

Kids who kill: school massacre raises fears

By CHANTELE GARZONE, AMANDA LEHMERT, COLLIN SEGUIN, JESSICA MAJERUS, and LAURA LINDSTROM
The Tattoo

On the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birthday, two guys dressed in black trench coats entered a school in Littleton, Colorado never to leave alive. They brought with them a bloodbath that turned a naive nation on its ear.

The brutal shootings at Columbine High School terrified, confused and shocked the world. They left many wondering if this tragedy could have been avoided. And - even scarier - if their school could be next.

Many believe it's nearly impossible to prevent this kind of violence.

Dave Albert, a Bristol parent, said, "I think it can happen anywhere, but you never think it will happen to you. You really can't control it and there's no way to stop it."

Several Bristol teens agreed with that statement.

Josh Krampitz, a senior at Bristol Central, said events

like these can't be controlled by laws or rules.

"That's something you really can't prepare for. There's no protection against people who aren't thinking rationally," said Krampitz.

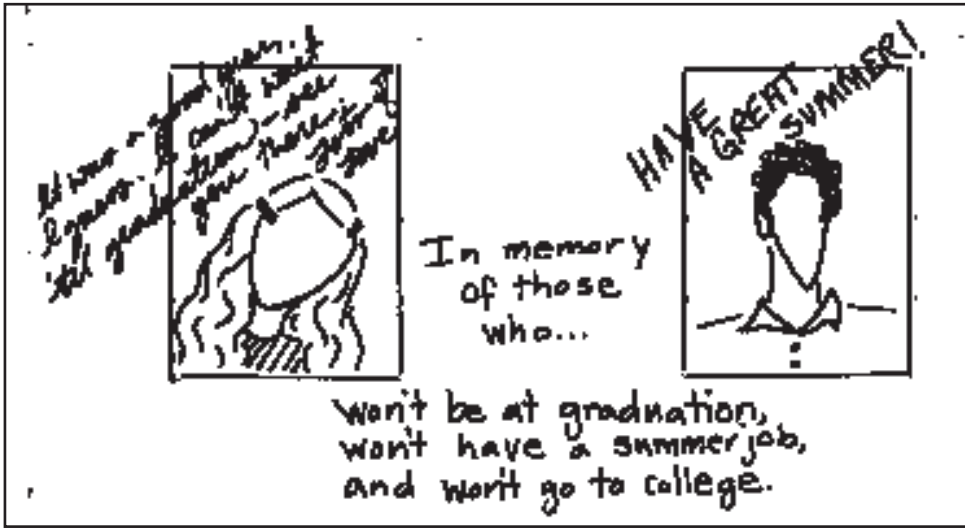
"It's scary. You never know what's gonna happen the next day," said Mike Consonni, a junior at Bristol Eastern.

With around a dozen school shootings over the last three years, parents and students alike are thinking twice about school safety.

Chris Wilson, a father of three said, "Anyone would be concerned that something like that would happen in your school."

Bristol Eastern freshman Nikki Botteon said she asked herself if an incident like the one at Littleton could happen at her school.

"I don't think it will," she said, "but what if it does?"



Jessica Majerus / The Tattoo

Although Wilson was concerned, he said Bristol schools are "as safe as can be."

The shootings made others wary of students with particular social affiliations.

A seventh grader at Chippens Hill Middle School, Morgan Nigro said of the Colorado massacre, "It makes me nervous because we have a lot of punks at our school."

Chris Fortner, a freshman at the University of Minnesota

at Duluth, thinks the media's portrayal of the killers as "punks" or "gothics" will only inflame the situation further.

"There was no need to discuss what type of students these people hung out with or how they chose to identify themselves, especially since there was no confirmation of who these people were," Fortner said.

"If the students who did this had been on the football team or involved in

sports ... we all know that they'd be called 'these seemingly normal students'."

Pat Flaherty, a teacher at Tootin' Hills Elementary School in Simsbury, said that even though she's not nervous about similar incidents occurring she is "concerned about the children's safety in school."

"I don't know if you could prevent it and it's so hard to enforce rules nowadays because of law suits," she said.

Groups like the "Trench Coat Mafia," Flaherty said, "shouldn't be allowed to wear trench coats...they conceal weapons."

"It's sad, but I believe that if this keeps on happening, metal detectors may need to be installed," Flaherty said.

Richard and Myrtle Ouellette of Bristol commented on the shooting not only as parents, but as grandparents.

"It was the worst thing that could've ever happened,"

Richard Ouellette said. "They should've had more security around the school in the first place."

Myrtle Ouellette expressed her disbelief that kids "have that much guts to kill each other," and the amount of leeway schools allow.

Albert, the Bristol father, said he's sure the parents of the victims in Colorado are "angry at everybody."

Miriam Gustafson, a senior at Northfield Mount Hermon School in Northfield, Mass., said the notion of a "Trench Coat Mafia" is silly.

