



**Metro Nashville Police Department  
Criminal Investigations Division – Homicide Unit**



## **Investigative Case Summary**

**Case Number 2023-0181711**

**Murders of Evelyn Dieckhaus, Michael Hill, William Kinney, Katherine Koonce, Hallie Scruggs, and Cynthia Peak**

**The Covenant Presbyterian Church and School, 33 Burton Hills Blvd., Nashville, TN 37209**

**Incident Date: March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Summary Date: March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025**



## Introduction

This report was created by the MNPD Homicide Unit and consists of the final investigative case summary regarding the murders of Evelyn Dieckhaus, Michael Hill, William Kinney, Hallie Scruggs, Katherine Koonce, and Cynthia Peak on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023. This report contains information gathered from a variety of sources by either the MNPD or by partnering agencies. This report is only a summarization of the information gathered and analyzed during the investigation; for details regarding specific facts and information gathered during the investigation, the investigative case file should be referenced. All copies of the investigative case file must be obtained from the MNPD Central Records Division.

Nothing in this report is designed or intended to assign or infer civil liability to any party regarding the murders. This investigation was conducted solely to determine criminal responsibility. The final determination regarding whether criminal charges are applicable was made by the District Attorney General of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Nashville, TN.

Even though this report will reference the officer involved shooting (OIS) that occurred during the initial response to the murders, nothing in this report is designed to replace or discuss in detail the investigation into the OIS. For information and findings resulting from the OIS investigation, please refer to the investigative file completed by the MNPD Cold Case Homicide/Missing Persons Unit under CPN 2023-0185510 and CPN 2023-0224639.

Nothing in this report is designed or intended to serve as an after-action review (AAR) or other assessment of the response to the homicides by first responders. All questions or requests for information regarding those findings should be referred to those individual agencies.

It should be noted that in life, the offender, Audrey Hale, gender identified as a male and used he/him as preferred pronouns. Under Tennessee law, a person's gender identity must correspond with their biological sex or with information present on their certificate of live birth (T.C.A. 1-3-105[c]). As Hale was a biological female at the time of her death and throughout the incidents described in this summary and in the case file, Hale will be referred to as a female.



The MNPD Homicide Unit would like to thank the following partnering agencies for their assistance in the initial response and continued assistance throughout the investigation.





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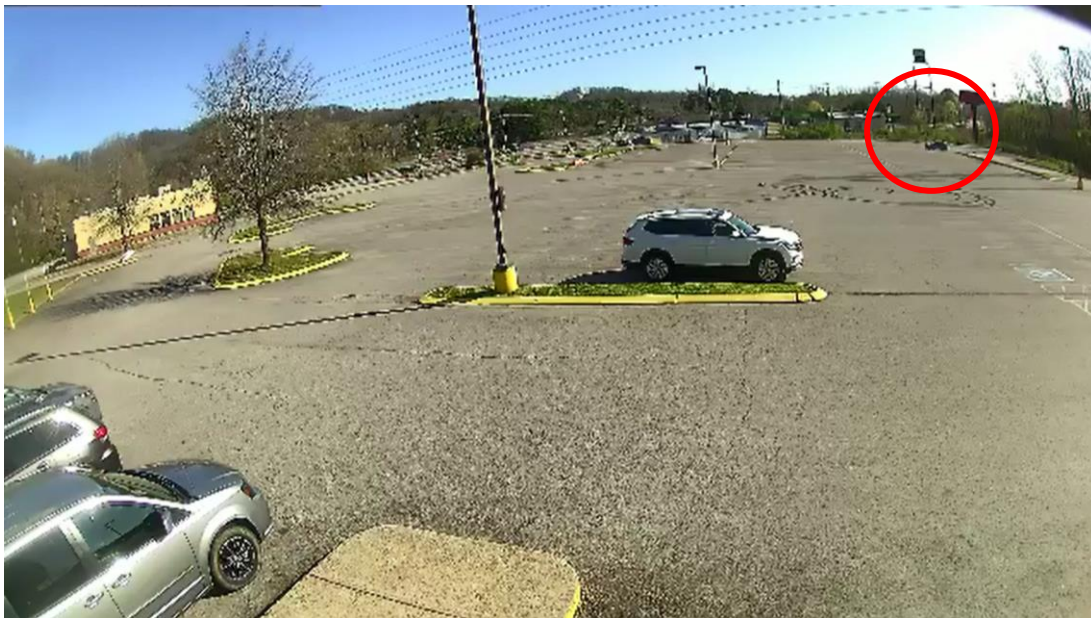




## Incident Summary

At approximately 8 a.m. on March 27, 2023, Hale left her residence at 3005 Brightwood Dr., Nashville, TN. When she exited her residence, she was carrying a large duffel bag which contained several firearms, ammunition for those firearms, tactical gear, and her stuffed animals. She also had with her a backpack containing two notebooks and assorted items. She loaded these bags into her vehicle, a 2014 Honda Fit hatchback, and left her residence.

Hale then drove to Royal Range USA, located at 7741 U.S. Hwy. 70 S, Nashville, TN, arriving there at 8:16 a.m. Upon arriving at this location, she drove to a far corner of the parking lot, well away from the building and the entrance to the lot. Once there, she donned her tactical vest and affixed magazine pouches to her belt. The vest was loaded with several spare magazines, an automatic knife, and other equipment. She then assembled and loaded three different firearms. She then remained in her vehicle in the parking lot of the location for over an hour and finally left the location at 9:33 a.m.



*Still image from the video surveillance footage from Royal Range, USA, showing Hale parked at the location between 8:16 a.m. and 9:33 a.m. on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (Hale's vehicle circled in red).*

Hale then drove directly to The Covenant Presbyterian Church and School ("The Covenant,") arriving there at 9:53 a.m. Upon arriving at the school, she first drove through the parking lot slowly before parking her vehicle in a parking lot on the west side of the building. Upon parking her vehicle, she waited inside her vehicle for several minutes. During this time, Hale sent a goodbye message to a friend through Instagram Messenger. At approximately 10:09 a.m., she exited her vehicle, slung two firearms around her neck and shoulders, and approached one of the west entrances to the building. The firearms Hale possessed at this time were:

- LeadStar Grunt-15 5.56mm/.223 caliber semi-automatic AR pistol
- KelTec Sub 2000 9mm caliber carbine
- Smith & Wesson M&P Shield 2.0 9mm caliber semi-automatic pistol



*Photographs of Hale's firearms, taken following the murders by crime scene investigators.*

At 10:10 a.m., Hale began her attack. Upon reaching the entrance, Hale fired her AR pistol at the doors several times, shattering the glass within each door. The bullets also travelled into the vestibule and shattered the set of doors just inside the building. Hale then crawled through the shattered glass and entered the school.



*Still image from the video surveillance footage from The Covenant, showing Hale entering the building after shooting the glass out of the doors.*

At the time Hale entered the school, Michael Hill, one of the custodians at the school, was cleaning a room adjacent to the Youth Center. Upon hearing the shattering glass, he stopped cleaning and went into the Youth Center to investigate. Hill reached the Youth Center at the same time Hale fully entered the building. They saw each other at the same time, and Hill reacted by turning to run away. Upon seeing Hill beginning to flee, Hale fired multiple bullets at him through the window separating the hallway from the Youth Center. Hill was struck multiple times in the back and collapsed on the floor in the Youth Center.

At the time Hale shot Hill, she was standing underneath a smoke detector positioned on the ceiling near the entrance she used to enter the school. Gunsmoke from the muzzle of her AR pistol drifted upwards when she shot Hill, which set off the smoke detector and triggered the building's audible fire alarm. The activation of the fire alarm also led to the magnetic door locks on doors separating the church from the school to become disengaged, per state fire codes.

Hale then proceeded down the hallway towards a stairwell leading to the second floor of the building. At the same time, students and faculty throughout the building heard the fire alarm and began their standard evacuation procedure in response to the alarm. The evacuation protocols included the students in each classroom forming a





single-file line, with the teacher for the class as the last person in line. Each class would then walk towards the nearest exit. One of the students in each classroom was designated the “line leader” and would take the first position in line during the evacuation. For the students and faculty on the second floor of the building, they would first travel to the nearest stairwell, descend to the first floor, and then walk to the nearest exit.

At the time the fire alarm sounded, Evelyn Dieckhaus, William Kinney, and Hallie Scruggs were in the same third-grade class on the second floor. They formed a line with their classmates, with Kinney as the “line leader”, followed by Scruggs and then Dieckhaus.

At the time Hale was entering the school, Cynthia Peak was in the school office receiving her classroom assignment and lesson plan prior to working as a substitute teacher for the day. Upon hearing the fire alarm go off, Peak left the office area and walked to a stairwell to assist with the evacuation of the building. Other faculty and staff members inside the office area remained, with some attempting to investigate the source of the fire alarm.



*Still image from the video surveillance footage from The Covenant, showing Peak exiting the office area in response to the fire alarm.*

Peak reached the nearest stairwell at the same time students were filing to exit the building. Peak then stood next to the stairwell entrance to allow Kinney, Scruggs, Dieckhaus, and their classmates to exit ahead of her. As Kinney and Scruggs entered the stairwell, Hale ascended the stairwell and appeared directly in front of them. Immediately upon seeing them, she fired several shots with her AR pistol, striking all four of them multiple times. Upon hearing the gunfire and seeing people shot in front of them, the other students and faculty members in the hallway behind them ran back into their classrooms as was the school’s protocol for an active killer response.

The school’s response plan called for each teacher to shut and lock the door once they confirmed their students were inside the classroom. The door to each room had a blackout curtain affixed to the interior of the door and security bars which could be used to reinforce the door to prevent entry into the room. The students would then be instructed to move to the wall next to the hallway and crouch down to both prevent from being seen and to minimize their risk to bullets or other flying projectiles that may enter the room through the door.

