

Amish remember gunman as good neighbor, family man

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BART, Pa. (RNS)—It's difficult for many to imagine that the man who opened fire in a one-room Amish schoolhouse Oct. 2 is the same man who took his sons to soccer practice and his daughter shopping.

Marie Roberts, the wife of gunman [Charles Carl Roberts IV](#), said it wasn't the same man.

"The man that did this today was not the Charlie I've been married to for almost 10 years," Marie Roberts said in a statement read to the media by a family friend. "My husband was loving, supportive and thoughtful—all the things you'd always want and more."

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State Police Commissioner Jeffrey Miller said the rambling letters Roberts left for his children and his wife at their home just a mile or two from the schoolhouse show a side of him unknown to his family or friends.

In the days before [the shooting](#), Miller said, Roberts became angry with his life, angry with God. Roberts apparently picked the [Amish](#) school because he wanted to molest and kill young girls as a way of “acting out in revenge for something that happened 20 years ago,” Miller said.

As police surrounded the school house, Roberts called his wife and told her he had been tormented by dreams of two relatives he claimed he molested long ago.

“It’s very possible that he intended to victimize these children in many ways prior to executing them and killing himself,” Miller said. But Roberts “became disorganized when we arrived,” and shot himself in the head after shooting 10 school girls, five of them fatally.

At home after her husband’s call, Marie Roberts found rambling suicide

notes, Miller said.

Roberts wrote in one of his suicide notes that he had been dreaming about the incidents of molestation and thought he would act again, Miller said.

He also wrote that he continued to be troubled by the death of the couple's first daughter, Elise, who died about 20 minutes after she was born prematurely in 1997. She is buried not far from their home.

"He said he was angry with God for taking Elise," Miller said. "He said it had changed his life forever."

The revelations added more questions about the shooting rampage.

Authorities said Roberts backed a borrowed truck filled with the items he brought up to the West Nickel Mines Amish School. He entered the school with a gun and talked with the students, at times incoherently.

With the gun in his hand and a stun gun on his hip, Roberts separated the girls and the boys. He allowed the boys to leave, along with a female student, their teacher and three other women. He lined the remaining girls in front of the chalkboard before binding their feet with plastic ties.

Roberts had pieces of lumber with 10 eye-bolts inserted in them, which Miller theorized he planned to use to restrain the girls. The girls were never attached to the devices.

Authorities believe his plans were interrupted by the relatively quick response of police, summoned by the teacher from a nearby farm.

As the police were breaking into the barricaded schoolhouse, Miller said, Roberts shot all 10 girls, five of them fatally, before turning the gun on himself. Police found him face down with a gunshot wound to the head.

The Roberts family said the gunman wasn't a vengeful man. He was a mild-

mannered milk-tanker driver who lived in this tight-knit Amish community. Police said he had no prior record.

"He was never a problem. He was a family man," said Roberts' grandfather, speaking at the home of Roberts' parents. "We're shocked. It doesn't make any sense."

Overcome by emotion, Roberts' grandmother seemed to gaze into the distance looking for answers. Then she let go of her emotions when reality set in. "He was a good son and a good father," she said. "He did that. He killed kids."

Although Roberts was a hunter, Jim Brubaker, his cousin by marriage, said Roberts never used a gun for anything but shooting game. Brubaker also never saw Roberts angry.

Roberts was the picture of the consummate family man to those who watched him take his children to the bus stop every morning.

An Amish woman who did not want to identify herself said it's hard for her to reconcile the stories she's heard about what Roberts did with her fond memories of him. "He was a good man," she said, declining to say more.

A 23-year-old Amish man walked near Roberts' home in the hours after the shooting. He characterized Roberts as "very dependable."

Roberts picked up the milk at the man's dairy farm, as he had done routinely for several years. The last time he saw Roberts was about 11:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 1. "He was a terrific milk-tanker driver," the man said. "He was a very nice man," he added. "I never thought any shooting out of him."

Morgan Erb, a 15-year-old girl who baby-sat Roberts' kids, said he was a quiet man, someone who "stuck to himself."

"He never looked you in the eye when he talked to you," she said. "He seemed nice enough."

Carrie Cassidy and T.W. Burger write for The Patriot-News in Harrisburg, Pa.

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