

Chapter III

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

The following timeline provides an overview of the events leading up to the tragedy on April 16, and then the actions taken on April 16. The time scale switches from years to months to days and even to minutes as appropriate. This information is a reference source to use as one reads the chapters.

The information here was drawn from numerous interviews and written sources. The Cho family and Seung Hui Cho's school administrators, counselors, teachers, and medical and school records are the prime sources for his history prior to attending Virginia Tech.

Information obtained on his university years before the shootings came from interviews with faculty, counselors, administrators, police, courts, psychological evaluators, suitemates, and others. The panel also had access to many university, medical, and court records and to e-mails and other written materials involving Cho.

The timeline for the events of April 16 relied primarily on state and campus police reports and interviews, supplemented by interviews with survivors, university officials, emergency medical responders, hospitals and others.

The information on the aftermath drew on medical examiner records, interviews with families, and other sources.

Each aspect of the timeline is discussed further in the following chapters, with an evaluation as well as narration of events.

PRE-INCIDENTS: CHO'S HISTORY

1986–2000

1984 Seung Hui Cho is born to a family living in a small two-room apartment in Seoul, South Korea. He is an inordinately shy, quiet child, but no problem to his

family. He has serious health problems from 9 months to 3 years old, is frail, and after unpleasant medical procedures does not want to be touched.

1992 Cho's family emigrates to Maryland when he is 8 years old.

1993 The Cho family moves to Fairfax County, Virginia, when he is 9 years old. They work long hours in a dry-cleaning business.

1997 Seung Hui in the 6th grade continues to be very withdrawn. Teachers meet with his parents about this behavior. In the summer before he enters 7th grade, he begins receiving counseling at the Center for Multi-cultural Human Services to address his shy, introverted nature, which is diagnosed as "selective mutism." Parents try to socialize him more by encouraging extracurricular activities and friends, but he stays withdrawn.

1999 During the 8th grade, suicidal and homicidal ideations are identified by Cho's middle school teachers in his writing. It is connected to the Columbine shootings this year. (He references Columbine in school writings.) The school requests that his parents ask a counselor to intervene, which leads to a psychiatric evaluation at the Multicultural Center for Human Services. He is prescribed antidepressant medication. He responds well and is taken off the medication approximately one year later.

2000–2003 (High School)

Fall 2000 Cho starts Westfield High School in Fairfax County as a sophomore, after attending another high school at Centreville for a year. After review by the "local screening committee," he is enrolled in an

Individual Educational Program (IEP) to deal with his shyness and lack of responsiveness in a classroom setting. Therapy continues with the Multicultural Center for Human Services through his junior year. He has no behavior problems, keeps his appointments, and makes no threats. He gets good grades and adjusts reasonably to the school environment. Both the guidance office in school and the therapist feel he was successful.

June 2003 Cho graduates from Westfield High School with a 3.5 GPA in the Honors Program. He decides to attend Virginia Tech against the advice of his parents and counselors, who think that it is too large a school for him and that he will not receive adequate individual attention. He is given the name of a contact at the high school if he needs help in college, but never avails himself of it.

2003–2004 (Virginia Tech)

August 2003 Cho enters Virginia Tech as a business information systems major. Little attention is drawn to him during his freshman year. He has a difficult time with his roommate over neatness issues and changes rooms. His parents make weekly trips to visit him. His grades are good. He does not see a counselor at school or home. He is excited about college.

Fall 2004 Cho begins his sophomore year. Cho moves off campus to room with a senior who is rarely at home. Cho complains of mites in the apartment, but doctors tell him it is acne and prescribe minocycline. He becomes interested in writing and decides to switch his major to English beginning his junior year. He submits the paperwork late that sophomore year. His sister notes a growing passion for writing over the summer break, though he is secretive about its content. Cho submits a book idea to a publishing house.

2005 (Virginia Tech)

Spring 2005 Cho requests a change of major to English. The idea for a book sent to a New York publishing house is rejected. This seems to depress him, according to his family. He still sees no counselor at school or home, and exhibits no behavioral problems other than his quietness.