As Hale was exiting the stairwell after shooting Dieckhaus, Kinney, Peak, and Scruggs, the teachers for the adjacent rooms (which were the second and third grade classrooms) had brought their students into their rooms and secured their classrooms. Hale then walked over to where the two doors for the third-grade classrooms were located (they were positioned next to each other). Hale then emptied the remainder of the magazine loaded into her AR pistol



through one of the classroom doors, shattering the window set in the door and sending bullets flying through the classroom and out the exterior windows on the north side of the building. Hale then changed magazines and emptied a second magazine through the door of the other classroom, also shattering the window set in that door and sending bullets flying through the room and out the exterior windows on the north side of the building. One of the students within the second classroom Hale fired into was slightly injured by flying debris from this shooting. After emptying the second magazine, Hale reloaded and walked down the hallway without making any attempt to further breach those rooms or harm anyone else inside.

Hale then moved through the second-floor hallways of the school, seeking out additional targets. By this point, all the students and faculty members in the classrooms on the second floor were aware an active killer was in the building and had barricaded themselves in their classrooms. Also located on the second floor of the school were offices for the church. Upon hearing and seeing the shooting that occurred, the staff within those offices barricaded themselves within their offices. Several of these individuals then began calling 911 to report the shooting at the school.

As Hale was moving through the second floor of the building, the school's Executive Principal, Dr. Katherine Koonce, was in the school office area attempting to ascertain why the fire alarm was going off. After failing to receive an answer from maintenance staff she contacted regarding the alarm, she set out from the office area to investigate. Based on the available video surveillance footage and from interviews with staff members following the murders, she didn't know of the active killer within the building.



*Still image from the video surveillance footage from The Covenant, showing Dr. Koonce exiting the office area to investigate the fire alarm.*

Dr. Koonce left the office area and walked down the hallway leading towards the church office area. As she reached the other end of the hallway where it intersected with the hallway leading to the church office, Hale rounded the corner, and they faced each other. Dr. Koonce was overheard challenging Hale about what she was doing in the school. Hale responded to the challenge by firing multiple times with her AR pistol, which struck Dr. Koonce and knocked her to the ground. Hale then transitioned to her pistol and fired an additional time at Dr. Koonce.

Some of the bullets Hale fired at Dr. Koonce went past her, travelled to the other end of the hallway, and struck the fire doors leading into the school office area. Upon hearing the gunfire in the hallway outside and hearing bullets striking the other side of the door, the staff within the school office appeared to receive their first indication of an active killer within the building. Many of them began finding places to hide and barricaded themselves within the office area. Some of them contacted other teachers within the school to alert them of an active killer within the building. At this





point, some of the classrooms had begun evacuating and were outside. Upon realizing there wasn't a fire and the emergency was an active killer on the campus, the teachers stopped the evacuation of their students and ordered everyone inside so they could take shelter within the building, per the school's active killer protocol. Some individuals, however, did not return to the school building. Instead, they ran through the woods to the fire hall for Nashville Fire Department Station 20, which was located next door to the school near the south entrance to the campus. Other students and faculty members ran into the woods and headed towards Burton Hills Blvd., which is north of the campus.

After she shot Dr. Koonce, Hale then moved through the hallways of the school for the next few minutes. Her exact path of travel at this point is unknown, as no video surveillance cameras were in those areas to capture her movements. It is known she entered certain rooms in the area where Dr. Koonce was shot to search them, based on statements from faculty members hiding in adjacent rooms. Hale didn't encounter or harm anyone within the rooms she searched; it's believed the rooms she searched were ones that were unlocked and unoccupied.

Hale then retraced her steps and walked back towards where the church offices were located on the second floor. Upon seeing the offices, Hale entered and performed a search of those rooms. This search was undoubtedly cursory, as staff members were hiding within offices, underneath desks, and even inside storage cabinets within those rooms, yet Hale never saw them or fired upon them. She spent less than a minute in each of the offices she searched. After searching those offices, Hale walked to a nearby stairwell and descended to the first floor of the building.



*Still images from the video surveillance footage from The Covenant, showing Hale entering one set of church offices.*

Upon descending the stairwell, Hale found herself at the northwest entrance of the building. By this point, everyone in the building was aware of an active killer being inside the building, and everyone began sheltering in place and barricading themselves where they could. Hale then walked through the lounge adjacent to the cafeteria, and the student lobby area, but found nobody else she could target.



*Still images from the video surveillance footage from The Covenant, showing Hale walking down the hallway past the cafeteria.*

Upon reaching the end of the hallway and the doorway leading to the main lobby for the sanctuary, Hale encountered two television sets mounted on the wall in the student lounge. She fired multiple shots with her carbine at the television sets. She then observed a set of doors on the opposite side of the hallway. On the other side of those doors was the hallway leading to the pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms. Hale then fired several shots with her AR pistol through those doors. Nobody was on the other side of those doors, and nobody was injured from those shots. Hale then ascended the second floor using a nearby stairwell.



*Photographs from the student lounge area on the first floor of The Covenant, taken by crime scene investigators following the homicides. The image on the left shows one of the television sets Hale shot. The image on the right shows the doors Hale fired through.*





Upon reaching the second floor, Hale found herself in the upper level of the main lobby to the sanctuary. She then entered the sanctuary itself, reaching the upper level. Once there, she fired several shots through a stained-glass window positioned high on the wall in the sanctuary with her carbine. Though the window was damaged, it wasn't destroyed. The window she targeted depicted Adam and Eve in The Garden of Eden. During this incident, she didn't encounter anyone else within the sanctuary (it was completely empty at this point). Hale then exited the sanctuary and returned to the upper level of the main lobby.



*Photographs from the sanctuary of The Covenant, taken by crime scene investigators following the homicides. The image on the left shows the stained-glass window damaged by gunfire (the red circle highlights the defects to the window). The image on right shows the fired cartridge casings from Hale shooting through the window.*

As Hale was moving through the school, police officers and paramedics were being dispatched to The Covenant. The first responding police officers arrived at the building at approximately 10:19 a.m. (at this point, Hale was searching the church offices on the second floor). None of the police officers arriving at the location had ever been inside the building or were familiar with its layout. Many didn't even know The Covenant existed prior to the homicides. The responding police officers came from several different precincts, investigative units, and other specialized units across the county.

Upon arriving, some of the responding police officers parked their vehicles in the parking lot directly in front of the church, which is positioned on the east side of the building. The first police officer entered the building through one of the west entrances at 10:20 a.m. (around the same time, Hale was walking through the first-floor hallway past the cafeteria). Being completely unfamiliar with the interior of the school, this officer found the layout of the school to be a maze, and was unable to hear any gunfire on the other end of the school. This officer eventually joined other officers at one of the south entrances, where those officers were trying to enter the school.

Meanwhile, Hale reached the second-floor lobby, where she found a large window overlooking the parking lot on the south side of the building. Upon seeing police officers arriving and exiting their vehicles in the parking lot outside, Hale took up a firing position at this window. She then proceeded to fire upon the officers through the window using her AR pistol.



*Photograph taken by a faculty member of the school while barricaded inside a room. This image shows Hale as she's firing upon police officers within the parking lot of the school.*

For over two minutes, Hale fired multiple shots at police officers and police vehicles in the parking lot outside of the main entrance to the sanctuary. Though she didn't injure any officers, she did manage to disable at least two police vehicles by deflating tires. The gunfire forced some police officers to take cover behind their vehicles, and it appeared to occupy Hale completely during this time period.





As Hale fired upon the officers in the parking lot, other officers entered the school through a south entrance. These officers were initially unable to hear where the gunfire was coming from due to the layout of the school affecting acoustics. When they passed a stairwell leading to the second floor, they could hear the gunfire more clearly. Upon ascending to the second floor, they moved through the hallways towards the source of gunfire and eventually located Hale. Due to the audible fire alarm, the earplugs she was wearing throughout the attack, and the sound of her own gunfire, Hale never heard the police officers as they entered the lobby behind her. One officer then fired a 5.56mm caliber rifle at Hale, striking her and knocking her to the ground. As the officers approached Hale to take her into custody, they saw she still had possession of her firearms and her arms were moving. A second officer fired a 9mm caliber pistol at her. She was fatally wounded by the officers' gunfire.



*Photograph taken by crime scene investigators following the homicides, showing the vehicles Hale damaged in the distance.*



*Still image from police body worn camera footage, showing police officers approaching Hale from behind in the second floor of the lobby just prior to her death.*

The responding police officers then began searching for other attackers within the school. After confirming there were no active threats remaining in the school, police officers began evacuating students, faculty, and staff from within the building.

Upon locating each of the victims, police officers carried Dieckhaus, Kinney, and Scruggs outside to waiting ambulances. All three of them were declared deceased upon arriving at Vanderbilt Children's Medical Center. When



police officers located Hill and Peak, they discovered each of them were still alive but in extremely critical condition. Both were evacuated from the building by paramedics and transported to Vanderbilt University Medical Center, where both later succumbed to their injuries. Upon locating Koonce, the responding police officers discovered she had already succumbed to her injuries.

The MNPD Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team then led a search throughout the school to confirm no other victims were present and no further threats remained. After confirming no other patients or hazards were present, the school was turned over to investigators for forensic processing and evidence collection.

Once the scene was secured, detectives from the MNPD Surveillance and Investigative Support Unit (SISU) responded to assist in obtaining the video surveillance footage from the school. Upon reviewing the available footage, they confirmed Hale was the only person who breached the school and committed the attack. They also discovered the location of Hale's vehicle in the parking lot on the west side of the building. Officers from the MNPD Hazardous Devices Unit reviewed the vehicle and confirmed no explosive devices or other hazards were present.

Once the vehicle was cleared, the vehicle was searched under the authority of a search warrant. During the search of the vehicle, detectives located Hale's wallet in the glove compartment, which led to her positive identification. Her cellphone was found in a small compartment located on the dashboard and her car keys in the driver's seat. Several stuffed animals were found on the front passenger seat, along with five fully loaded magazines containing 5.56mm ammunition. In the front passenger floorboard was a backpack. Inside the backpack were two notebooks containing handwriting and sketches, along with two thumb drives.



