

Go Hokies

April 17, 2007 By [Shawn Decker](#)

image by [Ben Lansing](#)



Yesterday Gwenn and I were just about to leave our house and drive to Philadelphia to speak at Drexel University. After I made sure that TiVo was up to speed on our TV-watching needs, I turned on the news.

1 dead, 17 wounded at Virginia Tech.

Some madman with a gun had gone on a rampage, but there weren't many details beyond that. We wanted to get more info, but had to hit the road to avoid DC traffic (the halfway point to Philly). By the time we got to Drexel, there were over 20 dead and close to 30 wounded, the worst on-campus act of violence in U.S. history.

Virginia Tech is about 3 hours away from where we live, Charlottesville. Everyone here knows someone who goes to Tech, or knows someone who knows someone that does. There's a rivalry between the schools, which in reality just gives everyone who follows college sports around here some fun dinner table fodder. (I don't follow college sports, but I know enough to never drive in town when there's a football game, particularly between Tech and UVa.)

Of course, yesterday you couldn't be a college speaker and not mention what happened. AIDS, in that moment, seemed inconsequential even to me. A cakewalk.

There were over 200 hundred students there, and I started by speaking into a lavalier mic that wasn't working. It seemed appropriate, a moment of almost-silence. Gwenn gave me her mic, and I stated the obvious: that everyone's minds and heart were in Virginia.

Speakers, you should know, can be fixated on their topics, but I avoided doing any lame kind of tie-in, which would have been disrespectful and inappropriate. I got a little choked up, but spoke as eloquently as possible. After I acknowledged our collective grief and worry, I was left me with only one possible segue into the program: "Now on to the fun topic... *of AIDS!*"

Go Hokies,

Shawn

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