

Thursday, March 26



Friday, March 27



Saturday, March 28



prayers being offered, calls and letters of sympathy, and plans for additional and expanded counseling programs. It's important to note that even on that first day, when it was easy and tempting to over-focus on the violent acts of perpetrators and their specific victims, the *Sun* expended large amounts of time and space reporting on what was going on in the overall community, as well as on the crime.

The community could see itself — not just the shooters and their targets — broadly reflected in the coverage, and that almost certainly led to its positive response to the newspaper's performance.

At the same time, the *Sun* did not back away from the grim details of the crime and its victims, or shield its readers from the horrors.

The Page One color photo is of a grieving girl in a bloody shirt being comforted in the arms of a teacher. There are two color photos inside of wounded students being rushed away on gurneys, and one — eight columns wide — of a dead student in a body bag being wheeled to an ambulance. There are other photos of grieving students crying on the shoulders of adults, badly shaken police officers with their heads in their hands, a deputy standing on the bloody sidewalk where the students were shot and fell, and close-ups of adults sobbing at a vigil for the wounded.

Those are the kinds of photos that sometimes anger readers as being intrusive and gratuitous. But our conclusion is that the citizens of Jonesboro were not offended by them because they were in the overall context of sympathetic and extensive coverage of the feelings of the shocked community, that larger group of "victims" that John Troutt had defined for his staff. Moreover, the 36-page newspaper (increased eight pages for the shooting story) also has three pages of other local news, three pages of national news, two pages of foreign news, a page of state news, five sports pages, two business/financial pages, a women's page, and the usual comics, entertainment and listings.

## March 26

The lead story and headline are about the two suspects and

the charges they may face. The story explains the complex legal process under way. A sidebar makes it clear that under Arkansas law the boys cannot be charged or tried as adults. They cannot face the death penalty. There also are stories quoting legislators urging changes in that law. But most of the other major stories in the newspaper are about the shock and agony of the community, the memorial services, the grief-counseling efforts, the messages of condolence from around the world, praise for the heroic teacher who died protecting a student, the white bows and ribbons of remembrance appearing everywhere, the flags flying at half-staff, the banks and other local businesses taking up collections for the victims' families, the waitresses and beauticians donating all of their tips.

Those are the bits of news that, in some other cities, might end up as single paragraphs in a long general story. But the *Sun* chose to report and write about each in detail and at length, to make each a separate story and display it prominently with a large headline. Again: The newspaper was reflecting the lives of its readers, reporting on what they were saying, feeling and doing as they tried to cope. Readers today would learn not just what the police were saying about the suspects and not just what the doctors were saying about the wounded, which is typical of second-day crime coverage, but what the community was saying about itself. It is a textbook example of the best kind of community journalism.

Troutt's first editorial on the tragedy appears today. It is about how the unthinkable had happened in Jonesboro. It notes that there will be plenty of time later to affix blame; that undoubtedly psychological answers will be offered. But it focuses principally on the pain the city is feeling and how it is responding. The headline: "We All Hurt."

## March 27

The lead stories are on the developing police investigation, details of the arsenal used by the shooters, and transcripts of the chilling 911 police tapes of the first reports. But there also are stories about the encouraging progress of the wounded, more details of the community rallying, plans for the com-