*Photographs of Hale's vehicle in the parking lot following the homicides. The photograph on the left is the car as it was parked, and the photograph on the right is the location of items of interest in the front passenger seat area.*

Once Hale's identity was established, detectives were able to locate her residence. Detectives from the MNPD The Investigative Team Addressing Neighborhood Shootings (TITANS) went to the residence to conduct surveillance prior to obtaining a search warrant. During the surveillance, detectives observed Hale's father exiting the residence and leaving in his vehicle. Detectives conducted an investigative stop of him and his vehicle a short distance away from the residence. While speaking with him and prior to mentioning his daughter's death, he claimed to have heard about the attack on The Covenant and suspected his daughter of being involved.

Not knowing if any other threats were present inside the residence, the residence was first secured by MNPD SWAT under the authority of a search warrant. The residence was then searched by detectives. During the search, detectives located Hale's bedroom, which quickly became the focus of the search.

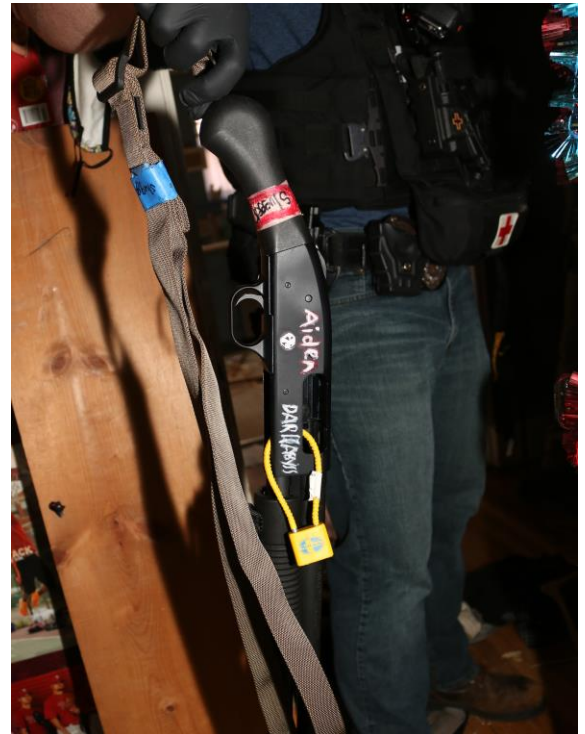
Within her bedroom, detectives discovered numerous items of interest. In her bedroom closet, detectives





located a short-barrel 12-gauge shotgun, along with boxes of ammunition for the weapon. Also in the closet, detectives located a white t-shirt with hand-printed words and a logo similar to the one she wore during the attack. Throughout the room, detectives located numerous notebooks, folders, sketchbooks, and loose documents that contained personal writings, artwork, sales receipts, and lists made by Hale. Five cellphones, two laptop computers, VHS cassette tapes, and several thumb drives were also found within the bedroom.

On her desk was a handwritten note addressed to her parents. In the note, Hale told her parents she was going to die and instructed them to care for her belongings.



*Photographs taken by detectives during the search of Hale's residence. The photograph on the left shows the handmade t-shirt found in Hale's closet similar in appearance to the one she wore during the attack. The photograph on the right shows the shotgun found in her closet.*

At The Covenant, investigators spent the next two days photographing the interior of the building, forensically processing the scene, and collecting evidence. This led to detectives reconstructing the crime, especially portions that were not captured by video surveillance cameras within the school. Investigators later determined that Hale fired a total of 152 bullets during the attack (126 from her AR pistol, 25 from her carbine, and one from her pistol). At the time of her death, she still had 272 live cartridges on her person (199 live 5.56mm caliber cartridges and 73 live 9mm caliber cartridges), most of which were loaded into magazines.

It became apparent shortly after the attack that nobody else was directly involved in the attack itself. The video surveillance footage available at The Covenant failed to show anyone else accompanying Hale during the attack, and nothing was found either at the scene or her residence to show anyone else directly aided Hale during the attack.



## Attack and Initial Investigation Timeline

- **3/27/2023 0800 hours CDT through 0816 hours CDT:** Hale left her residence and drove directly to Royal Range USA. When she left her residence, she carried a duffle bag and backpack, which contained three different firearms, ammunition, and equipment.
- **3/27/2023 0816 hours CDT through 0933 hours CDT:** Hale arrived at Royal Range USA. She parked in a corner of the parking lot far from the building and the entrance to the parking lot. Once there, she loaded her firearms and donned a tactical vest containing loaded magazines.
- **3/27/2023 0933 hours CDT through 0953 hours CDT:** Hale left Royal Range USA and drove to The Covenant.
- **3/27/2023 0953 hours CDT through 1010 hours CDT:** Hale arrived at The Covenant and parked her vehicle in a parking lot on the west side of the building. She remained inside her vehicle for the next several minutes and sent a goodbye message to her friend.
- **3/27/2023 1010 hours CDT:** Hale exited her vehicle and approached the west side of the building. She used her AR pistol to shoot out the glass in one of the west entrances to the building and crawled inside.
- **3/27/2023 1011 hours CDT:**
  - Hale encountered Hill just inside the west entrance, where she shot and killed him as he was turning to run away.
  - Smoke from the muzzle of her AR pistol set off the building's fire alarm at this time. This led to faculty, staff, and students within the building to start evacuating.
- **3/27/2023 1012 hours CDT:** Hale ascended a nearby stairwell, where she encountered Dieckhaus, Kinney, Peak, and Scruggs at the top of the stairwell. She shot and killed each of them. This led to other students and faculty members nearby learning of an active killer within the building and prompted them to retreat and barricade themselves within their classrooms.
- **3/27/2023 1013 hours CDT:**
  - Hale fired blindly into the two third-grade classrooms, which caused minor injuries to one student inside one of the classrooms. After firing in the classrooms, Hale began walking through the hallways seeking additional victims.
  - Some faculty and staff members within the school began calling 911 to report an active killer within the building.
  - Koonce left the school office area to investigate the source of the fire alarm without knowing an active killer was within the building.
- **3/27/2023 1014 hours CDT:**
  - Hale encountered Koonce walking through the hallway, where Hale shot and killed her.
  - The first police officers began their response to The Covenant in response to an active killer.
- **3/27/2023 1015 hours CDT through 1018 hours CDT:** Hale continued to search for additional victims within the second-floor building, without finding any.
- **3/27/2023 1019 hours CDT:**
  - The first police officers arrived at The Covenant and began seeking a way into the building.
  - Hale returned to the first floor and sought out additional targets without finding any. She did destroy two television sets and shot through the doors leading to a hallway while walking through the student lounge area.
- **3/27/2023 1020 hours CDT:**
  - The first police officers entered the building, looking for Hale.
  - Hale returned to the second floor and went to the sanctuary of the building.
- **3/27/2023 1021 hours CDT through 1022 hours CDT:**
  - Hale went to the second-floor balcony of the sanctuary. She damaged a stained-glass window using her carbine before returning to the second-floor lobby of the sanctuary.
  - Additional police officers parked in the south parking lot of the building, directly in front of the main entrance of the sanctuary. Other police officers began entering the building at one of the south entrances, where they began searching for the active killer.
  - Upon reaching the second-floor lobby, Hale saw the police officers parking outside through a large window. She took up a firing position at the window and opened fire on the officers exiting their vehicles, forcing them to take cover.





- **3/27/2023 1022 hours CDT through 1024 hours CDT:**
  - Hale continued to fire on police officers in the parking lot during this period. As she did so, other police officers heard the gunfire and moved to the second floor, searching for her. Upon finding her in the second-floor lobby firing upon police officers, they shot and killed her.
- **3/27/2023 1025 hours CDT:**
  - The police officers who entered the building found no additional threats within and heard no additional gunfire. After determining no active threats remained within the building, they began evacuating faculty, staff, and students from inside the school. They then summoned paramedics, who were staging nearby, and requested their assistance in evacuating casualties.
  - The responding police officers confirmed Koonce to be deceased upon locating her. They located Dieckhaus, Kinney, and Scruggs and carried them out of the building to the responding paramedics. The paramedics then entered the building and evacuated Hill and Peak.
  - A protective sweep was initiated by the responding police officers to insure no other injured victims were within and no other suspects were hiding within the building.
- **3/27/2023 1100 hours CDT:** medical staff at Vanderbilt University Medical Center confirmed Dieckhaus, Hill, Kinney, Peak, and Scruggs were deceased.
- **3/27/2023 1130 hours CDT:** the protective sweep was completed. No additional victims were found within the building. All personnel within the school were withdrawn in preparation for a search and forensic processing of the scene.
- **3/27/2023 1215 hours CDT:** detectives were able to access and review video surveillance footage from the building. They located Hale's vehicle in the parking lot.
- **3/27/2023 1233 hours CDT:** investigators approached Hale's vehicle in the parking lot. They determined no hazards were present on or around the vehicle. From the registration information on the vehicle, they were able to determine Hale's identity and address.
- **3/27/2023 1250 hours CDT:** detectives travelled to Hale's residence and began conducting surveillance on the residence.
- **3/27/2023 1304 hours CDT:** Hale's father is observed leaving the residence. He's detained by detectives and interviewed regarding the attack.
- **3/27/2023 1330 hours CDT:** detectives secured Hale's residence and failed to find anyone else inside or any other threats. Detectives then withdrew from the residence and secured it in preparation of a search warrant.
- **3/27/2023 1400 hours CDT:** detectives contacted Hale's mother and interviewed her regarding the attack on The Covenant.
- **3/27/2023 1500 hours CDT:** detectives began searching Hale's residence under the authority of a search warrant.
- **3/27/2023 1521 hours CDT:** investigators began searching and processing The Covenant for evidence related to the homicides.
- **3/27/2023 1615 hours CDT:** Hale's vehicle was searched at the scene under the authority of a search warrant. The vehicle was then towed to the MNPD Crime Laboratory for additional forensic processing.
- **3/27/2023 1849 hours CDT:** the search of Hale's residence was completed.
- **3/29/2023 1945 hours CDT:** the search and forensic processing of The Covenant was completed.
- **3/30/2023:** the forensic processing of Hale's vehicle was completed.



