

BACKSTREET BOY KEVIN RICHARDSON TAKES US FLYING



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AUGUST 1999

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a school under siege

The whole country watched the news reports and wept. These courageous teens witnessed the bloody massacre at Columbine High School from inches away—and lived to tell the chilling details of their escape from death

BY TOD OLSON AND JOHN D'CONSIGLIO

Tuesday, April 20.

It was warm for spring in Littleton, Colo., and Columbine High buzzed with tales from Saturday's senior prom.

Sara Houy was snapping pictures with the disposable cameras that were left over from after-prom; Jon Cohen was stressing about an English presentation he wasn't prepared for; Nick Foss was psyched that classes were winding down. Summer was almost within reach.

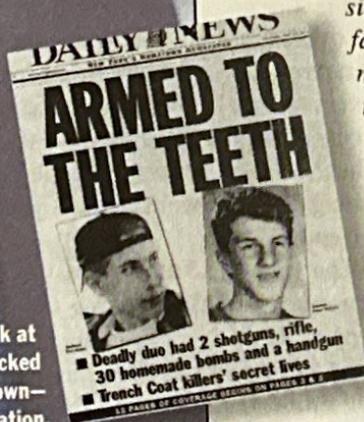
Then, as the fifth-hour lunch period began, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold turned Columbine High's late spring daydreams into a grisly nightmare. The two seniors entered the school carrying a semiautomatic rifle, a semiautomatic pistol, two sawed-off shotguns and dozens of pipe bombs. Four hours later, their bodies were found in the library. Thirteen others perished—victims of the nation's most lethal school shooting.

Sara, Jon and Nick were among the lucky ones. They each had brothers and sisters in school, and their families survived without major injuries. Now, they're trying to move on, each in a different way. However they will never forget their terrifying escapes from Columbine that day.

Jon Cohen, 17, a junior, was in choir practice.

"I was having a really bad day. The night before, my brother's girlfriend hit her head in our basement and had to get stitches. I remember thinking that I could never be a doctor because I couldn't handle the sight of blood—pretty ironic, now that I think of it." ▶

The vicious attack at Columbine shocked this Colorado town—and the nation.



Nick Foss, 19, a wrestler, was in the cafeteria during lunch.

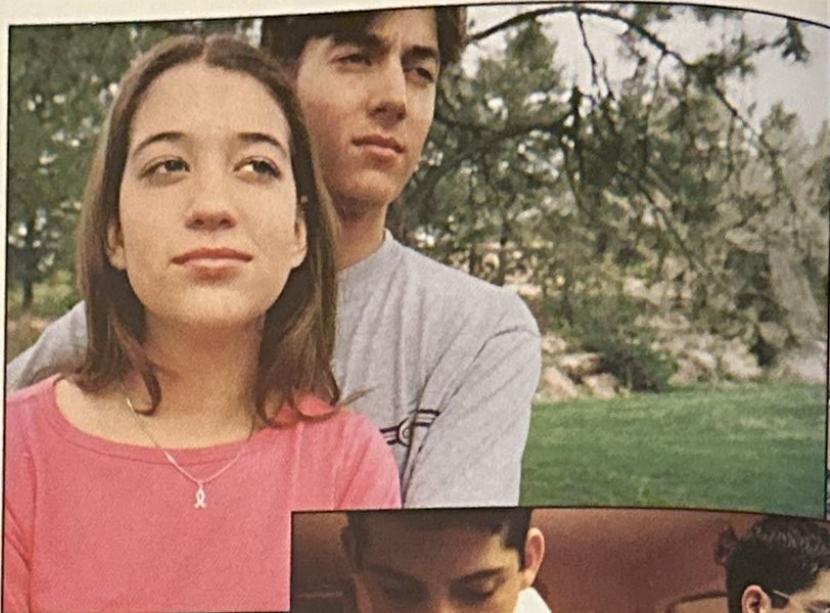
"I was thinking all day, 'Hey, this weekend I'm going to get my car rebuilt. I got all my tests done. English is done.' I was having a pretty fly day for a while. Then, all of a sudden, this woman came in, screaming, 'Someone got shot!' My first thought was, okay, some punk wannabe got shot in the arm or whatever. I ran to the hall. I wanted to see. It was curiosity, but it turned out to be stupidity."

Steve Cohen, 18, and his sister **Diana, 16** (Jon's siblings), were also in the cafeteria when a teacher (Dave Sanders, who was later shot and killed) burst in, yelling for people to get down.

"The first thing that came to my mind was the school shootings in Kentucky and Mississippi, so I thought, 'Oh, my God, we have to get out of here!' We all ran up the main stairwell, and Diana fell and got kind of trampled. It was chaos. Hundreds of people. I looked behind me, and she was gone. I was just standing there looking around for Diana. And my friend was yelling at me, 'You've got to go! You've got to go!' I didn't know what I was thinking then. I was just in a state of shock."

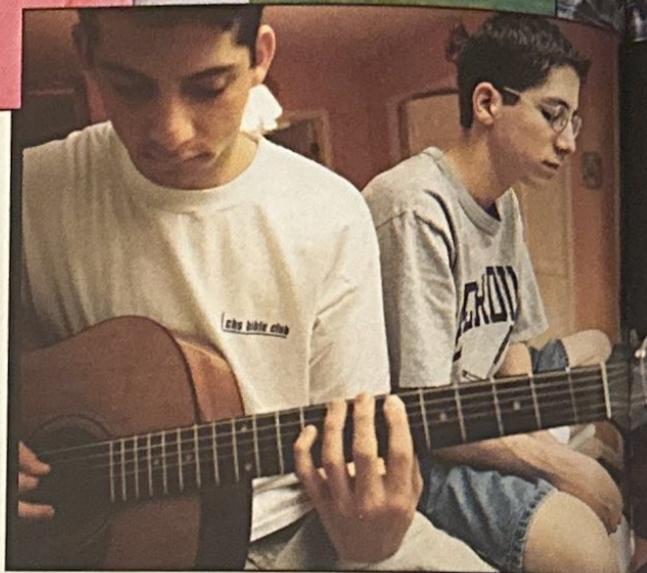
Nick Foss ran into the hallway and found a war zone.

"There were people all over, running and getting shot. Shrapnel and explosions and bullets everywhere. You ever see *Saving Private Ryan*? The first ten minutes of that? That's what it was like. I'm on the ground, looking right up at the two gunmen, where they were shooting. They went around the corner for a minute and then came back. So all the people got off the ground and ran. I tried to keep my head through the whole thing. It was just shock and adrenaline. I saw these two kids lying in the hall. So I ran back for them, about sixty feet from the gunmen. I checked this one kid, and I knew he was dead. It turned out to be Dan Rohrbough. I looked at the other kid, and he was moaning in pain and there was blood all over the place. He looked at me, and half of his



ABOVE: "Seth talks about it," says Sara Houy, with her brother, "but sometimes I don't want to."

