



School Safety Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 3

October 2015

Oregon gunman Smiled, Then Fired, Student Says

New York Times, Oct 9, 2015

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/10/us/roseburg-oregon-shooting-christopher-harper-mercero.html?_r=0

ROSEBURG, Ore. — The gunman who killed nine people October 1, 2015 during a writing class here had an uncomfortable exchange with the teacher earlier in the week, one of the survivors of the shooting at Umpqua Community College said.

The survivor, Tracy Heu, a nursing student, said she had recognized the killer, Christopher Harper-Mercer, as a student who had spoken up on another day when the teacher, Lawrence Levine, asked for the definition of a vocabulary word. When Mr. Harper-Mercer offered a response, Mr. Levine “kind of corrected Chris,” Ms. Heu, 30, said in an interview at her home this week.

Mr. Levine was among the nine killed by Mr. Harper-Mercer.

Another student in the class, Lacey Scroggins, confirmed through her father, Randy Scroggins, that Mr. Harper-Mercer had engaged with the teacher and said he was a vocal member of the class, which had begun that week.

Ms. Scroggins, 18, and Ms. Heu are among the few survivors from Classroom 15 in Snyder Hall who have described their experiences. On the morning of Oct. 1, Ms. Heu said, she was in a center seat in the front row of the writing class when Mr. Harper-Mercer strode into the room about 10:30, smiling and wearing black clothes and a bulletproof vest.



Lucero Alcaraz, 19



Rebecka Carnes, 18



Trevor Anspach, 20



Lucas Eibel, 18



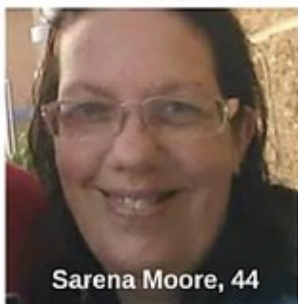
Quinn Cooper, 18



Jason Johnson, 34



Lawrence Levine, 67



Sarena Moore, 44



Kim Dietz, 59

Oregon shooting: Victims remembered for compassion.

<http://www.wptv.com/news/national/oregon-shooting-6-guns-on-campus-7-at-shooters-home-atf-says>

*Protecting our
future through
information
sharing*

In This Issue

- Oregon Gunman Smiled, Then Fired, Student Says
- Next Monthly Webinar - Date Change: Tuesday October 27, 2015
- Mass Killings Are Seen as a Kind of Contagion

Oregon gunman Smiled, Then Fired, Student Says (continue)

The gunman's first shot was to the back of the room, Ms. Heu said — a warning shot, it seemed, before he ordered the students and teacher to get down on the floor and lie on their stomachs. They huddled in the center of the room, noses to the ground, partly hidden below rows of two-person desks.

To Ms. Heu's right was Sarena Dawn Moore, a woman in a wheelchair who had crawled to the floor, next to her service dog. "He told her to climb back up," Ms. Heu said. "She tried to climb back up, and he shot her. And that's when I kind of knew: 'Oh, my God. It's real.'" There was a spray of bullets followed by a lot of blood, she said.

At one point, Mr. Harper-Mercer began asking students about their religion, though their responses did not seem to determine whether he shot them, Ms. Heu said. She recalled that he had asked two people if they were Christians; she thought that they said "yes" and that he killed them.

"He started pointing out, 'Hey, you with the glasses, you with the yellow tank top, stand up,'" Ms. Heu said. "And when he did all that, he started asking, 'What is your religion, do you believe in — are you a Christian?'"

"And that person would say, 'Yeah,'" she continued. "He said: 'Good. I'm going to send you to God. You're going to see God.' And then he'd just start shooting them."

"I don't think Christianity or religion had to do anything with him killing people," Ms. Heu added. "If it really did have something to do with it, when he came in, first he would have asked every single body to say what their religion was before he started shooting them."

The gunman never approached Ms. Heu. Lying face down in the front of the huddle, the blood of fellow students pooled beneath her, she said, she thought she appeared to be dead. "The only thing I could think of was: Just be calm," she said. "Try not to make your chest go up and down so high. Because he's going to realize that you're still alive and he's going to make you stand up. And you stand up — that's it."

Had the gunman asked, Ms. Heu would have told him that she is not a Christian. Her family practices Hmong shamanism.

At some point, the gunman handed a package to 18-year-old Matthew Downing and instructed him to deliver it to the police.

