge Jackson's courtroom, seeking to join in the open-records lawsuit already launched by the families of Kelly Fleming, Dan Rohrbough and other victims. The seating arrangement had an odd symbolism to it. On one side of the room sat the attorneys for CBS News and the Columbine families, hungry for information. At the defense table was an even unholier alliance -- Assistant County Attorney Lily Oeffler, Columbine chief investigator Kate Battan and attorneys for the Klebold and Harris families, all trying to guard their clients' secrets.

As a paid consultant for CBS, I had prepared a detailed list of dozens of items that appeared to be missing from the investigative files. The county attorney's office responded that some of the items had been "inadvertently omitted," while others had been misfiled. Other documents had never been collected in the first place or were considered "evidence" -- in other words, the sheriff's office was refusing to release them.

After weeks of lawyerly correspondence, Jefferson County generously turned over twelve pages out of the hundreds of pages of documents we'd requested. Five of the twelve pages were duplicates, yet their pagination indicated that there were at least 3,000 other pages of investigative materials that the county had not yet released -- or even bothered submitting to Judge Jackson for review in response to earlier court orders.

At the March 19 court hearing, we discovered that there were other materials Jeffco officials didn't want to give us -- or couldn't give us, anyway, because they couldn't find them. Investigators had taped at least six of the twelve interviews they'd conducted with police officers who fired their weapons at Columbine. Assistant County Attorney Oeffler reported that the county had tapes of only four of those interviews, one of which had to be retrieved from another police agency shortly before the hearing. Yet the official evidence log indicated that the two missing tapes had been placed in the evidence vault by Kate Battan herself. (Last week, Jackson ordered the release of all six tapes -- including the "missing" two, now found -- and several documents CBS had requested.)

What sent Gelber tugging at his tie, though, was the county's response to a simple request for a timeline. In a carefully worded letter to Gelber -- in which he declined to be interviewed -- Sheriff Stone had boasted that his officers had created "a detailed timeline of movement, associations and actions by the perpetrators...starting months before the incident." Little of this material had made it into Stone's report, which featured a timeline starting nine minutes before the attack began on April 20, 1999. Clearly, the more extensive chronology would be a matter of considerable public interest, and CBS News wanted it released.

Oeffler explained that investigators had indeed compiled a months-long timeline at one point, but it no longer existed.

"What happened to it?" Judge Jackson asked.

Oeffler shrugged. "It was destroyed, your honor," she said.

Deadpan, Jackson stared at her. "Destroyed," he repeated.

"It was shredded," Oeffler said.

"So," Jackson said slowly, "that [timeline] was created. But then destroyed."

"Of course," Oeffler said.

Of course. It would be a routine matter, after all, for detectives involved in the biggest criminal investigation in Colorado history to go about painstakingly re-creating the events leading up to the murders of thirteen people...and then decide not to publish this information in the official investigative report...and then shred the document...and forget to tell the sheriff that it was now so much confetti. Of course!

Jackson had begun the hearing exchanging casual quips with Oeffler and asking Battan about her golf game. By the end of it, he was unwilling to accuse anyone of bad faith, but he'd heard enough to issue a stern warning. "If I find someone's hiding the ball or misrepresenting anything to this court," he said, "the papers will have plenty to write about."

For Gelber, the problem was not what to write about, but how to get it all on television, his deadline ticking away like the famous *60 Minutes* stopwatch. Maybe nobody was hiding the ball, but it seemed pretty clear that various people -- cops, school officials, parents -- had dropped it and now wanted the whole mess to go away. Gelber and Bradley and their team were trying to pick up that ball and run with it.

But two years later, was anyone still paying attention?

There Is No Monkey

Although much more is now known about the events of April 20, 1999, than was known even six months ago, the timing of the CBS documentary wasn't exactly ideal. Given the orgy of press coverage in the year following the tragedy, the prospect of yet another platoon of national media types parachuting into Littleton was enough to make some locals want to bar their doors and let loose the hounds.