ABOVE, RIGHT: "We have this bond," says Nick Foss, left, with twin Adam. "We can tell if the other one is okay." **RIGHT:** Steve Cohen, playing the guitar, cowrote "Friend of Mine" with brother Jon (their pastor wrote the lyrics) about the incident. "I don't think I've grieved yet," says Steve.



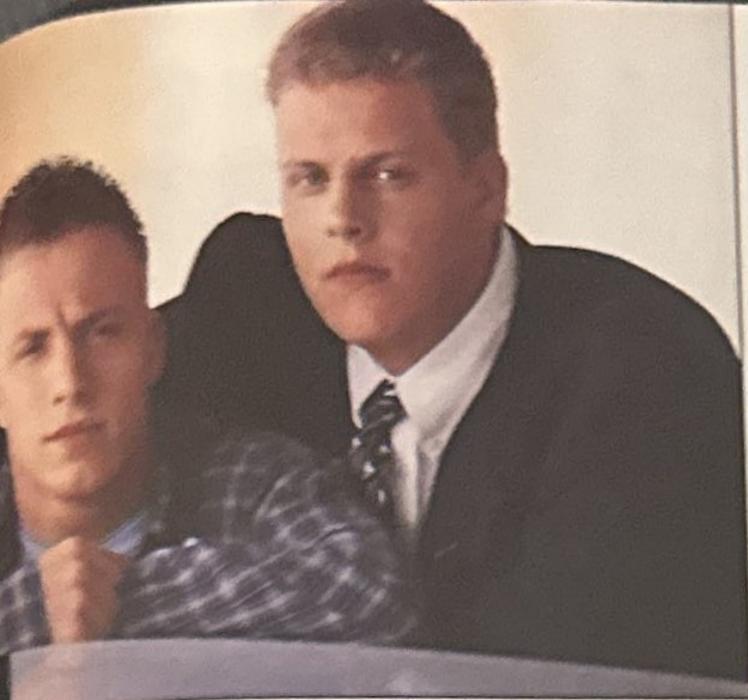
face was blown off. He just looked at me, like, I don't know.... What do you say at that moment when someone's going to die? [That student, Lance Kirklin, survived. He's out of the hospital, but doctors say he'll need several more operations to repair his shattered face.] Then, while I was sitting there, the gunman came around the corner again and pointed the barrel toward me. And I thought it was over. I thought I was dead. I just remember saying, 'I love you all,' out loud, to everyone in my family, my friends, everyone. And the gun went off. I got grazed by a bullet on the side of my head, from sixty feet away with a sawed-off shotgun. I was surprised to be alive. The shot kind of knocked me off my knees and rolled me. And then I ran like a little Mario or something. And some woman starts yelling, 'Get the heck into the teachers lounge!'"

Sara Houy, 16, was in the library on the second floor, with her older brother Seth and her friend Crystal Woodman, 17, when the shooters headed upstairs.

"I vaguely heard some guns or something, but I just thought it was a paint-ball gun. Then this teacher came in, and I thought she was just going to tell us to be quiet. She said, 'There's a guy with a gun out there. Everybody, get down!' We just thought it was a senior prank. Crystal and I were crouching, 'cause we didn't know whether to get under the table or not. Then she yelled again, 'You guys, GET DOWN!'"

Steve Cohen, still in the hallway outside the library, was jolted from a state of shock by the sounds of gunfire.

"The bullets were popping off the lockers. You see tons and tons of little flashes of light, and you think, 'Oh, my gosh, the next one is going to hit me.' I just had to get out of there. I turned around and scanned the people in front of me, hoping to see Diana. I remember she was wearing a pink shirt that day, and I was



looking for anything pink. Then I ran, just hoping she got in front of me."

Jon Cohen was in the choir room, not more than 50 feet from where his brother had just been.

"We looked up, and we could see out the door of the choir room. I saw people running, and we heard shots. Immediately, the guy sitting next to me, my choir partner, Adam Foss, he got up out of his chair and ran to the door to hear the shots. At that point, it was chaos—some people hit the deck, I guess. But I followed the group in front of me that got up and ran for the door into the hallway. I was just thinking: Get out! I could hear so many shots. For all I knew, there could have been twenty people shooting. I remember thinking, 'God, I hope I don't die.'"

Adam Foss, 19 (Nick's twin brother), stayed behind and helped students hide in the choir room office.

"I saw kids still in their seats who didn't even know where they were. I grabbed one girl—she didn't want to move. I just threw her in the office. We closed the door, and me and two buddies put the desk in front of it. We were, like, 'They can shoot all they want, but they are not coming in.' Kids were praying a lot and crying. But I was singing. I sang a little until someone told me to shut up. I had to do something to break the tension."

Jon Cohen got out of the choir room and ran right into his sister

Diana, just as the gunmen reached the top of the staircase, about 50 feet away.

"I started to turn right, but they were right there. I grabbed Diana, and she was just sobbing. We ran through the auditorium, heading for the main entrance, about two hundred feet down a wide hall. We were almost at the front door, I guess about twenty feet away, when all the glass suddenly shattered right in front of us. We thought there were more people in the parking lot shooting in through the front door. But they were really right behind us. So we ducked behind a trophy case wall that was to the left of us, and we just hid there. Bullets were flying by from behind us. So we thought, 'They're coming from behind us and in front of us. We're trapped!'"

Sara Houy was still crouching under her table when the gunmen left the hallway and headed for the library.

"Seth pulled us under the table, and all three of us started praying and asked God to protect us and keep us safe. Then the shooting started. [Dylan and Eric] said they'd been waiting to do this all their lives and that this was for all the people who had made fun of them. They said they were going to kill all the jocks. Then I heard them say to Isaiah [Shoels], 'Oh look, it's a f---ing n---r.' Then I heard, like, five shots. Then I heard them say, 'Oh, look, here's that f---ing nerd,' like he had glasses or something like that. And then some more shots. At first, it seemed like a dream 'cause I couldn't see how people could be so sick. It was just like a nightmare, and I was waiting to wake up or get shot."

Seth Houy, 18, was shielding his sister and Crystal under the table as the gunmen got closer and closer.

"I was trying not to be aware of where they were in order to stay calm. But finally they were, like, ten feet from us. You could hear people crying and people in pain, but nobody was really talking. They were at the table directly behind us, and they set some of their stuff on the table, and I could see them at that point. [They had stopped shooting and] one of them was trying to reload his gun.

I just kept asking myself what it was going to feel like when I got shot. Then, I heard the other one say he didn't have any more ammo. And that's when they took off and ran out of the library to reload. I got up, and Sara and Crystal just kind of lay there. They were too much in shock. So I just grabbed them and yanked them up and carried them toward the emergency exit. I just knew that that was our only chance to get out."

