

Mother-son bond over guns links Oregon and Connecticut slayings

Associated Press

PORTLAND — The deadly shooting last week at an Oregon community college has an eerie parallel with the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School that killed 20 pupils and six adult staff members in 2012.

Like Adam Lanza, the gunman in the Connecticut massacre, Christopher Harper-Mercer was living a mostly solitary life with a mom who shared his fascination with firearms.

Both stories illustrate the struggles parents face caring for a deeply troubled child, struggles that can inadvertently lead to a volatile outcome made easier by ready access to weaponry.

"When you begin to bring guns into the home environment where you have that dangerous cocktail of behavior, that's pretty unbelievable," said Mary Ellen O'Toole, a former FBI profiler who directs George Mason University's forensic science program.

Harper-Mercer bears similarities to other school shooters: a young male focused on mass lethality and carrying out the killings in a military-like mission destined to end in the killer's own death, O'Toole said.

He was a loner in his 20s like James Holmes, who killed 12 people in a cinema in Aurora, Colorado, in 2012; Jared Loughner, who seriously wounded Rep. Gabby Giffords and killed six in Tucson, Arizona, in 2011; and Elliot Rodger, who killed six people near the University of California, Santa Barbara, campus last year.

Like Rodger, he left behind a note that complained about not having a girlfriend.

But the comparison to Lanza extends to the relationships both shooters had with their mothers and guns.

Both women were long-time gun enthusiasts, not uncommon in many parts of America where gun ownership is prevalent and encouraged. The two



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File

Douglas County Deputy Sheriff Greg Kennerly, left, and Oregon State Trooper Tom Willis stand Oct. 2 guard outside the apartment building where alleged Umpqua Community College gunman Chris Harper Mercer lived with his mother in Roseburg.

mothers amassed weapons and took their sons to shooting ranges, according to the investigation into the Sandy Hook shooting and the Daily Breeze newspaper in Torrance, California, where Harper lived for years with her son.

It's easy to judge them in hindsight, but deeply strained and complicated relationships often lead to bad or desperate parental decisions with tragic consequences, said psychologist Peter Langman, author of two books on school shooters. Many troubled young people are so impaired they're incapable of living on their own.

"In some cases, (parents) don't recognize there's a problem," Langman said. "In other cases, they're aware of their child's mental health issues, but they don't see any evidence of violence, so they don't see any reason not to take their kid target shooting."

Parents may also use guns to bond with a mentally troubled, isolated child who is obsessed with weapons and violence, he said.

Laurel Harper's online postings don't indicate she knew her son had violent tendencies, but it is clear she relished her weapons.

Investigators found eight guns in the apartment she shared with her son near the North Umpqua River and another six at the

school where he killed eight students and a professor before killing himself last week.

She wrote enthusiastically about assault rifles and pistols and derided gun-control efforts in "lame states" on Yahoo! Answers using an account that is linked to an email address associated with her.

"I keep two full mags in my Glock case," she wrote in a three-year-old posting. "No one will be 'dropping' by my house uninvited."

Harper could not be located for comment and has not returned messages left by The Associated Press at her home.

The nurse, who moved to rural Oregon with her son from the Los Angeles area two years ago, speaks frankly in the postings about her son's Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism. Experts say that people diagnosed with Asperger's are not more prone to violence than anyone else.

Investigators said the mother has told them he had mental health issues, but has not released details.

Social profiles linked to her son suggested he tracked other mass shootings and was fascinated by the Irish Republican Army. Neighbors in the Los Angeles-area suburb of Torrance, where the mother and son lived before moving to Oregon,

recalled him as uncommunicative, having child-like tantrums and loud fights with his mother, who was overprotective of him.

Adam Lanza's mother Nancy Lanza also struggled with her son, who had developmental issues from early childhood, according to a report released last November by the Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate.

The report said Lanza's mother, like Harper-Mercer's, was doting. She attempted to eliminate disruptions to Adam Lanza's life "entirely through hyper-vigilance and management of his symptoms." In emails to her son, she wrote she loved him and wanted him to be happy, according to the report.

But Nancy Lanza isolated her son from the world. And while she sought some treatment for him, she rejected other help and was in denial about her son's illness. The teen became increasingly preoccupied with mass murder and engaged in a cyber-community of mass murder enthusiasts. Before the shooting, he lived in virtual social isolation, spent months in his bedroom with the windows blacked out, and communicated with his mother only through email.

The report says access to assault weapons with high capacity magazines "did play a major role" in the Sandy Hook massacre, alongside inadequate and uncoordinated mental health services and Adam Lanza's extreme preoccupation with violence. His mother, it notes, "seemed unaware of any potential detrimental impact of providing unfettered access to firearms."

