

HORROR AT VIRGINIA TECH

A SORROW BEYOND WORDS

**A gunman's senseless
rampage leaves
33 dead, a campus
wounded and one
agonizing, perhaps
unanswerable,
question: Why?**



They tell of hearing gunshots and seeing friends running and the cold, sudden clasp of fear—this is real. “We heard the shots getting closer, moving toward us, down the hallway,” says Andrey Andreyev, 19, a student at Virginia Tech, who at first did not understand the

sounds coming from a classroom next door to his. “Once we heard the screams, there were no longer any questions about what was happening.”

On April 16, 23-year-old Seung-Hui Cho, a senior English major at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the mountain town of Blacksburg, Va., killed 32 people in separate shootings two hours apart. It was the worst mass shooting in American history. Nothing that happened that morning made sense: not the sight of students leaping from windows; not the silent, methodical march of the madman; not, most of all, the unbear-

able number: 32, excluding the killer, who turned his gun on himself. Fifteen more were shot and wounded.

It started early. Around 7:15 a.m. University police took a 911 call about a shooting at West Ambler Johnston Hall, a dorm building on the 2,600-acre campus. Inside they found two students, a man and a woman, dead. Investigators believed the killings were an isolated event, leading university officials to make a fateful decision not to lock down the rest of the campus despite the killer still being on the loose.

Around 9:20 a.m. a half-mile away at Norris Hall, came a second attack.

Cho—a troubled loner who created an imaginary supermodel girlfriend and stalked several women on campus, said one of his former suitemates—apparently fastened chains to the exits of the building, then calmly walked into a German class on the second floor. Armed with a .22-cal. handgun and a Glock 9-mm pistol, he opened fire. “He started at the front of the room, and he shot our professor first,” says Trey Perkins, 20, who turned over two desks to hide. “He was shooting people as he saw them. It was so loud. But he never said a word the whole time.” Cho then walked into a French class and kept firing. “He took his time in between each shot, moving from person to person,” says Clay Violand, 20, who played dead under a desk and was one of only two students to walk out of that classroom. “After a shot, I’d hear a quick moan, or a grunt, or a quiet yell . . . I remember having stray thoughts, like, ‘I wonder if I’ll die fast or slow.’”

In a few frantic minutes, Cho shot people in four classrooms and a stair-

SEUNG-HUI CHO'S SOLITARY, TROUBLED LIFE

To his colleagues, Seung-Hui Cho was a man of no words. “He was a loner,” says Larry Hincker, Virginia Tech associate vice president for university relations. The English major from South Korea, a U.S. resident since 1992, had kept to himself while growing up in Centreville, Va., a D.C. suburb, with his family. “I saw so little of him, I wouldn’t even recognize him,” says neighbor Marshall Main. “They didn’t socialize with neighbors.” At college Cho, 23, barely spoke with his roommates in his Harper Hall dorm and often refused to make eye contact. During his playwriting class last semester, “he didn’t utter a single word,” says classmate Rachel Teitelbaum, 22.

The chillingly violent plays he wrote—graphic depictions of characters often trying to kill one another—said plenty. “There was a disgusting kind of sexual violence in it,” says Teitelbaum. She wasn’t the only one who was disturbed. Last year Cho’s macabre creative writing prompted then English department chair Lucinda Roy to share her concerns with Virginia Tech administration and

privately tutor him. “He did admit to me he was a very lonely person,” says Roy. More alarmingly, according to a former roommate who spoke to CNN, he stalked at least three women last year and confided to the roommate about one of his prey that “when he looked into her eyes, he saw promiscuity.” (Cho also told him he had an imaginary girlfriend named Jelly.) When one of his stalking victims called police and Cho subsequently threatened to kill himself, officers sent him overnight to a counseling center.

Before the shootings, Cho reportedly left a note in his dorm room with a list of grievances against “rich kids” and “deceitful charlatans” on campus, adding “you caused me to do this.” (It was not a suicide note, police say.) And while Cho had no criminal record, when news of the shootings first broke, some students instantly thought of him. “I thought about his violent plays and that it could possibly be this guy,” says Teitelbaum. “He was so different from any other student I’ve ever encountered here.”



Police carry student Kevin Sterne to safety. After being shot, Sterne, an Eagle Scout, wrapped a wire cord around his leg to slow the bleeding, most likely saving his own life (he's now recovering). Said a doctor: "He knew he was bleeding to death."



well. Witnesses say he tried to kill as many people as he could. Teams of police, locked outside, finally forced their way in, but by then the gunfire had stopped; police found Cho dead in a classroom, an apparent suicide.

