



School Safety Newsletter

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How the FBI Retraced the Steps of a Florida Teen 'Infatuated' with the Columbine Massacre

CNN, April 18, 2019

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/18/us/denver-sol-pais-thursday/index.html>

The frantic hunt for a Florida teen described by authorities as "infatuated" with the Columbine massacre started after a series of red flags that included her buying three one-way plane tickets to Denver.

Sol Pais, 18, traveled to Colorado this week from her home in the Miami suburb of Surfside.

As soon as the Miami high school student arrived in Denver on Monday night, she legally bought a pump-action shotgun at a shop less than two miles from Columbine High School, the FBI said.

Authorities in Miami notified their Denver counterparts that she was armed and considered a threat to the Columbine High School, leading to a shut down of at least 19 school districts in the Denver area.

About 24 hours later, she was found dead in the mountains outside Denver on Wednesday. Schools will reopen under tightened security Thursday for a Denver suburb already edgy with the 20th anniversary of the Columbine High School mass shooting just days away.

She made 'troubling' comments about Columbine

Since her death, alarming details have emerged about her past along with an electronic trail on a website that appears to allude to her plans.

Pais had made credible but not specific threats before and after traveling from Miami to Denver on Monday night, said Dean Phillips, the agent in charge of the FBI office in Denver.

Pais first raised suspicions with comments she made to people in Florida, the FBI said. Those comments were shared with police, who notified federal officials, he said, without elaborating on what they were.

"She made several comments to folks that we obtained through interviews ... comments that were troubling with regards to her infatuation with Columbine, the recognition that the Columbine anniversary is coming this week," Phillips said.

In addition to the comments, authorities discovered that she had bought three one-way tickets from Miami to Denver for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Phillips said.

"Things like buying three one-way tickets on consecutive days, very unusual activity ... that caused us great concern that obviously we worked quickly to identify and address," Phillips said.

She arrived in Denver with the ticket she bought for Monday, he said. After her arrival, the FBI received concerning information about her and worked to track her down and retrace her steps. By then, she'd already bought a gun and was nowhere to be found.

A rideshare pinpointed her location

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future through
information
sharing*

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How the FBI Retraced the Steps of a Florida Teen 'Infatuated' with the Columbine Massacre (Continued)

After law enforcement officials found out she was already in the state, they issued an alert Tuesday saying that she was last seen wearing a black shirt and camouflage pants.

Investigators discovered that she was moving around Jefferson County, where Columbine High School is located, in an "Uber-type of a system," Sheriff Jeff Shrader said. A driver had dropped her off at the foothills of Mount Evans, the FBI said.

Police waited for daylight to begin scouring the area for any clues on her location.

"It was a long night, we had a 24-hour command post," Phillips said.

She was found dead Wednesday morning of an apparent self-inflicted shotgun wound. Her body was found at the base of Mount Evans, a national recreation area outside Denver, Phillips said.

It's unclear why Pais went to Mount Evans, about 60 miles west of Denver. The driver of a rideshare or another vehicle dropped her off there, and later helped police pinpoint the location, authorities said.

She appeared to keep an online journal

Investigators are looking into a website believed to be connected to her, an FBI official said.

The website, which CNN is not naming, had scanned, handwritten journal entries from someone who signed them Sol Pais.

Some of the journals are barely legible -- sometimes because of handwriting, other times because of the scanning. There are a number of crude drawings of weapons, from long rifles to handguns and knives. One drawing has a trench coat figure holding an apparent weapon.

In most of the entries, the individual rambles about feeling like they did not belong in this world. Oftentimes, the writer would quote song lyrics.

One message on the website offered a dark insight into its potential purpose.

"The purpose of this site is for me to give insight into the thoughts I rarely, if ever, share with others, while remaining somewhat anonymous," one of the messages read.

"Everything from journal entries to my personal interests -- I want to leave a record of myself before I, well. ..." The final journal entry posted on the website is signed Sol Pais.

CNN could not independently confirm the website belonged to Pais. Phillips confirmed the FBI is looking into the website.

She bought her gun legally

Pais passed two background clearances by the National Instant Criminal Background Check System and the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, the gun shop said in a post on social media. It said the store had no reason to suspect she was a threat to herself or anyone else.

While she was considered a threat to the community and schools, there was no information on any specific threat to a particular place, Phillips said.

More than 2,000 miles away, Pais' relatives are relieved no one was hurt, said Surfside Police Chief Julio Yero, who broke the news of her death to her parents.