Fall 2005 Cho starts junior year and moves back into the dorms. Serious problems begin to surface. His sister notes that he is writing less at home, is less enthusiastic, and wonders if the publisher's rejection letter curbed his enthusiasm for writing and reversed his improving attitude. At school, Cho is taken to some parties by his suitemates at the start of the fall semester. He stabs at the carpet in a girl's room with a knife in the presence of his suitemates.

Professor Nikki Giovanni, Cho's poetry professor, is concerned about violence in his writing. She also asks him to stop taking pictures of classmates from a camera held under the desk. She offers to get him into another class and writes a letter to English Department Chair Lucinda Roy to create a record that could lead to removing Cho from her class.

Dr. Roy removes Cho from Professor Giovanni's class and tutors him one-on-one with assistance from Professor Frederick D'Aguiar. When Cho refuses to go to counseling, Dr. Roy notifies the Division of Student Affairs, the Cook Counseling Center, the Schiffert Health Center, the Virginia Tech police, and the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. Cho's problems are discussed with the university's Care Team that reviews students with problems.

November 27 A female resident of WAJ files a report with the Virginia Tech Police Department (VTPD) indicating that Cho had made "annoying" contact with her on the Internet, by phone, and in person. The

VTPD interviews Cho, but the female student declines to press charges. The investigating officer refers Cho to the school's disciplinary system, the Office of Judicial Affairs.

November 30 Cho calls Cook Counseling Center and is triaged (i.e., given a preliminary screening) by phone at following his interaction with VTPD police.

December 6 E-mails among resident advisors (RAs) reflect complaints by a female resident in Cochrane residence hall regarding instant messages (IMs) from Cho sent under various strange aliases. E-mails also report that he went in disguise to a female student's room (the event of November 27).

December 12 A female student from Campbell Hall files a report with the VTPD complaining of "disturbing" IMs from Cho. She requests that Cho have no further contact with her.

Cho does not keep a 2:00 p.m. appointment at Cook Counseling Center but is triaged by them again by phone that afternoon.

December 13 VTPD notifies Cho that he is to have no further contact with the second female student who complained. After campus police leave, Cho's suitemate receives an IM from Cho stating, "I might as well kill myself now." The suitemate alerts VTPD. The police take Cho to the VTPD where a prescreener from the New River Valley Community Services Board evaluates him as "an imminent danger to self or others." A magistrate issues a temporary detaining order, and Cho is transported to Carilion St. Albans Psychiatric Hospital for an overnight stay and mental evaluation.

December 14

7 a.m. The person assigned as an independent evaluator, psychologist Roy Crouse, evaluates Cho and concludes that he does not present an imminent danger to himself.

Before 11 a.m. A staff psychiatrist at Carilion evaluates Cho, concludes he is not a danger to himself or others, and recommends outpatient counseling. He gathers no collateral information.

11-11:30 a.m. Special Justice Paul M. Barnett conducts Cho's commitment hearing and rules in accordance with the independent evaluator, but orders follow-up treatment as an outpatient. Cho then makes and keeps an appointment with the campus Cook Counseling Center.

Noon The staff psychiatrist dictates in his evaluation summary that "there is no indication of psychosis, delusions, suicidal or homicidal ideation." The psychiatrist finds that "his insight and judgment are normal.... Followup and aftercare to be arranged with the counseling center at Virginia Tech; medications, none." Cho is released.

3:00 p.m. Cho is triaged in person at the Cook Counseling Center for the third time in 15 days.

2006

January The Cook Counseling Center receives a psychiatric summary from St. Albans. No action is taken by Cook Counseling Center or the Care Team to follow up on Cho.

April 17 Cho's technical writing professor, Carl Bean, suggests that Cho drop his class after repeated efforts to address shortcomings in class and inappropriate choice of writing assignments. Cho follows the professor to his office, raises his voice angrily, and is asked to leave. Bean does not report this incident to university officials.

Spring Cho writes a paper for Professor Hicok's creative writing class concerning a young man who hates the students at his school and plans to kill them and himself. The writing contains a number of parallels

to the events of April 16, 2007 and the recorded messages later sent to NBC.

September 6–12 Professor Lisa Norris, another of Cho's writing professors, alerts the Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Mary Ann Lewis, about him, but the dean finds "no mention of mental health issues or police reports" on Cho. Professor Norris encourages Cho to go to counseling with her, but he declines.

