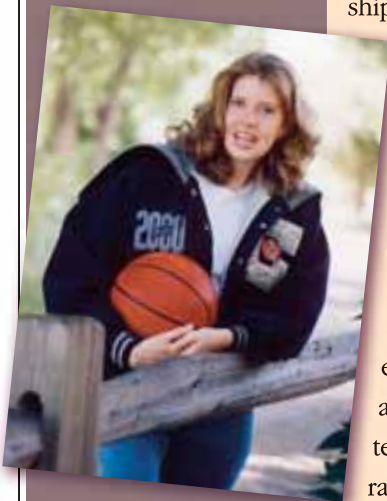


Columbine: TEN YEARS LATER

BY LIZ CARLSTON

What I learned in the wake of a national tragedy changed my life.

I was a basketball player at Columbine High School when the tragic shootings occurred. It was only through trust in the Lord that I finally was able to let the hurt go away.



The resurrected Savior asked Mary, "Why weepst thou?" at His tomb. There will be times when we also weep, and the Lord will comfort us too.

—Littleton, Colorado, April 20, 1999

In high school I played power forward on Columbine High School's girls' varsity basketball team. The weekend before prom I met with my coach to set expectations for the upcoming season, which would be my senior year. Coach Sanders and our team had just completed our first winning season in 12 years. He showed our team how to work together and be united. I admired his leadership and kindness. I didn't know that would be the last time I'd see him alive.

The following Tuesday, two male Columbine seniors carried out an attack on our school that was the worst school shooting in U.S. history. I was in my trigonometry class when the massacre began. Suddenly, fire alarms went off, and in a confused panic, teachers escorted us outside to wait. We watched as ambulances, police cars, and a SWAT team surrounded our school. When the rampage ended, 13 people had been murdered and 25 others were injured, some very seriously. Coach Sanders died of gunshot wounds while saving students by clearing out the crowded lunchtime cafeteria.

I was one of the lucky ones who didn't see the actual violence or have to live with the gruesome images that replay in a person's mind afterward. I did have to deal with the death of friends, and I had to learn how

to be sensitive about letting others grieve at their own pace.

The day after the attack, my bishop met with all of us who had experienced the terror. For a long time, he and I sat in his office and cried together. I asked him why such a horrible thing had happened to us. After a few moments of quiet consideration, he asked me to read from the Doctrine and Covenants. "Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. For after much tribulation come the blessings" (D&C 58:3-4).

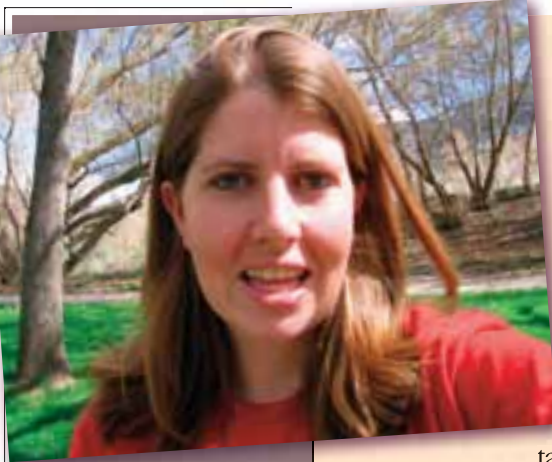
It didn't make sense that Heavenly Father would let this happen. My pain was too raw to see any blessings. But I knew there had to be something in these verses, since they were the ones my bishop wanted me to read.

Ten years have passed since the Columbine shootings. I've gone on to receive college degrees, serve a mission, and now work in a job I enjoy. When I reflect on the events surrounding the infamous shooting, three lessons rise to the surface.

The Atonement Is Real

No one got to say goodbye before the victims were taken from their families, although many attended the funerals in a variety





had to dig deep to understand the turmoil that was going on in my mind so I could find a healthy way to address it. I relied on prayer, friends, and family and trusted in the Savior's healing Atonement to mend my wounded heart.

of churches to show respect and gratitude for their lives. The services rang with emotional eulogies and were biting with sadness and hurt. Many believed those goodbyes were permanent. Because of what my parents had taught me and what I had learned in church and seminary, I knew that their deaths were not the end.

Salvation is possible because of Jesus Christ's Atonement. The Savior paid the ultimate price for our redemption and happiness (see Luke 22:42). I know that we will always receive heavenly help to see us through our trials—the big, splashy, front-page ones and the poignant hurts that only we know about individually.

Trust in the Lord

After the shooting, the question “Why did I have to experience this?” often passed through my mind. I had lost my innocent view of the world, the luxury of feeling safe and the ability to readily trust people. It was unfair that my basketball coach and my friends were taken from me. I often didn't know how to respond to others who were hurting and I felt guilty and angry in my inadequacy. It was hard to believe that after this tribulation any blessing could come.

Because my self-pity and anger smoldered for so long, it was hard to recognize them as problems, let alone get rid of them. People thought I was difficult and found it hard to get along with me. I had to dig deep to understand the turmoil that was going on in my mind so I could find a healthy way to address it. I didn't work through these issues alone. I relied on prayer, friends, family and trusted in the Savior's healing Atonement to mend my wounded heart.

I had to give up feeling sorry for myself and learn again to trust others. Columbine helped me become more empathetic and patient, more compassionate and loving, and more full of hope and joy. My experience is that no matter what happens to us during life's journey, it all turns out right in the end. If we take every question and every burden to the Lord, He promises that as we learn of Him our questions will be answered. He also promises that as we take His yoke, His name, upon us our burdens will become light (see Matthew 11:29–30). Finally, I could stop punishing myself and let the hurt go away.

Fear Not; Be Full of Light and Hope

Tumultuous events are all around us in the form of depression, natural disaster, terror, or even things as simple as gossip or disappointment. I can't comprehend how the Columbine gunmen could sink into a place so dark that they felt justified in killing. I feel sorry for them because they didn't know how to escape their mental turmoil. Though we live in a scary world, it is critical to know that we need not fear. We're entitled to the power and peace of the Spirit as we live righteously. This is the Lord's promise and He always keeps His promises.

“Fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail. . . . Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:34, 36).

I've learned to let go of fear. I trust the Savior. I trust my Heavenly Father. I know we are all in His caring, merciful hands. We cannot control others or the world around us, but as children of God we can control how we respond to adversity. Cultivating a faith-filled perspective and uplifting thoughts tends to push out the negative and defeating ones. Anyone can turn on a light in a dark room; we create light and hope in the world as we choose to be happy. **NE**