"I COULD HEAR SO MANY SHOTS. FOR ALL I KNEW, THERE COULD HAVE BEEN TWENTY PEOPLE SHOOTING. I REMEMBER THINKING, 'GOD, I HOPE I DON'T DIE.'"

—JON COHEN

Sara Houy "On the way out, you could hardly see anything, 'cause there was so much smoke and debris from the bombs. But I did see a whole bunch of blood. And I distinctly saw this guy huddled up under the computers and he wasn't moving. I wanted to stop, 'cause I couldn't just leave someone there. Seth had my arm, and he kept pulling me. If I would've stopped, they would've gotten me. We ran out the back door and got behind a police car. I helped [an injured student] into the first police car."

Nick Foss was hiding in a bathroom connected to the teacher's lounge with six or seven other people.

"After about fifteen, twenty minutes, I just figured I was going to die, and ▶

I got tired of being scared. So me and a friend [Tim Castle], we punched a hole in the ventilation shaft. He went through there first. We got all of the others out, and I went back through the shaft to get more kids. That's when I fell right through the ceiling onto a desk in the teachers' lounge. I was kind of hurt, but my adrenaline was still going. There was no one around, but I heard gunfire getting closer, and I ran out."

Jon Cohen, huddled behind the trophy case with Diana, thought he was going to die.

"I was just praying, 'God, help us. God, protect us,' the whole time. At that point, I really thought there was no way out. I actually forgot there was another hall [nearby, behind] us. One of the counselors walked out of the hall and said real calmly, 'Guys, this way.' And we just ran for our lives. Outside, there was chaos. Students everywhere. Most didn't know what was going on. [They] thought it was a fire drill. And many of them were joking and laughing."

Steve Cohen made it out a side entrance and ended up in a park across from the school.

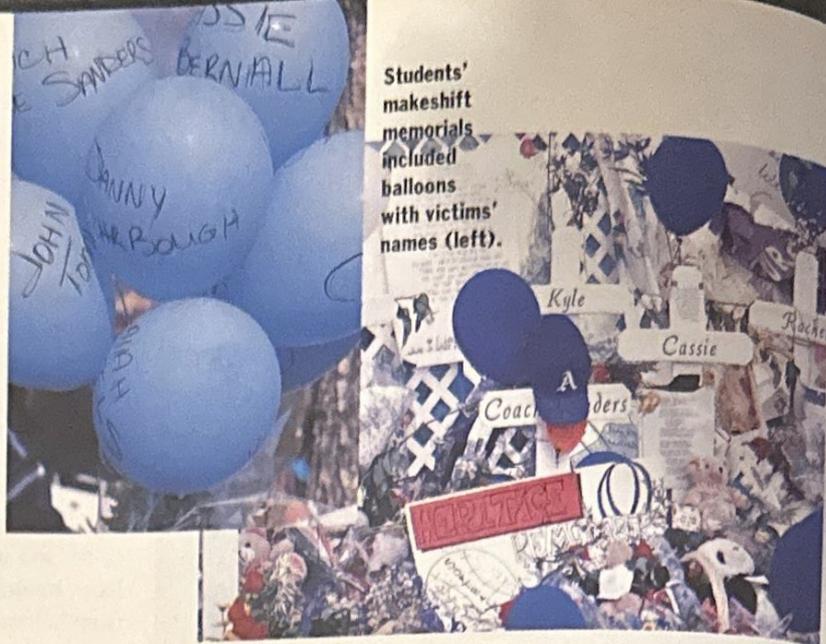
"KIDS DIED FOR BEING HEROES, FOR BEING THEMSELVES, FOR BEING HUMAN. CASSIE BERNALL, ONE OF MY GOOD FRIENDS, DIED FOR BELIEVING IN GOD."

—NICK FOSS

"A couple of people were hysterical. I was yelling, 'I can't find Diana!' I ran through the crowd looking for her four times before I broke down. I sat down and cried. Eventually, I made it to Leewood Elementary School [about a half mile away], where a lot of people were waiting. I remember Jon was wearing a ridiculous yellow shirt. I found him with Diana and Mom."

Diana Cohen "It was just so great to see him! I saw Steve start bawling and completely lose it. He grabbed me. Steve never cries, but he was holding me and sobbing."

Nick Foss "I guess the hard part after I got out was that I knew there



Students' makeshift memorials included balloons with victims' names (left).

were so many kids back in there. Then [the police] saw I was bleeding and got me to the hospital. I didn't know who was dead at that point; Adam could have been. I thought he was safe, though. My gut said he was okay."

Sara Houy, like the others, struggles to cope with her memories

"When I go to sleep I keep picturing things and hearing the sounds. I hear [the killers] saying all the things they did. I somehow keep seeing their boots and their trench coats. And I picture that kid under the computer. I haven't slept at home the last week; I've stayed at other people's houses, 'cause if I'm with other people, I can go to sleep. I'm going to have to live through it by myself, but just for now, it helps to be with friends from church. I honestly believe that God made us invisible in the library, and I'm just so grateful for my life and for everyone around me. Seth and I still have a bond that's [stronger] than everything else. He told us later that he would have taken the bullet if they had come to our table. That was just amazing. My brother and I were close, but to know that he would put his life on the line—that just made me even more thankful."

