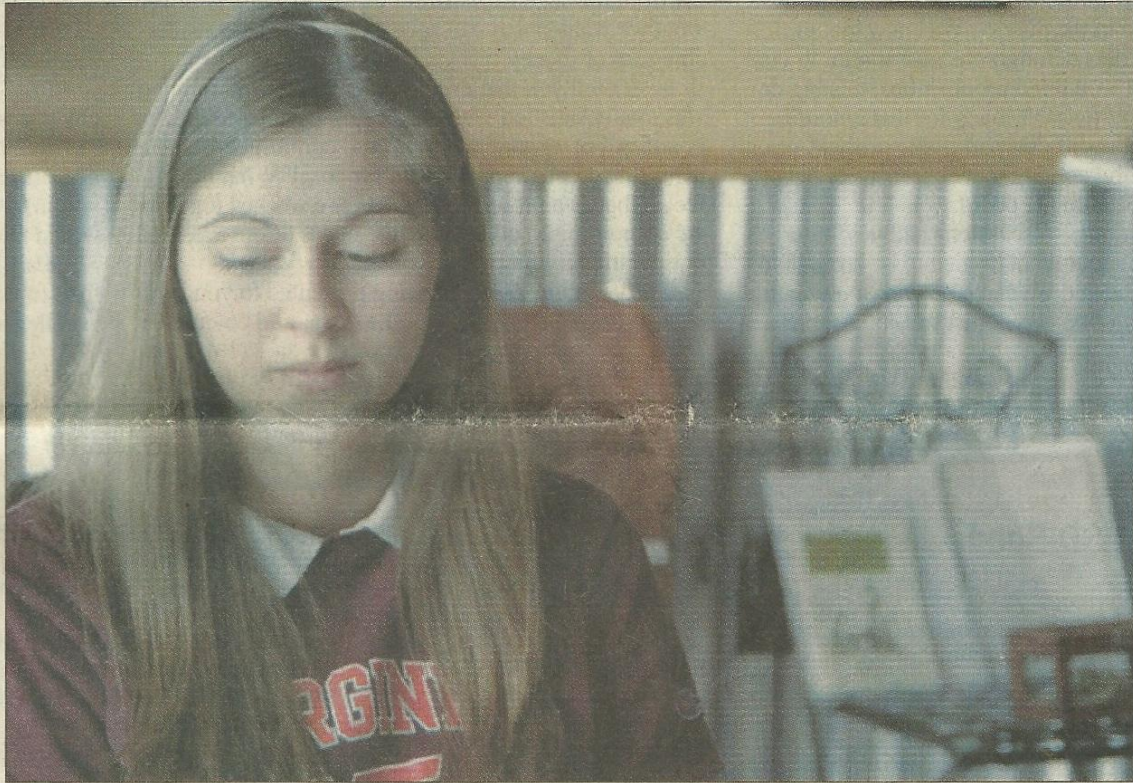


'It was just absolutely horrifying'



Rockwall County News/EMILY BERMAN

Rockwall's **Afton Cappello** experienced the national tragedy of the Virginia Tech mass shootings last week from much too close but she said she is thankful for the friends back home who called to offer support.

Rockwall student experiences Virginia Tech tragedy

By EMILY BERMAN
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When a tragic world event occurs, its impact usually always hits close to home. The Virginia Tech massacre was no exception.

Afton Cappello, a freshman studying psychology at Virginia Tech, is from Rockwall. Her main message after the horrific event is a thankful one to her community for all of their support. She also wanted the community to know that she was very satisfied with the way her school handled things and she plans to continue to carry out the rest of her college career there with Hokie pride.

Before moving to Texas, Cappello's family lived in Blacksburg, Va. She went back to visit Virginia Tech when she was considering schools and she said she real-

ly loved the campus so she decided to attend undergraduate school there.

"It's just a beautiful campus, a very big campus – about 26,000 students," Cappello said. "It's a really nice, small, quiet town ... a lot of very close-knit people."

