

In sorrow and disbelief

On March 4, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold sat for a class picture. On April 17, they both went to the prom. What they did next left their school in sorrow and disbelief

**By NANCY GIBBS
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High school is a haunted house in April, when seniors act up because the end is near. Even those who hate school sometimes cling to the devil they know. And for the kids who love it, the goodbyes are hard to think about. Two weeks ago, Sara Martin was chosen to be a graduation speaker for Columbine High, and she was struggling. She wanted to write about all the people she loved, in the choir and the Bible club and even the ones who turn left out of the right-hand lane in the parking lot.



"I have loved oysters at 7 in the morning in the teachers' lounge with Mme. Lutz and the halls that smelled like rotting Easter eggs," she wrote. "I have loved fire drills and Tai Chi on the lawn with Mr. Kritzer's philosophy class. I have loved you and our moments of folly together... We're all looking for passion, for something, anything, in our lives." And she wondered how to capture the spirit, "the humanity and integrity that walk the halls of our very own Columbine."

She was in the choir room last Tuesday when something very different was walking the halls. By the end of that gruesome day, by the time 15 people had died, her friends among them, she had her yearbook of humanity and integrity signed in blood. As Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris prowled the school with their guns and bombs, this is what the children did: a boy draped himself over his sister and her friend, so that he would be the one shot. A boy with 10 bullet wounds in his leg picked up an explosive that landed by him and hurled it away from the other wounded kids. Others didn't want to leave their dying teacher when the SWAT team finally came: Can't we carry him out on a folded-up table? A girl was asked by the gunman if she believed in God, knowing full well the safe answer. "There is a God," she said quietly, "and you need to follow along God's path." The shooter looked down at her. "There is no God," he said, and he shot her in the head.

Before we inventory the evil we cannot fathom, consider the reflexes at work among these happy, lucky kids, born to a generation that is thought to know nothing about sacrifice. They had no way of knowing what would be asked of them, what they were capable of. Among the kids who died and the ones who were prepared to die were the students who stayed behind to open a door, or save a friend, or build an escape route or barricade a closet or guide the descending SWAT teams into the darkness.

The story of the slaughter at Columbine High School opened a sad national conversation about what turned two boys' souls into poison. It promises to be a long, hard talk, in public and in

private, about why smart, privileged kids rot inside. Do we blame the parents, blame the savage music they listened to, blame the ease of stockpiling an arsenal, blame the chemistry of cruelty and cliques that has always been a part of high school life but has never been so deadly? Among the many things that did not survive the week was the hymn all parents unconsciously sing as they send their children out in the morning, past the headlines, to their schools: It can't happen here, Lord, no, it could never happen here.

Sure it can. It can even happen in Littleton, a town of 35,000 near the dusty-tan foothills of the Rockies, just southwest of Denver. It was once a small prairie town of gold rushers and traders, where the biggest scare was getting hit by a prairie dog. Now it's a stretched finger of the big city, with aspiring families who don't lock their doors, enclaves with names like Coventry and Raccoon Creek and Bel Flower, scrubland turned into golf courses, houses that run anywhere from \$75,000 to \$5 million or so. There's an arch over a hallway in the high school engraved with a motto: "The finest kids in America pass through these halls."

The day began with an omen. On the classroom video monitors, the "phrase of the day" was not exactly Ralph Waldo Emerson. Instead, noticed a student, it was something to the effect, "You don't want to be here." Below that was the date, not spelled out April 20, as was the custom, but written 4/20 in bold type, a pulsing message easily decoded. "It's weed-smoking day," one student said, referring to the shorthand for going out and getting stoned: marijuana is supposed to contain 420 different chemicals: the Los Angeles police department's code for a drug bust is 420.

And it was also, as we now know too well, Adolf Hitler's birthday. In the handwritten diary of one of the suspects, the anniversary, say the police, was clearly marked as a time to "rock and roll." Some members of Harris' and Klebold's clique, tagged in derision a few years before as the Trench Coat Mafia, had embraced enough Nazi mythology to spook their classmates. They reportedly wore swastikas on black shirts, spoke German in the halls, re-enacted World War II battles, played the most vicious video games, talked about whom they hated, whom they would like to kill. Harris and Klebold liked to bowl: when Harris made a good shot, he would throw his arm up, "Heil Hitler!"