## Victim and Offender Backgrounds

### Victims



*Evelyn Dieckhaus*



*William Kinney*



*Hallie Scruggs*



*Michael Hill*



*Dr. Katherine Koonce*



*Cynthia Peak*

As previously mentioned, Dieckhaus, Kinney, and Scruggs were all members of the same third-grade class and all were 9 years of age at the time of their deaths. Hill was age 61 and a custodian at the school, Koonce was age 60 and the Executive Principal, and Peak was age 61 and a substitute teacher. No information has been found to show Hale had any prior relationship with any of them prior to the attack.





## Offender



*Audrey Hale*

Audrey Hale was born March 25, 1995. She was a lifelong Nashville resident and lived with her parents at the time of her death. Hale attended The Covenant between 2001 and 2005, after which she attended middle school at Isaac T. Creswell Middle Magnet School for the Arts ("Creswell Middle"). She then attended the Nashville School of the Arts (NSA), graduating in 2014. She obtained a bachelor's degree in graphic design from Nossi College of Art ("Nossi") in Nashville, TN in 2022.

Hale held low-skill jobs throughout her life. She worked as a pet sitter and delivery person for Internet-based grocery shopping services.

Hale had no prior criminal history prior to her death. The only known interaction between her and law enforcement occurred less than a week before the attack, when she was questioned as a witness in an accidental discharge at a shooting range in Gallatin, TN.

At the time of her death, Hale was unmarried. After interviewing her family members and those friends detectives could identify, they all described her as shy and introverted. Hale openly identified as lesbian but

wasn't in a relationship.

She also made statements about wanting to transition genders. She began to use the name "Aiden Williams" in the years prior to her death and used male pronouns on her social media and networking accounts. Nothing has been found to suggest she initiated or was undergoing a transition at the time of her death, including medical documentation. During her autopsy following her death, it was determined she was biologically female.



## What She Left Behind

After it became apparent nobody else directly participated in the attack, three questions appeared regarding the murders: (1) did anyone else provide material support or assistance to Hale prior to the attack and knowing an attack would take place; (2) what was the motive behind the attack; and (3) was Hale sane at the time of the attack.

To determine the answers to these questions, multiple items were seized and examined during the investigation, which included:

- 16 notebooks, which contained writings made by Hale. Two notebooks were found within her vehicle after her death, and the other 14 were found inside her bedroom at her residence.
- Assorted folders and loose documents, which contained written and printed material either created by or concerning Hale. These items were all found within her bedroom at her residence.
- Seven sketchbooks and composition notebooks, all containing artwork and drawings created by Hale. These items were all found within either her bedroom or the basement at her residence.
- A yearbook Creswell Middle in Nashville, TN for the 2009 – 2010 school year.
- Three VHS cassette tapes, all of which were found within her bedroom at her residence.
- Eight memory storage devices (“thumb drives”), which contained 379.6 GB of data amongst all devices.
- Six cellphones, of which one was found within Hale’s vehicle after her death and the other five were found within her bedroom at her residence. The cellphone found within her vehicle had active service, while the devices found within her bedroom were all powered off and didn’t have active service.
- Three laptop computers, two of which were inside her bedroom at her residence and one found within the living room of the residence.
- An Apple iPod, which was found within her bedroom at her residence.
- A DVD-R, which was found within her bedroom at her residence.
- Two Google Drive data cloud accounts.
- Two social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram).

Not all the material gathered above was determined to be pertinent to the investigation. Some of the material collected from Hale’s residence belonged to her family members, including some items seized from within her bedroom. This included the laptop computer, which was seized from the living room of the residence (which belonged to Hale’s mother), the VHS cassette tapes seized from Hale’s bedroom (which appeared to have belonged to Hale’s younger brother), and two of the memory-storage devices (which belonged to Hale’s younger brother).

Detectives also interviewed Hale’s parents, her closest friend, and those she knew her in life. Information they provided was cross-referenced against the information found in the above materials to determine the accuracy and meaning of the information in the writings.

The following is a synopsis of the items seized within her room and what they contained.

### Notebooks:

The 16 notebooks were composition notebooks containing college-ruled lines within. The notebooks contained handwritten entries, photographs taped to the covers, and on select pages, charts, diagrams, and drawings. In many of the notebooks each page was filled with content on both sides of the page. In total, the notebooks contained 1,299 pages of content. The covers of the notebooks were decorated with pictures taped or glued to the exteriors, ribbons and buttons affixed to the exterior of the front cover, stickers, and drawings. Most of the notebooks had Hale’s name printed on the cover and a date range for when the content contained within was created. The interiors of each cover also contained pictures, stickers, and drawings created by Hale. Loose documents, sales receipts, and loose artwork were tucked inside the covers on some of the items.

The majority of the writings within the notebooks were structured in a journal format with dated entries. The dates provided for those entries were in the top margin of the page where the entry began and spanned the period of August 30, 2017 through March 27, 2023. Several of the entries would also contain a title, either describing the content of the entry or her thoughts and feelings at the time. Initially, the dates between entries were every few days and at least once a week. At times, Hale wouldn’t make an entry for a month or more but would revert to make an entry





at least once a week. The margins of the page on most entries contained notes made by Hale, as well as corrections or clarifications regarding entries written between the lines. Some of the entries made within the lines were crossed out, with



*Photograph of the notebooks, composition books and sketchbooks, and folders recovered from Hale's bedroom during a search of her residence on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023.*

corrections inserted between the lines. In several cases, the corrections made to certain content appeared to be entered at times different than the original text, based on the difference in color and thickness in ink. Nothing was present to explain when those changes took place or if they occurred at a different date and time as the text which was corrected. All the handwriting appeared consistent and created by the same person throughout the journals.

Even though the dates of the entries were generally consistent with the dates written on the exterior of the front cover, the entries weren't necessarily in chronological order. It appears Hale would sometimes skip pages when she made an entry and then return later to write a new entry. In several of the notebooks, the start date of the first journal entry overlapped the ending date of the last journal entry of a previous notebook.

In two of the notebooks, loose pages were inserted inside the back cover, which contained dated journal entries that occurred outside of the time period given on the front cover. It was apparent these pages were torn out of a different notebook, though none of the notebooks seized from Hale's bedroom appeared to be missing pages. It's likely those pages were taken from a notebook that no longer existed and were kept by Hale for a specific reason.

Interspersed amongst the journal entries were original poems written by Hale over a variety of topics, letters to family and friends, to-do lists, and charts and diagrams she created to analyze her thoughts and views. On some pages, Hale would add photographs of friends and family members, which often included drawings and doodles added by Hale.

Three of the notebooks consisted of stories created by Hale, documenting her childhood. One other notebook was recovered from her room, a spiral-bound notebook where each page was the size of an index card. This notebook was a listing of usernames and passwords for assorted online accounts and digital devices Hale used during her life.

### **Folders:**

Five folders were found within Hale's bedroom during the search of the residence. On the exterior of one of the folders was the logo and location information for Royal Range USA. Two folders were a plain, solid color but with hand-drawn images and handwriting on the exterior in pen. The final two folders were each of a plain color and with no



handwriting, drawings, or other material on the exterior of each cover.

Two of the folders contained numerous pages pertaining to medical and mental health assessments, with Hale listed as the patient. Some of the paperwork also included information from the Metro Nashville Public Schools regarding Hale. The dates present on these materials spanned from 2001 through 2013.

The other three folders contained several loose pages, sales receipts, business cards, and certificates. Some of the loose pages consisted of handwritten material, while several other pages consisted of printed material. Some of the printed documents did contain handwritten notes and other markings. The sales receipts were for transactions at various businesses that took place between 2020 and 2023.

### **Composition and Sketchbooks:**

A total of seven composition books and sketchbooks were seized from Hale's residence. On six of these books, the exterior of the front and back covers contained several photographs, sections of yarn and ribbons, and buttons affixed to the cover with glue or tape. Handwriting was also on the cover of those books, which on some of the books gave the date of the entries within the book. The cover of the seventh book, however, was undecorated. Affixed to the exterior of the cover on that book was a post-it note, which indicated the dates of the entries within were from Hale's freshman year in high school.

Within six of the books, each page contained content on both the front and back. One of the books was only half-filled with content. In total, 520 pages of content existed amongst all seven books.

Each book contained drawings and sketches created by hand. Most of these drawings were in color, but some consisted of uncolored pencil or ink pen sketches. Some of the sketches and drawings were accompanied by phrases and poetry. Some of the content was original comics, which contained dialogue between characters. Some of the pages were dated, though many weren't. Based on those pages where dates were available, the content within these books was created between 2009 and 2022.

### **Yearbook:**

As previously mentioned, a yearbook from Creswell Middle was seized from the residence. Based on the dates listed on the cover, the yearbook was for the school year 2009 – 2010. On the cover of the book, certain words were crossed out in pen and different words were substituted in pen. The same was true for content present within the yearbook. Even though some of the writings inside this yearbook were of the same handwriting and consistent with handwriting known to belong to Hale, several entries contained handwriting belonging to others, and some of those entries were addressed to Hale directly.

### **Assorted Loose Documents:**

Several loose documents were seized from within Hale's bedroom at her residence. Some of the documents were found on top of her desk, while others were found on bookshelves and storage totes within her bedroom. Some of the documents included sales receipts, articles of mail, handwritten documents, magazine cut-outs, schoolwork, and loose pages of original artwork.

The articles of mail primarily consisted of bank statements for an account in Hale's name. The schoolwork was dated and appeared to be essays and writings she completed while a student at Nossi. The sales receipts all appeared to be related to the purchase of firearms, ammunition, and firearms related equipment, which were all dated between 2020 through 2023. One of the documents seized from the bedroom was a handmade daily planner for the months of February and March 2023.