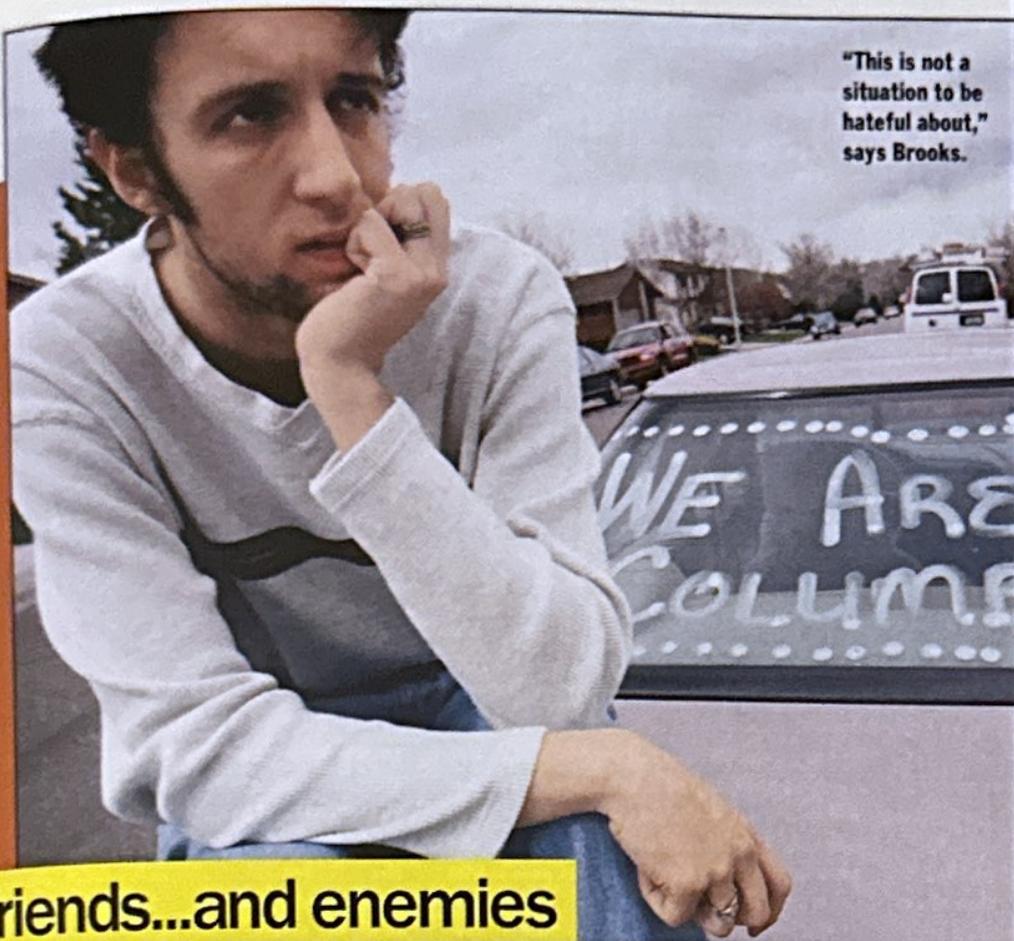
Adam Foss, who had spent three-and-a-half hours hiding in the choir room, was reunited with Nick that night.

"I try to focus my attention on positive things [now], more or less trying to put my life back in order. Like going to a movie with some friends the other night, trying to get back into a normal life. I'm angry, but at the same time, I kind of forgive them. Think of what it did to our community. You know the saying: What doesn't kill us makes us stronger? Well, it did. Kids like Isaiah and Cassie [Bernall] and Rachel [Scott], those were people who wouldn't be angry. I can live my life and know this happened and go on, as long as I'm able to deal with it openly. I'm going to get a tattoo, the [blue-and-silver commemorative] ribbon, right here [pointing to his chest]."

Nick Foss is mourning friends like Cassie, who was shot after saying, "Yes," when the gunmen asked if she believed in God.

"I'm angry. Kids died for being heroes, for being themselves, for being human. Cassie Bernall, one of my good friends, died for believing in God."

Steve Cohen "I was angry a day afterwards. I was incredibly angry at them—at life. Now, I don't know. You step back, and the anger goes away. There was a real pride in going to Columbine, and there still is. We don't want to be known as the school where the shooting happened. We want to be known as the school that got through, that bounced back from that. And I think that is going to happen." ❖



"This is not a situation to be hateful about," says Brooks.

friends...and enemies

Brooks Brown thought that he knew both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold—after all, they were two of his best friends. Now, he tries to come to terms with their senseless acts **BY TOD OLSON**

Brooks Brown still can't wrap his mind around it. On Monday, he was ditching Creative Writing with Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. By midday Tuesday, the pair had fatally shot 13 people—including two of Brooks's close friends—and were dead themselves. "I hate them for what they did," says the 19-year-old Columbine graduate, sitting on his back porch, "but they were my best friends for a long time."

Brooks and Dylan met the first day of first grade. They climbed on the rocks behind Dylan's house, played video games, had sleepovers. In ninth grade, they started hanging out with Eric, who was new to the area. They were smart, gangly—and on the fringes of Columbine's jock-centered culture.

Eric could be volatile. Two years ago, Brooks stopped giving him rides to school because Eric yelled at him if he was five minutes late. That winter, Eric cracked the windshield of Brooks's dad's car with an icy snowball. "I told him he was going to pay for it, and he said, 'Like hell,'" Brooks remembers. "So I drove up to his parents' house and told them what happened." Eric was furious, and the two stopped speaking to each other.

A few months later, a worried friend told Brooks to check out Eric's Web site. Eric

had filled it with threats, Brooks says, including one against his life. Brooks's parents complained to the sheriff's department, which seemed to take the threat seriously, according to his mother, Judy. But, she says, her repeated follow-up phone calls were never returned. Deputy Steve Davis, a spokesman for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, says the complaint against Eric couldn't proceed because the Browns asked not to be named and didn't want officers to question Eric.

"[The Web site] freaked me out," says Brooks. "I didn't confront Eric because I was scared. But then I decided it was probably just big words." He let it go and thanked the friend who'd warned him: Dylan Klebold.

This year, Eric was in two of Brooks's classes. "I figured we might as well bury the hatchet," he says. Eric agreed. They'd have lunch together and edit videos in the tech lab. On Tuesday, April 20, Brooks was in the school parking lot after fourth hour when he ran into Eric, who was pulling a gym-bag-size duffel out of his car. Brooks made a joke about Eric's missing a big philosophy test that morning. "It doesn't matter," Eric said, dead serious. "Brooks, I like you. Get out of here. Go home now!"

"I thought he was just into a big senior prank," Brooks says. "Not a nice one—like mace or something." He took off to smoke a cigarette. About five minutes later, the first shots rang out. Instinctively, Brooks knew that this was no senior prank. "But I kind of blanked out and ended up seven blocks away," he says. "I don't remember anything or how I got there."

Eventually he was able to find a phone and called his father, who was already hearing the news reports about the shooting. While he waited for his dad to pick him up, Brooks called the police and told them about his encounter with Eric. When he got home and learned that there was a second gunman, Brooks was pretty sure that it was Dylan. "They were best friends; Eric wouldn't have trusted anyone else," he says. Dylan may have been troubled about Eric's violent fantasies, but he was definitely a follower, says Brooks. "When we were friends, I'd have to decide where we were going."

The day after the shooting, Brooks got together with the debate team and cried for hours over the deaths of fellow members Rachel Scott and Daniel Mauser. "I'm just insanely confused," he says, a week after the tragedy. "I mean, I'm suffering four losses of close friends. And two of those killed the other two. And I just can't figure out why."

The answer he keeps coming back to is that years of torment at the hands of more popular kids eventually made Eric and Dylan snap. "The jocks in our school," he says, "they're treated like gods, and they treat everyone else like crap." He remembers seeing Eric and Dylan dodge rocks and bottles, brush off taunts, get pushed against lockers. "The hatred Eric and Dylan had for those people was so strong," says Brooks. "It was an act of revenge."