But they were not really dangerous, right? Every school has its rebels, its Goths in black nail polish and lipstick, its stoners and deadbeats, sometimes, as in this case, the very brightest techie kids who found solidarity in exclusion. "We hung out. We listened to music," says Alejandra Marsh, 16. "We went over to someone's house and watched cartoons. We loved Pinky and the Brain and Animaniacs." Fellow students described them as discarded, unwanted "stereotype geeks," who, like the jocks and preppies, had their own table in the cafeteria, their group picture in the yearbook with the caption, "Who says we're different? Insanity's healthy. Stay alive, stay different, stay crazy."

"They do it for the attention," says Greg Montgomery, 19. "It's kind of like a rivalry with us," pipes in hockey player Chip Dunleavy, 17. "They hate us because we're like the social elite of the school."

That rivalry had been smoldering for months. Some students say even the teachers picked on the Trench Coats, blaming them for things they hadn't done and letting the jocks get away with

anything because they were the crown princes. One athlete in particular liked to taunt them. "Dirtbag," he'd say, or maybe, "Nice dress." Others called them "faggots," inbreeds, harassing them to the point of throwing rocks and bottles at them from moving cars. "You have to understand that there were as many lies, rumors and intrigue as in Washington this past year," says Marsh. "It's almost the definition of a teenager to be cruel to those who are not like you. They don't like to admit it," she says, but "the ones who are the worst at spreading rumors and lies would be the jocks and the cheerleaders. There was one rumor we went around killing small animals. Another rumor that we had orgies."

Some of the Trench Coats tried to ignore the hazing, but some snarled back, and one reportedly flashed a shotgun at his abusers in the park. They made a video for class, a tale of kids in trench coats hunting down their enemies with shotguns. The graffiti in the boys' bathroom warned: COLUMBINE WILL EXPLODE ONE DAY. KILL ALL ATHLETES. ALL JOCKS MUST DIE.

It was all out in the open, all the needles and threats, but in a school of nearly 2,000 busy, ambitious kids, that quiet hissing sound was just background noise, drowned out by the gossip about who went to the prom with whom on Saturday night; the humming of the seniors' theme song, *The Way You Look Tonight*; and finally the normal sounds of a Tuesday morning, when the biology class was worrying about its test on the digestive system, the choir was rehearsing for its afternoon concert and it was warm enough outside to wear shorts, at last.

It was Free Cookie Day in the cafeteria, and there were hundreds of students draped around the tables and waiting in lines at the 11:30 lunch hour when the sounds of the firing erupted outside. Students saw two boys in trench coats and masks firing at kids; one tossed something up onto the roof of the school, and it exploded in a flash. Some kids thought it was the long-awaited senior prank; they had been expecting balloons filled with shaving cream. Surely those are firecrackers, they thought. Surely those guns are fake. Is the blood fake? Can a fake bomb make walls shake? Then they were screaming and running. One boy could feel the rush of a bullet past his head.

"Get down!" the janitor yelled. "Get under a table!" They dove for cover, then began crawling--under furniture, over backpacks, slithering toward the stairs. Then they ran as the shots came again. "We heard boom after boom," says sophomore Jody Clouse. "The floor was shaking from the explosions." Bullets clanged as they bounced off metal lockers. Some tried to run upstairs, to the safety of the library. But there was smoke everywhere, the fire alarms had gone off, and the sprinkler system was turning the school into a blinding, misty jungle. So they retreated back downstairs, away from the library, which, by the time the mayhem ended, had turned into a tomb.

Cafeteria worker Karen Nielsen had rushed to help the bleeding students when she spotted the shooters. As she heard the shots blowing through the room, she shoved the kids into a bathroom. She pulled a phone along with her to call the police. But then she worried, "They'll see the cord. And then we'll be trapped."

Sheriff's deputy Neil Gardner, posted at the school for security, heard the shots and ran toward the cafeteria. When he spotted one gunman, he exchanged fire, then ducked for cover and called

for backup. By this time the 911 calls were already coming in, and the SWAT cars were on the scene within 20 minutes. But the bombs were still going off, and the officers had no idea how many shooters there were--or which ones were killers and which were targets. "They didn't want to go in there with guns blazing," says Cathy Scott, mother of two students who escaped, "and kill the wrong kids." And so the police hunkered down, as the bombs kept exploding all around.

Upstairs in the science wing, science teacher Dick Will thought, "There go those chemistry people blowing things up again." But when the fire alarm rang, Will knew it was more than students at work. A group of his kids went down the hall to investigate and came back yelling and screaming, "They're shooting!" He herded his charges back to the corner of the room, shut off the lights and started turning over chairs and desks and piling them up against the doors.