For reasons that remain unclear, the gunman exited the classroom. When the police arrived at 10:44 a.m., Mr. Harper-Mercer stood in the doorway of the building, then moved outside, firing at two officers. Detective Sgt. Joe Kaney and Detective Todd Spingath of the Roseburg police had arrived without bulletproof vests; they fired three rounds. One lodged in the gunman's side, the police said.

Mr. Harper-Mercer, 26, then returned to the classroom, where he fatally shot himself. Mr. Downing, the student entrusted with the envelope, shouted for a student to kick the weapon — or weapons — away from the gunman's hand. The police later recovered six guns and copious ammunition from the school.

Ms. Heu sprinted out of the room. She entered a men's bathroom, she said, but was repelled by what she saw there: a long gun on the ground in the stall for the disabled, and a bag with its zipper open. She ran out of the building; Mr. Downing followed.

"They pointed the gun at Matthew," Ms. Heu said of police officers who had just arrived. "They didn't know. He was waving the envelope he had on him. I was like, 'He's fine. He's a student. The shooter told him to give that to you guys.'" "

At Mr. Downing's home, his mother said he was too traumatized to talk about what happened. "My son is not a hero," Summer Smith said, adding that he was just trying to survive.

Outside, Ms. Heu embraced Mr. Downing and another classmate, and climbed into an ambulance. At Mercy Medical Center in Roseburg, she was shocked to learn that she had been shot in her right hand. After surgery, she went home, kissed her three children and took a shower, sobbing as her husband scrubbed blood from her tangled black hair.

After hearing accounts of the day, Ms. Heu still does not have any idea what Mr. Harper-Mercer's motive was. "I would ask him: Why? Why he did what he did," she said.

Monthly Webinars!

Normally first Wednesday of Every Month at 10 am.

Next Webinar

Change of Date

TUESDAY
October 27,
2015

Each webinar has a round table discussion at the end. Questions are always welcome!

To participate, you must be a vetted member. For more information please email schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us

Mass Killings Are Seen as a Kind of Contagion

New York Times, October 7, 2015

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/08/science/mass-killers-often-rely-on-past-perpetrators-blueprints.html>

As mass shootings have become ever more familiar, experts have come to understand them less as isolated expressions of rage and more as acts that build on the blueprints of previous rampages.

Experts in violence prevention say that many, if not most, perpetrators of such shootings have intensively researched earlier mass attacks, often expressing admiration for those who carried them out. The publicity that surrounds these killings can have an accelerating effect on other troubled and angry would-be killers who are already heading toward violence, they say.

The killing of nine people at an Oregon community college last week was a textbook example. Before opening fire, the gunman, Christopher Harper-Mercer, 26, reportedly uploaded a video about the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

The perpetrator of the Sandy Hook murders was himself a student of earlier shootings — in 1999 at Columbine High School in Colorado, where 13 people were killed, and in 2011 in Norway, where 77 people were killed. And three days after the Oregon shootings, the F.B.I. warned colleges and universities in Philadelphia of a threat posted on the same website used by Mr. Harper-Mercer.

The potential for cultural contagion, many experts say, demands a public health response, one focused as much on early detection and preventive measures as on politically charged campaigns for firearm restrictions. But in some cases, efforts to identify and monitor potentially violent people can raise concerns about civil liberties.

“You’re balancing public welfare and personal privacy,” said J. Reid Meloy, a forensic psychologist in San Diego who consults on threat assessment for schools and corporations.

Some people have also suggested changes in the way the news media covers mass attacks.

“If you blast the names and faces of shooters on news stations and constantly repeat their names, there may be an inadvertent process of creating a blueprint,” said Dr. Deborah Weisbrot, an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Stony Brook University, who has interviewed hundreds of mostly teenage boys who have made threats.

Experts emphasize that many factors, including mental health issues, may motivate a mass killer.

But anyone interested in the mechanics of such killings can reconstruct them easily through a quick Internet search of news reports, websites and social media. One website lists rampage killings around the world. The gunman who killed 12 people at a movie theater in Aurora, Colo., in 2012 had a fan club on Tumblr.

“You’d have a hard time finding someone who didn’t do some research about those who went before,” said Robert A. Fein, a psychologist whose specialty is targeted violence and an author of a 2002 report by the Secret Service on school shootings.