Fall Professor Falco, another of Cho's writing instructors, confers with Professors Roy and Norris, who tell him that Dr. Roy in Fall 2005 and Professor Norris in 2006 alerted the Associate Dean of Students, Mary Ann Lewis, about Cho.

2007

February 2 Cho orders a .22 caliber Walther P22 handgun online from TGSCOM, Inc.

February 9 Cho picks up the handgun from J-N-D Pawnbrokers in Blacksburg, across the street from the university.

March 12 Cho rents a van from Enterprise Rent-A-Car at the Roanoke Regional Airport, which he keeps for almost a month. (Cho videotapes some of his subsequently released diatribe in the van.)

March 13 Cho purchases a 9mm Glock 19 handgun and a box of 50 9mm full metal jacket practice rounds at Roanoke Firearms. He has waited the 30 days between gun purchases as required in Virginia. The store initiates the required background check by police, who find no record of mental health issues.

March 22 Cho goes to PSS Range and Training, an indoor pistol range, and spends an hour practicing.

March 22 Cho purchases two 10-round magazines for the Walther P22 on eBay.

March 23 Cho purchases three additional 10-round magazines from another eBay seller.

March 31 Cho purchases additional ammunition magazines, ammunition, and a hunting knife from Wal-Mart and Dick's Sporting Goods. He buys chains from Home Depot.

April 7 Cho purchases more ammunition.

April 8 Cho spends the night at the Hampton Inn in Christiansburg, Virginia, videotaping segments for his manifesto-like diatribe. He also buys more ammunition.

April 13 Bomb threats are made to Torgersen, Durham, and Whittemore halls, in the form of an anonymous note. The threats are assessed by the VTPD; and the buildings evacuated. There is no lockdown or cancellation of classes elsewhere on campus. In retrospect, no evidence is found linking these threats to Cho's later bomb threat in Norris Hall, based in part on handwriting analysis.

April 14 An Asian male wearing a hooded garment is seen by a faculty member in Norris Hall. She later (after April 16) tells police that one of her students had told her the doors were chained. This may have been Cho practicing. Cho buys yet more ammunition.

April 15 Cho places his weekly Sunday night call to his family in Fairfax County. They report the conversation as normal and that Cho said nothing that caused them concern.

THE INCIDENTS

April 16, 2007

5:00 a.m. In Cho's suite in Harper Hall (2121), one of Cho's suitemates notices Cho is awake and at his computer.

- About 5:30 a.m.** One of Cho's other suitemates notices Cho clad in boxer shorts and a shirt brushing his teeth and applying acne cream. Cho returns from the bathroom, gets dressed, and leaves.
- 6:47 a.m.** Cho is spotted by a student waiting outside the West Ambler Johnston (WAJ) residential hall entrance, where he has his mailbox.
- 7:02 a.m.** Emily Hilscher enters the dorm after being dropped off by her boyfriend (the time is based on her swipe card record).
- About 7:15 a.m.** Cho shoots Hilscher in her room (4040) at WAJ. He also shoots Ryan Christopher Clark, an RA. Clark, it is thought, most likely came to investigate noises in Hilscher's room, which is next door to his. Both of the victims' wounds prove to be fatal.
- 7:17 a.m.** Cho's access card is swiped at Harper Hall (his residence hall). He goes to his room to change out of his bloody clothes.
- 7:20 a.m.** The VTPD receives a call on their administrative telephone line advising that a female student in room 4040 of WAJ had possibly fallen from her loft bed. The caller was given this information by another WAJ resident near room 4040 who heard the noise.
- 7:21 a.m.** The VTPD dispatcher notifies the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad that a female student had possibly fallen from her loft bed in WAJ. A VTPD officer is dispatched to room 4040 at WAJ to accompany the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad, which is also dispatched (per standard protocol).
- 7:24 a.m.** The VTPD officer arrives at WAJ room 4040, finds two people shot inside the room, and immediately requests additional VTPD resources.
- 7:25 a.m.** Cho accesses his university e-mail account (based on computer records). He erases his files and the account.
- 7:26 a.m.** VT Rescue Squad 3 arrives on-scene outside WAJ.
- 7:29 a.m.** VT Rescue Squad 3 arrives at room 4040.
- 7:30 a.m.** Additional VTPD officers begin arriving at room 4040. They secure the crime scene and start preliminary investigation. Interviews of residents find them unable to provide a suspect description. No one on Hilscher's floor in WAJ saw anyone leave room 4040 after the initial noise was heard.
- 7:30–8:00 a.m.** A friend of Hilscher's arrives at WAJ to join her for the walk to chemistry class. She is questioned by detectives and explains that on Monday mornings Hilscher's boyfriend would drop her off and go back to Radford University where he was a student. She tells police that the boyfriend is an avid gun user and practices using the gun. This leads the police to seek him as a "person of interest" and potential suspect.
- 7:40 a.m.** VTPD Chief Flinchum is notified by phone of the WAJ shootings.
- 7:51 a.m.** Chief Flinchum contacts the Blacksburg Police Department (BPD) and requests a BPD evidence technician and BPD detective to assist with the investigation.
- 7:57 a.m.** Chief Flinchum notifies the Virginia Tech Office of the Executive Vice President of the shootings. This triggers a meeting of the university's Policy Group.
- 8:00 a.m.** Classes begin. Chief Flinchum arrives at WAJ and finds VTPD and BPD detectives on the scene and the investigation underway. A local special agent of the state police has been contacted and is responding to the scene.
- 8:10–9:25 a.m.** Chief Flinchum provides updated information via phone to the Virginia Tech Policy Group regarding progress made in

