

Prosecutors want 13-year-old tried as adult

## Florida middle school student held in fatal shooting of teacher

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Another shocked community is trying to come to grips with a fatal shooting carried out by a teenager at school, an event which has become an all too frequent feature of life in America. This time the shooting took place in Lake Worth, Florida, a community of working class and middle class families.

Funeral services were held May 30 for Barry Grunow, a Lake Worth Middle School teacher who was shot by a seventh grader on May 26. Grunow, 35, leaves behind his wife Pam and two young children.

Nathaniel Brazill, 13, left school on the last day of classes, having been sent home for throwing water balloons. According to police accounts, he went home, got a .25-caliber handgun that he had taken from the home of a family friend a few days earlier, and returned to school on his bicycle. When Barry Grunow would not let Brazill into his classroom to speak to two students, Brazill fired a single shot, hitting him in the face. The shooting was witnessed by students and teachers and was recorded on the school's security cameras.

Students and teachers at the middle school were initially bewildered by the shooting. Nathaniel Brazill was an honor student with perfect attendance. He played in the school band. He had apparently been selected as a peer counselor for the next school year, to help advise fellow classmates with problems. Although Brazill had shown off the weapon used in the shooting to two students three days earlier, the teenagers didn't take it seriously because they didn't think he was the kind of student who would carry out a violent act.

However, as is often the case in such incidents, when one begins to look beneath the surface of the lives of those involved, disturbing details emerge. Nathaniel

Brazill had a fascination with the military and weaponry. The Sunday following the shooting police investigators removed the teenager's personal computer from the family home. They also removed piles of handwritten notes and military-related web page printouts.

According to Brazill's mother, Polly Powell, her son wanted to pursue a career in law enforcement or the military, and was particularly interested in becoming a Secret Service agent. He also liked to play simulated fighter pilot games.

Although there is no direct evidence of abuse in the family, police have reported that there were 17 domestic incident reports in the last six years, mostly concerning arguments between Polly Powell and her husband, Marshall Powell, and her previous husband, Wainford Whitefield.

Polly Powell reported to police that the day of the shooting began as it often did. She left home before Nathaniel got up for school to travel to her job as assistant food services director of a Lake Worth retirement home. She was often required to leave by 6:30 a.m. She called him later to see that he was getting ready for school.

Like many of the parents whose children have been involved in school shootings, Nathaniel Brazill's parents were as shocked as the community by the actions of their child. "I was just numb," Polly Powell commented. "It's too shocking to even imagine. The thought of your child, who you know you raised the best you can, has taken somebody's life."

But parents don't raise their children in a vacuum. Children in America grow up in a society that is economically and socially polarized, and glorifies the

private accumulation of vast fortunes at the expense of the majority of the population. The real violence takes place not on television and in video games, but in daily life—police shootings, state-sponsored executions, the prosecution of children as adults, the incarceration of 2 million in the nation's prisons and jails. The Clinton administration, which “problem-solves” around the world by dropping bombs, also set an example for the young Brazill.

In the wake of the shooting, teachers in the area expressed their frustration. One commented, “It's disconcerting, to say the least.... I mean, we didn't get into this profession to have to wrestle weapons away from people or dodge bullets. All we want to do is teach.” Teachers expressed the fear that students might respond violently to news that they wouldn't graduate, or not be promoted. It is a chilling commentary on society that teachers, the majority of whom enter the teaching profession out a desire to educate children, now fear that one of these children might snap and do them bodily harm.

The response of the authorities in this latest incident has been typical, turning a blind eye to the underlying social malaise that produces almost weekly eruptions of deadly violence. An investigation of the reasons why a seemingly well-adjusted teenager would turn homicidal, or any notion of his rehabilitation, are the farthest things from their minds.

Nathaniel Brazill has been charged with first-degree murder for the shooting death of Grunow, and is currently being held at the juvenile detention center in West Palm Beach. State Attorney Barry Krischer is asking that he be tried as an adult. A grand jury convening June 13 will decide whether to bring adult charges. If convicted as an adult the teenager would face life in prison without parole.

In a case in February 1999, prosecutor Krischer, in the name of “zero-tolerance” against school violence, pursued the prosecution of a 15-year-old mentally impaired Palm Beach County eighth-grader with an IQ of 58. The boy was charged with stealing \$2 from a classmate's pocket for lunch money. He spent seven weeks—including the first Christmas since the death of his mother—in jail, much of that time in an adult facility. It was only after the national spotlight was cast on the case with a story by the CBS newsmagazine “60 Minutes” that the prosecutor dropped the charges. But

600 other juveniles, including some as young as 13 years old, are presently imprisoned alongside adults in Florida.



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