

## Columbine school shooting survivors relive their personal hell in their own words

Several were shot, others lost family members and close friends in the massacre, which took place almost 20 years ago

JULIE MCCAFFREY

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MIRROR



The two killers, Eric Harris (left) and Dylan Klebold examine their rifles (Image: Getty Images)

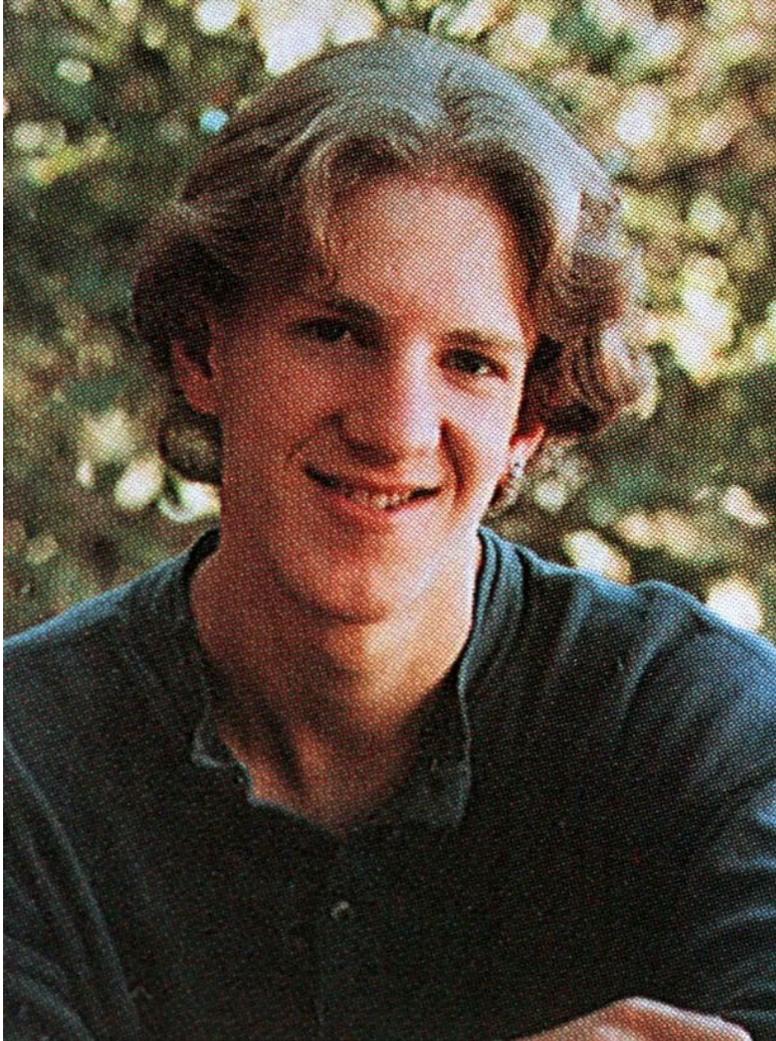
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They survived - but no one who witnessed the mass murders at Columbine High School emerged without deep emotional scars.

April 20 marks the 20th anniversary of the terrifying day Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, shot dead 12 pupils and one teacher in a meticulously planned atrocity.

The 49 minutes of terror ended when both shot themselves in the school library. Now in their late thirties, the Columbine kids who saw the senseless killings have struggled to cope since losing friends and coming so close to death.

Here, in their own words, they describe their lives in the two decades since the horrific day.



**Dylan Klebold, one of the Columbine mass murderers, in his 1999 yearbook** (Image: X80001)



**Murderer Eric Harris at the Columbine High School canteen in an undated yearbook photo** (Image: Reuters)

# Amy Over

**'I've worked hard on my trauma'**



**Amy had to hide under a table when the gunmen opened fire**

Amy Over was a high-school senior when two gunmen killed 12 students and a teacher at Columbine.

She was walking down for lunch when she first realised something was wrong.

Amy said: "I was walking down for lunch and started hearing some commotion. We looked outside the window and I thought it was a fight."

It was only when her basketball coach, Dave Sanders, told her there was a shooting that she realised how serious it was.

He told Amy and her friends that they needed to get away from the window and she said "he saved our lives".

She added: "I ran as fast as I could underneath a table. I could hear bombs going off and screams.