Other teachers had the same instincts. Business teacher Dave Sanders was in the faculty lounge when he heard the trouble, raced toward the cafeteria and went to war. "He screamed for us to get down and shut up," says freshman Kathy Carlston. "We crawled on the floor and made it to the stairs." When the firing began again, they got up and started to run. Sanders, on the ground, propped himself on his elbows, directing kids to safety as the killers moved in. Too terrified to look back, Kathy never saw the shooters, but she could tell they were close, very close. She stands over 6 ft.; she knew she made a promising target. So while other kids raced down a first-floor hallway, she leaped up the stairs toward the second floor. She tried the door to one science room, but it was already locked. Furiously she worked her way down the hall, finally to Science Room 3, into which two teachers were herding other kids.

The class had been taking a long, nasty biology test when the explosions came. Lexis Coffey-Berg, 16, saw Sanders running toward them, saw him shot twice in the back, with a jolt and spasm. "You could see the impact," she says. "You could see it go through his body. He was spitting up blood." He stumbled into the room, blood streaming from his chest, and collapsed over the desk, knocking out his teeth.

A teacher got the paramedics on the phone, and the classroom turned into a trauma ward. Aaron Hancey, a junior, had had some first-aid training, and the paramedics tried to talk the kids through the basic lifesaving treatment. Boys stripped off their shirts to make pillows for Sanders' head and bandages for the bloody holes in his torso. They found some emergency blankets stashed with the fire gear in that room and wrapped him up as his temperature started to fall. They could tell they were losing him.

"I can't breathe," he murmured. "I've got to go." But they kept talking to him, pulled his wallet out of his pocket and held up the pictures of his daughters. Tell us about them, they said. "He was breathing and awake the whole time," says Jody Clouse. "I'm sure the pain was great." They made a sign with the dry-erase board and held it up in the window for the rescuers to see: Help, Bleeding To Death. As the students prayed, Sanders every now and then managed to cough and spit out some blood to clear his lungs. But the time kept passing, and no one came. Said Sanders: "I don't think I'm going to make it."

On the classroom TVs, the barricaded students could see the SWAT teams assembling, the news choppers hovering and eventually the parents beginning to gather, as they and the rest of the

country watched the siege take hold of the school. "[The police] didn't know where the shooters were, or where the bombs were," says Lexis, "so they couldn't get us right away." Her friends began writing notes to their parents, saying that they loved them, that they thought they were going to die. Everyone was praying. "In a world where there are so many religions," says Lexis, "everyone was praying the same way." One friend made a vow. "If I ever get out, I'm going to be nice to my little brother."

Elsewhere up and down the halls, students locked themselves in closets and classrooms, also calling out on their cell phones. They called police; they called parents; they called for anyone who could come and help get them out. Some could hear sounds of laughing in the hallways, as the shooters prowled through the smoke. They heard the jeering. "Oh, you f__ing nerd. Tonight's a good night to die." Senior Nick Foss and a friend ducked into a bathroom, punched through a ceiling panel and shimmied along the ventilation shaft. Suddenly one of the vents broke, and Foss fell 15 ft. down onto a table in the teachers' lounge. Somehow uninjured, he picked himself up and sprinted out a door to freedom as the shooting continued behind him. "They were shooting everywhere; it seemed like they wanted to kill everything in sight," he says. "I've never been so frightened in my life. It was run for your life or die."

His twin brother Adam, meanwhile, was in trouble down the hall. He had been in choir practice, preparing for a concert that afternoon at an elementary school. When the shooting started, Adam and about 60 others crammed into the choir-room office as the explosions seemed to come closer and closer. They pushed a filing cabinet and two upended desks against the door. In the hot, stagnant air, several kids began to gag and cough. Shhh, quiet, the others said, fearing any sound would lure the killers, who for all they knew were right outside. The choir room lay near the top of the stairs, close to where the carnage began, and very close to the library where it would finally end.

Someone in the choir room whispered, "Who's religious? Anybody in here religious?" The huddled students started to pray, very, very quietly. "I was terrified on the outside," says Craig Nason, a junior. "But on the inside, God gave me peace. I felt like many others outside the school were praying for us." The walls of the office kept shuddering with each shot and explosion, for an agonizing 20 minutes or so. Then things fell quiet, and they waited. When they reached the police by phone, pleading for rescue, they were told that the police had to move slowly because of possible booby traps. Some students with asthma started having trouble breathing, so others climbed up and pulled out some ceiling tiles, then lifted the students up to where the air was fresher. The quiet was cut when the office phone rang. It was the elementary school calling, wondering why the concert was being delayed.

