

Healing starts in wake of Springfield slayings

By Teri Brosh
Catholic News Service

SPRINGFIELD, Ore. — As part of the healing process for his friends and for himself, 18-year-old Nathan Cole attended the 10:30 a.m. Mass at St. Alice Parish in Springfield May 24.

He'd been hit by seven bullets in the Thurston High School cafeteria May 21, but went to Mass, he said, so people in church would see he was doing well — "so I can help ease their pain," he said.

The shooting began after nearly 400 students had gathered in the school cafeteria early May 21 to visit with friends. Freshman Kipland Kinkel, 15, then allegedly entered the cafeteria and opened fire with a .22-caliber semiautomatic rifle. Students seem to have all thought the popping sound was a joke. In fact it was the sound of 50 .22 rounds and one 9-mm round.

Cole had arrived early at school for a 6:40 a.m. "Men of Excellence" breakfast in the library. After the 6-foot-6-inch champion wrestler went into the cafeteria to visit friends, who were sitting at one of the front tables, near the door that Kinkel entered.

"I thought it was a campaign thing until he started shooting," says Cole. "By the time I realized he was firing, it was too late and I was hit. Others were hit too. There were only three people at my table who didn't get hit."

"It sounded like a cap gun," said 14-year-old Ryan Crowley, also a St. Alice parishioner. "Nobody really thought a thing until people got hit and blood was flying. I saw them lunge and jerk real quick. Some of them fell."

"I said to myself, 'Oh my God. This isn't fake. This is really happening.' A bullet hit the bench near where my leg was. If I'd been on the ground, I would've been shot," Crowley added. "I watched him walk up to a friend of mine and just shoot him in the

head. A lot of people shot were my friends. I'm still not believing it."

Crowley, a slender, blond freshman, then felt the barrel of Kinkel's rifle between his eyes. "Then he pulled the trigger," he said. "I'm told he pulled it three times, but I only remember one. The gun clicked; he was out of ammo. I jumped up and hit him three times while he was trying to re-load. The gun flew out of one of his hands and the clip fell out of the other. That's when the wrestlers hit him."

Crowley shakes his head over being called a hero. "I'm not a hero. Batman's a hero," he says. "It was just instinct."

The shooting left two students dead and 22 wounded. They were taken in ambulances to Sacred Heart, a Catholic hospital in Eugene, and McKenzie-Willamette Hospital in Springfield.

When Crowley thinks of his friend, Mike Nickolauson, who died, he says, "I wish it were me instead of Mike. He was engaged. He was about to graduate."

Police seized Kinkel's rifle, a 9-mm Glock pistol, and a .22-caliber Ruger semiautomatic pistol at the scene. Later that day, Lane County Sheriff's deputies found the bodies of Kinkel's parents, William, 60, and Faith, 57, inside the family home.

Cole remembers the spasms in his leg. "I couldn't do anything with it. I fell to the ground. I couldn't straighten my leg. The only thing I realized was my leg was shot. I didn't realize my shoulder and stomach were also hit."

One bullet grazed his elbow; two entered and exited his body. Four still remained; doctors told him it would do more damage to remove them rather than leave them.

"Nathan's like the luckiest kid alive," said his mother, Linda Cole. "To get shot seven times and come out of it, and not be paralyzed, and come home the next day. ..."

Linda and Bill Cole first waited at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital, where they thought their son had been taken.



CNS/Reuters

Clinic cleanup

Workers clean the lobby of A Quality Women's Clinic in Dade County, Fla., following an acid attack May 21. The Florida Catholic Conference criticized chemical attacks on several Miami area abortion clinics as "misguided" and "unjustified."

"We were at the hospital going nuts," says Bill Cole. "As a parent, you're in there, you're worrying about your child. You have no idea where he's been shot or how many times."

They learned from the wrestling coach that their son could move his feet and could talk. What they didn't know was that he was at Sacred Heart Hospital; they were waiting at the wrong hospital.

Tom McNamara, pastoral associate at St. Alice, said the ecumenical prayer service at Springfield Lutheran Church on the night

of May 21 was moving and uplifting. He said a candle was lit for each victim and their names were read.

During the service, a girl walked up to the pulpit and asked to speak. She noted that prayers were being said for the students and their families, yet no one had said a prayer for Kip Kinkel and his family. Members of the congregation bowed their heads and united in prayer.

McNamara said the girl's insight was truly amazing. "That's Christianity," he added. "Solid, solid Christianity."

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*Sr. M. Lucy
Native of: San Francisco, California
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