

Developments in the Kinkel case

Throughout the last 18 months, a chain of events put the national spotlight on the small town of Springfield and forever changed the community.

May 21, 1998 A day after being expelled for bringing a gun to school, 15-year-old Kip Kinkel opens fire in the Thurston High School cafeteria. Students Ben Walker and Mikael Nikolouson die from their wounds, and his parents, Bill and Faith, were later found dead in the Kinkel home. As a part of his confession, Kinkel would return hours after the shooting ended to reinact it for police.

May 22, 1998 Kinkel is charged as an adult on four counts of murder.

June 13, 1998 President Clinton visits Springfield and Thurston High and talks with students and families about the shooting.

June 16, 1998 As victims of the shooting watch, Kinkel is arraigned on a 58-count felony indictment for the shooting and other crimes. He enters no plea to the charges.

Aug. 30, 1998 Kinkel celebrates his 16th birthday with a transfer from the Skpworth juvenile detention facility to the Lane County Jail.

Sept. 1, 1998 Students describe their first day back to Thurston High as having a sense of "normality."

June 7, 1999 Court documents are made public that Kinkel's lawyers will rely on an insanity defense.

Sept. 24, 1999 Three days before his trial is to begin, Kinkel pleads guilty to the killing and waiving of every victim, including his parents. His plea guaranteed him a minimum of 25 years in prison.

Nov. 3, 1999 A Portland psychologist testifies that Kinkel heard voices that commanded him to kill since he was 12 years old.

Nov. 10, 1999 Kinkel is sentenced to 112 years in prison. Emotions run high and many Thurston students leave the courtroom in tears. Mark Walker, father of the shooting victim, Ben Walker, collapses in an apparent seizure after the sentence was read.

Katlie Nesse Emerald

Statements reveal thoughts and feelings of case



courtesy of Lon Haverly

Jamon Kent, superintendent, Springfield public schools

Springfield School District officials are pleased with the result of the sentencing hearing [Wednesday] because it is a significant step along the road to healing. The shooting that occurred on May 21, 1998 affected hundreds of people from all corners of this community — the families of those who perished, the wounded, other Springfield students, staff, parents, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, emergency room and surgical staff, and many others. All have experienced pain and suffering in a variety of ways and are sure to mark [Wednesday] as a point in time upon which they may base part of their personal healing.

Over the last 18 months, the district has endeavored to assist students, staff, families and community members as they are all working their way through the pain and suffering of this tragedy. Help has come in many forms, from many people — including caring community members and national experts — and for that we express our thanks. The healing process continues and events like [Wednesday] can help everyone move forward and focus on the future.

Kip Kinkel

I thought about what I could say to make people feel just a little bit better, but I have come to the realization that it really doesn't matter what I say because there is nothing I can do to take away any of the pain and destruction I have caused.

I absolutely loved my parents and had no reason to kill them. I had no reason to dislike or try to kill anyone at Thurston. I am truly sorry for all of this that has happened.

I have gone back in my mind hundreds of times and changed one detail, one small event, so this never would have happened. I wish I could.

I take full responsibility for my actions. These events have pulled me to a state of deterioration and self-loathing that I didn't know existed. I'm very sorry for everything I have done and for what I have become.

Kristin Kinkel

Words are difficult at this time. Emotions are so overwhelming, I cannot differentiate between them. Today I lost another member of my family. I feel the same shock, despair and disbelief that I felt on May 21, 1998, when I learned what had happened to my parents, my brother and my community.

This has been an incredibly difficult time for all of us. To those victims who, on this day, reached out a hand to support me, please know it means more to me than you will ever understand. The pain is so great.

What pulls me through is the prayer that something positive can come from this tragic series of events. It will help us all to take hold of whatever good we can see and make an effort to let go of the negative. If we can succeed in taking that step, something truly positive will come from this tragedy. Our individual lives, our community and our world will be a better place.

this was a clear statement that the protection of society in general was to be of more importance than the possible reformation or rehabilitation of any individual defendant.

Article 1 Section 16 states in part that: "All penalties shall be proportional to the offense." ... And a sentence of 25 years or so in this case is not proportional to those sentences or to these present facts.

Based upon my experience, I believe it is highly probable that a jury would have found Mr. Kinkel guilty of multiple counts of aggravated murder and would have sentenced him to life in prison without the possibility of release. Believing that, the question becomes, should the court sentence any differently, at least without some good reason to do so?

The impressive medical experts who examined Mr. Kinkel necessarily and appropriately focused on him and on his condition, rather than on what would be an appropriate sentence based upon the facts of this particular case. They generally agree that with extensive, long-term treatment, they would not expect him to be dangerous to others, but they also acknowledge that future dangerousness is difficult to predict.