Memories of the camera crews surrounding Rebel Hill in the days after the killings still loom large among staff and students at the high school. *20/20*, *48*

Hours, *Dateline* and the morning shows waded through the grief and rage for their own purposes, offering gooey hymns to dead children or portraits of plucky survivors that bordered on tabloid exploitation. And *Time* magazine had poisoned

the well for other journalists with its December 1999 cover story on the videotapes that Klebold and Harris had made in the weeks before they carried out their suicide mission.

Time had set out to do a story on how the community was recovering from the murders; its reporters spent days interviewing teachers, students and victims' parents about their experiences and insights, their determination to honor their lost friends and loved ones. Most of that material never made it into print. Instead, the sheriff's office gave the magazine exclusive access to the so-called "basement tapes" -- under conditions that remain a matter of dispute -- and *Time* rushed into print with the scoop of the year.

The *Time* debacle left many in the Columbine community feeling betrayed -- not only by the press, but by Sheriff Stone ("Stonewalled," April 13, 2000). So when *60 Minutes*, the venerable Cadillac of network newsmagazines, announced it was taking a "fresh look" at the story, lots of folks were understandably wary. Curiously, the degree of suspicion at the center of the Columbine maelstrom was not as great as might be supposed. Many parents, teachers and even police officers were eager to talk to Gelber and company -- although not necessarily on camera. They had their own doubts about the sheriff's self-serving report, their own questions about the official story.

Some, like Randy and Judy Brown, who'd reported Eric Harris's Internet death threats to the police a year before the shootings, had been thrust into the spotlight from the beginning; others had never before talked publicly. Several parents were embroiled in lawsuits with Stone or the school district and had been vilified by critics as greedy, but they insisted they weren't after money. Could money bring their children back? What they wanted was answers, and if *60 Minutes* could provide them, so be it.

As Gelber saw it, the cooperation of the victims' families was essential to the success of the documentary; it's not an exaggeration to say that their quest for information became its driving force, its moral center. They had questions about how the Browns' complaint had fallen through the cracks, even though Harris was

already on a diversion program in another criminal case. They had questions about the threats and violent essays and videos Klebold and Harris had presented in class. They had questions about why, despite frantic 911 calls for help, police had held a perimeter outside the school while the gunmen executed students in the library; why teacher Dave Sanders bled to death while SWAT officers searched mostly empty rooms on the other side of the school; why the library was one of the last rooms reached by the rescue effort. Finally, they had questions about what officials had done since the killings about threat assessment, rapid response and other issues to prevent another school massacre.

These were darned good questions, but among those in a position of official accountability, they didn't seem to merit a response. "This community has no unanswered questions about Columbine," a spokeswoman for one of the rescue agencies told associate producer Dunn.

"Well, we've talked to people who do have questions," Dunn replied.

"This community has no questions," the woman repeated.

Jefferson County School District spokesman Rick Kaufman took a similar stance. The district had answered any questions about its role, he insisted; CBS was simply raking old muck -- and traumatizing people in the bargain. "We have been working with *60 Minutes* to mitigate the impact on the school and the community," he told the *Columbine Courier*. "These stories continue to damage the school and the community. We want to move forward."

It didn't take many conversations with Kaufman and his brethren for CBS to conclude that the flacks for various public agencies had been talking to each other and had decided to present a united front: There are no questions, hence we have no answers. Go home.

Among some members of Gelber's team, this kind of studied obtuseness became known as the "There is no monkey" line of defense. Helen Malmgren, Gelber's co-producer, tells the story of a man housesitting for a friend who has a pet monkey. The man's dog eats the monkey. When anyone calls to inquire how the monkey is

doing, the man replies simply, "There is no monkey." Not a lie, exactly, but hardly the soul of candor.

The most astonishing display of monkey business came from the Denver Police Department. Lawsuits have a way of zipping the lips of even the most media-friendly officials; still, no one quite expected the reception we got from the DPD, which isn't being sued by any of the Columbine litigants.

The investigative files released by Judge Jackson revealed, for the first time, the true scope of Denver's role in the police response on April 20, 1999 -- a contribution that was greatly downplayed in Sheriff Stone's report. Denver police responded en masse to Jeffco's call for assistance; some officers were on their way even before the official call went out, thanks to Columbine student Matt Depew, the son of a Denver cop, who got on the phone to DPD's District 4 soon after the shooting started.

