

*A Mother's Reckoning – Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy* by Sue Klebold

Discussion Questions

1. In the introduction, Andrew Soloman acknowledges that although the Klebolds deplored what their son, Dylan, had done, they were unflagging in their love for him. A theme that was evident throughout the book. Are you able to look at Dylan as someone who was loveable?
2. Due to Dylan's actions, the Klebolds were unable to undergo normal grieving practices, as they had to remain cut off from their community by remaining in hiding. Sue noted that it was a time of confusion, denial, guilt, and grief. Journaling helped her to process the events and facts and her own phases of evolution. Do you write in a diary, journal or even scraps of paper to work through a difficult time?
3. In the aftermath of Columbine, the world claimed Dylan was a monster. People needed to believe they would recognize evil in their midst. Surely, it couldn't happen to an ordinary middle-class family that lived on your street, could it?
4. The "basement tapes" that Eric and Dylan had made proved beyond a doubt that the rampage was planned for a long time in advance. Psychologists who reviewed the tapes noted that Eric's sadism was fueled by Dylan's slow-burning rage. A pattern of suicidal remarks filled the tapes. At the end, Dylan said, "I didn't like life too much." Why didn't Dylan reach out for help?
5. In 2001, Sue Klebold was diagnosed with breast cancer. While she wasn't entirely surprised by the diagnosis since she continued to live with grief, guilt, and growing anxiety. Do you think that tragedy can manifest itself as a physical ailment?
6. The book was written sixteen years after the massacre at Columbine. How does hindsight shape the way in which the author considers various events throughout the memoir?
7. Due to Columbine, the Klebold's financial situation was greatly impacted by enormous legal bills. All in all, there were 36 lawsuits filed against the family. The media, as well as

the town, blamed the parents as for the actions of their son, Dylan. Do you think there is some truth in that?

8. In 2014, after 43 years of marriage, Sue and Tom decided to part ways. Sue writes, “We ended our marriage to save our friendship, and I believe we will always care for each other. I am grateful for that” (271). What do you think that statement means?
9. By 2006, Sue felt that she was beginning to emerge from the cycle of grief that had consumed her. She planned a panel discussion on murder-suicides at UC Boulder. However, she experienced intense panic attacks and was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She got through the presentation but realized afterwards that her anxiety is a brain disorder that she will live with and manage the rest of her life. How do you think that experience helped her to understand Dylan’s mental health needs as well?
10. In writing this book, Klebold offers readers insight and understanding in the hopes that other families will be able recognize if their own child is experiencing distress. In telling her story, she wants people to know her regret in not being able to see Dylan’s depression. Is she being self-serving in telling Dylan’s story from the point of a loving mother?
11. Although Klebold admits that Dylan did not do what he did because he was able to purchase guns, her take on the easy availability of firearms is that it is a danger when someone is most vulnerable. Do you feel that guns are too easily attainable today?
12. Klebold’s mission is to raise awareness about brain illness and violence and that we develop interventions that can help people before they turn to harm themselves or others. Her final statement in the book notes: “One thing is certain: when we can do a better job of helping people before their lives are in crisis, the world will become safer for all of us.”

Do you agree with the author that better mental health resources can without question help to prevent violence?

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