"Perhaps the beauty and almost idyllic atmosphere makes places like Colorado seem very faraway," Gustafson said.

"Kids here are concerned about the shooting...there were numerous requests for prayer and remembrances on our school network," she said.

Whether these murderers seem ridiculous, scary, or otherwise, most believe you can't let fear reign.

"You have to live your life and not hold back," Consonni said.

Lots of questions, no answers

By CHANTELE GARZONE
The Tattoo

Last Tuesday afternoon in the sleepy suburb of Littleton, the worst school shooting in U.S. history grabbed the world's attention and focused it on Columbine High.

As the authorities rescued trapped victims, they found bodies under desks and cubicles, while others laid on staircases, backpacks still attached.

The aftermath of this chilling violence is one of consuming sadness, and the harsh realization of the seriousness of this widespread epidemic.

As these tragedies become more prevalent in the headlines and kitchen table discussions, we find ourselves asking, "Why?"

Why do these senseless acts

of violence continue to ravage our schools? Why are our seemingly average children committing murder?

There are a lot of questions, but few answers.

As a student, I have a distant fear that, if this could happen in a town of 39,000, why not here? How do we ever go back to school feeling secure, knowing that social "outcasts" may be planning to avenge the taunting of their peers?

Everyone has problems, and everyone feels isolated or lonely sometimes, but does that justify blowing away a dozen or more students?

School should not be an environment of paranoia, but one of learning. How many times does this have to happen before something is done?

The time line of in-school violence is too long, and its casualties are mounting.

Children killing children. I would ask what is next, but I am afraid someone might tell me the truth: that it will only get worse.

Something needs to be done, and fast. The distinction between the line that should never be crossed and the other side is becoming blurry.

Even if it helped, it is impossible to place the blame on just administrators, students, or parents. The responsibility falls on the community, as these children were a product of it. Could this shooting have been prevented? That is one question that we will never know the answer to, and the residents of Littleton will live with the rest of their lives.

Shooting: a sick new fad

By SHAINA ZURA
The Tattoo

Something is very wrong. A few years ago the term "school shooting" was not in our general vocabulary. But

Opinion by Tattoo staffers

*See more on our website: http://our-world.compuserve.com/homepages/Majerus_Collins

since October 1997, incidences of children firing on their classmates have become national news seven times.

The most severe case is the most recent. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold began spraying bullets into their Littleton, Colo. high school less than a week ago, and they were out to kill. They were laughing. They screamed racial prejudices and said peek-a-boo before firing. It was a game to them.

It is happening over and over again. It's like a sick new fad. Because of the number of these incidents in such a short period of time, it is obvious that something in our society is disturbed. These children are angry and violent. Something is telling them that it is okay to shoot their peers and teachers. Violence isn't

anything new to this country. We are faced with murder and gore on a daily basis in the media. But what is so fundamentally wrong right now? How are children being led to feel this is their most appealing option?

An answer to these questions is overdue.

It should be clear that we aren't doing nearly enough if it has happened seven times. What more do the children have to do to tell society that something isn't right?

People died for this red flag to be put up. They were victims of more than just a few kids with guns. They were the victims of a society too preoccupied to deal with its youth.

Hopefully we're hearing this message. We can't afford to overlook it any longer.

Consumed with hate, shooters needed help

By JESSICA NORTON
The Tattoo

Hate is defined as a four-letter word meaning severe dislike for someone or something, but last Tuesday two students of Columbine High took the word hate too far.

They ended the lives of 15 people and forever changed the lives of all their classmates.

We all know students like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the outcasts of our groups, the

brunt of our jokes and the object of our disapproving glances. They were the guys that the popular would never be seen with.

Maybe it was those reasons that Harris and Klebold formed the "Trench Coat Mafia." Perhaps it was their way of belonging to something - of coming together in their joint hatred of jocks, Jews, blacks and Hispanics.

Obviously this group allowed their hatred to grow so strong that they took it

upon themselves to make the people that had caused them pain and whom they found inferior pay an ultimate price.

These two needed help. There were warning signs that there could have been a problem.

Fights were threatened between the "Trench Coat Mafia" and various other cliques, but nobody looked deeper. No one thought the antics of these young men would go any farther, and no one, especially their fellow stu-

dents, ever fathomed the possibility of being held hostage, begging for their lives and having their friends shot dead.

On Monday the students of Littleton were worried about things like grades and proms, but after the shootings, they were simply trying to put their lives back in some kind of order, trying to understand why someone would do this.

There are no answers to their questions, and all that is left are the ruins of a school that will never forget.



Courtesy Pendleton / The Tattoo

'If it wasn't me, it wasn't real'

By LAURA LINDSTROM
The Tattoo

I was sitting there, a pile of tissues on the floor all around me, sobbing over the loss of a character on my favorite soap opera when I heard about it. Dan Rather interrupted my program to bring me the latest news out of Littleton.

