

## **Real fear at Columbine High School**

I was in the Columbine parking lot when I heard the first explosion. I thought it had to be a firecracker—some kind of senior prank.

Then, I looked up and saw the backs of two guys in black trench coats. They were standing at the top of the hill near the rear entrance to the school. It was Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. I didn't know their names then, but I'd seen them around. My friends and I would move out of their way in the halls. They scared us. I began to fear for my life.

As the two boys turned around, I saw that they had guns. I still thought it was a prank. I figured the rifles had to be paintball guns. They had no expressions on their faces. They showed no emotion—not anger, not fear, not hatred.

Then, they opened fire. Bullets struck students on the sidewalk, in the parking lot, and on the hill. My friend Anne Marie was standing on the sidewalk right below them. It looked like they shot her in the stomach. She doubled over and then fell on her back. Her knees flipped to the side. She didn't get up. She just stayed crumpled on the ground. That was what made me realize—oh, my God!—it was no joke. Fear became real. It wasn't red paint on the ground. It was blood.

Dylan was trying to get back at students who had mocked and bullied them during their four years at the Littleton, Colorado, high school. Below, Melissa—who knows how it feels to be picked on—shares her ideas for how students who feel alienated can turn things around without violence. She also tells the dramatic story of her escape from the shooting.

I was terrified. I quickly ducked behind a white truck. I did not dare look up. Crouched behind a tire, I was too full of fear to move an inch.

Then, a silver cylinder landed about five feet from me. I could smell the burning and see smoke coming out of both ends, so I covered my head with my hands. I

didn't know it then, but it was a pipe bomb. In seconds, the bomb exploded, and shrapnel rained down on the pavement around me. Somehow, I didn't get hit with any shrapnel. Just a few seconds later, there was another pipe bomb, and it came even closer to me. Again, by some miracle, I wasn't hit at all.

Eric and Dylan opened fire again. It didn't sound the way gunfire sounds in the movies. Each shot was like a dart hitting a dartboard. Nothing sounded the way you'd expect. No one was screaming or yelling at them to stop. It was actually really quiet.

A boy who'd been shot in the leg (I don't know his name) got up and ran away. Blood spurted through his fingers as he held onto his wound. Before he reached safety, he looked back over his shoulder at the gunmen. His eyes were so large and filled with pure terror and pain. I could almost feel his fear.

His face will haunt me for the rest of my life. I just hope it's a look that no one has to see or give ever again.

Eric and Dylan had stopped shooting. They'd gone inside. I started to taste my own fear – it tasted like metal in my mouth. I started to run away.