Many of the kids who made it out the exits ran into the parking lots. Police had heard rumors that the gunmen were exchanging clothes with the students, so everyone had to be checked, patted down, in order for the cops to be sure these were the victims escaping and not the killers. Neighbors arrived with blankets, bandages and gauze and brought kids into their homes. A nurse passing through the area found herself doing triage on a front lawn. The ambulances began shuttling the wounded--the ones who had been able to get out of the building on their own power--to area hospitals. Senior SWAT team agent Donn Kraemer spotted a boy in a window, limp, bleeding, desperate to get out. "He looked at us but was oblivious," Kraemer said. "He was

going to come out headfirst." Kraemer and another agent grabbed him and pulled him to safety. The boy, with gunshot wounds in the head and foot, was so much in shock that he could barely say his name. Rick or Rich, they thought he said. His name was Patrick Ireland. He had taken two bullets to the head. Last week the 17-year-old was in serious condition, suffering from impaired speech and damaged motor skills to his right side.

Among the countless offers of help that came in during the siege was one the police did not accept. Well before any potential suspects had been named publicly, Klebold's father contacted police, saying he thought his son might be involved and offering to help negotiate a surrender. The SWAT team leaders decided they didn't think he could be of any use.

All the while the killers were still inside, going about their business. And in the end, they did their deadliest work in the school's quiet place, the best place to find people in a school when finals are looming and everyone worries about getting term papers done on time.

A teacher, identified by police only as Peggy, made it into the library a few steps ahead of the killers. First she called the police. Then, over the phone, she could be overheard desperately trying to warn the kids. "There's a guy with a gun!" she yelled, bleeding. "Kids, under the table! Kids, stay on the floor! Oh, God. Oh, God--kids, just stay down!" At first, Craig Scott thought it was all a prank, maybe the teacher was in on it. But the noise was real, and the fear was real, and he ducked under a table with his friend Matt Kechter and one of Columbine's few black students, a senior named Isaiah Shoels. And they heard the gunmen come in.

They were laughing, excited. "Who's next?" they said, "Who's ready to die?" The two moved through the room, calling out: "All the jocks stand up. We're going to kill every one of you." Seth Houy had come to the library to hang out with his sister and a friend; they ducked under a table and he lay on top of them so he would be the one to be hit. "Honestly, I think that God made us invisible," he told the Denver Post. "We prayed the hardest we'd ever prayed, and God put an invisible shield around us."

The killers went round the room, asking people why they should let them live. Students heard one girl pleading for her life, then a shot, and quiet. They told wounded kids to quit crying; it will all be over soon, you'll all be dead. They approached another girl, cowering under a table, yelled "Peekaboo!" and shot her in the neck. Anyone who cried or moaned was shot again.

The murderers were utterly without pity. Survivors said they treated it like a video game. "We've waited to do this a long time," they said. At one point one of the gunmen recognized a student and said, "Oh, I know you--you can go." And then, "We're out of ammo.. gotta reload. We'll come back to get you three."

Craig took off his white baseball hat and hid it. When the killers walked by, they saw Isaiah and called him a "nigger." He pleaded with them not to shoot, just let him go home, he wanted his mom, and they pulled the trigger. Then they shot Matt. Craig, covered in his friends' blood, lay very, very still. As he told Katie Couric two mornings later, in an account almost unbearable to watch, Craig began praying for courage. "God told me to get out of there," he said. So he got up and started to run, yelling to others to come with him. One girl pleaded for help. "She had a

chunk of her shoulder blown off with a shotgun," Craig said. "And I helped her get out. She was bleeding all over the place, and her--her bone was showing." They got out of the library, out to an exit, down to the cops, where Craig told them what the shooters looked like, where they were.

And then he asked the other kids if they had any brothers or sisters in the school, and they started praying for them. As the minutes passed, "All these people that I was praying for, 30 minutes later, their brothers and sisters were showing up." And he said to the others, "See, I told you, I told you prayer worked. I told you your sister was going to come out of this, I said--and they thanked me. And they kept praying for my sister." But something told him that all was not right for Rachel. Only the next morning did he learn, officially, that she had died. But he already knew.

Meanwhile, in the science room, Mr. Sanders was dying. Students kept giving the police specific directions to the room, but there was so much confusion, and the time just kept passing. Via phone, Sanders was told it would be another 10 to 15 minutes before help would arrive. "It's too long," he responded. "Tell my girls that I love them...my wife..."

