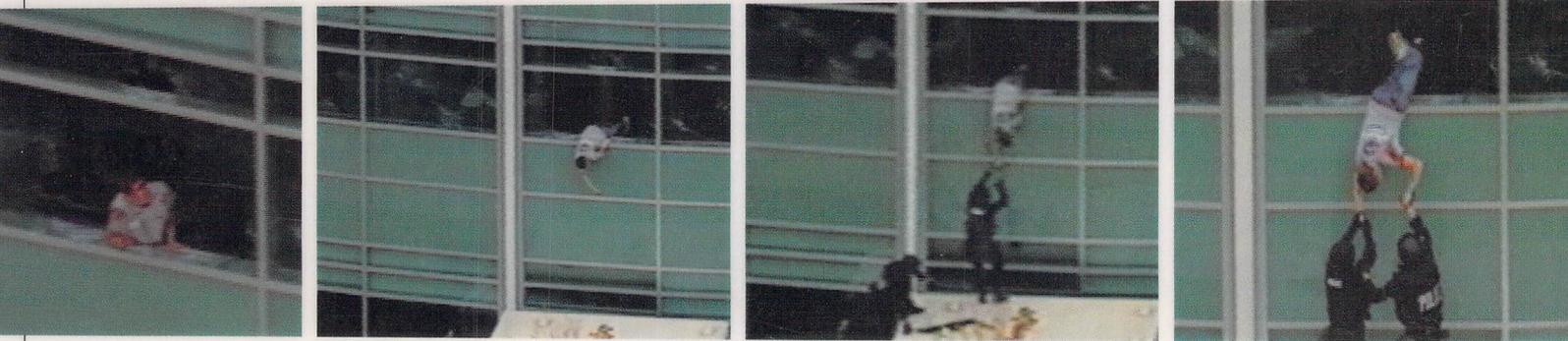


COLUMBINE CLOSEUP



THE BOY IN THE WINDOW Ireland's escape from the library was televised live. The then unknown student instantly became famous. At the time, his head injuries had impaired his vision, but he recalls "feeling the warm breeze, hearing helicopters and the SWAT team yelling for me to jump."

For the first 17 years of his life, it seemed as if no obstacle—physical or intellectual—was insurmountable for Patrick Ireland.

In high school he maintained a 4.0 average. He won awards for waterskiing, fired three-pointers and blocked shots for his YMCA basketball team. He threw baseballs right-handed and wrote, in small, neat capital letters, with his left hand. "Lots of things came easy to me," he recalls.

But that was before the morning of Tuesday, April 20, when seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold opened fire—with sawed-off shotguns, a rifle and a semiautomatic pistol—on their teachers and classmates at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. Ireland, a junior, was studying in the library with his friends Makai Hall, Dan Steepleton, Stephen Austin Eubanks and Corey DePooter.

Forewarned by the shouts of a teacher, the students were hiding under tables when the gunmen came in, told the "jocks" to stand, then began firing.

DePooter was killed. Hall, Eubanks and Steepleton were wounded; Hall was shot in the leg. As Ireland reached to put pressure on his friend's leg to stop the bleeding, his head rose above the table. He was shot three times,

twice in the head and once in the right foot.

He floated in and out of consciousness for several hours. When he finally came to, the other survivors had already escaped. Unbeknownst to him, Harris and Klebold had shot themselves and lay dead in the library.

"I wasn't sure where they were," Ireland recalls. "I told myself, 'If I'm going to survive, I've gotta get out of here.' There was some fear and some, like, worry and sadness about not letting people down, not letting the gunmen win. I tried to stand but couldn't." Remembering that day, he says, "I strove to survive."

His right side paralyzed, Ireland pushed himself across the room on his back with his left leg. When he reached the wall beneath a window, he propped his back against it, then, using a chair for support, pushed himself up with his left leg on his second try. He gradually lifted himself through the window and into the arms of a SWAT team crouched below, atop an armored van.

For the first week after the shooting, Ireland's mind was like a computer with damaged circuits. One bullet had passed through the left hemisphere of the brain, which controls language, complex thinking and the right side of the body. (The bullet remains lodged in Ireland's head, too risky to remove; his brain



THE COMEBACK KID

A critically wounded Patrick Ireland rescued himself after the Columbine High School shooting. He is using the same survival instincts to recover. **By Gerard Wright**