"This family contributed greatly to this investigation from the very onset," Yero said. "They provided us valuable information that led us to Colorado, and a lot of things that assisted in preventing maybe more loss of life."

Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of Every Month

at 10 am

(Except January, July, and August).

Next Webinars

Wednesday, May 1, 2019

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

Former Student Destroys 59 University Computers Using USB Killer Device

ZDNet, April 18, 2019

<https://www.zdnet.com/article/former-student-destroys-59-university-computers-using-usb-killer-device/>

An Indian national in the US has pleaded guilty this week to destroying 59 computers at the College of St. Rose, in New York, using a weaponized USB thumb drive named "USB Killer" that he purchased online.

The incident took place on February 14, according to court documents obtained by ZDNet, and the suspect, Vishwanath Akuthota, 27, filmed himself while destroying some of the computers.

"I'm going to kill this guy," "it's dead," and "it's gone. Boom," Akuthota said on recordings obtained by the prosecution.

The suspect destroyed 59 computers, but also seven computer monitors and computer-enhanced podiums that had open USB slots.

He did it using USB Killer, a weaponized thumb drive that he purchased from a well-known online store that sells these types of devices.

USB Killer devices work by rapidly charging thumb drive capacitors from the USB power supply, and then discharging the electrical current back into the USB slot --all in a matter of seconds-- effectively frying the computer to which the USB Killer device is connected.

Equipment damages amounted to \$51,109, along with \$7,362 in employee time for investigating and replacing destroyed hardware, which Akuthota agreed to pay as part of the plea deal, according to court documents.

He graduated College of St. Rose in 2017 with an MBA, and on the night of the incident, he was no longer a student at the college and was residing in the US on a student visa.

Akuthota was arrested on February 22 and will be sentenced later this year, on August 12. He faces up to ten years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of post-imprisonment supervised release of up to 3 years.

Two Students at a New Jersey High School Charged with Jamming School's Wi-Fi to Avoid Exams

NJ.com, April 2, 2019

<https://www.nj.com/hudson/2019/04/2-students-at-a-nj-high-school-charged-with-jamming-schools-wi-fi-to-avoid-exams.html>

If only a pair of students would have put this sort of ingenuity into their classwork, they may not have been charged. Two freshmen at Secaucus High School, using an app or a computer program, successfully crashed the school's Wi-Fi network on multiple occasions to get out of taking exams, authorities said Monday.

Two 14-year-old boys were charged with computer criminal activity and conspiracy to commit computer criminal activity after school officials notified police on Thursday. Because they are juveniles, their names are not being released.

"Our Wi-Fi connection was compromised over the past week," Schools Superintendent Jennifer Montesano said Monday. "The system has been restored and is now fully operational."

Montesano didn't provide additional details regarding the incident, but added an investigation found two students "who may have been involved in the disruption of our system."

Since much of the school's curriculum is internet-based, the lack of Wi-Fi connection disrupted the students' daily assignments. It is believed that the two boys took requests from other students to bring down the network.

Students interviewed Monday afternoon believe the boys used a Wi-Fi interrupter program, or an app, to send so much traffic to the routers that the system would crash, which ultimately caused connection failures when students tried to log on, do class work or take exams on their computers.

"One day we were supposed to be doing work on our Chromebooks, but we had no activity whatsoever to do in class because the Wi-Fi shutdown," said a student in the 10th grade at the 634-student high school on Millridge Road. "It interrupted the whole class, unfortunately."

A junior at Secaucus High said she learned about the Wi-Fi disruption when a friend told her she had asked one of the boys to jam the signal during an exam.

Two Students at a New Jersey High School Charged with Jamming School's Wi-Fi to Avoid Exams (continued)

"He was doing it to get out of tests and stuff like that," the student said as she stood surrounded by classmates after school Monday. "(One of the boys) was doing it also for (his friend), so she wouldn't have to take a test during the class. It was a big prank, really."

Some students said they were surprised kids their age were able to pull off such a stunt.

"I was surprised on how a kid our age, or close to our age, was able to do something like this," said another 10th grade student. Sounding more like a parent than a student, she joked "Kids these days and the internet."

The student added arresting the two boys seemed a little heavy-handed. "They are messing with people's education, but they aren't harming anyone."

Meanwhile, another student said what the students did was not right.

"I think it was dumb for them to do it," he said. "If you don't want to be in a test, you're going to have to deal with it because he wasn't the only one who wasn't going to take that test. It was a whole class."