Denver officers called for ambulances to aid wounded students outside the school. When no ambulances came, several officers left the safety of their perimeter assignments to evacuate the students themselves, while coming under fire from the gunmen in the library.

DPD dispatch tapes obtained by CBS show that the Denver command operated independently of Jefferson County's command post to a great extent, making many crucial decisions throughout the afternoon to try to contain the chaos.

Most important of all, the records confirmed that three veteran Denver SWAT officers, equipped with a submachine gun, a rifle and a .45 automatic, respectively, reached the west side of the school early enough in the conflict to spot a gun barrel sticking out of the west doors. Two of them fired at the shooter, who promptly retreated. But according to Sheriff Stone's report, two "outgunned" deputies armed only with pistols -- Neil Gardner and Paul Smoker -- exchanged shots with Harris at the west doors. Denver's participation in the gun battle isn't mentioned; in fact, Denver isn't even supposed to be on the scene at this point.

These were matters worth reporting, Gelber figured, since they raised a number of issues regarding the true circumstances of the police response and the accuracy of the official timeline. But to do it properly meant securing interviews with Denver commanders and responding officers. A meeting was arranged between Ed Bradley and Mayor Wellington Webb to seek official authorization to speak to the Denver officers.

The answer was a big, fat "There is no monkey."

The official explanation for Denver's refusal to cooperate with the documentary crew was a concern over "potential" lawsuits. This was the same explanation offered to the Governor's Columbine Review Commission when the city abruptly pulled two officers scheduled to testify before the panel last summer. Yet any letters of intent to sue Denver filed by victims' families expired long ago, with no legal action taken. Although a federal lawsuit against Denver could still, in theory, be filed up to April 20 of this year, a state statute shifts liability for police agencies responding to a call for mutual aid to the agency that put out the call.

The real reasons for not talking, sources inside the DPD told us, were political. Denver wasn't about to allow access to its officers if their stories called into question the actions of Jefferson County's commanders. The blue wall of silence must not be breached.

Gelber's team ended up talking to several Denver officers anyway. The conversations were off the record but highly illuminating. Many Denver officers were still angry about what they'd seen at Columbine. Some were sharply critical of Jeffco's commanders and the first deputies on the scene. Others defended the entire operation, insisting that no one could pass judgment on cops thrown into an impossible situation. Almost all of them were disgusted with the second-guessing of the past two years, as well as the gag order that had been imposed on them, and were dying to tell their side of the story.

But none of them would agree to appear on camera, for fear of losing their jobs.

Let Bradley Be Bradley

Most people have strange ideas about how television journalism works. They get these notions from movies, I suspect, in which TV journalists are invariably portrayed as lissome pariahs and obnoxious twits, chasing some poor slob with cameras and questions as he's trying to get from his house to his car.

Working with Gelber, I learned that ambush interviews, also known as "doorstepping," are far less common than Hollywood supposes. For one thing, they don't make for good television; just what journalistic point is made by a shot of the sanitation commissioner's rump as he waddles down the street, fumbling with his car keys?

Doorstepping is actually a tactic of last resort, spawned by the need to give the viewer at least a glimpse of the elusive bureaucrat who won't return your phone calls. Investigative programs such as *60 Minutes* rely to a much greater degree on extensive face-to-face interviews conducted by its star correspondents, who try to cajole, coax, cross-examine, castigate or ignite the various opposing sides of the story -- whatever it takes to get them to explain themselves.

Fairness demands such interviews. The medium demands it, too. Shots of intrepid, trench-coated reporters standing outside the building where the elusive bureaucrat works (also known as "guilty building" shots) just aren't as satisfying as a sitdown with the sanitation commissioner himself. In some cases, the interview turns out to be cathartic for everyone involved; it could be an opportunity for Mr. Big Rump to defuse the situation, lay the blame on some higher-ups or explain that the missing money isn't missing after all -- rather than lurking, guiltily, in his guilty office.