With the wrenching sadness that followed came tough questions: Could university officials have done more to prevent the bloodshed—especially the second wave? Why, despite a terrifying, minutes-long pop-pop-pop of audible gunshots, did police appear to take so long to enter Norris Hall? "The officers found the front doors barricaded," Virginia Tech President Charles Steger later said, defending the actions of police. "Within a minute the officers breached the doors."

Sadly, they were still too late. The investigation into Cho's motives and mental state will continue, and survivors will begin to recover. The sense of loss, though, will last a very long time. "We're standing looking at Norris Hall, and there are people in it, and all the lights are on, but I'm like, 'Two of my friends died in there,'" says freshman Margaret Morris, 18. "None of it has sunk in yet and I don't want it to." ●

IN THE LINE OF FIRE Witnesses who encountered the shooter and survived recall the chaos and danger—and one professor's stunning bravery

At 9:30 campus housekeeper Pam Tickle, 50, was beginning her rounds in Norris Hall when a student reported something odd: One of the building's exits had been chained shut.

TICKLE: I was dust-mopping the hall, and when I got to the end, a student was trying to get out the door, but it had a chain around it with a lock. That was weird. I've never seen that. The student said, "What's going on?" I said, "I don't know, but I'm going to call my boss."

At about that time, sophomore Trey Perkins, 20, was in his German class on Norris's second floor.

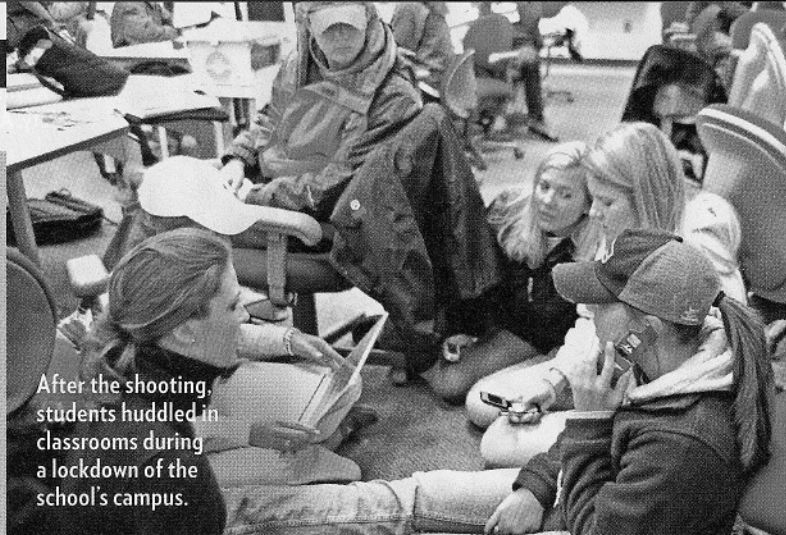
PERKINS: I saw this guy come in and start shooting. I turned over two desks just to get some kind of barricade. People around me were hit. After he left, he tried to come back in, but I and two other classmates, a guy and a girl, barricaded the door with our feet and arms. He shot through

the door about five times. We saw bullets splinter the wood. But we kept him out. He never said a word the whole time. After he left, I tried to find anyone who was conscious. There was so little we could do. I gave my jacket to a guy who was shot in the thigh. Another girl was shot in the mouth. I gave my stocking knit cap to her to try to stop the bleeding.

On the first floor, Gene Cole, 52, a Virginia Tech custodian, was talking to his supervisor Johnny Long.

COLE: This guy came up and said, "There's shooting going on." Then I saw people come running out of the lab and say, "Somebody got shot in there."

I went upstairs to the second floor to get my coworker Pam Tickle. I got off the elevator, and I saw blood all over the hallways. I went around the corner toward her [utility] closet, and I saw something laying in the hallway. **As he drew closer, Cole realized it**



After the shooting, students huddled in classrooms during a lockdown of the school's campus.

was a body. That's when this guy jumped out of a classroom and started shooting at me. He fired five times from about 40 feet away. I thought I was gone. I felt the bullets behind my ears when they were floating by.

Nearby, Richard Mallalieu, 23, and fellow students in Prof. Liviu Librescu's engineering class in Norris 204 heard a commotion outside their classroom.

MALLALIEU: About halfway through class, I heard something coming from the room directly behind us. I thought it was gunshots. I tried to convince myself it wasn't. But it was.

Also in class was Andrey Andreyev, 19.

ANDREYEV: Once we heard the screams, there were no longer any questions about what was happening.

MALLALIEU: At first everybody got down on the ground. Somebody went to the door to see if we could get out. But there were gunshots in the hall. We weren't going to be able to get out that way.