Richmond School Shooting: Gunman Went Into Dennis with Handwritten Plan, Police Say

Pal Item. USA Today Network, April 2, 2019

<https://www.pal-item.com/story/news/crime/2019/04/02/indiana-state-police-shed-new-light-dennis-school-shooting-incident/3341861002/>

RICHMOND, Ind. — The 14-year-old who shot his way into Dennis Intermediate School on the morning of Dec. 13 had a handwritten, specific plan with him that was aimed at causing "maximum damage and harm," according to an investigation by the Indiana State Police.

Capt. David Bursten, ISP's chief information officer, shared several new details about that morning during a press conference held late Tuesday afternoon in the Richmond Community Schools board room. Bursten, however, remained guarded about some details because Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Shipman continues to review the completed investigation for possible charges.

Bursten was accompanied by RCS, local law enforcement and other officials as he laid out the timeline for the events of Dec. 13 from the moment the teenager's mother called 911 to report her son had taken her boyfriend hostage at gunpoint and was heading toward a school to when the suspect finally took his life after being cornered in a second-floor stairwell.

Teen had materials to potentially make Molotov cocktails, police say

The teen, whom the Pal item is not identifying because of his age, was carrying a rifle bag with a Remington 700 bolt-action weapon inside and a .45-caliber Smith & Wesson semi-automatic pistol. The teen carried two magazines containing five rounds each for the pistol.

Inside the bag also were two 12-ounce water bottles filled with gasoline and a couple of rags to potentially make Molotov cocktails, a handwritten plan of action of what he wanted to do once he entered the school and a 12-ounce can of Mountain Dew.

"He had thoughtfully in his mind written out a specific plan that he wanted to follow through on, that he was taking steps to act on the plan," Bursten said. "I feel comfortable in telling you that his intent was to cause maximum damage and harm. I'm comfortable in telling you that no specific person was targeted."

When police confronted him outside the school, the suspect fired three shots into a glass door on the north side of the building in order to get inside. He later fired two shots from his pistol at police while in the stairwell and then seven shots from the rifle. The last was the one that he used to take his own life. Although law enforcement officers fired at the teen down a second-floor hallway, Bursten said the autopsy showed the teen was not struck by any law enforcement gunfire.

When police confronted him outside the school, the suspect fired three shots into a glass door on the north side of the building in order to get inside. He later fired two shots from his pistol at police while in the stairwell and then seven shots from the rifle. The last was the one that he used to take his own life. Although law enforcement officers fired at the teen down a second-floor hallway, Bursten said the autopsy showed the teen was not struck by any law enforcement gunfire.

The teen entered door No. 13 on the north side of the building and proceeded to the south stairwell, climbing to the second floor, where he encountered a closed door.

Richmond School Shooting: Gunman Went Into Dennis with Handwritten Plan, Police Say (Continued)

Principal Nicole VanDervort, who was in her office, began monitoring the teen's movements on a security video display soon after he entered the building. She provided important information to dispatch about his location that was relayed to officers inside the school.

Officers from multiple agencies followed the shooter into the school, heard gunshots from the second floor, climbed the north stairs and also encountered a closed door. Officers reported at 8:28 a.m. that the teen who was still behind the second-floor door, was firing at them. Officers returned fire.

Other officers continued arriving at the school, and a multi-agency group entered through the school's front doors on the east side. They also heard gunshots and ended up in the south stairwell, trapping the shooter, who then took his own life.

VanDervort relaying the teen's location in the stairwell was critical to officer safety, according to Bursten.

"Had Nicole not been there to translate that information where he was, more than likely one or more officers would have been injured by gunfire or killed by gunfire," he said. "I say with no trepidation in my voice that without the action that Nicole took we could have had a dead police officer in addition to the suspect being killed."

When asked about being credited with saving officer lives, VanDervort said, "It is nice."

Otherwise, she said she was following school protocols as she calmly spoke with dispatch.

"I think anybody with access to the camera system would do exactly what I did that day, which is to give the law enforcement officers as much information that I could," VanDervort said. "Any information that I could give them would be beneficial in helping keep the building secure."

Superintendent Todd Terrill called VanDervort's actions "heroic" as he thanked law enforcement, teachers and staff for their actions Dec. 13. He also thanked parents because attendance the first day school opened after the incident was more than 95 percent and enrollment actually grew by a couple of students over Christmas break.

Terrill also said reviews of the incident continue to underscore the importance of the regular drills conducted at RCS schools. Still, he said, the people made the difference that morning.