The dramatic content of network magazine shows revolves around the sitdown. It's a formula that *60 Minutes* invented and, with Mike Wallace and then Ed Bradley, has practically perfected. At the heart of every hard-nosed Bradley piece is at least one Confrontation Scene, in which the correspondent brings forth evidence of wrongdoing and demands an accounting from the powers that be. It's the moment

in which Bradley gets to be Bradley -- complete with glacial glare, withering frown and headmaster voice dripping with skepticism.

It sounds theatrical, but the sitdowns aren't staged; CBS News standards require that the interview subjects are never provided the questions in advance. Still, the sitdowns are often the result of weeks or months of negotiations, during which the potential candidates are urged to tell their story to 20 million people; to respond to what CBS's reporting has uncovered; to take their chances in the arena, rather than be a no-show. The groundwork for these interviews is done by a team of reporters and producers, who also compose questions for the interview and brief the correspondent.

Bradley, of course, didn't spend nearly as much time in Denver on the Columbine project as Gelber and his team. He certainly didn't have to join in long lunches in the culinary wasteland of South Wadsworth, meeting with sources at Applebee's, Bennigan's and the International House of Pancakes, an experience their jaded New York palates won't soon forget. (Associate producer Michael Karzis spent so much time quizzing Columbine kids at the IHOP that the mere mention of "The Hopper" could cause him to mist up.) The star correspondent works on several stories with different teams of producers at the same time, and Bradley's travel schedule kept him moving; if he did have any spare time, he fled Denver as quickly as he could for his house in Woody Creek, down the road from Hunter Thompson.

But Bradley is no actor, brought on stage at the climactic moment to interrogate the usual suspects. Unlike some superstars of TV news who are truly wretched journalists, he has remained interested in risky and difficult stories. When CBS executives balked at the idea of devoting an hour of prime time to the AIDS epidemic in Africa -- "a foreign story, a story about dying black people, with hardly any white people in it," Gelber notes -- it was Bradley who championed the project. (Two weeks ago the program won a Peabody, the most prestigious award in broadcast journalism.) No one on the CBS team seems to begrudge Bradley his seven-figure salary, either; as one member explained it to me, his appeal is what pays their salaries, too.

Bradley proved to be a quick study of the Columbine situation. Given how many other stories he was working on simultaneously, his command of the details was impressive. He really wanted to get to the bottom of this thing. There was only one problem: No one in a position of accountability was willing to sit down with him -- to let Bradley be Bradley.

Try as he might, Gelber was unable to budge Sheriff Stone from the media-proof bunker he's inhabited since the *Time* flap. Phone calls and letters appealing to the sheriff's sense of civic duty yielded only a polite, three-page response, in which Stone defended his officers and his department -- better than nothing, but a poor substitute for a sitdown. His refusal was disappointing but not unexpected, since he'd been telling people for months that he'd love to talk but that worrywart county attorney wouldn't let him, what with all those lawsuits piling up in federal court. Stone had already been pilloried by William Erickson, the head of the governor's Columbine commission, for not talking to that august panel, and he could hardly chew the fat with Bradley after snubbing the governor. (The commission's final report is due on Governor Bill Owens's desk around May 15.)

Gelber asked Stone to designate a surrogate, but that led nowhere, too. Former sheriff's spokesman Steve Davis, a smooth and leonine presence who had hustled to correct Stone's gaffes in the days after the shootings, left his post for the greener pastures of private enterprise months ago. There were a number of top law-enforcement people from other agencies at the command post that April 20, but none of them were eager to go on camera and defend the police response. Like the Denver brass, they wouldn't publicly criticize the sheriff -- but they weren't going to pinch-hit for him, either.

The school district was just as wary. After months of discussions with the district's attorneys and top administrators, Gelber was finally able to secure interviews with several Columbine teachers -- ordinary folk caught up in an amazing and traumatic situation, whose dedication and concern for their students made a vivid impression. But principal Frank DeAngelis, whose bland bafflement at the evil in his school

had been expressed in countless interviews, canceled his sitdown at the last moment, saying he didn't feel "comfortable" about the prospect.

Frustrated, Bradley was reduced to practicing his more aggressive techniques on Gelber himself. Trips to Whole Foods in Cherry Creek, the correspondent's favorite lunch spot, became odysseys of inquisition.