In a study of nine school shootings in Germany, Dr. Meloy and his colleagues found that a third of the killers had “consciously imitated and emulated what had happened in Columbine.” Other mass killers have visited Columbine or written online of their admiration for the two perpetrators there.

It is easy to see why Mr. Harper-Mercer might have identified with the Sandy Hook shooter. Both young men lived with their mothers, with whom they shared a passion for guns and even went to firing ranges to shoot. Mr. Harper-Mercer’s mother said he had Asperger’s syndrome; the Sandy Hook killer had received a similar diagnosis.

“The more they identify with the characteristics of the story, the more it will increase their level of risk,” said J. Kevin Cameron, the director of the Canadian Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response, who has consulted on school shootings in the United States.

At least one study suggests that mass killings, like teenage suicides, may “cluster,” with one highly covered case quickly followed by others. In a recent analysis of hundreds of killings from 1997 to 2013, researchers found that the probability of another attack was highest in the two weeks after a killing hit the news.

Mia Ray Langheim

School Intelligence
Officer



Mass Killings Are Seen as a Kind of Contagion (continue)

Some in law enforcement have begun to suggest that the news media adopt standards in reporting about such events that are similar to guidelines in place for reporting on teenage suicides.

Pete Blair, the director of the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center at Texas State University, has started a campaign, endorsed by the F.B.I., called “Don’t Name Them” — a policy that Sheriff John Hanlin of Douglas County, Ore., asked the news media to follow in the Oregon case, with little success.

Dr. Meloy said that it might be more important to avoid photographs and phrases like “lone wolf” that “convey a certain cool pose to young people.”

The New York Times ran a photograph of Mr. Harper-Mercer on its front page and featured it prominently online. Matthew Purdy, a deputy executive editor, said such images were not meant to glorify the perpetrators. “Our job is to explain and explore, and these images help to do that,” he said.

Most mass killers “leak” their intentions, dropping hints in conversation or on social media. Mr. Harper-Mercer, for example, reportedly wrote in a blog post, “Seems the more people you kill, the more you’re in the limelight.”

Parents, teachers, classmates, friends and others are in the best position to pick up on these clues, but they often dismiss or ignore them. So “see something, say something” strategies, like those developed in New York after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, can help encourage people to speak up, Dr. Meloy said.

Equally important is breaking down barriers among local agencies — law enforcement and mental health departments, for example — and developing a system to monitor threats and determine if the people who made them are simply troubled or “on a path to violence,” experts in threat assessment said.

Several localities have adopted broad and coordinated prevention measures. In Los Angeles County, law enforcement, the county mental health department and educational institutions share information and train staff members to recognize and report worrisome behavior.

The county has intervened in numerous cases in which students had weapons and elaborate plans to use them, said Tony Beliz, a consultant to schools and corporations on violence prevention who for many years ran the mental health side of the effort. In the weeks immediately after a mass killing, they closely monitor young people they believe pose a risk.

After the Sandy Hook shootings, for example, they checked on a 16-year-old boy who liked bomb-making chemicals and who had told the county workers two years before, “I have to get rid of the bad people in this world.” They also called the mother of a teenager who was fascinated by weapons and killing, had access to firearms and had extensively researched school shootings.

Yet such programs can sometimes collide with individual rights, especially when no crime has been committed.

Dr. Beliz and other experts said that mental health professionals and educators were often reluctant to share information about students or clients who exhibited worrisome behavior, under the misapprehension that privacy laws prohibit such disclosures. Part of the task, they said, is to educate teachers, principals and therapists, explaining the provisions in the laws that allow information to be shared if public safety is involved.

Dr. Beliz said there had been no school shootings in places where the Los Angeles program operated.

But, he added, “unfortunately, some campuses and law enforcement agencies are still in this state of denial where they don’t believe it’s going to happen in their community.”

The biggest obstacle experts may have to overcome, though, is the reluctance of people to recognize and report signs that someone they know might be dangerous.

After Columbine, “we believed that the biggest problem we were going to deal with was overreaction to minor situations,” Mr. Cameron said. “But the biggest problem we still deal with is under reaction to often blatant indicators that someone is moving on a pathway to violence.”

School Safety

Newsletter

Statewide Terrorism &
Intelligence Center
2200 S. Dirksen Park-
way
Springfield, IL 62703
Phone: 217-558-2661
E-Mail:
Schoolsafety
@isp.state.il.us