While most young men who commit mass shootings show evidence of mental problems, the vast majority of mentally ill people aren't violent.

Liza Long, an instructor at the College of Western Idaho, understands what Harper was up against. Her then-13-year-old son, who suffered from mental illness,

BRIEFLY

Ranchers re-sentenced in arson case

EUGENE (AP) — Two members of a prominent Eastern Oregon ranching family have been sentenced to five years in prison for committing arson on federal lands along Steens Mountain.

A Pendleton jury three years ago convicted 73-year-old Dwight Hammond and 46-year-old Steven Hammond. By law, the crime carried a five-year minimum sentence. A judge, however, gave the father and son much less prison time.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals later ordered the Hammonds to be resentenced, saying the judge did not have the authority to be so lenient.

Judge Ann Aiken on Wednesday imposed five-year sentences with credit for time already served.

The government alleged the Hammonds set the range fires to reduce the growth of juniper trees and sagebrush and to accelerate the production of rangeland grasses for cattle feed.

3 boys accused of setting Eugene ballpark fire get probation

EUGENE (AP) — Three boys accused of playing with fire and starting a massive blaze that destroyed a historic Oregon ballpark will spend up to five years on probation.

The boys reached settlements with prosecutors this week on charges of second-degree arson and recklessly endangering another person after the fire June 29 at Eugene's Civic Stadium, the Register-Guard reported. Flames shooting high above the facility forced a two-block area to temporarily evacuate, but no one was hurt.

Investigators say three 12-year-olds and a 10-year-old were playing

with fire and then ran away when the flames got out of control. The panicked boys jumped a chain-link fence as the fire spread and sped away on their bicycles. The case against a fourth boy charged in the blaze is ongoing.

The three who were sentenced Tuesday acknowledged in court that they also set a trash bin on fire the day after the stadium blaze.

In addition to supervised probation, the boys must also complete a fire safety course. Judge Clara Rigmalden noted that the boys are younger than most offenders in the juvenile system.

Portland will celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day

PORTLAND (AP) — Portland has joined the list of cities marking the second Monday in October as "Indigenous Peoples' Day."

A resolution unanimously approved by council Wednesday honors the contributions of Native Americans in the Portland area and says the city has a responsibility to oppose "systemic racism" toward indigenous people and promote their well-being.

It's no coincidence that it falls on the same date as the federal Columbus Day holiday, established in 1937 to commemorate Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas in 1492. Many Native Americans say the holiday is a painful reminder of oppression.

Minneapolis and Seattle approved similar resolutions last year, and some smaller cities followed. In Seattle, some Italian-Americans criticized the move, saying it disregarded their heritage. Nobody testified against the Portland declaration.

Representative from several tribes testified in favor, describing it as a way to honor those with indigenous ancestry, help heal old wounds and educate Portland residents about Native American culture.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather.com Forecast TODAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY MONDAY Sun; pleasant and warmer Partly sunny and pleasantly warm Mostly cloudy Sunny Mostly sunny and comfortable PENDELTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST 74° 53° 77° 54° 76° 56° 70° 47° 74° 52° HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST 75° 51° 80° 55° 78° 56° 74° 48° 76° 52° ALMANAC PENDLETON through 3 p.m., yesterday TEMPERATURE HIGH 70° LOW 59° YESTERDAY 68° NORMALS 68° 43° RECORDS 87° (1980) 23° (1898) PRECIPITATION 24 hours ending 3 p.m. Trace Month to date 0.01" Normal month to date 0.22" Year to date 5.83" Last year to date 8.54" Normal year to date 9.16" HERMISTON through 3 p.m., yesterday TEMPERATURE HIGH 71° LOW 65° YESTERDAY 69° NORMALS 69° 41° RECORDS 88° (2014) 25° (2012) PRECIPITATION 24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.01" Month to date 0.18" Normal month to date 0.12" Year to date 3.66" Last year to date 4.98" Normal year to date 6.68" SUN AND MOON Sunrise today 7:02 a.m. Sunset tonight 6:23 p.m. Moonrise tonight 2:51 a.m. Moonset today 4:32 p.m. REGIONAL FORECAST Coastal Oregon: Sun and clouds today. Eastern Washington: Times of clouds and sun today. Partly cloudy tonight. Cascades: Warmer today with times of clouds and sun. Partly cloudy tonight. Northern California: Intervals of clouds and sunshine today. Partly cloudy tonight. Partly sunny tomorrow.

