



## MINUTE FOR MISSION

May 1, 2007

### White Balloons in Blacksburg, Virginia



*A single white balloon, one for each of the victims, was released on the Virginia Tech campus.*

It used to be that no one knew where Blacksburg was, and when we bought our house here we realized why. It is a really small place—it takes five minutes to drive anywhere. Now Blacksburg is famous.

These are a few of my thoughts about the past week. It started with the slowly growing shock of how many were killed at Virginia Tech. It was snowing Monday morning the day Blacksburg became the center of the world. Three years ago we were also in Thailand when the tsunami hit, and not far from Pakistan when the earthquake reduced so many poorly made buildings to rubble.

We have been so close to these disasters but so removed and spared from personal tragedy. Our son Tim could easily have gone to VT this fall; he could have been in the classrooms. Scott took classes there last semester. From our daughter Hilary's view the reality of what had happened started



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with the high school being under “lockdown” the day of the killings. In class they watched the news as it was being told Monday afternoon. The school bus taking them home also had the news on the radio. Then it was announced that all local schools were closed Tuesday, then Wednesday, then the whole week, as school spouses, siblings, and close friends were on the list of victims. The boys’ lacrosse team coach, who was a professor, was also one of the victims. His daughter is on Hilary’s team.

Before this week I had not realized the importance of color as a symbol. For the whole week, everywhere we went we saw the orange and maroon colors of the school—on cars, persons in the cars, lampposts. The lacrosse sticks are going to take on those colors next week.

On Monday April 23rd we stood with five thousand others on the Drill Field in the center of campus for the one-week remembrance service. The amplified bell was tolled at half-minute intervals, the first one with no balloon; but after that, at each toll, a white balloon was let go into the beautiful blue sky, 32 of them, one for each victim, in utter quietness. Then, hundreds of orange and maroon balloons went up into the sky. It really was a very fitting symbolic gesture. No opening words, no closing words. What could anyone say? Then slowly, everyone turned and walked quietly back to classes and offices, and on with life.

Scott and Melanie Smith  
PC(USA) Missionaries to India  
On Interpretation Assignment in Blacksburg, VA

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*For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or [Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org).*

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