In all it was 3 1/2 hours before the second-floor class was rescued. Students asked if they could please help carry Sanders out on a table. No, said the SWAT team, and they herded the students through the halls, now filled with 6 in. of water from the sprinklers, past the bodies and the blood sprayed everywhere. In the cafeteria the half-eaten lunches lay soaking on the tables.

"Everything was left in place," says Lexis, "like it was a normal day." She recalls the police yelling, "If any of you take your hands away from your head, we're going to pull you away immediately. Get up and put your hands on your head. Run! RUN!"

It was too late for Sanders. Gradually his breathing weakened, his face turned blue and pale. He died just minutes after paramedics reached him. "The wait for help was so long," says Jody Clouse. "Everything that happened just didn't seem real."

All the while, the terrified parents were watching it unfold in real time. They streamed toward the campus as the news spread, some abandoning their cars as they came. They approached anyone who looked official, begging for news of their children. Why were the police waiting so long? Their kids were in there, some were running out in gushes, but so many were still missing. Where are they? Who is helping them? In time the parents were told that everyone would be reunited at nearby Leawood Elementary School, and so the vigil moved there. The parents waited as the yellow buses pulled in one at a time, dispensing 40 or so kids into joyful reunions with family and friends, like some kind of awful lottery.

There were so many lists circulating, like the dreaded lists of the war dead, except these were survivor lists, and parents were desperate to see, hear anything, called out names, searched for their kids' friends to find out if they knew anything. They called homes, called hospitals, called anywhere they could think. Some of the kids who fled the school early on had gone into hiding at their friends' houses, in such shock that it was hours before they made contact with their parents.

"I'm so very happy," said Cathy Scott, mother of two, "and so very sad. My kids aren't going back to school anytime soon."

Bruce Beck searched each face coming out, looking for his stepdaughter Lauren Townsend. "You see all the kids run out of the building," he told the Rocky Mountain News. "You're just sure one of the kids is going to be yours." Lauren's mother waited by the phone, waiting for word. And it didn't come. As the afternoon turned to evening, the crowd finally became smaller and more desperate. At one point there were far more pastors and counselors than parents left. Over a basketball hoop was a pink sign--PRAYER CORNER: PLEASE JOIN US. Though by this time the police had secured the high school, officials from the sheriff's office explained that there were bombs stashed among the bodies and it was too dangerous to go in and move them. And then they asked parents to come back in the morning--with dental records. Two mothers fled the building and threw up outside.

It took hours to catalog the carnage. "There were SWAT team people who were in Vietnam," said district attorney Dave Thomas, "who were crying and weeping over what they saw." But only on Thursday did officials truly appreciate the level of mayhem the killers had in mind. In the school kitchen, in a duffel bag, they found the sinister parcel containing a propane tank, gasoline can and nails and BBs and glass that would have taken dozens of lives in the busy cafeteria. The killers, Sheriff John Stone said, "were going to destroy the school."

Before they fired their last two shots into their own heads, the killers fired off an estimated 900 rounds, using two sawed-off shotguns, a 9-mm semiautomatic carbine and a TEC-DC 9 semiautomatic handgun. And as the smoke cleared, police discovered more than 30 bombs in all: several pipe bombs in the school and others outside in cars in the parking lot, an arsenal so large that suspicions immediately arose about whether Harris and Klebold could possibly have acted alone.

The hardest thing about the search for an explanation was the growing fear there might not be one. There would be lots of talk about the venomous culture that these boys soaked in--but many kids drink those waters without turning into mass murderers. There would be talk of deep family dysfunction, something in their past or their present, but nothing in the first days of archaeology turned up anything tidy that explained something so massively wrong. These were parents who came to all the Little League and soccer games. They even came to practices.

Dylan Klebold was said to be the weaker spirit of the two: quiet, reserved, looking for a leader, which he found in Eric Harris when the Harrises moved to Littleton from Plattsburgh, N.Y. Klebold's father Thomas is a former geophysicist who launched a mortgage-management business from his home. His mother Susan worked with blind and disabled kids at the local community college. They lived in a modern wood-and-glass home tucked under a stunning outcropping of red rocks in an area called Deer Creek Canyon. On the day before the shooting, neighbors of the Harrises saw Klebold's black BMW parked outside Eric's house. Harris' father Wayne was a decorated Air Force pilot. One neighbor heard one of them ask the other if he had a metal baseball bat. From the garage came sounds of hammering and breaking glass. "He was always in there with the door closed," said a fifth-grader who lived nearby. Police say it would be possible to build 30 bombs in a single afternoon, with less than \$200 worth of materials, all easily found at hardware and sporting-goods stores.