**Columbine high school shooters Eric Harris (L) and Dylan Klebold appear in this video capture of a surveillance tape** (Image: Getty Images)

"When the gunmen started coming in to shoot is when I ran. We ran out that front entrance door and we were being shot at as we ran."

But the trauma was far from over for Amy.

On her daughter's first day at preschool, she collapsed in the car park.

She admits she thought it was a heart attack.

Amy said: "The doctor asked if I ever had a panic attack. Could any trigger have caused this? I said I just dropped my daughter off at school, and I'm a Columbine survivor.

"I've worked hard on my trauma. I'm in a place where I want to share my story because I own my story."

# Amanda Stair

'I believed I was going to die'



**Amanda hid under a table in the library while the gunmen prowled around her**

Amanda Stair, 35, hid under a table in the library, where the teenage shooters killed 10 students and took their own lives.

She could only see one of the shooters from the waist down but that sight chilled her.

The gunman had a gun strapped to his leg and she admits she was "absolutely terrified".

Amanda said: "They just kept walking around and shooting for what felt like forever.

"I heard an explosion directly to my right, where I knew that another girl was hiding.

"My ears started ringing, and I knew that I was next, I had to be. I put my arms over my head with my elbows facing forward.



**Traumatized Columbine High students watched as their school was evacuated** (Image: AFP/Getty Images)

"I squeezed into a ball as tightly as I could. I held my breath and closed my eyes. I waited for a gunshot to rip through my ribs, but it never came."

She says it sounded like the two shooters, Eric and Dylan, were "having the time of their lives".

Amanda added they were "making comments about blowing up the library and commenting on the kids they had shot".

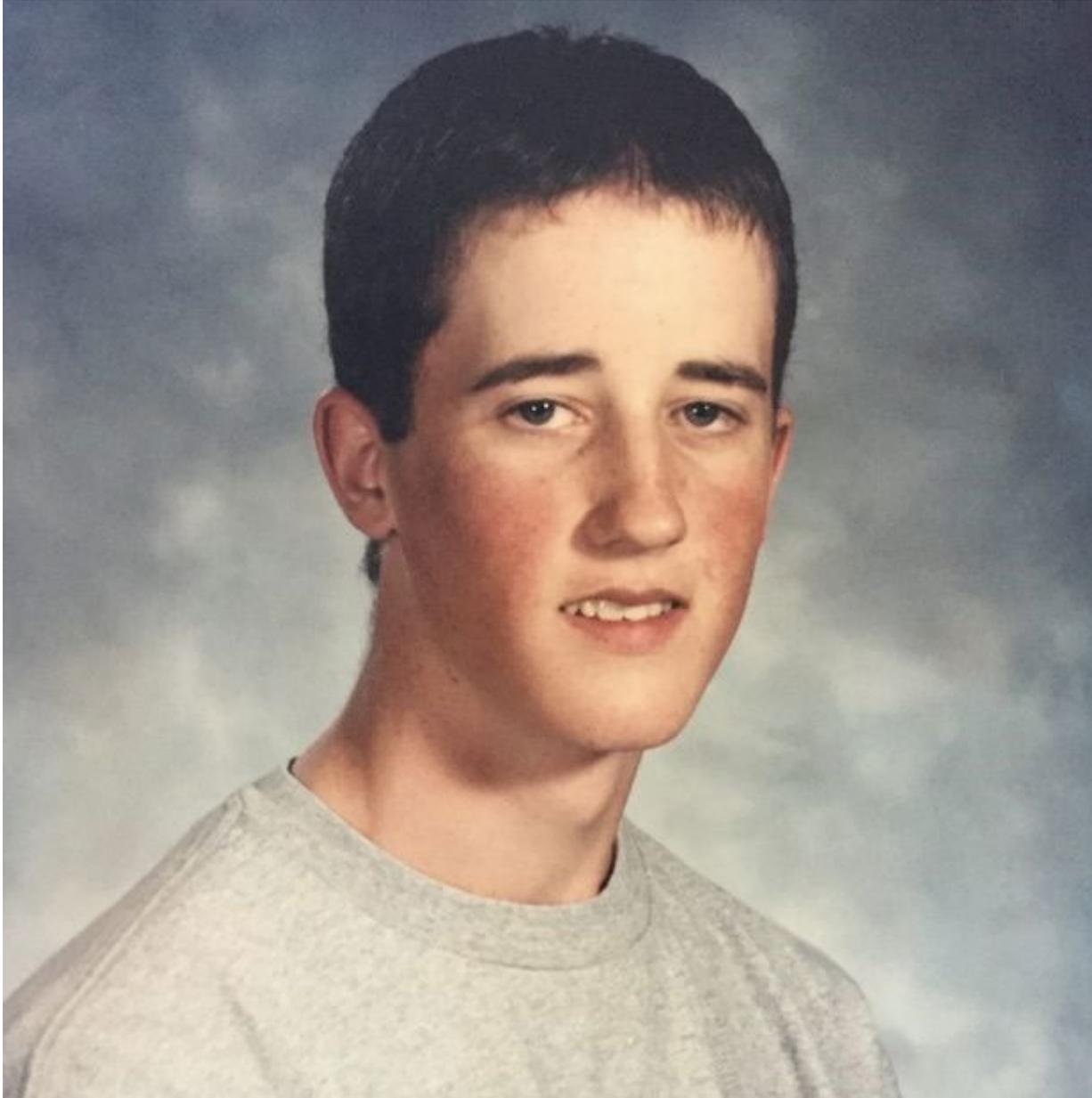
She added: "I heard one of them say, 'Don't worry about it, you're all going to be dead in a few minutes'.