REGIONAL CITIES Today Fri. Astoria 67 54 pc 67 56 r Baker City 75 41 pc 81 38 s Bend 78 48 pc 79 51 pc Brookings 68 55 pc 68 57 pc Burns 79 40 pc 83 38 s Enterprise 73 43 pc 80 47 pc Eugene 77 50 pc 77 58 c Heppner 73 46 pc 78 51 pc Hermiston 75 51 pc 80 55 pc John Day 80 56 pc 85 57 s Klamath Falls 81 40 pc 81 39 s La Grande 75 48 pc 82 44 pc Meacham 72 49 pc 78 42 pc Medford 87 49 pc 86 55 pc Newport 64 55 pc 65 55 sh North Bend 68 55 pc 71 59 sh Ontario 80 46 pc 84 45 s Pasco 75 48 pc 80 54 pc Pendleton 74 53 pc 77 54 pc Portland 77 56 pc 82 44 pc Redmond 80 42 pc 82 44 pc Salem 77 53 pc 75 60 sh Spokane 69 50 pc 73 54 c Ukiah 73 44 pc 80 46 pc Vancouver 74 57 pc 71 62 sh Walla Walla 75 55 pc 78 58 pc Yakima 73 48 pc 78 51 c WORLD CITIES Today Fri. Beijing 66 44 s 67 45 s Hong Kong 89 76 pc 88 76 s Jerusalem 72 59 pc 74 58 s London 61 44 s 61 45 pc Mexico City 76 55 pc 74 56 pc Moscow 38 30 pc 35 27 sf Paris 60 44 pc 60 46 pc Rome 72 55 pc 71 55 t Seoul 76 51 pc 67 56 s Sydney 71 61 c 76 62 s Tokyo 75 61 s 75 63 pc WINDS (in mph) Today Friday Boardman NE 3-6 SW 4-8 Pendleton NE 4-8 WNW 4-8 UV INDEX TODAY 0 1 2 2 1 0 8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m. 0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection. Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. © 2015

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day. NATIONAL SUMMARY: Rain will sweep through the Upper Midwest as showers and locally heavy thunderstorms crawl through parts of New Mexico and Texas. Rain will brush Washington state as Ohio heads for southeastern Alaska. YESTERDAY'S NATIONAL EXTREMES: (for the 48 contiguous states) High 95° in Thermal, Calif. Low 20° in International Falls, Minn. NATIONAL CITIES Today Fri. Albuquerque 73 54 pc 74 53 pc Atlanta 81 62 pc 81 65 c Atlanta City 70 59 s 76 59 r Baltimore 74 57 s 79 54 r Billings 68 51 pc 80 55 pc Birmingham 84 64 pc 83 63 c Boise 80 55 pc 86 58 s Boston 62 51 s 68 49 r Charleston, SC 81 63 pc 83 68 pc Charleston, WV 81 60 pc 77 54 r Chicago 76 54 c 59 46 pc Cleveland 74 61 pc 65 48 r Dallas 90 69 pc 89 62 c Denver 72 45 pc 72 50 s Detroit 72 57 pc 64 45 pc El Paso 74 59 t 72 61 c Fairbanks 45 33 c 40 30 pc Fargo 58 38 pc 65 50 s Honolulu 87 75 pc 88 77 pc Houston 88 69 pc 89 69 c Indianapolis 80 59 pc 67 48 c Jacksonville 83 68 pc 84 69 pc Kansas City 83 55 pc 68 46 pc Las Vegas 92 70 pc 93 70 s Little Rock 89 66 pc 86 57 c Los Angeles 89 70 pc 96 72 c Louisville 84 64 pc 73 55 r Memphis 88 68 pc 83 57 t Miami 87 76 t 87 75 t Milwaukee 72 52 t 58 47 s Minneapolis 65 45 c 61 46 s Nashville 86 65 pc 80 57 t New Orleans 85 70 pc 84 70 pc New York City 70 60 s 77 55 r Oklahoma City 87 60 pc 74 52 c Omaha 78 48 c 67 46 s Philadelphia 73 59 s 81 57 r Phoenix 92 70 s 95 78 s Portland, ME 61 44 s 59 41 r Providence 65 50 s 70 49 r Raleigh 80 61 pc 81 62 pc Rapid City 63 41 r 72 48 s Reno 85 52 pc 90 51 pc Sacramento 88 55 pc 89 56 pc St. Louis 84 60 pc 66 51 pc Salt Lake City 75 52 pc 77 55 s San Diego 82 67 s 88 72 s San Francisco 74 56 pc 74 60 pc Seattle 69 57 pc 66 59 r Tucson 84 65 s 87 69 pc Washington, DC 75 62 s 82 57 r Wichita 88 57 pc 74 50 pc