My first reaction to the school shooting was, "Here we go again."

But as the story unfolded I realized this one was a little worse than the others. There were bombs now. Deputies were opening fire. Everything was confused and chaotic and my jaw was on the ground.

I didn't know why I was so surprised. Things like this happen in America. Psycho kids killing each other, bomb-making recipes on the Internet, guns for sale on your local street corner.

Just then, something truly symbolic happened. Rather signed off, and my soap came back on. Do you know what I did? I didn't call my mother to see if she'd heard. I didn't go on a rampage about the tragedy. I didn't even think about those kids in Colorado. I went back to my soap. If it wasn't me, it wasn't real.

That's the attitude a lot of people have. Unless something like this happens close to

home, the shock is just not enough. No one pays attention until it blows up in their face.

The thing that upsets me the most about the whole thing is that these people were allowed to die. That two kids got their hands on bomb-making materials and guns, walk into a school, and opened fire. No one could do a thing, and no one saw it coming.

It's tragic, it's sad, it's depressing, and it's frustrating to know that even after this happened, the world will move and shake for a while, but when the fear and shock have worn off, we'll slide right back into steady slow motion. We'll have our guard down, we'll be

sitting pretty with our metal detectors and see-through back packs, and it'll happen again.

It makes me wonder if the problem really lies with the guns and bombs, or in the kids who are committing these terrorist acts. But can we fix it? Can we ever be ready for it? Unless it's happened to us, are we scared enough to really care? I actually think I'm more scared of not knowing than of some lunatic shooting me in the lunch line.

And while I feel for the children in Colorado, I don't feel it enough to miss my soap tomorrow.

What's worse: epidemic violence or apathy?

By KATHLEEN HAYNES
The Tattoo

Last Tuesday morning, I woke up, took a shower, got dressed, ate breakfast and headed off to school. After my classes ended, I returned home to change for work, where I found my dad watching MSNBC. He told me that there had been another school shooting. I said, "Oh."

That's all that went through my head: "Oh."

Not "oh my God, those poor people." Not where, how or why. Just "oh."

I went to work and didn't think about it again. I heard a newsbrief on the radio but I didn't pay much attention. It wasn't until I got home and heard that as many as 25 people were dead and my television

showed the events of the afternoon that I realized what happened.

Fifteen people were dead, many more were at hospitals, with parents praying that their child wasn't number 16.

The town of Littleton is grief-stricken and in shock. Nearly 1,800 students can't go to school tomorrow, not because of vacations, but so investigators can try to figure out what happened in their little suburb.

All I said was "oh." I sat glued to the news. I watched kids like me come running out of a building, scared and hurt, and I watched people gather in the streets, hoping to find their brother, sister, friend or teacher.

After I got the details and realized how bad everything is out there, I began to

develop feelings about it.

There are two things that bother me about it - first, obviously, kids are dead and the kids who aren't dead and the people of this town are living a nightmare, but what also bothers me is that when I first heard what happened, it didn't faze me. It did not even faze me.

I heard that kids had been murdered by other kids and I said "oh."

There have been so many instances - Jonesboro, Paducah, Springfield - that when I found out about the latest one, I apathetically said "oh."

I really don't know what is worse, the epidemic of school violence that is spreading across the country or the way that it doesn't even bother me to hear about it.

Slaying hits home

By NATALIE MINOR
The Tattoo

Tuesday night around 10:30, I was checking my e-mail when my mom walked into my room. "Could you check up on that Denver shooting for me?" she asked casually. "I'm giving a presentation on violence in the schools for work and I want to bring this up."

I got on the web and went to www.cnn.com. I was almost as shocked as my mother when I read that possibly 25 kids had died. My mom started to cry. She wondered aloud how she could give a presentation about safety in the schools the next day.

"How can I send you to school on Monday and be positive that you'll come back alive?"

I didn't know what to say. At this point, I was pretty upset, but I went back to reading my e-mail. I had almost forgotten about the incident when my friend Spencer came online.

He told me that his cousin had been killed during the Littleton shooting. That's when it hit me. The people who were shot and killed were real. They were somebody's brothers, sisters, friends, and cousins. That made me think of my own cousin who lives (luckily) in another suburb of Denver. I was relieved that it wasn't her neighborhood but at the same time I was afraid that it could have been her - or my own - school.

"The 'Trench Coat Mafia' didn't think about who they were killing," said Steve Parish, a junior at Manchester Central High School in Manchester, NH. The dozens of people killed and injured could have been anyone. The scariest part is, no one made a move to stop them before it happened.

Hopefully the reality of this tragedy will make people take gun control and violence prevention more seriously.

We welcome your comments

Published occasional Mondays, *The Tattoo* is written by area high school students under the direction of reporters Steve Collins and Jackie Majerus, who are volunteer advisors. Questions or comments? Call 589-5316 or e-mail us: SteveJackie@prodigy.net