

Campus reaction to verdict shows complexity of case

Some students felt Kinkel's age and mental history should have lowered the sentence

By Stefanie Knowlton
Oregon Daily Emerald

The nearly 112-year sentence handed down to Thurston High School gunman Kipland P. Kinkel provoked reactions that varied from a need to forgive to a sense of retribution and justice on campus Wednesday afternoon.

In a high-profile sentencing, Judge Jack Madison ruled that Kinkel, now 17, would spend the rest of his life in prison for killing

his parents, two classmates and injuring 26 others in May 1998.

"This is a hard case because I think he is clearly insane," said Margaret Paris, associate law professor who specializes in criminal justice. "I think that this is a really sad thing that we can't see this as a horrible mental illness."

Kinkel pleaded guilty in September, forgoing his right to an insanity defense. But disturbing testimony during the sentencing from psychologists such as Orin Bolstad, who interviewed the defendant after his incarceration, indicated that Kinkel was mentally ill.

However Chad Horis, a senior biology major, said he believes

that insanity is no excuse and that the sentence was just.

"I do not buy into the voices-in-your-head argument," he said. "I don't think he deserves to be in public anymore. Obviously he planned it out well enough. That is my problem with an insanity plea."

It wouldn't be fair to the victims if he was ever released, Horis said.

Linda Sundell, also a senior in biology, said she didn't agree with the sentence.

"He is only 17," she said.

She said she remembers seeing the morbid details unfold on a Swedish television station shortly before she moved to the United States to attend the University.

"Of course he needs to get his punishment because what he did is horrible," she said. "I believe at least they should try when you're young to get medical care."

As of Wednesday afternoon, out of 78 people who were polled on the Oregon Daily Emerald Web site, 46.15 percent agreed with the judge's sentence and only 30.7 percent believed Kinkel should be released after serving the minimum sentence of 25 years.

Paris said she hopes that this case will urge parents, teachers and community members to get help for troubled individuals.

Programs such as the Institute on Violent and Destructive Behavior at the University might

have helped, said Hill Walker, co-director at the institute. He said that Kinkel's interest in bombs and guns should have sent up a red flag.

Although he said he has not dealt with anyone as troubled as Kinkel, Walker refers cases of this kind to outside mental health services.

Paris said she hopes the victims find peace in the sentence and begin to heal from their pain and their rage, but from her experience even victims who attend executions looking for retribution often find little peace.

It comes from forgiveness, she said.

Sentencing hearing told the whole story

With evidence, defense presented as in a trial, the hearing spoke volumes on the facts and impact of the case

By Felicity Ayles
Oregon Daily Emerald

Nov. 2 was the beginning to an end.

Finally, after a couple long weeks in a courtroom, the tragedy would be over for victims of the Thurston High School shooting. Sentencing was finally in progress, and justice would be done. Kipland P. Kinkel pleaded guilty and the community was spared a trial that would dredge up painful memories that would rather be forgotten.

At least that's what we all thought.

Plenty of tears were shed in that Lane County Courtroom throughout the hearing. Graphic photos were displayed and horrifying events were recounted. Due to the plea agreement, the prosecution didn't go to trial but did its best to provide one anyway.

The first day of the hearing was a disturbing one. I gathered in Harris Hall at the courthouse with about 20 other members of the media and the public, just hoping that I'd get a seat in the courtroom and I didn't get up early for nothing.

Everyone present received a pass that day through the public lottery system, and we all filed in the courtroom just before 9 a.m.

At about 8:55 a.m., a hush fell over the court's spectators as they heard the distant rattle of chains. Kinkel was led into the courtroom, his wrists and ankles bound. He sat while his chains were removed and then laid his head in his arms on the table before him, not looking up again until court was adjourned.

As the hearing got underway, the prosecution recounted all the evidence found at the crime scenes, and the victims heard for the first time exactly how Kinkel did it.