the investigation. He informs them of a possible suspect, who is probably off campus.

- 8:11 a.m.** BPD Chief Kim Crannis arrives on scene.
- 8:13 a.m.** Chief Flinchum requests additional VTPD and BPD officers to assist with securing WAJ entrances and with the investigation.
- 8:15 a.m.** Chief Flinchum requests the VTPD Emergency Response Team (ERT) to respond to the scene and then to stage in Blacksburg in the event an arrest is needed or a search warrant is to be executed.
- 8:16–9:24 a.m.** Officers search for Hilscher's boyfriend. His vehicle is not found in campus parking lots, and officers become more confident that he has left the campus. VTPD and BPD officers are sent to his home; he is not found. A BOLO (be on the lookout) report is issued to BPD and the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office for his vehicle. Meanwhile, officers continue canvassing WAJ for possible witnesses. VTPD, BPD, and the Virginia State Police (VSP) continue processing the room 4040 crime scene and gathering evidence. Investigators secure identification of the victims.
- 8:19 a.m.** Chief Crannis requests BPD ERT to respond for the same reason as the VTPD ERT.
- 8:20 a.m.** A person fitting Cho's description is seen near the Duck Pond on campus.
- 8:25 a.m.** The Virginia Tech Policy Group meets to plan on how to notify students of the homicides.
- 8:52 a.m.** Blacksburg public schools lock their outer doors upon hearing of the incident at WAJ from their security chief, who had heard of the incident on police radio.
- 9:00 a.m.** The Policy Group is briefed on the latest events in the ongoing dormitory homicide investigation by the VTPD.

- 9:01 a.m.** Cho mails a package from the Blacksburg post office to NBC News in New York that contains pictures of himself holding weapons, an 1,800-word rambling diatribe, and video clips in which he expresses rage, resentment, and a desire to get even with oppressors. He alludes to a coming massacre. Cho prepared this material in the previous weeks. The videos are a performance of the enclosed writings. Cho also mails a letter to the English Department attacking Professor Carl Bean, with whom he previously argued.
- 9:05 a.m.** Classes begin for the second period in Norris Hall.
- 9:15 a.m.** Both police ERTs are staged at the BPD in anticipation of executing search warrants or making an arrest.
- 9:15–9:30 a.m.** Cho is seen outside and then inside Norris Hall, an engineering building. He chains the doors shut on the three main entrances from the inside. No one reports seeing him do this.
- 9:24 a.m.** A Montgomery County, Virginia deputy sheriff initiates a traffic stop of Hilscher's boyfriend off campus in his pickup truck. Detectives are sent to assist with the questioning.
- 9:25 a.m.** A VTPD police captain joins the Virginia Tech Policy Group as police liaison and provides updates as information becomes available.
- 9:26 a.m.** Virginia Tech administration sends e-mail to campus staff, faculty, and students informing them of the dormitory shooting.
- 9:31–9:48 a.m.** A VSP trooper arrives at the traffic stop of the boyfriend and helps question him. A gunpowder residue field test is performed on him and the result is negative.