As for the recipes, those are even easier to find for a kid with that much cyberskill. Harris' personal website, since taken down by AOL, detailed advice on building pipe bombs. "I will rig up explosives all over town," he wrote. "I don't care if I live or die." Elsewhere on the website he writes that a pipe bomb is "the easiest and deadliest way to kill a group of people," and he offers advice on shrapnel: "You can use screws, BBs, nails of all kinds..." According to an internal information memo in the possession of district attorney Thomas, Harris had spoken to a psychiatrist sometime before the shooting, and the doctor recommended that he begin taking antidepressants. The doctor said Harris had expressed anger about the world.

Klebold and Harris had charmed their way through the legal system. They were convicted of a felony in January 1998 after breaking into a van and stealing about \$400 worth of electronic equipment. They entered a juvenile-court rehabilitation program that allowed them to clear their records by participating in community-service programs and an anger-management seminar. Last Feb. 3 both were allowed to finish the program early, having been such model participants. "Eric is a very bright young man who is likely to succeed in life," said the termination report on Harris. As for Klebold, he too was "intelligent enough to make any dream a reality, but he needs to understand hard work is part of it."

If the professionals did not spot the warning signs, neither did the people who saw the boys every day. The owner of the pizza parlor where they worked says they were model employees. For all the talk of fierce racism, Harris was well liked back in Plattsburgh, where his best friends, according to the local Press-Republican, were black and Asian. As for the neo-Nazi Klebold, his great-grandfather was a prominent Jewish philanthropist back in Ohio.

Yet the police disclosed that the handwritten diary they had found was drenched in Nazi-philia: phrases in German punctuating a year's worth of meticulous planning for the attack on Hitler's 110th birthday. There were also annotated maps of the school showing the best places to hide and where and when the most students gathered. Again and again, hatred for the jocks emerged in the writings. Said Sheriff Stone: "They wanted to do as much damage as they could possibly do, destroy as many children as they could and go out in flames." The remains of their preparations were evident, he says: the barrel of a gun was clearly visible on the dresser of one suspect when investigators entered his room at home.

Whatever the threats and intentions, the killings were, in the end, blindly indiscriminate. They shot at the math whiz and the actress, the wrestler, the debater, jocks, brains, band members, freshmen, seniors. They shot at the head football coach; they shot at the science teacher. "They shot at everybody," says senior Nick Zupancic, "including the preps, the jocks and the people who wore Abercrombie & Fitch clothes. But it would be hard to say they singled them out, because everybody here looks like that. I mean, we're in white suburbia. Our school's wealthy. Go into the parking lot and see the cars. These kids have money. But I never thought they'd do this."

By the time the memorial services had been held and the flowers piled up in the soft spring snow in the parking lot, the recriminations were well under way. How could parents not know their garage was a bomb-making factory? How could a school not know the hatred in its halls was

more than routine teenage alienation? Why had the SWAT team members been so cautious when people were trapped and bleeding to death? What if their kids had been inside?

There was nothing the school could have done differently, insisted Columbine's principal Frank DeAngelis. "We could have had the National Guard on alert, and it wouldn't have stopped this," he said. Metal detectors would not have stopped the rampage at the door, and he doesn't think the killers stashed their arsenal ahead of time, an argument that became harder to defend when it was reported that as a member of the audio-visual program, Harris may have had a key to the school. Maybe it would help to search routinely every car in the lot, the principal said, but that "is just not practical." DeAngelis passed the job back to students. "It's students' responsibility to report even idle threats. They must tell adults, and then it's our job to check them out." So how could glaring omens like Harris' website pages, on which he reportedly threatened another kid's life, or his violent fantasy stories and videos be missed? DeAngelis has no answer.

In the meantime, the Columbine survivors are left with their fear and grief. The grocery stores are out of cellophane cones of flowers. Prom pictures have become obituary shots. A bunch of kids went out to dinner at Applebee's Thursday night. Everyone stared. "They knew we were kids from Columbine," says junior Scott Schulte. "No one said anything. Then a waitress dropped a booster chair. We all jumped."

Sara Martin has come to her own conclusions. The graduation speaker now hopes she won't have to speak at all. "When those guys walked into the hallways in their trench coats, with their guns and their bombs, they brought in fear and hate and pushed out everything else--every ounce of life."

In its place, students planted crosses: four pink ones for the girls, nine blue ones for the boys--and two black ones, set apart, for the killers.