One of the documents seized from on top of the desk within Hale's bedroom was a letter addressed to her parents. This letter was dated March 27, 2023.





Photograph of the communications and memory storage devices, cassette tapes, and DVD seized from Hale during the investigation.

## Laptop Computers

Two of the laptops seized from within the residence were found within Hale's bedroom. Both laptops had stickers covering the back of the display screen. One of the laptops was found on top of the desk in Hale's bedroom and was connected to a power cable. This device was determined to be the laptop she used at the time of her death. The second laptop appeared to be an older laptop and was found in Hale's bedroom closet. Approximately 168 GB of data were present on both of those laptops.

## Cellphones and iPod

The cellphone seized from Hale's vehicle had active service and was powered on at the time it was seized. During an analysis of data extracted from the device, it was determined this was the device she actively used at the time of her death. The five cellphones seized from Hale's residence were older devices she kept. Data and content were able to be extracted from one of those devices, but the other four devices were much older and were not compatible with digital forensic tools available to investigators at the time they were seized. Furthermore, the batteries on those devices were completely dead and were unable to be recharged, which kept investigators from fully examining the contents.

Data and content were successfully extracted and analyzed from the Apple iPod seized from Hale's bedroom. This device was used up until Hale's death.

Approximately 37.6 GB of data were present amongst the three devices where data was successfully extracted and analyzed.

## Thumb Drives:

As previously mentioned, two of the nine thumb drives seized during the investigation didn't belong to Hale and contained no content related to the attack on The Covenant. Two other devices appeared to have originally belonged to



Hale's father, with Hale using those devices at a later date to store content she created or downloaded. The other four devices were used exclusively by Hale and contained a vast amount of data and content created or downloaded by Hale. The data on the devices Hale used that could be attributed to Hale spanned from 2010 until the day prior to her death. Approximately 379.6 GB of data were present across all devices.

### **Data Cloud Accounts:**

Hale used three different data cloud accounts during her life. One of those accounts was an Apple iCloud account, which was associated with her laptop computers. Based on connectivity logs for that account, it appeared Hale hadn't used this account to back up data saved to her computer for at least three years prior to the attack. Furthermore, the only data shared with the account was log data for assorted applications and services associated with her laptop; no user content was shared between her device and this account.

The other two data cloud accounts were provided by Google and were used to backup data from two different cellphones. These accounts also stored non-content related data, such as device logs and historical location data shared by the device to Google. Both accounts were used by Hale from approximately 2017 until the day of her death. Each of the accounts used by Hale were provided by the respective companies for free upon the purchase and activation of the device. Approximately 6 GB of data were present across the two Google accounts Hale used.

### **Social Media and Social Networking Accounts:**

Hale had both a Facebook and an Instagram account at the time of her death. She also used accounts with Pinterest and KakaoTalk prior to her death. The data and content related to both her Pinterest and KakaoTalk accounts were present on the two cell phones where data could be extracted, so no additional data was obtained from those companies independently. Data and content was obtained from Meta (the parent company for Facebook and Instagram) directly due to the possibility data may be on the account that wasn't saved to the device itself.

### **Synopsis of Content Across All Sources:**

Upon reviewing the data present in the artwork, digital devices, online accounts, and writings, and comparing the information gathered from the review with information developed from interviews, video surveillance footage gathered during the investigation, and information obtained from other sources, detectives were able to piece together the planning and preparation Hale conducted prior to the attack, compiling a timeline of the events that led to the attack, establishing the motive, and determining her state of mind throughout these events. It should be noted that in some cases, incomplete information was available to establish the progression or reasons behind certain events, as either Hale didn't fully document those events or insufficient information was available from other sources.

It should be noted that in most criminal investigations, detectives are only offered a limited amount of information regarding a person's daily life and interactions, their planning and preparation regarding a criminal act, and information regarding who they communicated with and the contents of those communications. Often, the sources of information regarding an individual's actions and interactions with others are limited to data and content found on their cellphone, computer, online accounts, and information obtained from interviews with those who know or interact with the offender. In this case, the amount of information Hale left behind was far more than is usually available in a criminal investigation. Considering the materials she left behind spanned several years, detectives were offered an opportunity to examine Hale's life in far more detail than many other offenders.





## What She Didn't Leave Behind

Early in the investigation, it was suggested Hale left behind a “manifesto” detailing her motives and intentions. This has elicited a great deal of interest from the public and had led to repeated demands this manifesto be released for public study and comment.

By definition, a manifesto is a mission statement or other document written and disseminated by an individual or group to enumerate or expound upon the guiding principles and beliefs that inform their actions. Regardless of length, a manifesto is a single document that outlines all the factors, intentions, and objectives of an individual act or a series of actions.

In this case, a manifesto didn't exist. Hale never left behind a single document explaining why she committed the attack, why she specifically targeted The Covenant, and what she hoped to gain, if anything, with the attack. As previously mentioned, what did exist were a series of notebooks, art composition books, and media files created by Hale documenting her planning and preparation for the attack, the events in her life that motivated her to commit the attack, and her hopes regarding the outcome of the attack. No single document, notebook, or digital device contains the answer to those questions. The answer is scattered throughout all the assembled material, which required a careful review of the material to understand Hale's motive.



## Summary of Attack Progression

Based on the material Hale left behind, data pertaining to Hale gathered during the investigations from other sources, and information obtained from online accounts, it was possible to reconstruct the sequence of events leading up to the attack. This information includes Hale's mental state throughout the course of her life, what events or interactions impacted her mental state, as well as the planning and preparation she conducted leading up to the attack.

### Prior to 2018

Hale wrote biographical stories of her formative years, which provided a first-person account of her life. The available material also included information obtained from her mental healthcare providers and records from Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), which Hale kept following her graduation from NSA. This information allowed detectives to piece together Hale's formative years and discover the origins of her mental health disorders.

In her writings, Hale often made mention of her struggles with mental health and claimed these struggles began when she was toddler. She claimed she had always been sensitive to loud noises and was easily frightened by large groups of children, large animals, and adults. Even though these recollections were written after Hale reached adulthood and therefore must be taken with a grain of salt due to the difference in time, one thing which was certainly documented was her mental health history, which began in 2001 when Hale was six years of age.

After noticing developmental delays in her daughter and believing she was autistic, Hale's mother took her to a mental health provider for an assessment. The assessing psychologist concluded Hale did have certain developmental delays, particularly in asserting herself in social situations, emotional processing, and indicators of anxiety. Nothing was found during the assessment to show Hale had autism spectrum disorder. Hale's mother also held her back from attending kindergarten for a year, believing the delay would help her catch up to her peers socially and emotionally.

Hale then attended The Covenant from her kindergarten year through the fourth grade (2001 – 2006). Hale considered these years the happiest of her childhood. She felt safe and accepted at The Covenant and made friends with other students. She considered her family life during this time as happy, with a positive relationship with both of her parents and her brother. During this time, she showed a proclivity for art, which her parents and teachers remarked was advanced for a child her age. Hale denied suffering any emotional or physical abuse during this period, and no records have been found to counteract her claims.

When Hale reached the fifth grade (2006), she transferred to Creswell Middle, a magnet school for the arts, and remained there until she completed her eighth-grade year (2010). This transfer was done to allow Hale to pursue her artistic interests. Once she arrived at Creswell Middle, she encountered a culture shock. While most of her classmates at The Covenant were predominantly white and came from middle class to wealthy households, most of her classmates at Creswell Middle were predominantly from minority groups and came from working-class households. Hale remarked it wasn't long before other students began to pick on her and even bully her, believing she was a rich white girl and worthy of derision. Though Hale's academics didn't appear to struggle mightily during this period, she began to feel socially ostracized, which lowered her self-esteem and self-confidence.

The turning point in her time at Creswell Middle was during her seventh-grade year when she made the school's basketball team. Hale was the only white player and a year behind most of the other players on the team, but she found her teammates were accepting of her and welcomed her participation. Some of her teammates stood up for her with other students and, for the first time, she believed she had found true friends rather than acquaintances. The team was successful and reached the city championships, where they lost in the final game. Hale came away from the experience with higher self-esteem and self-confidence than in the prior two years. She considered some of the girls on her team as her best friends and even began to experience romantic feelings for some of them.

The following year, however, was a disappointment. Most of the teammates she felt closest to had moved on to high school, which she felt left her defenseless against other students picking on her about her social background. The team wasn't nearly as successful her eighth-grade year, which was a further let down for Hale. The low self-esteem and self-confidence returned, to be eventually joined with anger.

After middle school, Hale attended high school at NSA. Upon arriving there her freshman year, she reconnected with some of her former teammates from middle school, including one she considered her best friend and the girl she





had the strongest romantic feelings towards. But upon arriving, she discovered those girls (who were starting their sophomore year while she was starting her freshman year) had developed new interests and social circles. Their interests and hobbies differed remarkably from Hale's, and she failed to establish connections within their social circles. This led to feelings of inadequacy on her part and increased her social isolation. She also discovered she didn't fit in with many of the other social cliques present at the school, which increased Hale's loneliness and self-doubt. This quickly impacted her grades, which her mother noticed. Hale remarked that during this time period, she first began to contemplate committing suicide. Believing something was wrong with her daughter, Hale's mother took her back to a therapist for assistance in correcting the behavior in 2011.

The therapist Hale saw was the therapist she visited periodically over the last several years. Upon noticing troubling behaviors with Hale, a psychological assessment was performed. This assessment concluded Hale suffered from major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, social phobias, anger-management issues, and was underdeveloped both emotionally and socially. This assessment also concluded Hale didn't suffer from autism spectrum disorder, despite Hale's and her mother's insistence to the contrary. From this point forward, Hale began attending therapy regularly and began taking medication to manage her conditions prescribed to her by a psychiatrist.

It was during this time Hale's relationship with her father first became strained. While she was in school, her father retired and began living on a fixed retirement income. This amount was less than the family enjoyed previously, which led to more austere living conditions. Hale also claimed her father rarely left the house and became withdrawn from the family, which Hale resented.

