

# on the MOW

# TEENS & GUNS

ately, teen shooting rampages seem to be breaking out in rapid-fire order across America.

Tragedies in Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas and Oregon between September 1997 and May 1998 have left 15 people dead and 44 injured. In all four cases, the accused slayers were gun-brandishing teenage boys who performed their attacks on school grounds.

Could such an incident occur here in western New York? Sasha Campbell believes it's possible.

"It can hit really close to home. Nothing is impossible if it's the right time, the right day. It's gotten to the point where people don't know what's going to happen," said Sasha, 15, a parishioner at St. Bridget's Church in Rochester. She attends Wilson Magnet High

School in Rochester.

Sasha bases her opinion not only on the national incidents, but also her own environment. Every so often, the sound of gunfire reaches her home in the southwest section of Rochester.

"You can hear the gunshots within a one-mile area," she explained.

These blasts, she said, are the byproduct of gang and drug wars — and they often involve teenagers. So although she's never actually witnessed a shooting, Sasha worries about her own safety as well as her family's.

"I have an older brother who lives in the same neighborhood, and he walks his dog all the time," Sasha said.

When Sasha hears of any crime linking teens with firearms, she said that three questions quickly come to mind:

"Who would do this? Why? And how did they get the gun?"

These questions have also been debated in society. For instance, a story in the July 6 issue of *Time* magazine listed several possible motives for the accused teens: rejection by girlfriends and other schoolmates; family discord; and preoccupation with violent television shows, video games and rock music lyrics.

Sasha's perplexity at how the teens obtained the guns is another key issue at hand. Teens interviewed for this story — as well as the mother of a teen — agreed that teens should never have open access to firearms.

Barbara Burns said that she and her husband, Tom, grew up with guns in their houses but were taught proper safety precautions. Now, she said, they observe the same guidelines

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