He still can't match the image of the killers with the kids he knew. It's as though Eric and Dylan each had two people inside, he says, but only revealed one to the rest of the world. "I guess I hope that the Eric and Dylan I knew go to heaven while the people who did this go to hell."

remembering rachel



As the killers attacked the library, Craig Scott, 16, lay motionless near the body of his friend Isaiah Shoels. Playing dead saved Craig's life. His sister Rachel, 17, was not as fortunate. Here, Craig tells how he's struggling to cope with her death

I've had a hard time trying to deal with what happened. At times, I've felt like I was lost. I've been sad, numb, depressed, angry. But we've had support from a lot of people, and that has really helped. Now I want to make something good come out of this. That's the best thing I can do for Rachel.

It helped to talk with a counselor and a psychologist. At first, I thought that idea was kind of lame. I thought just talking about it wasn't going to do anything. But it did. It helped in a different way when they gave me a plastic bat and said I could beat out a chair. That got the anger out.

I was angry at Eric and Dylan because my sister was not the sort of person who was an enemy to anybody. They felt no one accepted them, and they watched their Hitler tapes and played Doom to build up all that hate inside them. But Rachel accepted everybody for who they were. She never made fun of anybody. She was just the kind of person they needed, and they shot her.

I can't change what Eric and Dylan did. But maybe I can do something about the way we treat guys like them. The kids who taunted them, who slammed them against lockers, need to change. They need to see that it's not cool to put other people down for a cheap laugh. Nobody really respects that, even though people may not speak up because they're afraid to seem uncool. We need to reach out to kids who seem like they're having problems. We need to find some common ground with them. That's my main goal.

The greatest comfort I have is seeing that some people are trying to be more sensitive to other kids. There's this one big football player at school—his name is Joe—and he wrote me a letter that was totally not what I would have expected from him. He told me he was praying for me, and he said some real nice things. That meant a lot to me. I looked at it and I thought, "Wow, he really wrote that with his heart."

I know what happened at Columbine has brought up a lot of issues about schools, families, laws, video games and music. All of

the violence that comes at us all the time has to have an effect. You can't pretend that it doesn't, especially on people who aren't real stable. But I honestly don't think that new laws about guns or more metal detectors at school are the answer. They're not going to stop the sort of people who decide to do something like what happened at our school. What we need is a better way of thinking about each other. We need to be more careful about how we treat people who seem torn up inside.

Rachel was such a good example of how to treat people. She was never fake. She was so real with people that everyone respected her. Rachel was her own person. I think of those funny hats she liked to wear: a top hat, a fedora, a sailor hat, a Dr. Seuss hat. When she wore her floppy bucket hat, we called her Gilligan.

I don't want to sound like everything was perfect. We fought sometimes, and we could be bratty to each other. But she was a really good person who was passionate about so many things. She wanted to be a poet, an actress; she wanted to do missionary work. Rachel was secure with who she was. She was pretty, but she wasn't vain. She cut her hair short and dyed it maroon to get into her role in the school play. She played someone who was kind of freaky and looked different but was really a caring person underneath. The play was staged just a couple of weeks before she died.

I keep thinking about an assignment she did for photography class back around January. She took a picture of her hand and wrote a religious poem around it with lots of warm colors. "What if you were to die today.... Tomorrow is not a promise but a chance."

I thought it was brave of Rachel to be so real with her classmates about her spiritual feelings. I don't think I'd have the nerve to do it.

Michael, Craig's brother, sits at his shrine to Rachel.

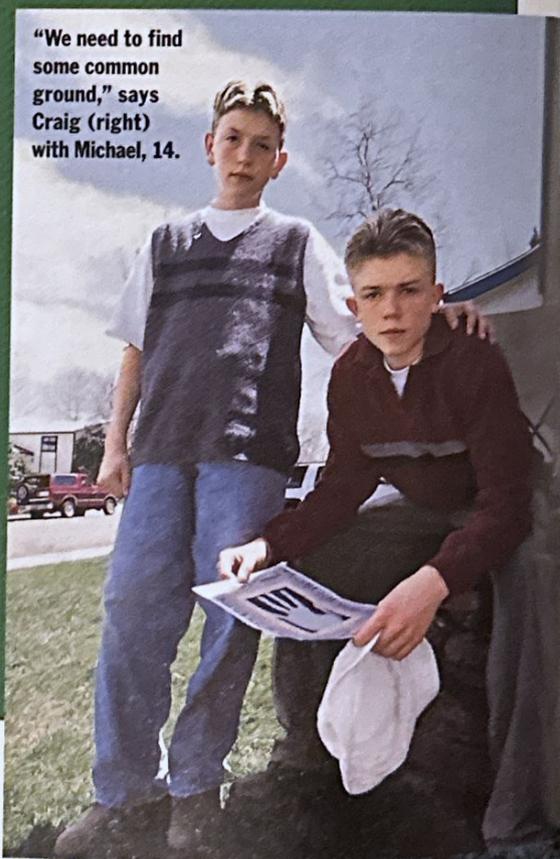


I think it's good that people from around the world have poured out their feelings for Rachel and everyone else who got hurt that day. Her car was parked near the school for weeks, covered with things that people left there. It was like a memorial to her, with flowers and wreaths, stuffed animals, balloons, drawings, poems and posters signed by lots of people. My younger brother Michael kept some of the things and put them on a table in his room, alongside pictures of Rachel. It's like his shrine to his big sister.