Though Hale's academic performance improved significantly after she began therapy, her emotional and social development barely changed. Even though she still maintained some connection with her middle school teammates, it was far from her expectations, especially when it came to romance. Hale did establish friendships with a few other students, but none of these friendships were the same to her as the ones she felt she was losing.

Hale graduated from high school in 2014, and, shortly afterwards, began attending Nossi, where she majored in graphic design. Hale wrote she didn't want to go to college due to her less-than-stellar experiences with education, but her mother made her, believing it was the only way Hale would ever develop the means to become independent. Hale continued to live at home while at Nossi and attended classes part-time. She didn't hold a job when she first attended Nossi, focusing entirely on her education.

Hale greatly enjoyed the classes she took as part of her degree concentration but struggled mightily with the core curriculum required for her bachelor's degree. These struggles also coincided with her middle school teammates drifting further apart from her, with many of them attending college elsewhere and pursuing different interests. Hale also discussed struggling to establish friendships while she was at Nossi. Though she found classmates she got along well with, she believed this was only due to their shared time in class and not because they truly had the same interests. Furthermore, none of them met the standards she created based on those friends from middle school she lost. This only increased her loneliness and began to affect her self-confidence, as she felt she would never find romance or reconnect with her best friend. She also began to place her anger on those teammates, claiming they were "bad friends" who "abandoned" her.

By early 2017, the stresses of college and her increasing loneliness and despair began to affect Hale's weight. Her weight dropped to unsafe levels, which alarmed both her mother and her therapist. At their recommendation, Hale agreed to attend an eating disorder clinic for six weeks in the summer of 2017. The program helped Hale regain weight to a healthy level and improve her eating habits, which Hale felt appreciative towards. The program also helped Hale progress against her anxiety and depression, which also led to an improvement in her academic performance.

But despite the improvement in weight and academics, Hale was still deeply lonely. During this time, she began stalking her middle school teammates through the social media pages and collected details about their lives. She downloaded numerous photographs from posts they made to their respective accounts and kept tabs on the events of their lives without her. This seemed to only deepen her loneliness as she began to feel hopeless in ever finding romance with those she heavily fantasized over. She also began to grow more resentful of those she believed were her "best friends" having "abandoned her" and being "dismissive" of her.

Shortly after she completed the program at the eating disorder clinic, Hale's therapist suggested to her she should begin journaling. Hale took to the idea immediately and began her first journal in August 2017. She began to use the journals to document her romantic longings, anger, isolation, and deepening depression. She also began to discuss



her father more negatively, which started at disappointment and resulted in outright hatred. She began to blame him for her mental health issues and claimed he demonstrated the same issues she possessed. She also criticized him for her limited options in obtaining mental health care due to her family paying out of pocket for her mental health treatment following his retirement.

## **2018 and Forward**

Despite the ongoing therapy and medication regimens, Hale's anxiety, depression, and rage only escalated. She commented how she felt she was being swallowed by despair and even created drawings documented how her assorted mental health conditions were affecting her mind. Her anxiety and social phobias only magnified, which led to her self-isolating more often. Though she did visit different places and pursue interests, these were done only when Hale felt she wouldn't have to deal with crowds. Her isolation and loneliness led Hale to begin believing the only true friends she could confide in were her stuffed animals, who she felt would never abandon her. She assigned them names and personalities, took them with her whenever she travelled, and began creating cartoons and digital media, including stories where they demonstrated some of the same emotions she felt.

Hale also wrote during this time she began shoplifting from businesses and began to develop a "shopping addiction." She always maintained an interest in video games, trading cards, and children's toys and would occasionally shoplift those items, along with art and office supplies. Hale believed collecting "treasured possessions" soothed her anxiety and depression, which she used as a justification for committing a theft.

Hale also expressed suicidal thoughts regularly in her entries. As her depression deepened, these thoughts turned into ideations. On a couple of occasions, Hale claimed to have made attempts at suicide. This included cutting her wrists with a knife and attempting to strangle herself. Neither attempt resulted in significant injury to Hale nor any physical indicators which would cause Hale's mother or therapists to become alarmed. Hale claimed she stopped herself upon realizing if she committed suicide, nobody would remember her or care.

But always ever present in Hale's life was her anger. From 2018 forward, she began to insert her anger more and more into each entry. She began to write "rage storms," which consisted of long, expletive-filled entries devoted to topics that greatly angered her. Though she had many targets of her anger, the most common topics at first involved societal viewpoints that differed from hers and her father. Eventually, these viewpoints expanded to perceptions she held, which included her believing she was being discriminated against and disparaged for being autistic, being ostracized by black culture despite her longing for acceptance, political topics, gun control, white privilege, and how humans were ruling the world. Hale explained, however, none of these writings were to be taken literally, including the homicidal fantasies she penned regarding her father, as she was simply writing these passages to "blow off steam" in a manner that didn't alarm anyone.

But eventually, the rage became directed towards the middle school teammates who abandoned her. As Hale continued to stalk them online, she noticed many of them were enjoying their adulthood and finding success in romance, education, and careers. She began to seethe over their posts showing them with their significant others, starting new careers, and enjoying themselves without Hale being present. She would write "rage storms" regarding their abandonment and wishing ruin upon them. Even though she would later write a retraction on many of these "rage storms" in the form of a letter or poem longing to be with them again, for those she believed were her "best friends" her rage never seemed sated. Eventually, this led to her deciding she needed to make them and society as a whole notice her.

In November 2017, Hale wrote a journal entry recounting how she had recently watched several documentaries regarding school shootings. She became fascinated with the topic and began to seek out additional information on the topic. Hale then reviewed countless news articles, documentaries, and other information available through the Internet regarding other mass killers in the United States. She downloaded images of the offenders, the weapons they used (either the actual firearms or stock photographs of the same make, model, and caliber of firearm), what information was publicly documented regarding their mental health, their known motives, where the attacks occurred, and the number of people killed and injured during the attack. Hale didn't particularly focus on school shooters or the specific motive of the



attack, only that a mass-shooting incident occurred. She then compiled this material using Adobe Photoshop and created multiple page documents detailing this information, which she referred to as her “research material”. Yet even though she reviewed information for every mass killing she could find regardless of their motives or the targets they selected, she kept returning to Columbine as her true source of inspiration. She did extensive research into the offenders, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, and considered them worthy of emulation. She focused on how their documented mental health history and societal views were similar to her own and how the notoriety they achieved following their deaths led them to becoming “gods.”

As time progressed, Hale began rating other mass killers based on the number of people they killed, what targets they selected, and the level of notoriety they achieved. She considered those offenders who killed a low number of people to be “amateurs” who weren’t worthy of respect. She further explained those individuals made it difficult for people like her with “god-like intentions” to commit an attack of their own. She made exceptions for those offenders with documented mental health histories showing they had serious mental health diseases or disorders, as she believed they were “too sick” to formulate an effective plan to kill an adequate number of victims.

Those fantasies began to turn into intentions in the summer of 2018. By this point, Hale wrote how she was tired of being alone and ignored, ostracized by those she felt were her friends, and shunned by society for being autistic. After writing an expletive rant directed towards her “best friend” for choosing a relationship with a man over her, Hale decided it was time to make others notice her for a change. She felt by “killing a bunch of children” she would no longer be ignored.

Around this time, she openly discussed how much she chafed over her mother’s control over her life and craved for independence. Even though she deeply loved her mother and considered her a “rock,” she felt her mother was dictating her life, despite her being an adult, and constantly prying into things that weren’t her business. She also feared to open up to her mother about her being a lesbian, believing her mother’s “traditional Christian” values would make her incapable of understanding, if not derisive towards her daughter’s orientation. Hale considered this a wedge between them and increased her desire to maintain secrecy regarding what she felt and believed.

By December 2018, Hale began actively planning an attack at Creswell Middle. She drew a map from her memories of the layout of the school. In the map, she specified the locations of classrooms, common areas, and where the entrances and exits were located. She outlined how she would progress through the school, who she would target and in what sequence, and where she would commit suicide within the school once she was done. Knowing access to the interior of the school was highly restricted during school hours, she detailed an elaborate plan to enter the school without being stopped or detected so she could begin her attack with the element of surprise.

During the first half of 2019, Hale continued to plan her attack on Creswell, without knowing how to obtain the means to commit the attack. Her OCD was manifest during this time with the excruciating detail she gave to the attack, including precise timelines, detailed descriptions of the clothing she would wear, and the specific route she would progress through the school. The more she pored over the details, the more convinced she was of her own success. The “rage storms” that interspersed these plans also became more heated, showing Hale’s anger was reaching the boiling point.

It would be that anger that would lead to her first roadblock in her plan. During therapy sessions in the spring and summer of 2019, Hale’s therapist noticed this anger with greater frequency. Eventually, Hale let slip she had suicidal ideations and homicidal fantasies, though she was quick to explain she didn’t have a plan for either. Her therapist became concerned and recommended Hale take part in a psychological assessment at Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC), which occurred in June 2019. Based on records from the assessment, VUMC confirmed the mental health disorders Hale was already known to have and identified her depression and anxiety as the largest aggravating factors. They made no mention of psychosis and noted Hale denied having any plans to harm herself or others, nor the means to do so. They recommended she participate in an intensive outpatient program (IOP) to address her mental state, which Hale (at her mother’s urging) agreed to complete. This program lasted eight weeks, with Hale completing the program near the end of August 2019. While Hale participated in her IOP, her therapist retired, which led to Hale acquiring a new therapist in the fall of 2019.