On May 20, 1998, Kinkel was expelled from school and arrested for carrying a gun. His father, Bill Kinkel, picked him up from the police station and took him home that afternoon. At about 3 p.m., as Kinkel's father sat at the kitchen counter, Kinkel came up behind him and shot him in the back of the head.

Bill Kinkel lay dead on the kitchen counter. Kinkel said he didn't know what to do, so he dragged his father to the bathroom, put a white sheet over him and locked the door. Kinkel then proceeded to clean up the bloody mess left in the kitchen.

Three hours later, Kinkel's mother, Faith Kinkel, returned home from work. She drove up the driveway into the garage and closed the garage door behind her. As she started up the stairs from the garage to the house, she was greeted by her son. He said, "I love you," and then shot her six times.

Kinkel dragged his mother to the center of the garage and put a white sheet over her body. This time he didn't bother to wipe up the trail of blood; rather, he went up the stairs back to the main house and began making bombs. He spent the entire night placing explosive devices around the house and planning his activities for the next day.

The next morning, May, 21, 1998, Kinkel took a leisurely walk down to the end of his rather lengthy driveway to get the newspaper. He sat down at the living room table with a bowl of cereal and read a story in The Register-Guard about how he was expelled the day before. Meanwhile, his parents' corpses were still in the house.

After breakfast, Kinkel packed his backpack full of ammunition, grabbed a few guns, taped a knife to his leg and drove his mother's car to school. Just before 8 a.m., Kinkel entered the Thurston High School cafeteria and began shooting.

According to witnesses, he didn't just spray the room with bullets, but rather he seemed to seek out his victims. When the shooting spree was over, one student, Mikael Nickolauson, lay dead and 26 others were wounded, some in critical condition. The death toll climbed further when one more student, Ben Walker, died in the hospital later that day.

Victims and community members, myself included, watched and listened in horror as the two days' actions were recounted.

The prosecution continued its presentation by showing items taken from Kinkel's home and bedroom. These included bomb-making devices, messages of hate and Kinkel's journal, in which he explained how he hates every person on earth and wishes everyone would go away.

The courtroom audience listened attentively to the evidence, and a sense of confusion, not anger, settled in. Victims wondered how Kinkel's mental deficiencies went unnoticed and how the tragedy might have been avoided if he had undergone therapy long ago.

With the prosecution's evidence presentation complete after the first day, the defense went to work on day two to paint a different picture of the defendant.

They showed a sad, mentally disturbed little boy who didn't know what he was doing on May 20 and 21 of 1998. He heard voices in his head, and they told him to kill people. Kinkel was subject to various psychiatric evaluations prior to the hearing and the doctors concluded that he was a very mentally ill boy but could be cured nevertheless.

Later on in the defense's presentation, evidence of mental illness in Kinkel's family came about. Depression, alcoholism and institutionalization were rampant on both sides of Kinkel's family. The defense brought in character witnesses, friends and teachers who testified that Kinkel had never before appeared to be a violent person. Elementary school teachers testified as to Kinkel's trouble in school and frustration with simple activities.

But it seemed that nothing could convince the victims and their families. During a break in the hearing one afternoon, a group of victims stood together in the courtroom, joking about the defense testimony they had just heard.

While Kinkel sat within earshot, they made fun of the so-called voices he heard, the excerpts from his diary and instances of mental illness in his family. Kinkel simply sat quietly in the corner, trying not to listen to their laughter and ridicule.

After the sentence was decided Wednesday, a group of victims sang a mock version of the Mickey Mouse Club theme because Kinkel admitted to a fear of Disney World. It seems that public humiliation is the only way for the victims to express their anger toward Kinkel.

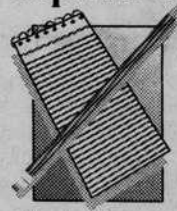
I know he is a killer. He is a murderer and what he has done cannot be taken lightly. But isn't he still a person?