Librescu, a Holocaust survivor, moved toward the classroom door, blocking it with his body.

ANDREYEV: His English was not good, and it must have been hard for him to communicate in this situation, so he talked to us with his hands. He used his hands to tell us to get back. We heard the sounds getting closer. The shots were moving toward us, down the hallway.

Andreyev grabbed Librescu and tried to pull him to safety, but the 76-year-old professor

refused to budge.

ANDREYEV: He pushed me back. He stood at the door and wouldn't move. He pushed me toward the back of the room, a corner. He himself would not move. He just stood there.

MALLALIEU: Everyone headed to the windows. We pulled out the screens. We were about 10 feet from the ground, kind of hanging from the window ledge, and we more or less fell out.

As the gunman moved from classroom to classroom, Gene Cole managed to escape by dashing for the building's rear stairwell.

COLE: I went down the hallway, down to the auditorium and kept on going. I was trembling from toe to head.

Housekeeper Pam Tickle was safe as well. She and coworkers locked themselves in a student lounge and waited out the gunfire. Meanwhile, in Norris 204, Professor Librescu continued to barricade the doorway as his students escaped.

MALLALIEU: I think 12 or 15 students went out the windows. Four students and our professor were in the room when the gunman got in. I think all four are going to be okay. But our professor died.

ANDREYEV: He saved everyone in the classroom. He saved our lives. As I got ready to jump out the window, I turned back to look at the professor. He just stood there, holding the door. The last I saw him, he was blocking the door.

THE LIVES TH

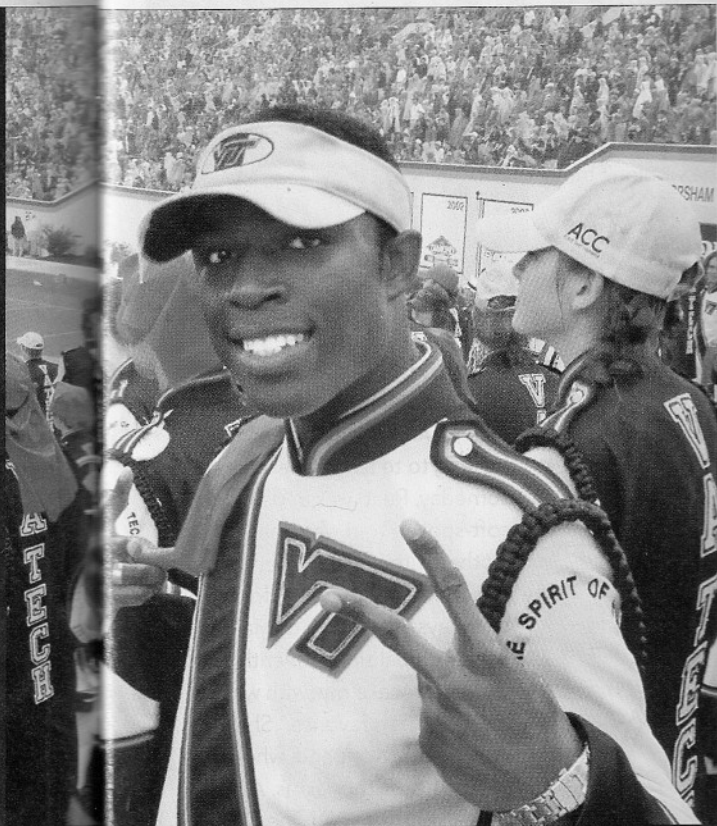
PROMISING STUDENTS, BELOVED TEACHERS: Family and friends remember their los

THE FIRST VICTIMS

RYAN CLARK, 22

Senior. Major: psychology, biology and English
Martinez, Ga.

Juggling three areas of study (plus band practice—he played the baritone—and resident-advisor duties at West Ambler Johnston Hall) “was nothing to him,” says step-sister Claressa Thompson of Ryan, who also has a twin, Bryan, who is in the Marines. “He never said he was tired and still made time for everybody. He was outgoing and always had a joke. If there was a bad situation, he would know how to laugh about it. I know he wouldn’t want us to be all mopey.”



EMILY HILSCHER, 18

Freshman. Major: animal and poultry sciences
Woodville, Va.

Hilscher, Cho’s first victim, carried her girlhood love of horses to college, where she was a member of the equestrian club. “She absolutely loved animals,” says high school pal Rachel Gall. At Tech, Hilscher was among the top riders and talked about making horses her career, either as a veterinarian or a trainer, says club member Niki Knoebel. Next year looked even brighter for Hilscher, as her longtime boyfriend planned to transfer to Virginia Tech. Says Knoebel: “She seemed really optimistic.” As for rumors that Hilscher was the object of the killer’s unrequited affection, Knoebel doesn’t believe them. She says she doubts Hilscher even knew him. “She never mentioned him. Some people are saying he was stalking her, but [if so] she never said anything.”