"I believed what they said. Why shouldn't I? For all I knew everyone in the library was dead.

"Emotionally, I shut down. I went numb. I learned that when something is really serious and going down, I can become coldly logical."

# Austin Banks

'I became an addict'



**Austin was hit by two bullets in the massacre**

Austin Eubanks was hit by two bullets and saw his best friend killed right in front of him.

He had just walked into the library when a teacher followed him in and shouted for all the students to get under tables.

Then the shooters walked in.

Austin said: "They went pretty methodically from section to section, coming to ours last."

Following his ordeal Austin was prescribed opiates and other medication to help him cope with the trauma.



**Terrified Columbine High students run to take cover** (Image: AFP/Getty Images)

He said: "The predominant emotion is anger.

"After a tragedy like this, there's a tendency to withdraw or detach emotion whenever emotion is difficult.

"People find a way to medicate. I chose substances.

"But I finally found the courage to do whatever it took, and I stayed in treatment for 14 consecutive months to resolve the underlying trauma, the survivor's guilt, and to live a life that wasn't controlled by substances."

# Chad Laughlin

**'Shooters were my friends'**



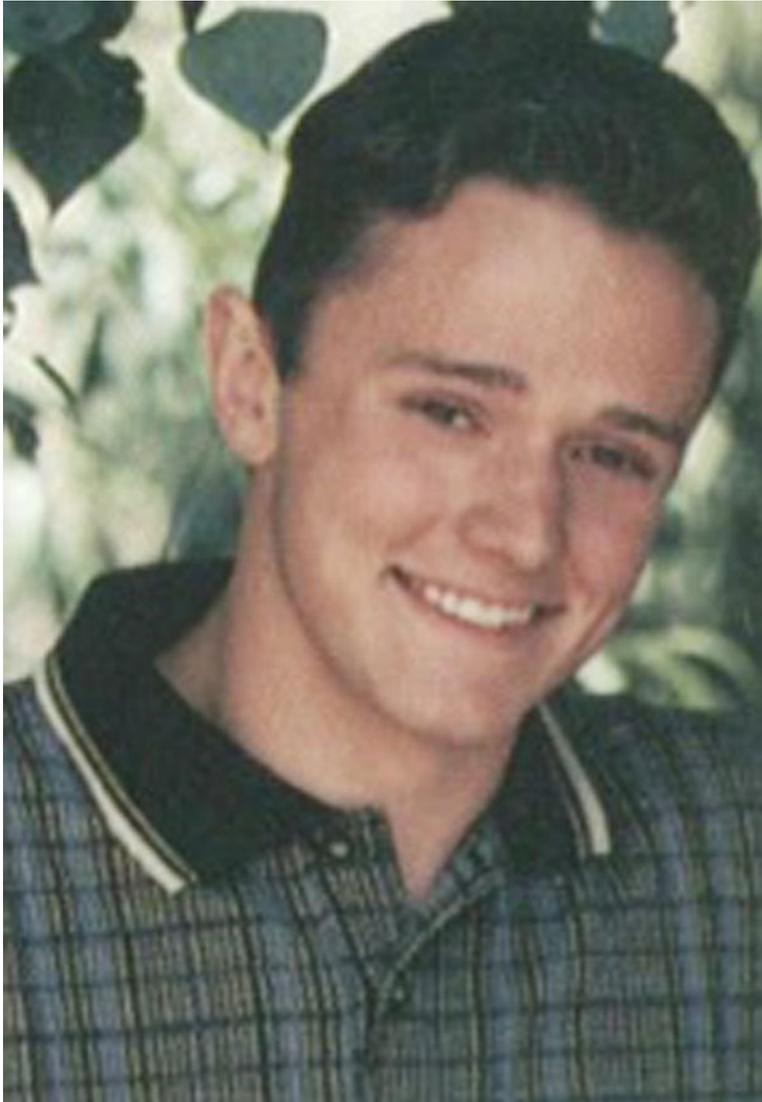
**Chad Laughlin was friends with the two shooters**

