

The **Killer**

at Thurston High

1x60



International

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Kip Kinkel, a fifteen-year-old boy from a solid middle-class family, made headlines in 1998 when he was accused of murdering his mother and father and then opening fire on his fellow students at an Oregon high school, killing two and injuring twenty-four others. What went wrong with Kip Kinkel?

FRONTLINE goes behind the headlines of the tragic case to explore how a boy some called “a shy and likable teenager” became what the police would later deem “a cold-hearted killer.” The film’s producers spent nine months in production conducting interviews with friends and family—many of whom have never before spoken publicly.

School officials tell of an average adolescent who nobody would have identified as a high risk kid. Kip Kinkel’s friends talk of someone who seemed just like them. Victims of the school shootings remember a troubled teen, and Kip’s older sister, Kristin Kinkel, the only surviving member of his immediate family, tells of a kind and sensitive brother who in spite of this unexpected violence, is still her “little brother.”

Prosecutors on this case allege that on May 20, 1998, after being expelled from Thurston High School for bringing a stolen .32 caliber pistol to class, Kinkel went home where he shot his father in the head, and then waited for his mother to return home from her job as a high school teacher in a neighboring community. Before pulling the trigger, Kinkel reportedly said, “I love you, Mom.”

Kinkel spent that night in the house and allegedly rigged it with explosives. He drove to school the next morning with three guns hidden under his trench coat and a hunting knife taped to his leg. Using a semi-automatic rifle, a 9mm Glock pistol, and a .22 caliber semi-automatic pistol, Kinkel opened fired as students gathered in the cafeteria. He emptied a fifty-round clip into the crowd before being wrestled to the ground by five classmates—to whom he pleaded, “just kill me, just kill me.”

FRONTLINE

“The Killer at Thurston High” is co-produced by Michael Kirk, Karen O’Connor and Miri Navasky. New Yorker writer Peter Boyer is the correspondent. Kirk and Boyer are among the nation’s top investigative journalists, whose previous collaborations for FRONTLINE include: “Once Upon a Time in Arkansas,” the recipient of a Writer’s Guild of America award; the Emmy Award-winning “The Navy Blues”; and “Waco: The Inside Story,” which was awarded the prestigious George Foster Peabody Award.

Cover Photo Credit: Courtesy Lane County Jail



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