About 9:40 a.m.¹ until about 9:51 a.m. Cho begins shooting in room 206 in Norris Hall, where a graduate engineering class in Advanced Hydrology is underway. Cho kills Professor G. V. Loganathan and other students in the class, killing 9 and wounding 3 of the 13 students.

Cho goes across the hall from room 206 and enters room 207, an Elementary German class. He shoots teacher Christopher James Bishop, then students near the front of the classroom and starts down the aisle shooting others. Cho leaves the classroom to go back into the hall.

Students in room 205, attending Haiyan Cheng's class on Issues in Scientific Computing, hear Cho's gunshots. (Cheng was a graduate assistant substituting for the professor that day.) The students barricade the door and prevent Cho's entry despite his firing at them through the door.

Meanwhile, in room 211 Madame Jocelyne Couture-Nowak is teaching French. She and her class hear the shots, and she asks student Colin Goddard to call 9-1-1. A student tells the teacher to put the desk in front of the door, which is done but it is nudged open by Cho. Cho walks down the rows of desks shooting people. Goddard is shot in the leg. Student Emily Haas picks up the cell phone Goddard dropped. She begs the police to hurry. Cho hears Haas and shoots her, grazing her twice in the head. She falls and plays dead, though keeping the phone cradled under her head and the line open. Cho says nothing on entering the room or during the shooting. (Three students who pretend to be dead survive.)

9:41 a.m. A BPD dispatcher receives a call regarding the shooting in Norris Hall. The

¹The panel estimates that the shooting began at this time based on the time it took for the students and faculty in the room next door to recognize that the sounds being heard were gunshots, and then make the call to 9-1-1.

dispatcher initially has difficulty understanding the location of the shooting. Once identified as being on campus, the call is transferred to VTPD.

9:42 a.m. The first 9-1-1 call reporting shots fired reaches the VTPD. A message is sent to all county EMS units to staff and respond.

9:45 a.m. The first police officers arrive at Norris Hall, a three-minute response time from their receipt of the call. Hearing shots, they pause briefly to check whether they are being fired upon, then rush to one entrance, then another, and then a third but find all three chained shut. Attempts to shoot open the locks fail.

About 9:45 a.m. The police inform the administration that there has been another shooting. University President Steger hears sounds like gunshots, and sees police running toward Norris Hall.

Back in room 207, the German class, two uninjured students and two injured students go to the door and hold it shut with their feet and hands, keeping their bodies away. Within 2 minutes, Cho returns. He beats on the door and opens it an inch and fires shots around the door handle, then gives up trying to get in.

Cho returns to room 211, the French class, and goes up one aisle and down another, shooting people again. Cho shoots Goddard again twice more.

A janitor sees Cho in the hall on the second floor loading his gun; he flees downstairs.

Cho tries to enter room 204 where engineering professor Liviu Librescu is teaching Mechanics. Librescu braces his body against the door yelling for students to head for the window. He is shot through the door. Students push out screens and jump or drop to grass or bushes below the window. Ten students escape this way. The next two students trying to escape are shot. Cho

returns again to room 206 and shoots more students.

9:50 a.m. Using a shotgun, police shoot open the ordinary key lock of a fourth entrance to Norris Hall that goes to a machine shop and that could not be chained. The police hear gunshots as they enter the building. They immediately follow the sounds to the second floor.

Triage and rescue of victims begin.

A second e-mail is sent by the administration to all Virginia Tech e-mail addresses announcing that “A gunman is loose on campus. Stay in buildings until further notice. Stay away from all windows.” Four loudspeakers out of doors on poles broadcast a similar message.

Virginia Tech and Blacksburg police ERTs arrive at Norris Hall, including one paramedic with each team.

9:51 a.m. Cho shoots himself in the head just as police reach the second floor. Investigators believe that the police shotgun blast alerted Cho to the arrival of the police. Cho’s shooting spree in Norris Hall lasted about 11 minutes. He fired 174 rounds, and killed 30 people in Norris Hall plus himself, and wounded 17.

