

I cannot imagine what those in the classroom experienced. Each has a story, and each did the right thing. Paul Uhl, Leo Valdez, and others tried to save Arnie Fritz's life. Nikki Greenwalt helped Emily Stuber. Jon Lane risked his life to protect everyone. Everyone there helped each other through simple reassurance. Everyone was called upon to show his or her virtue. Everyone did.

Since the day of the shooting, I've heard a series of rumors about what Manuel Vela supposedly did to me. I should have dispelled those rumors before. I didn't. I want to make clear now that he never did anything to me physically. He never threatened me physically. He and some of his friends made fun of me a few times. That was it. In 1997, Manuel Vela's father told me I'm not fit to tie his son's shoes. He's correct. Manuel Vela was a better person than I am, and I know it.

In day-to-day life, I was rude. I was hostile to people for no reason. This behavior may be trivial in contrast to the other things I've done, but I want to apologize nonetheless. I'm sorry to those I've offended or hurt.

I betrayed the values of life and reason. I've betrayed this community. I'm sorry for the pain and outrage I've caused everyone here. I know that after February 2, this community came together. I know it was at its best when I was at my worst. But it shouldn't have had to unite over something like this.

Your Honor, you once said that if there was any case that kept you awake at night, it was this one. You never should have had to deal with this. None of this should have happened in the first place, but if it did, I could at least have had the decency to have pled guilty instead of trying to escape justice. I put you and an entire community through an agonizing, senseless, and expensive process in an attempt to flee from justice. I apologize to you and them.

To everyone who had to work on this case, I'm sorry. I apologize to the prosecutors, to Mr. Knodell, Ms. Wise, Ms. Fitzgerald. I apologize to the police and the sheriffs. You all had jobs to do and you all did them well, but you never should have had to do them. None of this should have happened.

To the question of whether I'm sorry for what I've done yes, I am. Nothing good has come from this. Everyone's life is worse because of it. I've shocked a community and shamed my family. I've hurt people profoundly and irreparably. One measure of a human being is based on what he or she has done to promote life, to move the world, to make it better. Those are things at which I categorically failed, and have robbed three people of the chance to succeed.

I've caused harm I can never repair, and done things I can never make right. Twenty years ago I had the audacity to ignore these facts, to cast aside people's need for justice in pursuit of my own interests. I am no longer so audacious. It is therefore my intention to defer to the will of the victims' families with respect to sentencing. I have asked my legal counsel to do everything they can to ensure this will be the final hearing on my case.

Sincerely,

Barry Loukaitis