



# Freedom in Forgiveness

## Amish School Shooting

### School Shooting in an Amish One-Room School

October 2nd, 2006 was a typical fall day. Normally quiet and peaceful in the rolling Amish farmlands of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania but that peace was suddenly shattered when the sound of gunfire was heard from inside an Amish school.

Charlie Roberts was a milk truck driver who serviced the local community, including the farms of some of the victims' families. Nine years earlier his wife Amy gave birth to their first child, a baby girl. However, the baby died after living only 20 minutes. Apparently, his daughter's death affected him greatly. He never forgave God for her death, and eventually planned to get revenge.



*West Nickel Mines Amish School*

On the morning of October 2nd Roberts said goodbye to two of his own children at the school bus stop, then drove to the West Nickel Mines Amish School. When he walked in the door, some of the children recognised him. That day the school had four adult visitors – the teacher's mother, her sister, and two sisters-in-law. When the young teacher saw his guns, she and her mother left the other adults with the children and ran to a nearby house for help. A call was made to 911.

Then he told the boys to leave. The boys huddled near an outhouse to pray. Roberts had the 10 girls lie down facing the blackboard and he tied their hands and feet, and he told the girls he was sorry for what he was about to do, but "I'm angry at God and I need to punish some Christian girls to get even with him."

When local police broke into the one-room Amish schoolhouse they found 10 Amish girls ages 6-13 had been shot by Charles Carl Roberts IV, who had then committed suicide. Five of the girls died and five survived.

In the midst of their grief over this shocking loss, the Amish community didn't cast blame, they didn't point fingers, they didn't hold a press conference with attorneys at their sides. Instead, they reached out with grace and compassion toward the killer's family.

The afternoon of the shooting an Amish grandfather of one of the girls who was killed expressed forgiveness toward the killer, Charles Roberts. That same day Amish neighbours visited the Roberts family to comfort them in their sorrow and pain. Later that week the Roberts family was invited to the funeral of one of the Amish girls who had been killed. And Amish mourners outnumbered the non-Amish at Charles Roberts' funeral.

After he cold-bloodedly shot 10 innocent Amish school girls, the Amish almost immediately forgave him and showed compassion toward his family. In a world at war and in a society that often points fingers and blames others, this reaction was unheard of. Many reporters and interested followers of the story asked, "How could they forgive such a terrible, unprovoked act of violence against innocent lives?"

The Amish culture closely follows the teachings of Jesus, who taught his followers to forgive one another, to place the needs of others before themselves, and to rest in the knowledge that God is still in control and can bring good out of any situation. Love and compassion toward others is to be life's theme. Vengeance and revenge is to be left to God. The words recorded in the Scriptures which is known as the Lord's Prayer states, "Forgive us our sins as we also forgive everyone who sins against us" and was very real to the Amish community.

Following the tragic event reporters from throughout the world invaded Lancaster County, PA to cover the story.

You can read the full story of the Amish school shooting here:

<https://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-school-shooting/>

In the hours, days and years following the shooting, an unexpected story developed.

***“Her son shot their daughters 10 years ago.  
Then, these Amish families embraced her as a friend.”***

“The simple, quiet rural life of Terri Roberts was shattered on Oct. 2, 2006, when her oldest son, Charles Carl Roberts IV, walked into a one-room Amish schoolhouse on a clear, unseasonably warm Monday morning. The 32-year-old husband and father of three young children ordered the boys and adults to leave, tied up 10 little girls between the ages of 6 and 13 and shot them, killing five and injuring the others, before killing himself.

Terri Roberts’s husband thought they’d have to move far away. He believed they would be ostracised in their community, blamed for not knowing the evil their child was capable of.



*Terri Roberts with the photo of her son*

The Amish families did not see the couple as an enemy, but rather, as parents who were grieving the loss of their child, too.

The world watched in amazement as, on the day of their son Charles funeral, nearly 30 Amish men and women, some the parents of the victims, came to the cemetery and formed a wall to block out media cameras. Parents, whose daughters had died at the hand of their son, approached the couple after the burial and offered condolences for their loss.

But the Amish did more than forgive the couple. They embraced them as part of their community. When Terri Roberts underwent treatment for Stage 4 breast cancer,

one of the girls who survived the massacre helped clean her home before she returned from the hospital. A large yellow bus arrived at her home around Christmas, and Amish children piled inside to sing her Christmas carols.

“The forgiveness is there; there’s no doubt they forgive,” Terri Roberts said.

**Colby Itkowitz wrote the story above for The Washington Post 1/10/2016.**

Is this forgiveness only relevant to the Amish community or is this something we should all consider? Were you aware that we now, here in Australia, have an i4give Day to celebrate each year?

Parents Daniel & Leila Abdallah have created i4give Day as a remembrance of their three children and a niece that were tragically lost on the 1st of February 2020. This is to also help others who have suffered in a similar way.

Please read their story <https://www.i4give.com/> and be inspired and encouraged

You can also read our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison’s speech at the launch of i4give day to be celebrated annually on the first of February.

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/speech-i4give-day-launch-sydney>

Why Forgive? is a book which contains real life stories of people who have suffered some unthinkable events in their lives but were somehow able to forgive the perpetrators and come to a more peaceful place in life.

[www.plough.com/en/topics/life/forgiveness/why-forgive](http://www.plough.com/en/topics/life/forgiveness/why-forgive)

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