"Just how many cell phones have you lost?" Bradley demanded one day, as Gelber dialed furiously on a borrowed Nokia.

"Not many," Gelber replied, then tried to change the subject.

"Is it five or six?"

"No more than four, Mr. Bradley."

"And how many pagers?"

"This is only my second one."

"You're sure of that?"

At the eleventh hour, the school district realized that it was better to provide a spokesperson to handle the tough questions than to join the ranks of the no-commenters. The correspondent flew in special for the interview from New York and was joined by an elite camera crew from San Francisco. For a brief and shining hour, Bradley got to be Bradley.

It's Always Spring in the Commune

A former *Village Voice* writer with a keen ear for leftist cant, Gelber liked to repeat cheery slogans from the People's Republic of China to bolster spirits during the Columbine project.

"Just remember," he'd say, "it's always spring in the commune."

Whenever he said it, I knew another interview had just been canceled, another lead squashed. The phrase was also invoked after the City of Littleton informed CBS

that it wanted \$20,000 to redact and release its police-dispatch tapes. No setback could change the course of spring in the commune.

But with so many officials suffering from laryngitis, Gelber had to find other ways to tell an extremely complex story. Fortunately, the paper trail of Columbine, along with the audio and video record of the police response, told a great deal. Here are three examples.

Item one: Our document hunt turned up an affidavit for a search warrant for Eric Harris's house drafted by a Jefferson County sheriff's investigator months before the shootings, in response to the Browns' complaints about death threats and pipe bombs. The warrant was never executed or even submitted to a judge; after the killings, it had been shown to Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas, who told the cops that he never would have approved it anyway, based on the information presented. Yet the affidavit's very existence contradicts the sheriff's explanation that the Brown complaint was a "routine" matter that led nowhere, that there was no real indication that a crime had been committed. At least one investigator took the report seriously enough to want to pursue it, and that raises all sorts of questions about the lack of further action on the case.

Finally released Tuesday, the affidavit shows that the investigator was able to link Harris to another open case involving pipe-bomb materials found in a field. "You tell me there isn't enough in this affidavit to get a search warrant? In what universe?" demands a livid Randy Brown.

Item two: After the killings, school officials took an odd comfort in the news that police hadn't found any drugs in student lockers when they processed the crime scene. But glimpses of another side of Columbine are scattered through the investigative files, including a report of a bag of marijuana found outside the school. Hardly stop-the-presses stuff, but it's one strand in a larger puzzle. According to the autopsies, Harris and Klebold had no drugs in their systems -- other than trace amounts in Harris's system of the prescription drug Luvox, an inhibitor of anxiety and obsessive-compulsive behavior -- but the evidence log

obtained by CBS through its court action indicates that a drug pipe was found on one of their bodies.

Other inside dope on dope could be contained in the interviews a Jeffco investigator conducted with former Columbine student Brooks Brown. I say "could be," because the written record of those interviews is missing -- one of the most glaring omissions from the investigative files. Assistant County Attorney William Tuthill's response to a request for the documents was coy: "No report was generated if there was nothing to report."

Actually, the 11,000 pages of investigative files released to date contain countless examples of interviews that generated no new information but were written up anyway. Brooks Brown and his parents -- whose ongoing feud with Stone led to a failed effort to recall the sheriff last year -- say Brooks spent several hours with a Jeffco investigator and an FBI agent, answering questions about his friendship with Klebold and conflicts with Harris. Other police reports make reference to the statements Brown gave in those interviews. But the statements themselves are missing.

Brooks Brown doesn't know what happened to his interviews. He does, however, recall telling the investigators that somebody ought to check out the Subway shop near the high school, which had become a haven for drug dealing. Nearly a year after the massacre, two Columbine teens were murdered in that same sandwich shop. The killings remain unsolved, but speculation that the crime was drug-related continues.

Item three: In concocting its official report of the events of April 20, 1999, the sheriff's office had to ignore or contort several crucial details found in its own deputies' statements about what they saw, heard and did. The result is a "minute-by-minute" timeline that is not only flawed, but misleading.