I wouldn't give anything to be the judge in this case. What if he really is telling the truth? What if the sad face I saw in the courtroom every day really does feel remorse?

It doesn't seem to matter anymore if Kinkel really is mentally ill or if there really are voices in his head. He has been put in prison forever, assuming all appeals are unsuccessful.

For the victims, the end is finally here. For Kinkel, the end will come in 112 years.

Reporter's



Notebook

Victims

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in the shoulder by Kinkel, said he didn't believe insanity should be an issue in determining the outcome of the case.

"I don't think he has a soul at this point," he said.

Thomas also said the probability that Kinkel will appeal the ruling does not bother him.

"Let him appeal," he said.

Josh Ryker, who was not shot by Kinkel but helped restrain him in the school's cafeteria until police arrived, said he felt closure but did not believe Kinkel's closing statement was genuine.

"He took two years of my life, and that can never be replaced," he said. "I have been rushed into the adult world ..."

Josh said when he gave his victim impact statement Tuesday, he felt that Kinkel's eyes looked empty and hollow. Ryker's brother, Jake, was shot in the chest and hand by Kinkel.

"I don't think there is any punishment good enough for him," he said.

Jake Ryker's girlfriend, Jennifer Alldredge, who was wounded in her chest, hand and neck, spoke at length about the effect the shooting has had on her and her boyfriend.

"Until the scars go away, until I can move my hand again, until I can look at my boyfriend and he won't feel guilty because he couldn't save his friend Mikael [Nickolauson], the emotional pain won't go away," she said.

Allredge also expressed her disgust with Kinkel's defense team, which tried to shorten Kinkel's time in prison by questioning his lucidity at the time of the shooting.

"The more the defense tried to come up with lame excuses, the more it didn't matter ... prosecution is great, defense is slime," she said.

The victims also expressed empathy for Kinkel's sister, Kristin. They said the students signed a note and gave it to Kristin during the hearing.

"Kristin is one of the victims; she is more of a victim than most of us," said Michael Crowley, father of victim Ryan Crowley. "She lost her mother, her father and, for all real purposes, her brother."

The victims spoke in front of a makeshift memorial to Kinkel's parents, Bill and Faith Kinkel, and Thurston students Mikael Nickolauson and Ben Walker, those slain. A black heart and one white flower beneath the victims' names was referenced by victims who placed other flowers under the memorial, promising to never forget those who were killed.

Gary McKenzie, whose daughter Elizabeth was wounded in the



Scott Barnett Emerald

Jennifer Alldredge speaks to the press.

hip, said the victims have plans to establish a permanent memorial on the grounds of Thurston, but the school has not been responsive to their request.

But people within the school district are working on a memorial, said Cherie Kistner, Springfield school district spokeswoman.

"The school is still working on the committee that will develop the memorial," she said.

Other sentiments against the school were also present during the conference.

"Our principal doesn't know how we feel. I don't like him," said Melissa Taylor, who was struck in the shoulder. Alldredge, as well as some other students, nodded in agreement with Taylor.

In a statement, Thurston Principal Larry Bentz said he was grateful for the "strength of character which the Thurston High students, staff and community have displayed during the last 18 months.

"Perhaps the best way that we can continue to honor the memory of Mikael Nickolauson and Ben Walker is not only to continue to respect each other's right to heal in our own way at our own pace but also to continue being committed to working together for a better future. Healing is hard work, and there is still much healing to be done."

Taylor, who knew Kinkel prior to the shooting, said she felt sorry for him but felt justice was served.

"He was a very nice young man," she said. "I hate to see him spend the rest of his life in prison, but I guess you get what you deserve."

At the end of the conference, the shooting victims expressed their satisfaction with Kinkel's sentencing by making fun of Kinkel's fear of Disney World, which he thought would take over the globe.

The students sang: "M-I-C. See you real soon. K-E-Y. Why? Because you're going to prison. M-O-U-S-E."