Chad Laughlin, 37, was a childhood friend of one of the shooters, Dylan Klebold. He passed him in the car park three minutes before the shooting began.

Chad said: "I was pretty much in denial, emotionally, for six or seven years.

"I knew Dylan and Eric better than most people - particularly Dylan. And that weighs heavily, obviously.

"I had a bit of therapy in the beginning but I didn't feel like there was really anyone that could handle it.



**Chad says he still suffers from survivor's guilt**

"I think that the whole community is traumatised, and I don't think that anyone is fully healed."

He admits he still suffers from survivor's guilt, along with many of his circle of friends.

Chad said: "I don't think it will ever go away. It comes up every day in our thought processes.

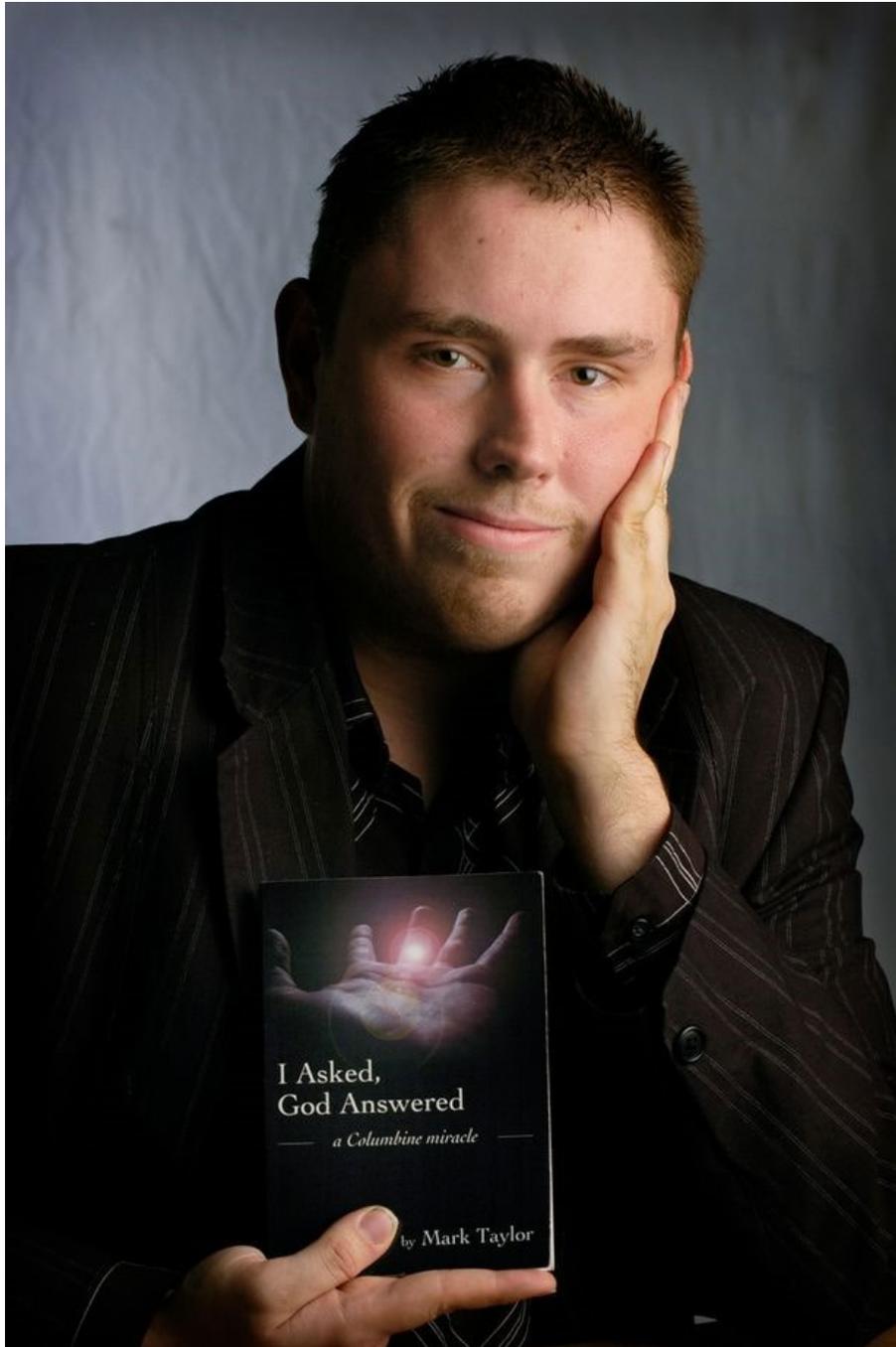
"I might go the whole day without thinking about it, and then I will drive by a 'Respect Life' license plate, and I'll snap right back into it."