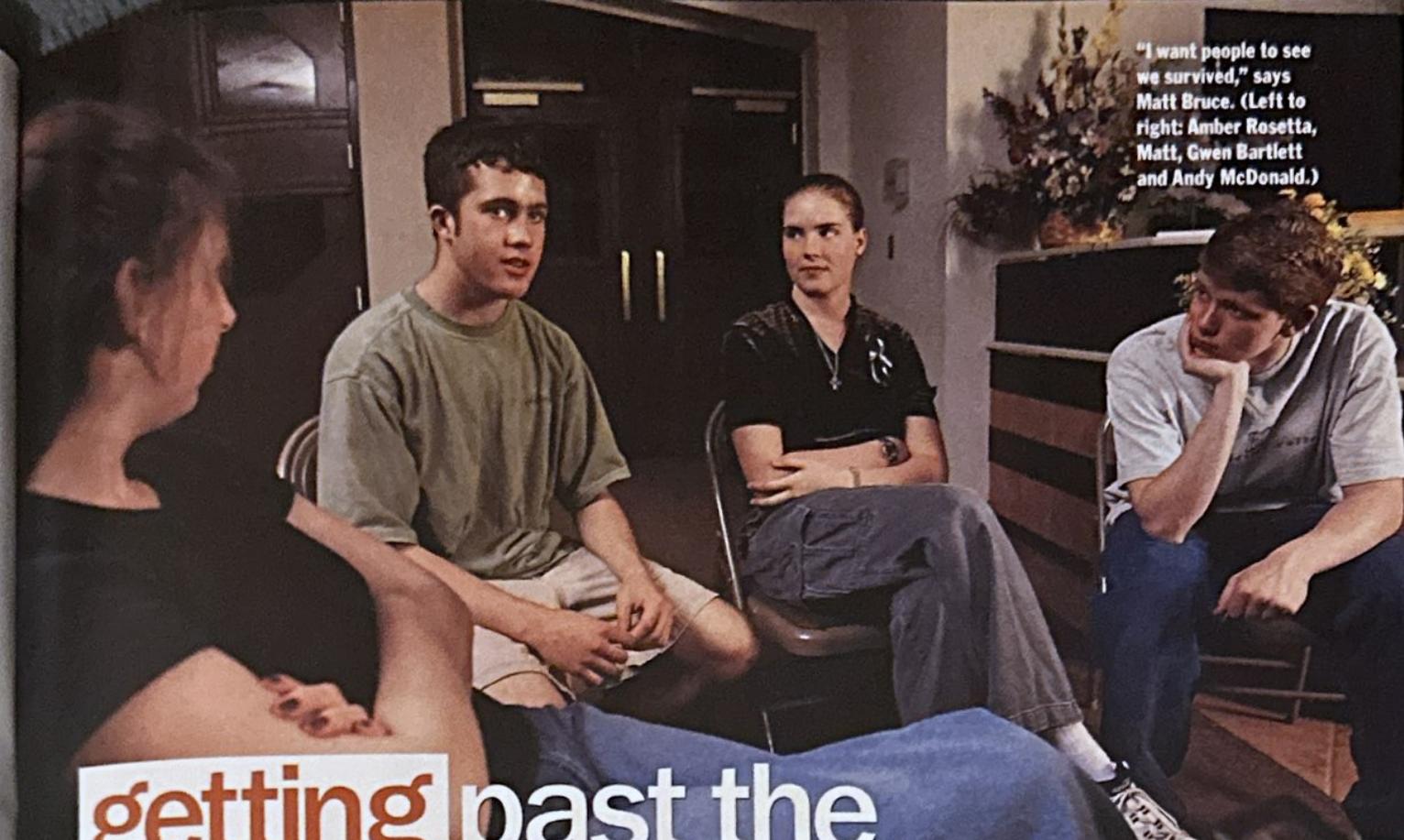
I know I have to move on eventually because I'll go crazy if I don't. But I don't want to forget Rachel. I want her memory to be strong. I want it to mean a lot. She wanted to reach out, to minister to people with her life. Now she's touching a lot of people with her death.

—By Craig Scott, as told to Jerry Kammer
You can see some of Rachel's art and poetry at her Web site, www.racheljoyscott.com.

"We need to find some common ground," says Craig (right) with Michael, 14.



"I want people to see we survived," says Matt Bruce. (Left to right: Amber Rosetta, Matt, Gwen Bartlett and Andy McDonald.)



getting past the fear

No community is immune: The killings at Columbine have made that all too clear. How should teens deal with fears of violence at their schools? Is there a way to keep such tragedies from happening? Experts offer advice on how to spot the warning signs and take action—and Littleton students talk about putting this ordeal behind them

AUTUMN HETTINGER CALLS HER SENIOR PROM "THE LAST happy memory." Flipping through the photos she took that night, the 18-year-old from Columbine High School can't help but notice how much fun everyone was having. How excited everyone seemed.

There's her friend Lauren Townsend dancing in one photo. There's Isaiah Shoels in another. "My friends and I had a lot of fun. We went to Starbucks. We played Super Nintendo in the limo. It was beautiful," Autumn says. "It was the last great time we had." Just three days later, many of the teens in those photos would be dead—killed by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. "I'm trying to get on with my life, but I don't think I'll ever put this behind me," Autumn says as she stares down at the prom photos. "I don't know. I try to smile."

grim memories Throughout Littleton, Autumn and other students are trying to move on, struggling to recapture a normal life any way they can. Brooks Brown plays video games for

hours to keep from remembering. Nick Foss has taken sleeping pills to end the insomnia that haunted him. And Amber Rosetta, who spent four terrifying hours hiding in a biology classroom during the shooting, copes by spending more time with friends from church. But she can't forget what she saw and heard.

"At different points, different things stick out," says the 15-year-old freshman. "Sometimes it's the body that I saw. Other times it's the shots. I'm a jumpy person anyway, and what happened has made me more jumpy."

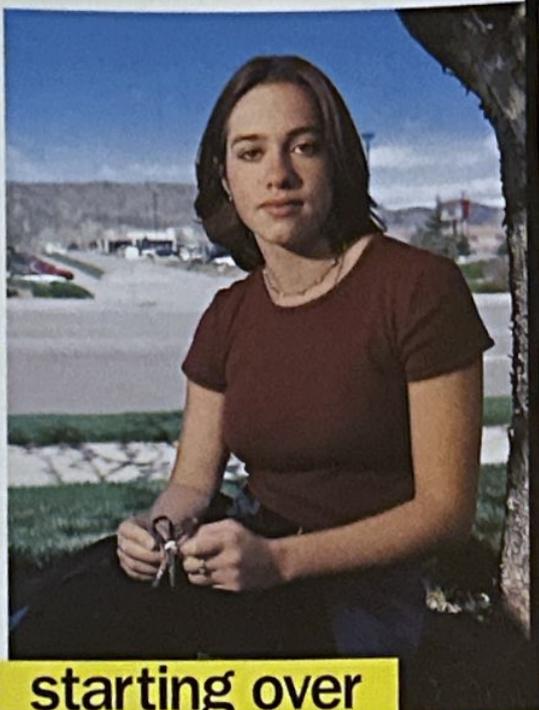
why? Teens around the country are still trying to make sense of the killing spree. In the aftermath of the fifth deadly school rampage in the last two years, many are left shaking their heads, wondering: Why?

"Eric and Dylan were part of our school, and they did this," says Autumn. "I never thought in a million years that there were people walking down our halls who could do this kind of thing."

And yet this kind of thing seems to be happening more and more—and in the quiet ▶

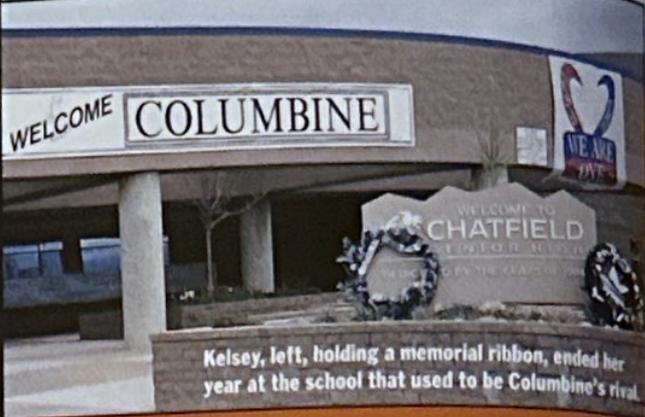


Students wear blue-and-silver ribbons to commemorate the tragedy.



starting over

Returning to class was scary for many Columbine students, but Kelsey Bane, a 16-year-old junior, writes about something the killers couldn't destroy: school spirit



Kelsey, left, holding a memorial ribbon, ended her year at the school that used to be Columbine's rival.

