

Thurston Memories Relived

This is a Clackamas student's account of her experiences during the Thurston tragedy.

Springfield remembered two years after the tragic shooting.

My name is Amanda Gosser, and I grew up in Springfield, Oregon. I moved to Oregon City in July, 1999. Whenever I tell people where I am from, the first thing they ask is, "Springfield? Isn't that where that shooting happened?" My reply is always the same. I say yes in a way that I hope will convey I would rather not talk about it. But I will never forget May 21, 1998 and how it has affected my life.

I was at Springfield High School. It was before classes had started and I was assistant teaching at the preschool located in our school. I bent over to pick up a dropped toy when I heard an astonishing announcement over the speakers. Minutes before, there had been another shooting, but that wasn't the astonishing part—the astonishing part was that it was happening a few miles across our small town at our rival high school, Thurston.

At first we thought that couldn't be possible. Then we had parents calling to make sure their children were all right, not knowing exactly where it was happening. About one hour later I was called to the office for a message. The office was packed full of high school

s t u d e n t s whose parents had called telling them to come home, or to make sure they were okay. I took a friend to the hospital for something unrelated. While I was there, my mother, who

works for the sheriff's office, had to inform me that earlier that morning they had found my all time favorite teacher, Faith Kinkel, murdered in her home with her husband Bill.

People always ask me how I could be affected when I wasn't even at Thurston when it happened. My response could go on for hours. The first thing that affected me was the death of Faith Kinkel. She was my Spanish teacher in high school, but she was more than that. Faith was a person who listened. When I was her academic assistant, she knew my mood as soon as I opened the door. She was fun and caring, bright and cheery, and a real joy to have around school.

I was also affected by a girl named Teresa Miltonberger. She was shot in the head at Thurston, and while she was in the hospital my parents took

her family food because my father works with her father.

Tony Case was another person who was shot while knocking Kip Kinkel, the shooter and son of my slain teacher, to the ground. Tony worked across the street from where I worked, and he used to come in to eat during his break. For a while Tony did not come in and that really hit me—that the shootings had really hap-

pened.

My brother Nik played football against Kip when they were younger, and watching them we would never have thought this could happen. My boyfriend at the time, Trevor, was in the Thurston cafeteria during the shootings. Afterward, we constantly had to leave places where we could hear people talking about that day, because it was too painful for him to hear.

After the shooting, many things happened in our community for support. Blue ribbons were tied around almost every standing thing throughout our town, and on every car antenna. Blue and red ribbons were worn on shirts, and there was a candlelight vigil downtown by the courthouse. At Springfield High, we had school assemblies paying tribute to Faith Kinkel at which we were

allowed to get up and talk to our class, sharing memories and feelings. There was also a night memorial that Kristen Kinkel (Kip's sister) attended, when the whole community came together to share their feelings and grieve.

I think the thing that affected me the most (next to Faith Kinkel's murder) was visiting Thurston High



The graphic to the left is from Thurston High School's Memorial website.



amazing.

Our community really came together, wearing and passing out ribbons, raising money, and just being there for students from any school in the community.

Last year, at the one-year memorial, my

School a few days after the shooting. There was a fence around the perimeter of the school, and people were putting things on the fence showing their support. When my brother Nik and I visited, we were overwhelmed. Driving down the street we saw so many visitors waiting to contribute to the memorial growing at the fence; and there were so many media vans that the

road was blocked off. When Nik and I finally made it to the fence, we could not believe our eyes. The fence was actually invisible because there were so many things covering it. There was everything—ribbons, flowers, poems, stories, letters, burning candles, pictures and much more. It took us hours to walk from one end of the fence to the other. The sight was truly

school handed out blue ribbons to every car driving by; we decorated our school and our community with those blue ribbons.

I will always be affected by this incident in some way. I will never forget the sight of the fence at Thurston, or look at a blue ribbon the same way. And I will never forget Faith Kinkel and what she meant to me.