Untreated, or I suppose improperly or incompletely treated, he is and remains dangerous. And as required by Article 1 Section 15, my focus must be much broader than the possible reformation or rehabilitation of Mr. Kinkel.

One of the last things Dr. Bolstad said was to the effect that there is no cure for Mr. Kinkel's condition, that he should never be released without appropriate medication and — I quote — "an awful lot of structure and appropriate support services arranged for him."

We cannot predict what advances in medical science will make the treatment of whatever mental illness he has. We cannot guarantee that he will receive the treatment these doctors believe is necessary while in prison. And Dr. Bolstad, who knows the system, was not optimistic in that regard. And we cannot guarantee that Mr. Kinkel would follow up as necessary were he released to a relatively uncontrolled environment.

Springfield Mayor Maureen Maine

This has been a sad and difficult experience for the victims of the Thurston shooting, for the Kinkel family and for the entire community. Hundreds of lives have been changed in Springfield by the events of May 21, 1998. My own thoughts at this time are focused on moving Springfield forward and on healing — both for individuals and for the community.

I'm thankful for the extraordinary city, hospital and school employees who responded to the original event and for the sensitivity with which all the resulting activities to date have been handled. Springfield continues to be a great place to live and work. I urge us all to continue to support each other and to focus on moving on with our lives.

Lane County Circuit Judge Jack Mattison's sentence

On November 5 of 1996, the people of Oregon voted to change this section to its present form, which reads: "Laws for the punishment of crimes shall be founded on these principles: the protection of society, personal responsibility, accountability for one's actions and reformation." To me,

Excerpt from Kip Kinkel's journal

I sit here all alone. I am always alone. I don't know who I am. I want to be something I can never be. I try so hard every day. But in the end, I hate myself for what I've become.

Every single person I know means nothing to me. I hate every person on this earth. I wish they could all go away. You all make me sick. I wish I was dead.

The only reason I stay alive is because of hope. Even though I am repulsive and few people know who I am, I still feel that things might, maybe, just a little bit, get better.

I don't understand any fucking person on this earth. Some of you are so weak, mainly, that a four-year-old could push you down. I am strong, but my head just doesn't work right. I know I should be happy with what I have, but I hate living.

Every time I talk to her, I have a small amount of hope. But then she will tear it right down. It feels like my heart is breaking. But is that possible? I am so consumed with hate all of the time. Could I ever love anyone? I have feelings, but do I have a heart that's not black and full of animosity?

I know everyone thinks this way sometimes, but I am so full of rage that I feel I could snap at any moment. I think about it every day. Blowing the school up or just taking the easy way out, and walk into a pep assembly with guns. In either case, people that are breathing will stop breathing. That is how I will repay all you mother fuckers for all you put me through.

I feel like everyone against me, but no one ever makes fun of me, mainly because they think I am a psycho. There is one kid above all others that I want to kill. I want nothing more than to put a hole in his head. The one reason I don't: Hope. That tomorrow will be better. As soon as my hope is gone, people die.

I ask myself why I hate more than anyone else. I don't know. But my head and heart want him dead. He only knows who I am through reputation, and I know he is scared of me. He should be. One bad day, and there will be a sawed-off shotgun in his face or five pounds of Semtex under his bed.

I need help. There is one person that could help, but she won't. I need to find someone else. I think I love her, but she could never love me. I don't know why I try.

Oh, fuck. I sound so pitiful. People would laugh at this if they read it. I hate being laughed at. But they won't laugh after they're scraping parts of their parents, sisters, brothers and friends from the wall of my hate.

Please, someone, help me. All I want is something small. Nothing big. I just want to be happy.

End. New day. Today of all days, I ask her to help me. I was shot down. I feel like my heart has been ripped open and ripped apart. Right now, I'm drunk, so I don't know what the hell is happening to me.

It is clear that no one will help me. Oh, God, I am so close to killing people. So close.

I gave her all I have, and she just threw it away. Why? Why did God just want me to be in complete misery? I need to find more weapons. My parents are trying to take away some of my guns. My guns are the only things that haven't stopped me — that haven't stabbed me in the back.

My eyes hurt. They hurt so bad. They feel like they are trying to crawl out of my head. Why aren't I normal? Help me. No one will. I will kill every last mother-fucking one of you. The thought of you is still racing in my head. I am too drunk to make sense.

Every time I see your face, my heart is shot with an arrow. I think that she will say yes, but she doesn't, does she? She says, "I don't know." The three most fucked up words in the English language.

I want you to feel this, be this, taste this, kill this. Kill me. Oh God, I don't want to live. Will I see it to the end? What kind of dad would I make? All humans are evil. I just want to end the world of evil.