On April 20, 1999, I woke up and checked my horoscope in the newspaper, as I do every morning. I was rather upset to read that I was predicted to have only a two-star day. If I could have seen into the future, I'd have realized just how wildly optimistic this forecast really was.

My life has completely changed since 11:21 on what was supposed to be an ordinary two-star Tuesday. I know nothing will ever be the same as it used to be. I know that I am not the same person I was before this hateful event.

Thirteen days after the shootings, a neighboring school, Chatfield, opened its doors to all of us Columbine students (Chatfield students attended classes in the morning; Columbine students in the afternoon). If you had been to any of our sporting events against Chatfield, you know that there is a huge rivalry between our schools. Welcoming us the way they did was an incredibly generous gesture.

As I walked into this new school, my main emotion was fear, but I knew that many others were just glad to be back among friends. To begin the day, we had a huge assembly with all the Columbine faculty and students. We sang our school song and screamed, "WE ARE! COLUMBINE!" as a way to restore our sense of school pride, courage and strength. Our principal Mr. DeAngelis, said he was so proud of us for standing up and taking in



It goes from liquid to foam



active role in determining what was to become of our school. We told him that even though we knew the building needed extensive remodeling, it would always be home to us, and we wanted to go back. After the assembly, we went to all of our classes. We had extra time to talk to people in our fifth-hour classes, where most students were when the shootings occurred. I had been having lunch in the Commons, but it still helped to speak to these friends about where they had been and how they were doing. For some, discussing what had happened was easy because they had already talked about it so much. But for others, it was very difficult. One of my best friends had been in the library, and I think all that she had seen was finally starting to hit her. Every time she began to talk, she would break down in tears. It was difficult to see my friend in such pain. I'm glad I was able to be with her and help comfort her, but at the same time, I wish I could remove the memories, so that they won't haunt her forever.

That first day was by far the toughest. As I write this, two weeks into school, some familiar faces are returning from the hospital, and it's reassuring to see our dear friends again. To know that they will be okay and that they are becoming stronger is very comforting. We all need each other as a form of support. But on the day we went back to school, a friend of mine had four empty seats around him in one of his classes, and only one of these seats will eventually be filled again.

Some of my friends say they are feeling no fear, but rather anger, sadness or despair. I know it's fear that overwhelms me, and the only way I can overcome it is to face it. That's why I chose to go back to school. Fear of what? I'm not completely sure, but it's there, and it enters me like a cold gust of wind. An unpredictable sound can send me into uncontrollable anxiety. Just being in a large group of people makes me apprehensive.

The first few days after the shootings were incredibly tough for me. I found myself constantly wondering if I was going to make ▶

little places where you'd least expect it: Pearl, Miss.; Springfield, Ore.; Jonesboro, Ark.; Paducah, Ky.; and Conyers, Ga. "I think Littleton finally puts to rest the notion of being immune to this, that these kids are different from the ones in your town," says Scott Poland, Ph.D., a psychologist who has counseled families in Jonesboro, Paducah and Littleton. "But maybe that's a good thing, because now we can get down to answers."

taking control Unfortunately, answers are hard to come by. What's important to remember is that, despite the heavy media coverage, these incidents are *still* very rare. "Schools are enormously safe," says Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Temple University and a TEEN PEOPLE advisory board member. "These events get a lot of attention only because they are rare." Which doesn't mean that kids aren't going to get scared anyway. "It's normal and natural for people to feel anxious when things like this happen," he says. "Don't feel weird for feeling that way."

Instead, try opening up and discussing your fears and emotions with friends, parents and teachers. "It's better to talk about these things than it is to hold them in," says Steinberg. And it's even better to act on those feelings, by figuring out what you and your school can do to solve the problem—whether it's organizing an antiviolence group, bringing up your concerns in class or talking to the ▶

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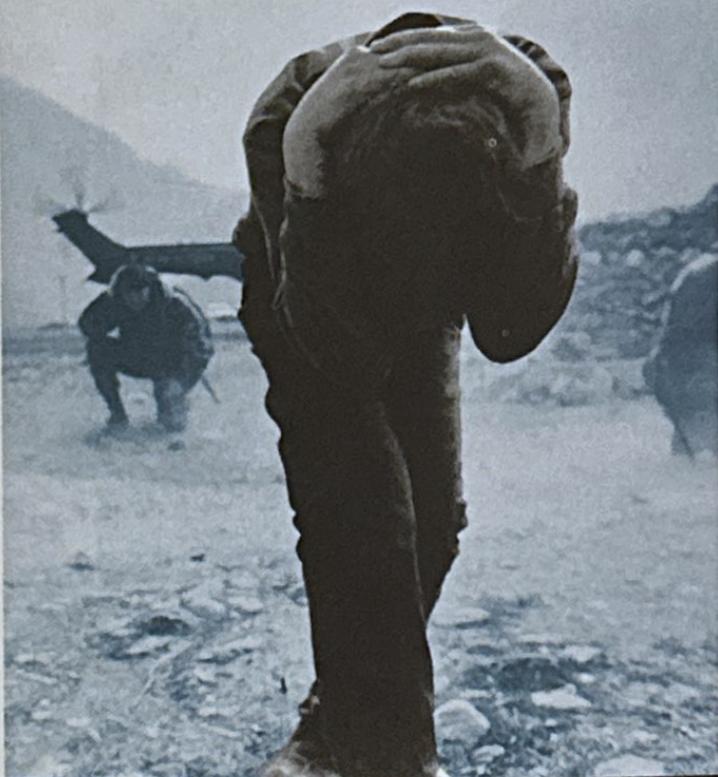
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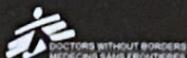
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it through the day. I always did because of the strong support from the people around me. Once, as my mom and I were passing the memorial at Clement Park, I looked at all the people who had come to grieve for Columbine, and I found myself saying, "They know the sorrow, but they'll never know the fear." When I said that, I was mad because I didn't think I could handle this fear on my own. I was mad at what had happened to my friends and the school where I'd felt so safe and secure for so long. Now, I look back on what I said, and I'm relieved that the people who came to show their support will, I hope, never know this feeling of fear. I know I can't give in to it because then I'd be giving up on my life and letting the killers win. I know that I'll find a way to make something good come of this experience.