For a short period of time, the treatment seemed to work, as Hale’s writings tended to be more positive, and fewer mentions of depression and anxiety were present. She seemed more hopeful about life and the possibility of finding independence and success. But these feelings quickly faded, as the social and personal factors that drove her depression in the first place never left. Hale quickly sunk back into deep rage and despair. Her despair led her to suicidal





ideations once again, with Hale equating the consuming despair with being sucked into a “Dark Abyss.” This culminated in the belief the only way Hale was ever going to escape the pain and loneliness she experienced was through her death. At this point, Hale not only resumed her planning for a mass killing, she felt it was now more essential than ever as it would give her death more meaning. She likewise became more focused on the notoriety she would attain during a mass killing, as she sought to become a “god” like Harris and Klebold by killing victims nobody would forget: children.

Over the next several months, Hale began fantasizing and even considered other targets for a mass shooting. These locations included: Harpeth Hall Academy in Nashville, TN; Nashville School of the Arts; Harding Academy in Nashville, TN; and Hillsboro High School in Nashville, TN. Regarding her fantasies about Nashville School of the Arts, Hale’s fantasies were driven solely over how much easier it would have been to commit a mass shooting there while she attended high school. She documented how certain social groups at the school excluded her, which she considered ample justification for an attack. As for the other locations she fantasized about, Hale’s fantasies were driven solely by negative past experiences with certain students at the school. Even though she explicitly detailed some of those fantasies, Hale quickly added they were only fantasies, and she wouldn’t consider those locations to be viable targets. In the case of Harpeth Hall Academy, Harding Academy, and Hillsboro High School, Hale claimed she didn’t know enough about the location to accurately plan an attack and felt those targets would be inappropriate due to her lacking a connection to those locations.

By March 2020, Hale began to express doubts about targeting Creswell Middle. Her doubts weren’t necessarily about the intention to kill children, but more about the racial demographics of the school. Hale knew a large portion of the student body was black. Though she had no qualms about killing anyone regardless of specific demographical categories, she worried she might be branded as a racist, which would remove her ability to give the motive and reasoning for the attack and allow others to choose it for her once she was dead. Despite these concerns Hale continued to plan an attack on Creswell Middle, primarily due to the perceived past abuses she experienced there.

In the summer and fall of 2020, Hale began shopping for firearms, specifically AR-style rifles and shotguns. On October 30, 2020, Hale obtained her first firearm, a Smith & Wesson M&P-15 5.56mm caliber carbine. She purchased this firearm from a retail location using money she received from her federal student loans. Hale promptly purchased ammunition and accessories for this firearm, which included a gun sock to store the firearm within in her bedroom closet.

At this point, Hale then began recording what she referred to as the “Room Tapes.” These were a series of videos she recorded using her cellphone that she intended to leave behind after her death to explain her motivations for the attack. Hale intended to record 13 of these videos but only recorded 12 prior to her death. The videos were recorded over a 14-month period and were anywhere between five minutes and 40 minutes in duration. Some of the videos were messages she recorded for family and friends to explain why she committed the attack and how she felt about them, with the intention the videos be given to the recipients after her death. Other videos appeared to be addressed to law enforcement and the general public, with the intention they explain her motivations and showcase how carefully she planned the attack.

It was the purchase of the gun sock that led to her mother first discovering Hale owned a firearm. In an entry written on December 5, 2020, Hale explained her mother found the wrapper for the gun sock in a trash can. When questioned about the wrapper, Hale admitted to her mother she had purchased a rifle. Her mother immediately objected to the rifle due to Hale’s history of depression and suicidal fantasies, but her father stated he had no problem with Hale having a firearm provided she take classes to learn how to use the rifle safely and responsibly. Hale’s mother begrudgingly agreed, and Hale kept the rifle.

In December 2020, Hale conducted her first reconnaissance of Creswell Middle. She went to the school after hours and took photographs of the entrances of the building. She managed to enter the building by unknown means and noted the layout of the school, with the intention of reconciling the layout with her memories. She paid particular attention to the structure and strength of the doors, especially since she planned for the eventuality she may have to force entry into the school to commit the attack.

In January 2021, Hale created a logo she called the “Dark Abyss.” The logo was designed to explain how Hale’s depression had consumed her wholly and how she had abandoned any hope of overcoming her depression. Hale would use this logo for the remainder of her life as a symbol of her attack. She drew the logo on some of her notebooks and folder covers, doodled the logo in the margins of her notebooks, and printed the design on a t-shirt she would later wear in the attack. At this point, she also began stating it was destiny to commit suicide, as she found nothing worth living for any longer.



Also in the month of January 2021, Hale began to consider The Covenant as a potential target. Hale traveled to the school outside of school hours and conducted a reconnaissance of the exterior of the building. She paid particular attention to the entrances to the building and how those doors were constructed, as she did with Creswell Middle.

On February 4, 2021, Hale purchased a second firearm, a Mossberg Maverick 88 12-gauge shotgun. She purchased this firearm from a firearms dealer and used money she saved from her job pet sitting. Her father learned of the firearm shortly after she purchased it and again raised no objections to her owning it. No information is available to show Hale's mother was aware of this firearm at this time.

Hale initially planned to attack Creswell Middle on April 13, 2021. Hale selected this date in honor of Columbine (the attack at Columbine occurred on April 13, 1999) and considered it a fitting tribute to the memory of Harris and Klebold. She then decided to postpone her attack to obtain additional training on her firearm to ensure she would be proficient with it during the attack. Hale then began to seek out private instruction and training from multiple firearms dealers within the greater Nashville area.

On April 8, 2021, Hale cancelled the attack on Creswell Middle all together and changed her target selection to The Covenant. Hale then listed the pros and cons for each target, focusing on the physical structure and security of each location, the age and backgrounds of the individuals at each location, and the public reaction she would receive following the attack. Based on this analysis, she chose The Covenant as the better target for three reasons: (1) The Covenant was more geographically isolated than Creswell Middle, which she felt would give her more time to kill; (2) with The Covenant being a private Christian school, she would receive more notoriety; and (3) due to the student body at Creswell Middle being predominantly black, she was afraid she would be seen as a racist, which would affect how much control she had over the narrative after her death and allow others to state her motive behind the attack.

Around the time she selected The Covenant, another red flag was raised by Hale, this time to her therapist. During a therapy session in April 2021, Hale let slip to her therapist she owned a rifle. The therapist immediately objected to Hale owning a firearm due to her history with depression and suicidal fantasies. Hale claimed she managed to assure her therapist those fantasies were well in her past and she was no longer in danger of harming herself. Following this session, Hale chided herself for losing control and letting slip proof of her "true intentions". She was determined to be more careful in the future regarding how much others would know about her plans. After this, she took more precautions to hide the ammunition and equipment she was stockpiling for the attack, along with her writings and "research materials" she compiled to prepare for the attack. She also began shopping for other firearms that were easier to conceal than the two she already had, to prevent her parents from seizing those firearms if she made any future mistakes.

On April 16, 2021, Hale purchased a third firearm, a KelTec Sub 2000 9 mm caliber carbine, from a firearm dealer. To pay for the firearm, Hale used money she obtained from her federal student grants which was left over after paying her education costs. Hale mentioned how she kept this purchase from both of her parents. On June 11, 2021, Hale purchased a fourth firearm, a Mossberg Shockwave 12-gauge shotgun, from a firearm dealer. Once again, Hale used money she obtained from her federal student grants which was left over after paying her education costs. She then began obtaining and stockpiling ammunition, magazines, and other equipment related to those firearms with the intention of using them during the attack.

In late June 2021, Hale's plans were further postponed by her parents and therapist. Hale's mother discovered Hale purchased a copy of the book *The Columbine Diaries* from Amazon, which was delivered to their home. After learning what Hale was reading and remembering her daughter owned at least one firearm, Hale's mother brought her concerns to Hale's therapist. This prompted a meeting between Hale, her parents, and her therapist regarding Hale's firearms. At this point, it came to light how Hale had been experiencing homicidal fantasies towards her father. Her therapist and parents convinced Hale to surrender her firearms to her parents, who would then store the firearms at a safe location. Her therapist then recommended Hale be assessed at VUMC to determine the best course of action, which Hale also begrudgingly agreed to.

The seizure of her firearms enraged Hale, specifically towards her therapist. On July 7, 2021, Hale achieved some measure of revenge when she purchased another firearm, a Smith & Wesson M&P Shield 9mm caliber semi-automatic pistol, from a licensed firearm dealer. To pay for the firearm, Hale used money left over from her federal student loans and charged the remainder to her credit card. Hale managed to keep the purchase of this firearm a secret from her parents and her therapist.

Even though Hale was assessed at VUMC, she wasn't hospitalized a second time. Instead, Hale and her mother



elected to seek out the services of a different therapist and began seeing this therapist within a few months after the assessment. After Hale agreed to her mother's request to sell her firearms and show she was serious about not wanting to harm herself, her parents returned firearms to her on July 23, 2021. Even though Hale would sell two of the firearms she possessed (she sold the Smith & Wesson M&P-15 on December 7, 2021 to a private buyer she communicated with on Armslist, and she sold the Mossberg Maverick shotgun to a firearm retailer on or about December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021), she never sold the KelTec carbine, the Mossberg Shockwave shotgun, or the Smith & Wesson semi-automatic pistol.

The temporary loss of the firearms made Hale determined to be more careful going forward. She decided to purchase firearms that would be easier to hide (either in size or the ability to fold or disassemble them for easy concealment), developed hiding places within her bedroom to prevent items from being found, deleted search histories from her cellphone and computer to prevent her mother from finding out what she researched, and elected to be more judicious in how she spent money on her preparations and planning to prevent her mother from taking notice. Once she sold two of her firearms, she remained devoted to training and practicing at shooting ranges but elected to rent firearms and purchase ammunition at the range to prevent her mother from knowing what she intended to do.