## Mark Taylor

'I've forgiven them'



**Mark Taylor was shot and left for dead** (Image: Denver Post via Getty Images)



**Mark said the emotional trauma was the hardest thing to overcome** (Image: Denver Post via Getty Images)

Mark Taylor, 36, was shot and left for dead on the lawn of Columbine High School.

He said: "The emotional trauma was probably the worst part of it for me. Not understanding what happened, why they would just shoot me."

"Seeing my family have a hard time with it. There was some bitterness at first. But God has worked with me on that. I've had great opportunities."

But amazingly, he has forgiven the two shooters, even though they tried to kill him.

Mark said: "So many people let their past hold them back.

"They're victims, and then they go out and do something to someone else because they have unforgiveness and bitterness."

## Patrick Ireland

**'I was determined not to let them win'**



**Patrick was shot twice in the head and fell out of a window** (Image: Dan Callister/REX/Shutterstock)



**Patrick Ireland was shot twice in the head and fell through a window to escape** (Image: DAILY MIRROR)

Patrick Ireland, 37, was blasted twice in the head but dragged himself to the library window and fell from the first floor to safety.

Now a married father-of-three, Patrick told the Daily Mirror how he fought back to strong physical and mental health.

He said: "We were all shot fairly early on in the library. We heard their shots and the throwing of pipe bombs as they got closer. It was harrowing.

"After I was shot, I blacked out and was unconscious through most of the mayhem.

"It was a blessing in disguise. It saved me from a lot of traumatic memories.



**Patrick with his wife Kacie, daughters Kennedy and Kensington and baby son Keene.** (Image: James Breeden)

"Those of us who choose to be victors can achieve the goals we set out for ourselves.

"You have to believe that tough times don't last, but tough people do.

"I was so determined not to let my shooters win. I believe the world is still good at heart. People need to hold on to that.

"Evil will not win. There are too many good people in the world."

# Alisha Basore

'There's still a deep, dark hole'



**A Columbine High School student hugs her mother on the day of the shootings on April 20 1999** (Image: Reuters)

Alisha Basore, 37, who works in a hair salon, ran away from her high school building when the shootings began. Her best friend Rachel Scott was killed.

She says she has managed to move on - and tries not to dwell on what happened.

Alisha said: "There's still this deep, dark hole I can crawl back into when asked to go there.

"I don't sit at home and dwell on it. But when my clients find out I went to Columbine, it's the same questions: 'Were you there?' 'What did you see?'"

## **Craig Scott**

**'I used to fantasise about revenge'**



**Craig Scott's elder sister was killed in the horrific events**

Craig Scott played dead during the shootings at Columbine High School, but two friends Isaiah Shoels and Matthew Kechter, were killed right next to him.

As he ran from the school he had an ominous feeling about his elder sister Rachel. She was one of the first students killed.