As the week continued at our new school, I began to feel that finally a sense of order was being restored to my life. When I first heard we were going back to school, I was upset. How could any of us focus on schoolwork? I thought our teachers would expect us to go back into our everyday routine as if nothing had happened. That's exactly the opposite of what they did. The first day back, many of them asked for our opinions on how we should get through the last weeks of classes. That's when I began to understand that they were feeling the same way we were and we all understood each other in a way that no one else could. This tragedy has brought us closer than I ever imagined a school of almost two thousand students could become. Everyone is sharing their feelings and giving hugs to people they had never taken the time to talk to before. Even those friends who had taken separate paths because of arguments and competition were now hugging again. I think everyone has a newfound respect for their fellow classmates—and for life itself.

Some teachers wanted to give us all a few days to adjust before getting back into a somewhat everyday lesson plan. They came up with creative activities, like a hula-hoop contest, which helped students feel closer without having to talk constantly about what had happened. By this time, we were tired of talking; no one can continuously relive the grief and horror they've experienced. If we did that, we'd never be able to overcome it.

In language arts class, we began a new journal. On April 19th, the day before the shooting, we had written about what our personal definition of courage was. Now, this seems a bit too ironic for me. In our new journal, we wrote about how our definition has changed, how the people around us are showing courage, and how we are in need of more courage. I have a feeling this helped a lot of people, because no matter how open you think you've been, there are always things that you need to express but are unable to say out loud. The teacher told us that if we didn't want her to read it, she wouldn't. This allowed us to write our deepest and most personal feelings about the past weeks, and I know it helped me. In my first journal, I had written about my dance squad tryout. I didn't make the squad, and I believed I had shown courage by coming to school the following Monday to face my friends and tell them the bad news. I almost laughed when I reread it because that seemed so incredibly unimportant after the events of April 20th.

I know now that everyone has courage, and when it's needed they'll be able to find it within themselves. I am so proud of all the students and teachers for sticking together and returning to school instead of giving up when everything seemed so hopeless. These are by far the bravest people I believe I will ever meet in my life. We have come through this and are stronger because of it. Each day proves that a little more. My new definition of courage is my classmates and the faculty of Columbine High School.

TEEN PEOPLE AND DATELINE NBC PRESENT A BACK-TO-SCHOOL SPECIAL

On August 11, TEEN PEOPLE and Dateline NBC team up to investigate what drives teens to violence—and what can be done to stop it. Tune in to NBC, and read Part 2 of this Special Report in our September issue, on newsstands August 6. We'll cover teens' efforts around the country to prevent violence and promote tolerance, examine the pros and cons of cliques and offer tips on how you can take action in your own community.



principal about having a school assembly to discuss the issues. "One of the things that makes us feel in control," says Steinberg, "is when we feel like we're actually making a difference."

And that means stepping in and reporting behavior that looks suspicious or potentially dangerous before there's a crisis, so that troubled kids can get help. "Teenagers are the key to stopping this from happening, because they're the ones who often see the sides of a kid who might be dangerous," says Steinberg. And while it can be impossible to spot a troubled teen from a class picture, there are warning signs, such as explosions of rage, lesser acts of violence in a kid's past and written statements of violence like the messages Eric Harris reportedly left on Web sites.

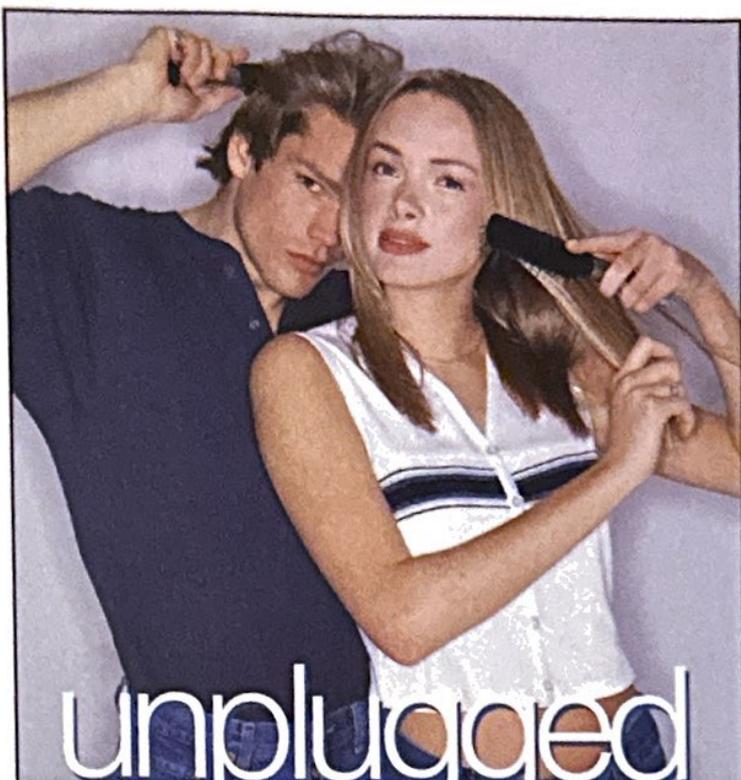
Students can also help by easing up on teasing and trying to accept differences. That's what Gwen Bartlett, a member of Amber's church youth group, hopes for. "Some of the nicest people I know have been in the weirdest cliques," she says. "The kinder we make the environment for all kids, the less we poison the troubled ones," says James Garbarino, Ph.D., a Cornell University professor and author of *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them*. "That's a prevention strategy that every teen can use."

Rachel Scott, 17, one of the Columbine victims, had recognized the dangers of cliques and had talked of uniting the school. "She wanted to set up something in the school to really reach people," says junior Jon Cohen, 17, "especially people like the Trenchcoat Mafia. You know, loners and outcasts. She really had a heart for them."

Many Columbine students say the shootings could unify the school and create a more accepting environment for all kids. "It really has broken down barriers," says Andy McDonald, a 17-year-old junior. "People that I don't usually associate with, we'll give each other hugs and say, 'Hang in there, it will be okay.'"

finding strength Slowly, the students of Columbine will be okay, experts say. "With a one-time trauma like this, you can be pretty successful in getting back to a normal life," Garbarino says. "You can come out of it a better person." Adds Matt Bruce, 16, "If ever a tragedy hits me [again], like when my grandparents die, I'll be able to handle that easier." Kids at other school shooting sites, like Jonesboro and Paducah, have channeled their anger and grief into worthy causes. "Whether it's making ribbons or forming clubs to stop violent images in the media or just doing something to bring their school together," says Poland, "I've seen kids make a lasting contribution to keep this from happening somewhere else."

The survivors are pulling their strength from the memory of the victims. Andy recalls swing dancing with Rachel Scott at last year's homecoming. Jon remembers Cassie Bernall, 17, as the "super nice" friend who "never said anything bad about anyone," and had promised on the morning of the day she was killed to help him with his chemistry homework later. "I was friends with a lot of these people," Andy says. "They'll always be a part of me." ❖



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