

Columbine victim inspires Central stud

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By Eddie Jimenez / The Fresno Bee

Rachel Scott, the first student killed in the Columbine High School shooting, knew she would die at a young age and left behind a message that people should be kind to each other.

"Rachel's Challenge," a school program based on her acts of kindness and compassion -- and on her thoughts -- was presented at Central High School in Fresno on Tuesday when her father, Darrell Scott, told his daughter's story to students at the Central High School.

Her premonition of an early death was revealed in her writings, her father said. About 11 months before she died, she wrote, "This will be my last year, Lord. I've gotten what I can. Thank you." She died in April 1999, when two students killed themselves and others.

In her brief life, she made a commitment to urge students to treat one another with respect. "People will not respect you if you do not respect them," she wrote. Scott recounted a story about how his daughter came to the defense of a mentally and physically disabled student who was being harassed.

Rachel was furious and came between the student and his two tormentors, telling the two to take her on in a fight.

The disabled boy told Scott after Rachel's death that knowing someone like Rachel cared enough to stand up for him meant a lot. "She was a real person," Scott said.

Scott said the two Columbine shooters made choices "that led them down a dark path." He challenged the students to surround themselves with positive influences.

Scott also will make a presentation today at Rio Vista Middle School in northwest Fresno.

Tuesday's events included a training session to establish a "Rachel's Challenge" club at Central High, said Superintendent Powell. "It's not just 'Let's hit them with an assembly and hope it sticks,'" Powell said. "The training is about the school."

He said his office has funds to establish a "Rachel's Challenge" program in every middle and high school in the county. "Sponsorships and other funding would bring the program to all of the county's 325 schools," Powell said.

Scott's presentation was inspiring to Central High senior Ashlie Day, 18.

"I see kids ... by themselves eating lunch," Day said. "I never really took the time to say anything to them."