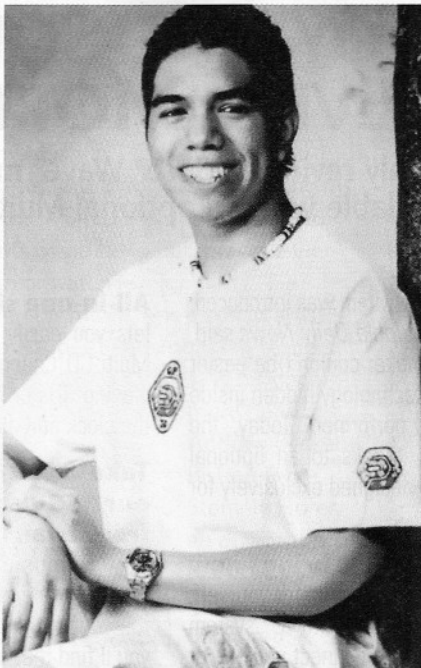




JOCELYNE COUTURE-NOWAK

Professor, French, Blacksburg, Va.

"She was an adoring mother" with "a great family," says friend Lloyd Mapplebeck of Couture-Nowak, a Canadian who previously helped to found a French school in Nova Scotia. With husband Jerzy Nowak, head of Virginia Tech's horticulture department, she had two daughters, Francine and Sylvie. Says Mapplebeck: "There was always a sparkle in her eye."



DANIEL ALEJANDRO PEREZ CUEVA, 21

Junior. Major: international relations; Minor: French Woodbridge, Va.

Perez was in high school when he came to the U.S. with his mother from Peru (where his father still lives). Initially homesick, he lately relied on YouTube to reminisce about his childhood. "We watched TV shows from when we were little," says Hugo Quintero, 20, a Colombian student who became his best friend. "Our favorite was a cartoon soccer show called *Super Campeones*." But Perez, an excellent swimmer, also looked ahead: Just

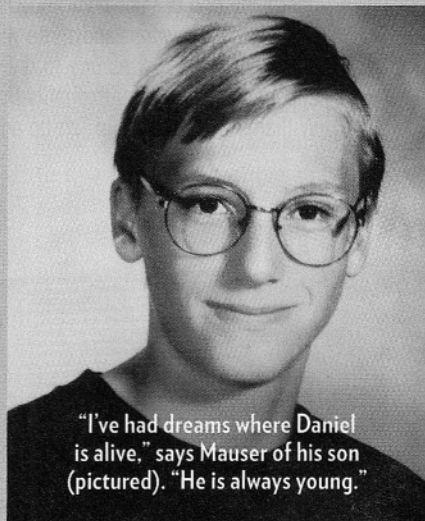
the Saturday before the shootings, he had been talking about his intern applications to the French and Italian embassies. "He was talking about jobs, the future."



Share your thoughts on the Virginia Tech tragedy, plus get news updates on the shooting, at people.com/vatech

AFTER COLUMBINE The father of a Columbine shooting victim tells how his family coped after April 20, 1999. "If you love your child," he says, "you simply don't get over that. But you learn to deal with it."

Daniel Mauser would have been 24 this year. He was a sophomore, just 15, when two fellow Columbine High School students ended his life eight years ago in the campus rampage that left 13 victims dead. Daniel had excelled at biology, ran track and, despite a natural shyness, competed on the debate team. There isn't a day that his mom, Linda, sister Christine, now 21, and father, Tom, don't feel his absence. "The emotional wounds never heal. They will grow smaller, but they won't go away," says Tom Mauser, a manager at the Colorado department of transportation and, since 1999, a lobbyist for stricter gun-control laws. Mauser says his wounds were ripped when he tuned in to news of Virginia Tech. In the victims' families, he says, he recognizes himself in the first days following the Columbine shootings. "They are asking now why their child was murdered: 'Why my child?'" To those facing the worst, Mauser's words of advice are respectfully few. "Get counseling. Don't let someone else tell you how to grieve. And celebrate the life of your child." He and his family—which now includes daughter Madeline, adopted from China in 2000—have done so with a Web site, danielmauser.com. "I wanted to tell his story and have him live on by telling the world, 'This was a great kid. He didn't deserve this.'"



"I've had dreams where Daniel is alive," says Mauser of his son (pictured). "He is always young."

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