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Isla Vista Murderer Reflects on Topanga Childhood in Manifesto Time to Transcend the Killing Machines

By Kateri Wozny

Elliot Rodger describes it as his only "period of contentment"

A young man who went on a killing rampage near UC Santa Barbara has close ties to Topanga.

Elliot Rodger, 22, a Santa Barbara City College student, murdered six students and injured several others last Friday in Isla Vista after spending his whole life being socially rejected, according to him. He later took his own life that night after committing the horrific crimes.

During his childhood, Rodger grew up in Topanga and attended Topanga Elementary. In his 141-page manifesto entitled "My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger," Rodger detailed his life from the day he was born until the day he performed the "Day of Retribution" on May 23.

For the majority, Rodger said nothing but positive experiences about his time in Topanga, saying that it was the "best years of my life." He was born in London and moved to Woodland Hills when he was 5-years-old so his father, director Peter Rodger, could pursue his dream in Hollywood. The family later moved to Topanga.

"Adjusting to my new environment in Topanga was quite easy for me, especially since school was so much fun," Rodger wrote. "I was now a Topanga kid...I recall having so much fun (at school) that I didn't want to leave! That's a first. In the past, I was always eager to go home after spending hours at school."

Rodger also considered himself an outstanding student while attending school despite a few mishaps along the way.

"I always considered myself a good, well-behaved student, so I was a bit disappointed at the few times I got in trouble. My class had a system where if we did something wrong, we would change our card color from green to yellow and then to red if we did any more troublemaking," he wrote. "I thought I would never have to change my card, but I had to change it to yellow a few times for minor things..."

"When first grade ended, I made the resolution that in second grade I will never be forced to change my card."

During his time at Topanga Elementary, his teachers included first-grade teacher Mrs. Matsuyama, third grade teacher Mrs. Buntin, fourth grade teacher Mrs. Gill, fifth grade teacher Mrs. Damart and second grade teacher Amy

Weisberg, who still teaches at Topanga Elementary.

"...Mrs. Weisberg was very kind," Rodger wrote. "The students in my class were mostly the same as my first grade class, with only one or two new students who transferred from other schools...my second grade year flew by like a breeze. I don't remember much of it, but I did have a blast."

"I remember Elliot as a shy, quiet kid," Weisberg told the Messenger.

At recess during his elementary school years, he would trade Pokémon cards with his friends, play endless games of Nintendo and participate in basketball games. Girls were not a concern for him during this time, as he was a young boy enjoying his childhood and the innocence that came with it.

"It was as if the girls in elementary school were part of a separate reality. Despite not having much interaction with them, they treated me cordially, as they treated all other boys of my age. This was fair and I was content with this. I hadn't gone through puberty yet, and so I had no desire for female validation," he wrote. "My 8-year-old self had no inkling of the pain and misery girls would cause me once puberty would inevitably arrive and my sexual desires for girls would develop..."

"...Some of the boys in my class would grow up to be embraced by girls, while I would grow up to be rejected by them. But at that moment in time...I was living in ignorant, innocent bliss. And I was happy with it."

Rodger lived in two homes in Topanga while attending school. The first he called the "Round House" while his father and mother, Lichin Rodger, were still married.

"I loved the new house the moment I laid eyes on it. It was a beautiful, round, wooden house located up the road from Valley View Drive, in the better part of Topanga. It had two stories, a swimming pool and a lovely deck that provided a view of the lush mountains," he wrote.

Once his parents divorced, Rodger's mother had moved across town to a smaller home which he called the "Red House." Back at the "Round House" which his father maintained, he felt an



Elliot Rodger as a child in Topanga.

PHOTO BY MARY CUMMINS

overwhelming sense of sadness.

"The Round House was very different without mother being there. When we entered, I felt a wave of sadness creep over me as I was reminded of my life when mother and father were together," he wrote. "The house was full of memories; happy, cheerful memories that were lost in the past. With my mother missing from it, there was a sense of bleakness and loss to the place..."

"Despite the initial sadness I felt from my family splitting in half, my new life situation wasn't all that bad. It was still practically the same life, though I lived with my mother in one house and my father in another."

Rodger's father later moved to a smaller house in the rustic part of the Topanga mountains that oversaw "Big Rock." Rodger made it a goal to climb it as he had already conquered every other rock in the area.

"When I first saw Big Rock, I told myself that one day I'll climb to the top of it!" he wrote. "...the best part, of course, was reaching the top, and the sense of accomplishment I felt. I finally did it!" he wrote. "Looking down, I could see the vastness of the Old Topanga Canyon region, and father's house looked tiny down there...I felt so proud of myself for climbing that rock that it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be."

As time went on during these years, Rodger began to develop jealous and envy characteristics that would "dominate my entire life and bring me immense pain..."

"The feelings of jealousy I felt at 9-years-old were frustrating, but they were nothing compared to how I would feel once I hit puberty and have to watch girls choosing other boys over me," he wrote.

As in most schools, Rodger would try to blend in with the "cool kids" to become well-accepted, even taking up skateboarding, Hacky Sack and dying his black hair blonde.

"I realized, with some horror, that I wasn't 'cool' at all. I had a dorky hairstyle, I wore plain and uncool clothing and I was shy and unpopular," he wrote. "I envied the cool kids and I wanted to be one of them."

As his elementary school days came to an end, Rodger noted that fifth grade was his "favorite school year."

"I played with more people than I ever did in previous grades, I was less shy, I wasn't a dork and I had an awesome time learning how to skateboard and Hacky Sack," he wrote. "It was a memorable year filled with joyful experiences." ■

By Riley Anapol

Over this past weekend, I learned that a tragedy had taken place in Santa Barbara. At the time, I was out in the desert, removed from society and technology, at a transformative music festival called "Lightning in a Bottle." As information slowly reached me, I heard that a troubled young man, Elliot Rodger, not much older than I, had taken the lives of a number of his peers and himself.

I also discovered that in his life-spanning manifesto he had mentioned my name. Hearing this blasted me back into the world that I had been hoping to leave behind for the weekend. "Lightning In a Bottle" is a place to escape some of the ills of society and reflect upon what can be done to make the world a more loving and beautiful place.

It was difficult to wrap my head around the whole situation. How could I be involved in something so terrible? Elliot mentioned that we had been friends when I was a small child. I cannot say that I remember him but, as I sat under the desert sky, I wished that I could have gone on to know him better and maybe to have done something to help him.

Adolescence can be hard and while Elliot might have felt especially dispossessed from the college environment, I feel this is something we all experience. The college social system seems set up to separate the social elites from those who have a hard time fitting in. It's not a healthy way to be learning and it can warp our perception of love and friendships.

The Greek institutions promoted by most universities are exclusive groups that support shallow values that are destructive to a healthy society. For Elliot, it was too much to bear. In a world where there is so much pressure to fit in, he must have felt that he had nowhere to turn and let out the accumulated rage of his life in an act of incomprehensible horror.

As time passed, I was troubled by how easy it had been for Elliot to go ahead with his plan of slaughter. Maybe, if the tools used in these all too frequent mass shootings were not so easy to get, this tragedy might never have happened.

Working in the realm of politics, I understand the influence that money has over our governmental policies.

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