I don't want to see, hear, speak or feel evil, but I can't help it. I am evil. I want to kill and give pain without a cost. And there is no such thing. We kill him — we killed him a long time ago. Anyone that believes in God is a fucking sheep.

If there was a God, he wouldn't let me feel the way I do. Love isn't real, only hate remains. Only hate.



Kristen Kinkel leaves the courtroom after hearing that her brother will spend the rest of his life in prison. Kip Kinkel shot and killed his parents and two classmates in May 1998.

Thomas Boyd AP/Pool

Sentence

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mentally ill. He is neurologically impaired, and he is a child."

Kinkel's attorneys indicated they intend to appeal the sentence within the 30 days allotted under court of appeals regulations. With an appeal, the case could continue for at least another two years, defense attorney Richard Mullen said.

Kinkel himself stood before the judge to read from a single piece of paper, offering apologies for killing his parents and shooting his classmates.

"I thought about what I could say to make people feel better. Nothing I can do can take away the pain and destruction I caused. I am truly sorry for all this," he said. "These events have taken me down to a place of deterioration and self-loathing I didn't know existed."

On Sept. 24 Kinkel pleaded guilty to the four counts of murder and signed an agreement that guaranteed a sentence of at least 25 years. Kinkel sprayed the Thurston cafeteria with bullets on May 21, 1998, after killing his parents, Bill and Faith Kinkel, the night before.

As the sentence was read, Mark Walker, whose son, Ben, was killed in the cafeteria shooting, collapsed in an apparent seizure and was carried out on a stretcher. Mattison said later it appeared Walker would be all right.

Mattison stated that under current Oregon law, specifically the language of Measure 11, the primary consideration for punishing crimes should be the protection of citizens.

"To me, this was a clear statement that the protection of society in general was to be of more importance than the possible reformation or rehabilitation of any individual defendant," Mattison said.

Under mandatory sentencing rules, there can be no possibility of parole or early release for 17-year-old Kinkel, but Mattison

told Kinkel that should he conduct himself as a model prisoner, he could hold onto the hope of one day qualifying for a governor's commute of his sentence.

In statements full of relief and satisfaction at Kinkel's determined fate, many survivors and their families commented in a press conference afterward that they felt justice had indeed been served.

"Kip is obviously not a productive member of society," Thurston student Gabriel Thomas said. "So he needs to spend his life in prison. He's going to have to live with this."

Gary McKenzie, father of shooting victim Elizabeth McKenzie, said he was relieved that his family could finally put the ordeal behind them.

"It's been a long 18 months," he said. "But the system worked. We must stop school violence. This behavior will not be tolerated in Springfield, Oregon, nor will it be anywhere else."

Lane County District Attorney Doug Harclerod issued a formal statement saying that while he, too, believed justice had been adequately served, the task of healing was still before the community.

"As we close this chapter in the Thurston High School shootings, it will quickly fade from the media spotlight as well as from some people's immediate thoughts," he said. "However, the victims and survivors of this tragedy will not so soon forget. They will continue to endure the mental and physical impact of that terrifying day."

When asked if he was relieved by the judge's decision, Thurston student Josh Ryker, who helped tackle Kinkel on the day of the shooting, said he was in an "extreme state of limbo" and wasn't sure how he was feeling.

"I hope he lives with the mental images of what he has done to us for the rest of his life," he said.

Mullen responded to the sentence with a commitment to move forward with the case in a court of appeals.

"This sentence did not end this

case today. There will be an appeal," he said. "We're going to be dealing with the issue for a long time. He is vulnerable to psychotic episodes and vulnerable to hearing voices. He spent three and a half years resisting those voices. Finally, when they got strong enough, he was overcome by them."

Kinkel's defense team said it was expecting a sentence of 32 and a half years for its client, "certainly less than 50," Mullen said.

He said the victims of the tragedy should undergo counseling to deal with their emotional scars.

"I am disturbed at the amount of non-healing in the Springfield community," he said.

Prosecuting attorney Kent Mortimore underscored his belief that Kinkel should spend the rest of his natural life in prison because his crimes were among the worst in recent memory nationwide and that Kinkel is beyond rehabilitation for the mental illness his defense claimed he suffers from.

"They chose to waive the mental defense," Mortimore said. "I think that tells you how strong their case was. What they presented painted the picture of a person who couldn't be helped."

"There's no doubt in my mind he's responsible for his actions," Mortimore added.

The defense's main arguments focused on the testimony of two child psychologists, who concurred that Kinkel had been hearing voices, indicating the possibility of paranoid schizophrenia as early as age 12. During days of testimony from friends of Kinkel's family and even his sister, Kristin, the court heard of a young man who cared for animals and was quiet and hypersensitive.

