

## Homeschool the Safe Alternative

from Howard Richman

[This article first appeared in Issue 67 (Summer 1999) of the *PA Homeschoolers* newsletter.]

The mass murder of twelve students and one teacher by two students in Littleton, Colorado, marks a new low for American public schools. In the weeks following the Littleton shooting, public school after public school had to cancel classes because of threats and fears. School officials are clearly worried about a repeat of last spring's spree of copycat murders.

In the wake of the Littleton shooting, pundits have blamed guns, the media, the school curriculum, the students' parents, and the peer group at Columbine high school. Reporters have been calling our offices, wondering whether Littleton and its ilk are one reason people homeschool. It seems possible that Littleton will shape public debate on education and cultural issues.

The two killers were members of a clique known as the "Trenchcoat Mafia"; they were an isolated clique, at war with the school's jocks. The jocks were also far from blameless they regularly taunted this out-group. School culture can often be one of continually competing cliques, almost a miniature Balkan state.

A look at the public schools over the past decade reveals a tide of violence which has spread outward from the inner cities to rural and suburban schools. The photos of armed policemen using metal detector wands to check random students are chilling they remind you of a juvenile prison. This is where kids are supposed to learn? Perhaps the most powerful lesson that they will learn is of hate and suspicion.

And violence is not the only thing spreading through the school peer group - drugs entered the schools in the 1960's and have swept down year by year to ever younger grades. Then there have been trends toward increased promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, suicide, and cheating. The long-term trend has been toward an ever-sicker peer group culture.

Homeschooling is one of the healthy alternative trends in American society. Currently it is growing at about 15% per year. We wonder if there will be a huge jump this year as a result of the Littleton murders.

In the past most homeschoolers have homeschooled for a combination of the three reasons summarized by one of our bumper stickers, "Homeschool = Learning + Values + Family."

*Learning.* Every test score study has found that homeschoolers score average or above on standardized achievement tests, from 3rd grade, to 5th grade, to 8th grade, to college-entrance SAT's. And when homeschoolers go to college, they generally get excellent grades during their first semester (according to our survey of Pennsylvania Homeschoolers graduates). The educational success of homeschools shows that schools are not the only way to provide students with educational opportunities. When in need of advanced

courses, for example, homeschoolers often use excellent teachers available by video or the Internet or take a course at a community college.

*Values.* Homeschooled kids have been growing up sharing their parents' religious values. Homeschooling parents are generally more religious than the general population. A study in Oregon found that 73% of the homeschooling parents there attended church or synagogue at least once every week compared to 28% of the national population. Homeschooling parents promote wholesome values in their children.

*Family.* A University of Florida doctoral dissertation by Larry Shyers found what homeschooling parents already knew to be true our children play very well when they get together. They are cooperative and friendly. Shyers theorized that homeschooled children learn how to behave toward others by modeling their parents, not their peers. Since they spend so much time with their families they learn from their families. Being with friends is a special treat, not a daily dread.

*Safety.* And now, with the increase in school violence we have a new bumper sticker, "Homeschool: The Safe Alternative." We've been getting phone calls these past weeks from many new families seriously looking into homeschooling because their kids are refusing to go to school out of fear, or the parents are worried about threats made by bullies. And we've also been hearing some homeschooled kids saying how grateful they feel to be educated in a safe environment right at home.