While the shootings at Norris Hall were occurring, police were taking the following actions in connection with the shootings at WAJ:

- Officers canvass WAJ for possible witnesses.
- VTPD, BPD, and VSP process the room 4040 crime scene and gather evidence.
- Officers search interior and exterior waste containers and surrounding areas near WAJ for evidence.
- Officers canvass rescue squad personnel for additional evidence or information.

- Police officials assign the additional responding law enforcement personnel.

At Norris Hall, the first team of officers begins—

- Securing the second floor.
- Triaging the 48 gunshot victims and aiding survivors in multiple classrooms.
- Coordinating rescue efforts to remove survivors from Norris Hall.
- Gathering preliminary suspect or gunman descriptions.
- Determining if additional gunmen exist.

9:52 a.m. The police clear the second floor of Norris Hall. Two tactical medics attached to the ERTs, one medic from Virginia Tech Rescue and one from Blacksburg Rescue, are allowed to enter to start their initial triage.

9:53 a.m. The 9:42 a.m. request for all EMS units is repeated.

10:08 a.m. A deceased male student is discovered by police team and suspected to be the gunman:

- No identification is found on the body.
- He appears to have a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.
- He is found among his victims in classroom 211, the French class.
- Two weapons are found near the body.

10:17 a.m. A third e-mail from Virginia Tech administration cancels classes and advises people to stay where they are.

10:51 a.m. All patients from Norris Hall have been transported to a hospital or moved to a minor treatment unit.

10:52 a.m. A fourth e-mail from Virginia Tech administration warns of “a multiple shooting with multiple victims in Norris

Hall,” saying the shooter has been arrested and that police are hunting for a possible second shooter.

10:57 a.m. A report of shots fired at the tennis courts near Cassell Coliseum proves false.

12:42 p.m. University President Charles Steger announces that police are releasing people from buildings and that counseling centers are being established.

1:35 p.m. A report of a possible gunshot near Duck Pond proves to be another false alarm.

4:01 p.m. President George W. Bush speaks to the Nation from the White House regarding the shooting.

5:00 p.m. The first deceased victim is transported to the medical examiner’s office.

8:45 p.m. The last deceased victim is transported to the medical examiner’s office.

Evening A search warrant is served for the residence of the first victim’s boyfriend. Investigators continue investigating whether he is linked to the first crime; the two crimes are not yet connected for certain.

POST-INCIDENT

April 17, 2007

9:15 a.m. VTPD releases the name of the shooter as Cho Seung Hui and confirms 33 fatalities between the two incidents.

9:30 a.m. VT announces classes will be cancelled “for the remainder of the week to allow students the time they need to grieve and seek assistance as needed.”

11:00 a.m. A family assistance center is established at The Inn at Virginia Tech.

2:00 p.m. A convocation ceremony is held for the university community at the Cassell Coliseum. Speakers include President

George W. Bush, Virginia Governor Tim Kaine (who had returned from Japan), Virginia Tech President Charles Steger, Virginia Tech Vice President for Student Affairs Zenobia L. Hikes, local religious leaders (representing the Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian communities), Provost Dr. Mark G. McNamee, Dean of Students Tom Brown, Counselor Dr. Christopher Flynn, and poet and Professor Nikki Giovanni.

8:00 p.m. A candlelight vigil is held on the Virginia Tech drill field.

11:30 p.m. The first autopsy is completed.

April 18, 2007

8:25 a.m. A SWAT team enters Burruss Hall, a campus building next to Norris Hall, responding to a “suspicious event”; this proved to be a false alarm.

4:37 p.m. Local police announce that NBC News in New York received by mail this day a package containing images of Cho holding weapons, his writings, and his video recordings. NBC immediately submitted this information to the FBI. A fragment of the video and pictures are widely broadcast.

April 19, 2007

VT announces that all students who were killed will be granted posthumous degrees in the fields in which they were studying. (The degrees are subsequently awarded to the families at the regular commencement exercises.)

Virginia Governor Kaine selects an independent Virginia Tech Review Panel to detail the April 16 shootings.

Autopsies on all victims are completed by the medical examiner. The autopsy of Cho found no gross brain function abnormalities

and no toxic substances, drugs, or alcohol that could explain the rampage.

April 20, 2007

Governor Kaine declares a statewide day of mourning.