Take, for instance, the official story of the first few minutes of the attack, before the library rampage. According to the report, Deputy Gardner pulls into the Columbine parking lot, sirens blazing, at 11:24 a.m. His arrival distracts Harris and

Klebold from their killing spree. Harris, who is at that moment outside the west doors, firing into the doors and wounding teacher Patty Nielson and student Brian Anderson, turns and opens fire on Gardner.

When Gardner returns fire, Harris retreats into the building. Two minutes later he reappears, and this time both Gardner and motorcycle cop Paul Smoker shoot at him. Harris retreats into the building again. The library killings begin three minutes later, with the handful of deputies outside helpless to do anything about it.

It's a heck of a story, but it doesn't match up with the times and circumstances reflected in dispatch calls and police reports. In their statements, both Gardner and Andy Marton, a school employee who was riding with Gardner, report that there was already shooting going on *inside* the building when they arrived. Both say that Harris came *out* of the west doors to engage them, rather than being "distracted" in the middle of his shooting spree outside. Klebold doesn't make an appearance at all. And when did this happen? Gardner's 11:26 a.m. call to the dispatcher is about shots in the building, not about being under fire or even seeing a shooter. He doesn't report "getting a couple of shots off at the shooter" until 11:29. His actions during the first five minutes after his arrival remain unclear.

As for Smoker, the report places him on the west side of the school, firing at Harris, at 11:26. But his statement indicates he's still in Clement Park, north of the school, when he hears Gardner's 11:26 call for assistance. At 11:28 he reports to dispatch that the shooter is wearing a black trench coat -- information he gathered from students fleeing into the park. According to his statement, he doesn't fire on Harris at the west doors until after "a whole slew of kids ran out of the cafeteria. Numerous had gunshots, bleeding all over the place."

Those kids didn't come out of the cafeteria. The only injured party in the cafeteria was a teacher, caught on the surveillance videotape as he's bowled over by a pipe bomb -- an event the report ignores. No, those kids ran and crawled out of the library emergency exit around 11:37 a.m., after Klebold and Harris left the library, and took cover behind the patrol car manned by Smoker and another deputy.

In other words, the report's timeline for the two gun battles is at least ten minutes out of whack, and the report's claim that the deputies twice tried to stop Harris before the library massacre is problematic, at best. Instead, it appears that after Gardner's brief exchange of shots, the Jefferson County officers busied themselves setting up a perimeter while ten people were being murdered inside. And when Harris did reappear at the west doors, there were far more cops on the scene -- including, as noted earlier, some well-armed Denver officers -- than the public has been led to believe.

The account of the gunfights is just one of several claims in the sheriff's report that don't match up with the evidence. How many of these glaring contradictions find their way into the final cut of the CBS documentary is anybody's guess. (Tune in to KCNC/Channel 4 on Tuesday, April 17, to find out.) Television requires not only images but a kind of emotional certainty that mere documents can't provide. Ultimately, it depends on people to tell the story, and many of the people who know the secrets of Columbine aren't talking.

Yet their silence gains them nothing. In a way, it only confirms what Gelber suspected all along, that the Columbine story is far from over. Much of the media attention has dwelled on the violent netherworld of teenagers, their capacity for rage and access to firepower, and their clueless parents. But it is also a story about the failure of public institutions to take responsibility for their own mistakes and indifference.

One of the most disturbing aspects of my *60 Minutes* experience was the discovery of how little attention the authorities have devoted to investigating themselves. Despite the intensive self-examination and breast-beating the Columbine community has gone through over the past two years, fundamental questions were never asked by the people in the best position to get the answers. The costly, year-long police investigation focused primarily on dispelling the rumor of a third gunman; motives, causes and lessons to be learned were all given short shrift.

Police and school officials seem to have a feebler grasp of the details of what happened than reporters who've spent months poring over their statements. Perhaps what *60 Minutes* learned will compel the keepers of the secrets to hold an open house. Until that day, spring is still a long way off, in the commune or anywhere else.

What couldn't happen here did. As long as officials continue to say, "There is no problem, and we have solved it," there is no reason to believe it won't happen again.