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PERSPECTIVES

Actions of heroes deserve acclaim

When the gunfire rang out in the cafeteria, only a handful of students reacted by moving toward the shooter

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

More than a month after the fact, the images are still clear.

KEZI's ruffled-looking news anchor Rick Dancer reporting live from Thurston High School. President Clinton offering his condolences. Springfield Mayor Bill Morisette struggling to lead a shattered community.

On May 21, people from all over the world followed the news as it trickled in. One student dead ... two bodies discovered at the suspect's home ... a second student dead ...

But even more than the gruesome story of two high school students shot to death in their cafeteria, the nation was captivated by the story of the handful of students who saved lives. The heroes.

The news media immediately chose junior Jacob Ryker as their poster boy for heroism. Already shot through the chest, Ryker moved toward the shooter and was the first to get there. A moment later, Adam Walburger piled on, followed by a few more students. Then Ryker was shot again through the hand with a 9mm handgun as he continued to battle the gunman on the ground.

In its July issue, Life magazine ran a cover spread and inside story highlighting the acts of nine Thurston students, including Ryker and Walburger. "Stopping the bullets: heroes of a high school shooting," reads the cover. Scoffing at the "hero" tag, the students say they didn't even think about their actions. They simply reacted.

"I didn't do it alone," Life quoted Jacob Ryker as saying. His attitude

toward his own actions has remained consistent. Just days after the shooting, Ryker refused to appear on CNN's Larry King Live unless some of the others were invited.

"I don't feel like a hero," Jacob's younger brother Josh Ryker said in Life.

Despite their modesty, these students truly are heroes. A lot of heroes emerged from the frightening incident. Doctors, students, teachers, parents — they all contributed. Everyone was reacting. Some ran toward the bullets, and others ran away. Some ran toward the carnage to administer first aid, and others ran away.

A handful of teenagers reacted unlike anyone else. They risked their lives to save lives. That is a heroic action. It's not what most people would do in that situation, and that is evidenced by the number of people who reacted by leaving the cafeteria.

The situation remains sad and disturbing. A young suspect awaits a trial, accused of the murders of two classmates and his parents. One victim is still recovering at Sacred Heart Medical Center. Friends and families still mourn the premature deaths of Ben Walker and Mikael Nickolauson. A community is still startled.

But in spite of the sadness, the title "hero" is appropriate. These students acted quickly and smartly, and they have earned recognition for their heroic acts.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

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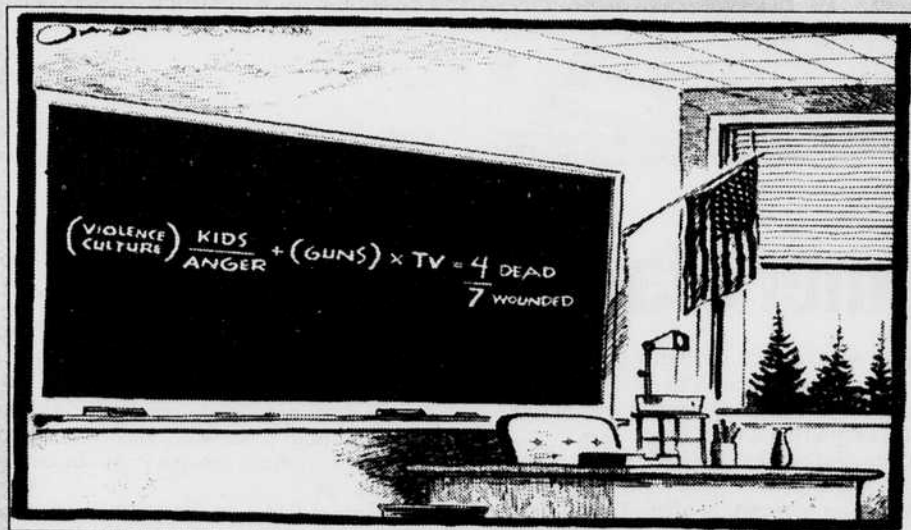
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