Prosecutors pointed to the planning and premeditation that characterized Kinkel's crimes to argue that mental illness was not a valid excuse for murder or attempted murder in this case.

Emerald reporter Felicity Ayles and the Associated Press contributed to this story

Brief history of school shootings between 1992 and 1999

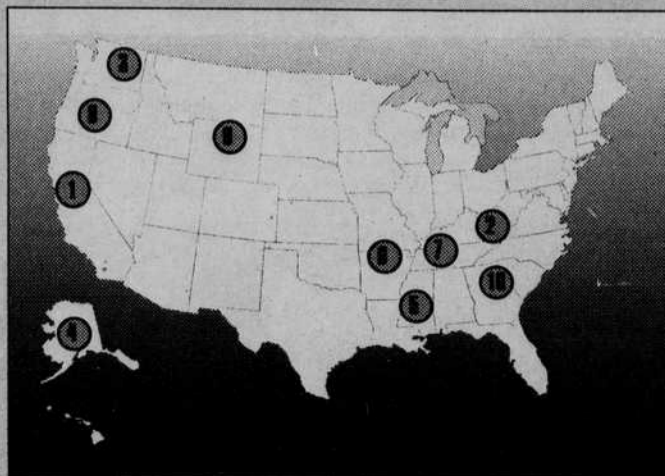
1. May 1, 1992: Eric Houston, 20, opens fire at his former high school in Olivehurst, Calif. Houston kills four people and wounds 10 in an attack prosecutors claim was retribution against a teacher for a failing grade. Houston was convicted and given a death sentence.

2. Jan. 18, 1993: In Grayson, Ky., Scott Pennington, 17, shoots his English teacher, Deanna McDavid, in the head. He then shoots janitor Marvin Hicks in the abdomen. Pennington was sentenced to life without parole for 25 years.

3. Feb. 2, 1996: Barry Loukaitis, a 14-year-old Frontier Junior High School student, kills two classmates and a teacher with an assault rifle in Moses Lake, Wash. Loukaitis was sentenced to two mandatory life terms for the attack.

4. Feb. 19, 1997: Evan Ramsey, 16, opens fire with a shotgun in a commons area of his Bethel, Alaska high school. School principal Ron Edwards and classmate Josh Palacios die in the attack, and two other students are wounded. Authorities later accuse two other students of knowing the shootings would occur. Ramsey was sentenced to two 99-year terms.

5. Oct. 1, 1997: In Pearl, Miss., 16-year-old Luke Woodham is accused of killing his mother and then going to school and shooting nine students. The boy's ex-girlfriend was one of two students fatally shot.



Authorities later accused six friends of conspiracy, saying the suspects were part of a group that practiced satanism. He is facing life in prison.

6. March 24, 1998: Students Mitchell Johnson, 13, and Andrew Golden, 11, pull a fire alarm to lure their teachers and classmates out of

Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Ark. They then open fire, killing four girls and a teacher and wounding 11 others. Both pleaded guilty to murder and are sentenced to the Arkansas Division of Youth Services until they are 21.

7. May 19, 1998: Jacob Davis, 18, is accused of shooting and killing another student in the parking lot of Lincoln County High School in Fayetteville, Tenn. Three days before they were to graduate, Davis allegedly confronts fellow student Nick Creson, apparently because they had argued about a girl. After the shooting, Davis reportedly put the gun on the ground, sat down next to it and put his head in his hands.

8. May 21, 1998: A day after being expelled for bringing a gun to school, freshman Kip Kinkel opens fire on the Thurston High School cafeteria in Springfield with a semi-automatic rifle, killing two students and his parents the night before.

9. April 20, 1999: Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, open fire at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., killing 15 students and injuring 20 students. The gunmen were also killed.

10. May 20, 1999: T.J. Solomon, 15, is accused of opening fire on his classmates at Heritage High School in Conyers, Ga., injuring six students before reportedly falling to his knees and surrendering in tears to an assistant principal.

Students reflect on Kinkel's fate



"He's just a kid and can still be reformed. Society has to come up with a better way to deal with people like Kinkel. It's a problem with him but also with society. Everyone is to blame."

Proteep Malik senior, physics



"If he's clinically depressed or mentally ill, sending him to a state prison might not help him at all."

Theresa Majeres sophomore, journalism



"I hate to say it: I think he deserves it. Maybe after 50 years he could be ready to return."

Matthew Lieuellen sophomore, political science



"I agree with the sentencing. Based on his diary entries, he wasn't crazy and he wasn't hearing voices. He just hated everyone, and that's not insanity."

Josh Kogut junior, physics