



**Suzann Wilson:** "The only time I ever got real upset with the press was at the funeral" of her daughter.

Benny Baker, the minister, was at the hospital Tuesday night checking on the condition of Lynette Thetford, a Westside teacher who had been wounded. She is his son's mother-in-law. Although she was in intensive care, she was in stable condition and doctors were encouraged. But when Baker got in his truck to return to his church in Bono, he picked up a radio newscast from Chicago reporting "four students were dead, one teacher dead and another teacher not expected to live through the night." He did not note the call letters of the station.

"Now let's just say that that radio had been playing in intensive care," Baker said. "That that radio was being heard by an unconscious person, and it says that she's not supposed to live through the night." He said hearing wrong information the day of the shootings remains his most negative memory of the media's performance.

By Wednesday, even more reporters, satellite trucks and television crews were arriving. In many cases, television networks were sending teams from their evening news shows, their morning news shows, their magazine shows and their Sunday shows. Individuals who were interviewed complained that staffers from one show didn't seem to know who else was in town from the same network.

Outside the jail where Sadler held his regular briefings, where the suspects were detained and where their hearing was held, "it was a mob scene," *Sun* reporter Paul Holmes said. "It was one lane of traffic in and out of the road and finally, the Sheriff's Department had to make some effort to regulate that traffic. It became like a tent city. It seemed like every day, there were more trucks, more people, and more [microphone] stands. By the end of the week, they had little tent covers set up, to keep the sun off the reporters, I guess. I still can't grasp the enormity of it."

With so many reporters in town, it didn't take long for the "bad apples" to make their presence known.

Gretchen Woodard says she was hounded by two reporters who accosted her when she left her house, demanding to know if she was Mitchell Johnson's mother and refusing to leave when she told them she had nothing to say to them.

They hid in the yard through the night, she said, and she had to call the police at 1 a.m. and again at 3 a.m. to get them off her property. Neither the police nor Woodard knew what organization the pair worked for.

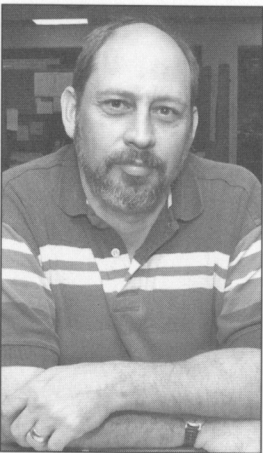
Mitchell Wright says he is convinced that photographers climbed his fence and tried to get into his yard one night while he was away. A television crew set up in the street across from his house, focusing a camera on his front door. "One of my neighbors told them if they didn't get their stuff out of the road, he was going to run over it," Wright said. "I think what most of them wanted was a picture of me and my boy together. That was the one picture they were really wanting, I think, and I wasn't going to let them have it."

After he granted the interviews to ABC and NBC about his wife's heroism, the CBS representatives in Jonesboro said that they, too, were entitled to an interview. "I said no ... and one young lady called me and said, 'You don't understand, my big boss is really going to be upset.' And I said, well surely, your big boss will understand that my little child needs me right now more than you do," Wright said.

By Thursday morning, so many complaint calls had come into Sheriff Haas' office that he took action. "We had reports of the media peeking through people's windows in neighborhoods, knocking on the door and as people open the door, walking into their living rooms with a news crew and starting to ask questions, telling them they're live on 'Action News' or ... what have you," Haas said.

"The straw that broke the camel's back was an incident involving a victim's family," Sadler said. "A mother was trying to feed her children at the breakfast table, and she looked up and there are one or two still cameras pressed up against the kitchen window. She screamed." The sheriff's office was called but "by the time [deputies] got out there, the photographers were gone. That's when the sheriff came out and read the riot act" to the media.

"We went out and talked to the press ... and explained to them what the consequences would be if they continued to misbehave," Haas said. The consequences: "They would be arrested for criminal trespassing and whatever various



**Paul Holmes, *Sun* reporter:** "It seemed like every day, there were more trucks, more people, and more [microphone] stands."

**8:00 PM** At a second formal briefing, Sadler confirms the names of the victims.

Emergency-room physician Beaton later would say of the briefings: "I felt like ... most of [the reporters] were courteous and most of them asked fairly intelligent questions. ... We had obviously some patient confidentiality we couldn't breach and we tried to give them information as detailed as possible without breaching that. ... I had a couple of interviews on the side but they for the most part stayed within the ground rules. They knew what questions I could answer ... and I thought from our standpoint, from the medical standpoint ... they did a fairly good job of getting things right."

**9:00 PM** The *Sun* offices are part local newspaper, part media headquarters and part news set, as editors and reporters put out the newspaper while fielding requests for workspace, help with facts and interviews. The newspaper's deadline, midnight, is approaching all too quickly.

**10:00 PM** KAIT's late-evening newscast airs, reporting that just minutes earlier Sadler had announced the death of teacher Shannon Wright.

**10:35 PM** ABC's "Nightline" airs from KAIT. "Nightline" producers have made a decision to feature the "first reporter on the scene" as part of the program — and to feature *Sun* assistant publisher Ed Troutt from the newspaper's newsroom. (Troutt and his brother Bob had been out of town when news of the killings first broke.)

On the air, ABC's Cokie Roberts makes no mention of the "first reporter," but does interview Troutt and two others — a paramedic and a minister. No one from KAIT is interviewed.

The decision infuriates KAIT Vice President and General Manager Clyde Anderson and News Director Harvey Cox — their own network is ignoring Huddleston and KAIT's role. Like the newspaper, the station's offices and available