Craig's family later set up a nonprofit organisation, Rachel's Challenge, to inspire students and have since shared Rachel's story with 25 million people.

Craig said: "The days right after, you're in so much shock.

"You could ask me a question, and I could just sit there, looking at you, because I felt like I'm not even there.



**Rachel Scott was one of the first Columbine students killed** (Image: Unknown)

"I used to fantasise what it would be like to get revenge on the shooters. If I had just five minutes alone, what I'd do to them. And it started to eat me up.

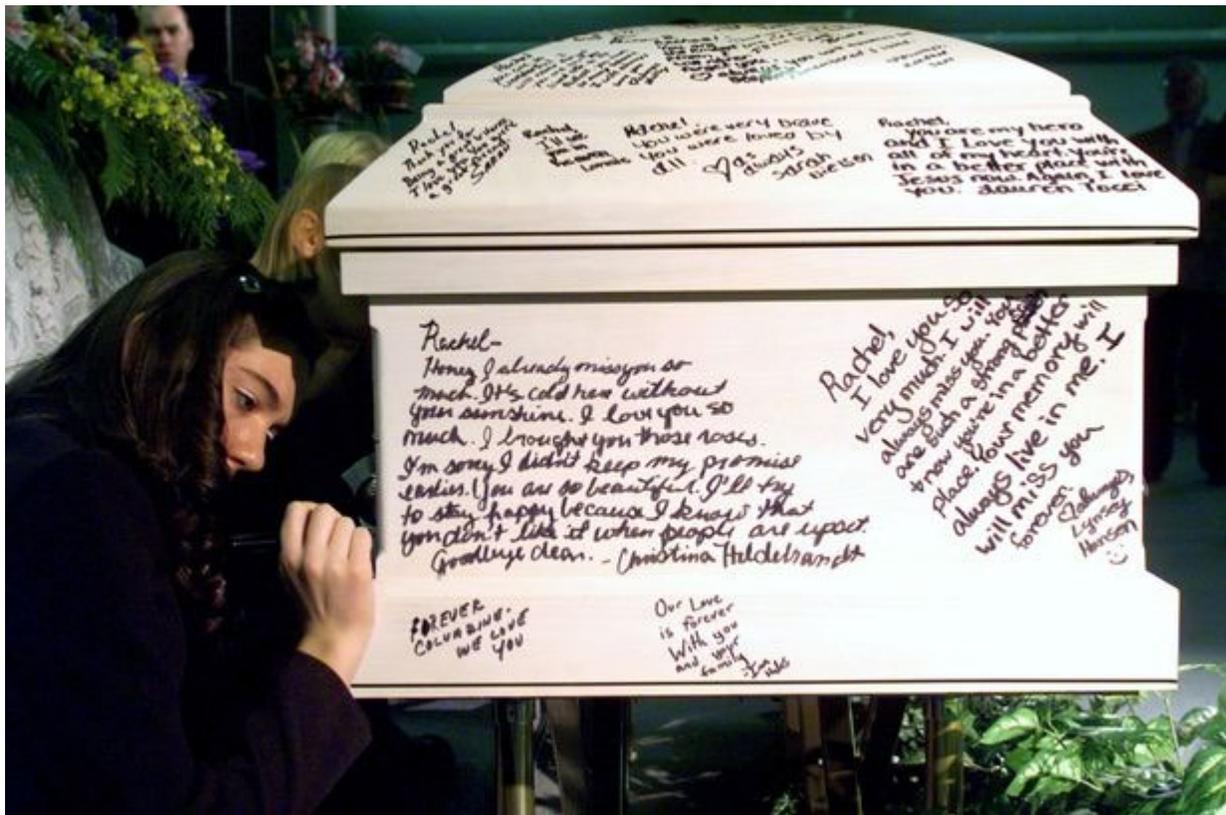
"My family, in the months to come, started to feel a sense of purpose and mission with telling Rachel's story.

"And that, as we saw it, that was having an impact, that was part of our hope.

"I think my story's a real eye-opener for some students going through a hard time.

"They can look at me and tell me, 'I saw that you went through this, and look, you made something good out of it. I can get through what I'm going through'.

"I talk to them about forgiveness and letting go, and how if they don't, it can really imprison their heart."



Rachel Scott's coffin was covered in loving messages (Image: Reuters)