"The human element of this is what saved lives," he said. "We have all kinds of safety measures and protocols in place, but again if it was not for the human element, the teachers, the staff members, Mrs. VanDervort and her leadership in that building and the way they responded. If it was not for our officers going shoulder to shoulder as shots were being fired. If it wasn't for the 911 center and the way that they responded, which was just, in my mind, unbelievable, the way that they continued to work through that event. Without that human element, this would be a different story, and I thank each and every one of them and the things that they did for us on that day."

Mayor Dave Snow reiterated thanks to responders, teachers and staff members, but he expanded his appreciation to the entire community.

"In the days after this tragedy, we had several businesses, neighbors, friends, family members who came together to support these students and their families with such a tremendous show of solidarity and resilience," he said. "It's just very humbling to see the true hallmarks of this city are that solidarity and that resiliency."

Snow also urged that mental health issues remain at the forefront of conversation about the incident.

"It is so important as a community that we remove the stigma of mental health and continue to strive to help people understand to seek help when they have a mental illness and to make mental health resources both available and affordable," he said.

Stresses of Being a School Resource Officer (SRO)

By Deputy Kip Heinle, Madison County Sheriff's Office SRO

Nothing sounds better than the sound of Velcro ripping off, and the unclipping of my gun belt on a Friday afternoon. A sigh of relief comes across me as I think..., I made it through another week. As I'm taking off my uniform my stress level drops. Monday through Friday my school is constantly on my mind, all day and all night. I think about ways I can make my school safer. I go over scenarios in my mind, "what if" today is the day my school will have a shooting? How will I handle the situation? Will I be able to stop the threat before somebody gets hurt or killed? I cringe when my work phone rings at night with a familiar number of either the Sheriff's Office or one of the school administrators. As I answer, I wonder what was posted on social media by a student, or what crisis has come up that can't wait until the morning.

These are stresses I didn't have when I started my career in law enforcement over 23 years ago. As a patrolman I did my 12-hour shift and went home, not worrying about getting a call from the Watch Commander about an issue that has come up. My days off were my days off. I knew every day I would handle calls but at the end of my shift and my reports were completed, I was done for the day. When I became an SRO, in 2006, I didn't worry much about school shootings. I knew they occurred, but I never thought much about it happening at my school. I didn't have to worry about social media threats and careless acts and thoughts that students are putting on social media for all to see. Back then we had fights, thefts, and an occasional drug bust, but now in the world of social media everything is instant, and it is 24/7 for all to see.

Social media especially snapchat is the biggest stress. The bullying videos that students are putting on social media are endless and daily issues for SROs. The mental health issues are more frequent now than they were when I became an SRO and the kids have changed. Kids are bolder now when it comes to the way they talk to their teachers, Principals, and SROs. What happened to the good old days, I often ask myself? I come home, and my wife sometimes knows not to ask how my day went, she can tell by my body language. I talk to other SROs around the areas and they are having the same issues I am. The stress builds as the year goes on. It seems to get worse starting in March and last until the end of the school year. I, sometimes ask myself why I continue to return to the school, year after year? Here is the reason why.

I LOVE my job! Like most SROs, we are in the schools for the right reasons. We enjoy interacting with the students! We aren't in the schools because we are at the end of our career, wanting to ride out an "easy" day job. There is nothing "easy" about being a good, effective SRO. We enjoy being a role model and positive influence on the students. We want to make a difference. I think about my students and how 95% are great young adults. I'm not going to let the 5% stress me out or disgruntle me to the point where I hate my job. The 95% is what makes the SRO job the best-kept secret on any police force. I enjoy watching my students grow and mature over the four years I have them. SROs build lifelong bonds with their students. Nothing feels better than having a former student and their parents stop and talk to you in the store or come over to you at a restaurant and tell you that you made a difference in their life.

I try to find various things to release my stress during the school year. Working out, boxing, going to after-school sporting events at my school as a "normal" person and not a SRO. Stress can put a strain on your personal life. There's a reason why divorce and suicides are so high when it comes to law enforcement. It's because of the stress. Whatever you do find your own release from the stress. Don't bring it home. Don't let it ruin your life away from work. Recently I have found my release in a 15lb, four month- old, grandson that I'm helping to raise. When I'm having a bad day all I have to do is watch one of the many videos I have of him laughing and smiling. This instantly takes away whatever is stressing me, puts a smile on my face, and I know I have him to look forward to when I take off my vest and gun belt at the end of my day.



School Safety Newsletter

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