

# Guys Don't Get Mad, They Get Even

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## Terry Frisbie

I can't tell you exactly why the April 20, 1999 massacre at Columbine High School had such a huge impact on my life. Whatever the reason, I had an obsession with the media reporting about it for several months. I can tell you that when I heard Fr. Richard Rohr's comment, "We did this to them," it made total sense to me. What I heard was that men, as elders, were not there for Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. I had a strong feeling that this tragedy was completely preventable. I further identified that I was ill equipped to be any kind of elder to those boys, or to any others for that matter. It was 7 or 8 months later that I registered for the Men's Rites of Passage, not out of a conscious connection with Columbine, but, in hindsight, I have come to believe it disturbed my subconscious enough that the MROP became the logical next step on my spiritual journey.

This all started for me on August 1, 1966, when Charles Whitman set out to kill everyone he could from his sniper's perch atop the University of Texas tower that ended with 16 killed and 30 wounded. Then in 1970, during my senior year, a freshman boy carried a hunting rifle into my high school office and killed the principal who had expelled his girlfriend for being pregnant. Years later, incidents of young men killing innocent people started to occur again, increasing in horrific scale and terrible scope, including Virginia Tech (32 killed), Aurora (12 killed, 70 wounded) and now we have all experienced Sandy Hook Elementary (27 killed, including 20 children, ages 6 and 7). At the time it seemed that the nation was in the mood to stop the slaughter but, just one year later, statistics show that 23 mass shootings have left 100 dead across 17 states since Sandy Hook.

We are all asking, "What is going on?" Is it guns? Guns certainly played some role here. Is it untreated mental illness? Yes, the gunmen all seem to have varying mental illnesses, yet the overwhelming majority of mentally ill people do not hurt other people and the majority of violence is performed by people who would test as fully rational. And yes, of course, our violent media culture has to have some cognitive impact, but a vast majority of game players and media consumers will never commit a violent act. These are the focus of much of the discussion in the news and politics following these terrible events, but an often-unmentioned factor is the utter maleness of these mass murderers: 83 of the 85 perpetrators in this country in the last 30 years have been men.

How does masculinity fit into this? "From an early age boys learn that violence is not only an acceptable form for resolving conflict but one that is admired. Violence is not an inherently male characteristic; most boys don't carry weapons and almost all boys do not kill. Boys learn it.

They learn it from their fathers, from a media that glorifies it, from sports heroes who commit felonies and get big contracts, from a culture saturated in images of heroic and redemptive violence. They learn it from each other. Guys don't get mad, they get even." Has the need for men to act as elders ever been greater?

I believe that the masculinity factor of this modern-day mass shooting problem can be influenced by *Illuman's work to recover traditional patterns of male initiation, affirm a masculine path to healing, reveal the true and false self, and honor the way of descent. By seeking a life-changing spirituality that is fed by the wisdom traditions of forgiveness and radical inclusion, and with a primary focus on inner work, we can make a difference in the world.* The world's desperate need for elders was the message I heard back in the aftermath of Columbine and it continues to motivate me to participate in the efforts of *Illuman: Men transforming men through a power greater than ourselves.*

One of the basic tenets of our men's work is: **the pain you don't transform you will transmit.** Considering the extent of the father wound and the treacherous path of navigating through male adolescence, or "guyland" (see *Guyland* by Michael Kimmel), there is much of the masculine that needs healing. Our earliest ancestors knew that men need to be taught, and taught carefully. Most cultures practiced rites of initiation where the men ushered boys into manhood. A healthy masculinity would reveal boys and men being taught to be authoritative and generative, and acknowledged as elders by others. I can foresee the day when a boy like Adam Lanza, in his pain, is swept up by a community of elders that provides him with real connections with the masculine that he can trust. Elders that provide him with real-life examples of alternatives to violence, proving that love is more powerful than hate, life is more potent than death, and forgiveness is sweeter than getting even.

Truth be told, the young men perpetrating mass murder are just the ugly tip of a problem of greater breadth and depth. In the book *Raising Cain*, the authors offer these statistics:

- 95% of juvenile homicides are by boys
- 9 out of 10 alcohol and drug law violations are by boys
- suicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death in mid- to late-teenaged boys and occurs 7 times more often than girls
- the suicide rate for boys has more than tripled since 1950
- a 2006 U.S. prison census showed the number of incarcerated men (boys, really, although chronologically the age to be called men) to be 2.4 million compared to 105,000 women

I ask again: Has the need for men to act as elders ever been greater?

Based on the 15 years since Columbine, the outlook would predict more men resorting to mass shootings at increased frequency with many more being killed and injured. The grim experience of this moment is the reality we face. But I do believe in miracles. I have my own personal experience of recovery and I continue to see other men and women, who suffer from seemingly hopeless states of mind and body or who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, recover if they have the capacity to be honest and are willing to have a spiritual experience. The numbers of those recovered and healed are in the millions.

I submit that Illuman and the MALEs program, and others like them, can be part of a larger healing, what Joanna Macy calls *The Great Turning*. I hope we can collaborate with other like-minded groups to establish a movement that results in more and more men acting as authoritative and generative elders, actively participating in the healing and maturing masculinity of boys and men. Let us dream about future generations of men who will restore the five touchstones of Illuman: *Centering, Gathering, Releasing, Connecting and Serving* — helping to build a world that celebrates the beauty of all beings.

\* *Excerpts from Guyland by Michael Kimmel*