On the morning the shootings took place, Cappello was in her dorm on campus – Slusher Wing – across the drill field from where Norris Hall is – the 'second site of the shootings.

"I woke up and there were sirens outside," she said. "We thought it might be just another bomb threat because we had bomb threats last week."

Cappello's roommate was getting ready to go to class and Cappello was just getting ready for the day because her classes were a little later in the day.

"We got an e-mail saying there had

been a shooting," she said. "They just said, 'If you see anything, let us know.'"

After Cappello's roommate left, she checked her email again and this time she was informed there was a gunman on the loose and everyone needed to go back to their dorms.

Cappello and her dorm friends continued to watch T.V. and remain in the dorm. At approximately 9:50 a.m., they got another email that said someone was loose in Norris Hall and they were killing students.

"It was just absolutely horrifying," Cappello said. "I never left the room that day. I just stayed with my hall mates in a room. We weren't really allowed to leave. We contacted our families and everybody was just calling.

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Tragedy

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"I had so many phone calls from people from Rockwall ... people that I barely knew were calling to check on me. It was really very nice."

Cappello didn't even think about escaping her dorm to try to get away from it all. She wanted to stay put and just talk to her family on the phone. She said she wasn't afraid of the gunman coming to her dorm because outside her window, there were police everywhere.

"I felt safe," she said. "I knew where he was and it's across the drill field and I don't know how he would get around them so I was just more worried about the people [who were getting hurt]. I didn't know if it was somebody that I knew ... it was just scary."

Two girls who lived downstairs from Cappello where shot and killed that day – Rema Samaha and Erin Peterson – both freshman girls who were trapped in Norris Room 211, Intermediate French. They were also both from the same high school Cho attended. Nine others were killed in this room and it is also where Cho committed suicide.

"I wasn't really close with either of them but I did know Rema through some of my hall mates who had classes with her so I had seen her in the laundry [room], we had said hello," Cappello said. "It's just crazy that it was two people from the floor below me that I see everyday. They were killed so that was very tough for my dorm because we're all pretty close.

to each other and it's a lot easier for us to talk about it because we were all there experiencing it together," she said. "I'm kind of anxious to get back and have some closure with the campus for the rest of the year."

Cappello said the overall sentiment on campus has been hectic. From what she's heard, the media has been trying to spin stories and put a negative perspective on how the school handled everything.

"A lot of my friends have said people have come up to them and trying to get them to bad-talk the school or say that they're angry and everyone's feeling a little bit threatened I guess by the things that they're saying," she said. "Everyone is just uniting actually and it's easier because there are so many students there that experienced it together that they're just bonding more."

Cappello said she received an email from the school notifying students that returning for the remainder of the semester is optional. Students can either keep the grades they currently have or finish out the semester. Cappello said she going to try to finish it.

"I want to go back and see my friends and be with them and get some stuff done," she said.

Cappello isn't afraid to go back. On the contrary, she said she feels it's one of the safest places to be right now with all the police still on campus and everyone being very cautious.

She said she works at Raft, a crisis hotline for the community in Blacksburg, which is the first place Cho was evaluated. Cappello's supervisor has asked that she picks up more shifts when she gets back

Cappello left Monday night after the administration and security had cleared everything. She went to stay with a friend who lives in a nearby town and Cappello's father got her a flight out Tuesday morning. She said her family was relieved when she came home. They were thankful she's and her close friends are OK.

"We spent a lot of time together when I came home," she said. "It makes you really appreciate your family when things like this happen."

Cappello stayed in Rockwall with her family until Sunday, April 22 when she flew back to school.

"It's good to get back with my friends because we've been talking

and to be there to talk to the students. she said she feels that will be her part in trying to help the campus.

"I just want to thank the Rockwall community for everything. The e-mails the calls, the cards that I've gotten," she said. "Just them praying for the school, I really appreciate them and I hope they continue to pray for the families and the well being of Virginia Tech.

"I want them to know that I'm not angry with the school. I love the school and I know that they did everything they could to protect us and I'm going to be going back next year. It's not going to change my decision about being there."