

WAKE UP CALL

APRIL 1999

When the news of the massacre at Columbine High School flashed across my television screen, I was overcome by various emotions ranging from rage, anger, frustration and sadness. One response I did not feel was surprise. I have many family and friends who are educators and I talk with them about the attitudes of their students today. A reoccurring theme that I hear from all is the complete lack of respect for rules and authority. That may be true, however the question remains, why?

It was an announcement so grim that the president needed to bite his lower lip before speaking. We have "a changing culture that desensitizes our children to violence." Most teenagers, he continued, "have seen hundreds or even thousands of murders on television in movies and in videogames before they graduate from high school." Not surprisingly, then, "too many young people seem unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their actions, and all too often, everyday conflicts are resolved not with words but with weapons." That speech was made in 1998 during the White House Conference on Youth Violence, which convened after the Springfield, Oregon School shootings.

Since the shooting there have been various calls to get to the bottom of this tragedy. The blame game, for lack of a better term, is fast becoming a national pastime. The media loves to play this game on talk television pitting various lobbyists against one another in a forum that resembles professional wrestling without the physical contact. Our society likes to place blame instead of claiming responsibility. Allow me to let everyone in on a little secret. Rock music, violence on television, the internet, etc. did not cause the massacre. Censorship of various media outlets would not have stopped the massacre. The problem lies with our society and it's narcissistic values and selfishness.

An unprecedented crime wave or moral meltdown has overtaken the 30-49 year set. FBI figures show that boomers were involved in three-quarters of the nation's violent crimes in 1996. The number of 30-49 year-olds cuffed for serious crimes of all kinds has more than tripled since 1980. From 450,000 to 1.5 million in 1996. At the height of school shootings last year, on-campus fatalities occurred about four times a month. Adults were killing kids at a rate of six a day. Emergency room visits involving thirty-something drug overdoses rose from 60,000 in 1980 to 200,000 in 1995; heroin and cocaine emergency cases, shot up from 10,000 to 100,000.

When I was a kid I couldn't drink a beer at a friend's party without my mother knowing about it. In fact, my mother still calls a dozen times a day to check up on me. However annoying at times, that type of attention is necessary with all the outside negative influences that can affect a child. The argument that outside influences today are more dangerous than yesterday in my opinion, is ridiculous. Negative forces and dangerous situations are not a phenomenon of modern times. Evil manifests itself in many different forms and has been present since the dawn of time. I feel that we as a society are failing our children in protecting and educating them.

The job of being a parent is unfortunately transforming itself from a full-time job to a part-time one. The media has all but completely ignored the home life of the teens involved, because of the fact that they came from affluent families. Having a large house, driving a BMW and buying ones children anything and everything they want does not qualify someone as being a good parent. Money does not take the place of attentive parenting. We as a society place such a value on wealth and the dollar. I myself work in the business of making money. However, society must realize that money cannot raise a child. It can't teach a child. It can't hold a child. Money will never be able to provide the intangibles that are necessary ingredients in raising a

child. The career of parenting is exactly that, a career, not a job. When undertaking this career, individuals must realize that there is no retirement. It is a lifetime commitment that does not pay monetary rewards. If we want the shootings and school violence to end, we must as a society practice what we preach and become role models and become more involved in our children's lives.

There is a line in the movie "Parenthood" where a character states, "You need a license to drive a car. You actually need a license to catch a fish; but, they will let anyone be a parent." The responsibility of parenting a child is one where there is no room for selfishness. Growing up, and still to this day, my role model has always been my father. He isn't a millionaire. He isn't a sports star. He is a man that never missed a single little league game or High School football game. He has always pushed me to work hard and respect others. These are the things that will prevent future massacres and tragedies.