Though the loss of her firearms made her more cautious, it equally galvanized her commitment to carrying out a school shooting and properly planning an attack on The Covenant. On September 14, 2021, Hale visited The Covenant and sought a tour of the school. Even though she gave her reason as being an alum who wanted to reminisce about her time in elementary school, her true purpose was to review the interior layout of the school to make sure nothing was markedly different than her memories. The school staff granted her request and on September 18, 2021, Hale was given a tour with a faculty escort. During the tour, Hale discreetly photographed different locations within the school and videotaped the progress of her tour. While doing so, she took special note of the library, the hallways near the classrooms, the sanctuary, and the large window present in the second-floor lobby of the sanctuary that overlooked the south parking lots. Following the tour, Hale prepared a detailed map of the layout for The Covenant as she planned where she would enter the building, what route she would travel through the school, and which classrooms she would target and in which order. She also plotted alternate routes to use in the event something arose that required her to adjust quickly.

Hale also decided at this point she needed additional training and practice to ensure the result of the attack would meet her expectations. She also felt she needed to wait a little longer to convince her parents she was no longer a threat or a reason of concern. As such, she postponed her attack date until April 2022.

Between January and May 2022, Hale began to attend formal firearms training classes at Royal Range USA. Based on the information gathered during the investigation, the classes she participated in were designed to teach basic marksmanship and safety techniques to new shooters, as well as how to use the firearm for the purpose of self-defense. She also researched websites devoted to marksmanship and downloaded shooting drills she believed would help her become more proficient and deadly during a mass shooting. She continued to shop for an AR pistol during this time and remarked how she took every opportunity to rent and try out different AR pistols to decide which one she wanted.

At the same time, Hale continued to pore over documentaries, articles, and writings regarding other mass shootings, with a focus on school shootings. Hale took detailed notes regarding what those offenders did right and wrong during their attack. She appeared to use the analysis to determine what she may need to incorporate in her own plan so it would succeed. Hale frequently commented how her attack would be a failure if she killed less than 10 people and desired a body count of at least 40.

In February 2022, Hale watched the televised coverage of the Travis Reinking trial in relation the mass killing at a Waffle House restaurant in Antioch, Tennessee, on April 22, 2018. Hale remarked how she watched the entirety of the trial (either live or recorded segments posted on the Internet) and learned about what to expect if she survived or was taken alive following a mass shooting. Hale dreaded the possibility of being taken alive after an attack and specifically worried about a "hero" disarming her before she could achieve her desired number of victims. She claimed one of the reasons she chose The Covenant was due to the likelihood those within wouldn't fight back. She claimed she had to prepare herself for the eventuality she would be taken alive and created detailed plans in the event of her capture. She created a t-shirt with handwritten phrases and her "Dark Abyss" logo printed on the front that she intended to wear during the trial (this shirt was very similar to the one she intended to wear during the attack). Believing she would likely not receive the death penalty for committing a mass murder, she held out hope that one of the other inmates would kill her once she was taken into custody.

Hale began seeking alternate targets to attack in the event she felt compelled to commit an attack when The Covenant was closed. Hale based the need for an alternate target due to her increasing depression, which she worried would drive her to suicide before she was ready to commit an attack. She also worried her mother would somehow





discover she was acquiring firearms and stockpiling ammunition, which may trigger another incident where her firearms would be seized. She started researching potential attack locations and focused on shopping malls, highly travelled roadways, and public spaces. The locations she specifically researched were: Green Hills Mall in Nashville, TN; Opry Mills Mall in Nashville, TN; the interchange of Briley Parkway and Centennial Blvd. in Nashville, TN; Belmont Blvd. just south of Belmont University campus in Nashville, TN; and the interchange of N. Mount Juliet Rd. and Interstate 40 in Mount Juliet, TN. Hale analyzed the pros and cons of each attack location as a means of determining which options would better suit her. While doing so, she highlighted her discomfort with large crowds and packed public spaces but was willing to endure that discomfort if it meant she was able to commit her attack. She eventually decided her “emergency” targets were Opry Mills Mall and Belmont Blvd. She chose Opry Mills Mall due to the number of people who would be present and her familiarity with that mall. She chose Belmont Blvd. solely due to the proximity to her residence.

Despite Hale planning to commit the attack on The Covenant in April 2022, Hale postponed the attack yet again and changed the prospective attack date to August or September 2022. Hale did so to accommodate her graduation from college, which occurred in late May 2022. She also wanted to pursue prospective employment as a professional artist or designer first prior to committing an attack. Furthermore, Hale had yet to procure the AR pistol she desired.

Her lack of her desired weapon was rectified on June 6, 2022, when she purchased a Lead Star Grunt-15 5.56mm caliber AR pistol from a firearms dealer. She paid for the weapon using money she had saved and received from family members as gifts upon her graduation from college. After Hale failed to land a job in art or graphic design quickly after graduation, she decided to continue her final preparations in committing her attack.

Prior to her committing the attack in August 2022, as she had planned for months, one of Hale’s childhood friends was involved in a serious motor vehicle crash and would later die. Her death severely affected Hale and caused her to sink into a deep depression. It wouldn’t be until October 2022 before she finally claimed she had recovered from that depression and could again proceed with committing an attack. At this point, she decided she would commit her attack following the new year.

During the fall of 2022, Hale became increasingly paranoid. She was constantly worried about being discovered by her parents or therapist. She was worried they would discover her plans and contact law enforcement, which would result in her being involuntarily hospitalized and her firearms taken from her. She documented occasions where she believed she was almost caught by her mother and chided herself about being more careful. Due to this paranoia and her increasing desire to die during a mass attack, Hale created another “emergency plan,” which involved her killing her parents to prevent them from raising an alarm. In this contingency, she decided following their deaths she would need to quickly travel to one of her “emergency” targets and commit a mass killing, even though neither location were her ideal target. This paranoia also led her to abandoning nascent plans she formed in potentially recruiting an accomplice to help carry out an attack.

Hale also reviewed her plans and adjusted her attack plan during this time period. Even though she maintained the same route throughout the school and still established her goal was to kill at least 40 people, Hale made adjustments to her plans based on her research into other mass killings. She established she must keep moving during the attack and couldn’t allow herself to be locked in or confined to a single room or area within the school. She declared she couldn’t spend more than one minute in any room, regardless if she had doubts if she had killed everyone within. She researched the distance between The Covenant and police precincts and established how much time she would have to carry out her attack before first responders arrived. She was initially worried about the presence of a fire station next door to The Covenant and briefly considered creating a distraction involving a small fire or explosion down the street. She abandoned this idea very quickly, as she worried she may be stopped by a “hero” either while setting the distraction or as she was leaving that location. She also acknowledged an attempt by Harris and Klebold during the school shooting at Columbine involved the employment of an improvised explosive device, which failed to detonate. She doubted she could do better and thus abandoned using fire or explosives as a distraction.

The additional planning also contained clues as to how or why Hale selected potential targets within the school. She openly expressed a desire to primarily kill children, though she believed only the older children (over 7 years of age) were viable targets. She felt the younger children were too young to understand the difference between good and evil or how the world was structured, which made killing them especially cruel. She reiterated her belief that the race, religion, gender, or other demographical categories of her victims wouldn’t matter, provided most of her victims would be children. She openly acknowledged none of those she would kill were guilty of anything and denied any personal motivation for targeting them. She felt their deaths were necessary to give her death meaning.

Hale also expressed her fantasies regarding the aftermath of the attack, which included documentaries and books



about her, her belongings and weapons being placed in museums as exhibits, and even her own bedroom being preserved and visited as a memorial to her life. She believed the attack would highlight her struggles with mental health and demonstrate to the world how she shouldn't have been ignored and ostracized.

During this time, she wrote out a "will," where she explained in detail who was supposed to obtain her possessions following her death, which included her toys, video games, movies, stuffed animals, and the writings and videos she created regarding the attack over the previous three years. She detailed her fear that her possessions would be mistreated after her death and explained how she wanted all the writings to be published. The publication of the writings would serve three purposes: to document her struggles with her mental health; to show how, despite her autism and OCD, her mental health conditions helped her "to execute the perfect plan"; and to show others like her how to best plan and carry out an attack.

In December 2022, Hale purchased a tactical load-bearing vest from a military surplus store in Nashville, TN. She would later use this vest to hold magazines and ammunition she would carry during the attack. When combined with magazine pouches she purchased that could be affixed to her belt and the military fatigue pants with cargo pockets she could use to hold additional ammunition and equipment, Hale was now able to carry hundreds of rounds of live ammunition without the need to carry a duffel bag, backpack, or other container. Around the same time, Hale purchased an automatic knife with a glass-break tool she planned to use in the event she had to stab someone or break the glass out of a window to enter the school or a specific room within the school. She prepared detailed diagrams outlining where on her person she would store her pistol, spare magazines, loose ammunition, and other equipment she planned to use during the attack.

By the beginning of 2023, Hale had set four new dates for her attack. The dates she set for January and February of 2023 were postponed, but by March 2023, she no longer saw the point in postponing the attack. Her writings became darker and more rage was visible in the entries. At this point, she began preparing folders containing all of her research material, information documenting her preparations for an attack, and transferring data to thumb drives so they could be found and studied. Her stated purpose behind these preparations was to allow her to dictate the narrative surrounding the attack instead of it being dictated by others.

As her attack date approached, Hale made a change to her plan regarding which firearms she would use during the attack. She originally planned to carry all four firearms that she owned during the attack and use them for specific functions. As the attack date approached, she decided to not take her shotgun with her due to her concerns about how effective she would be with this firearm. Due to the shotgun having a pistol grip and designed to be fired from the hip, Hale wasn't able to use the firearm at most shooting ranges due to safety concerns. Even though Hale found locations to practice outdoors where she would be able to shoot from the hip, she discovered she wasn't as accurate with this firearm as opposed to the others.

The only known encounter between Hale and law enforcement prior to the attack occurred on March 23, 2023, when she was present when someone became injured during an accidental discharge at a shooting range. Hale commented how she was briefly questioned by law enforcement but was allowed to be on her way once it was realized she saw nothing of the incident.

On the night prior to the attack, Hale prepared her equipment and recorded a last video within her bedroom. She reviewed the data she saved on the thumb drives she planned to leave behind to ensure the files could be accessed and the content met her approval. On the morning of the attack and prior to her leaving her residence, Hale wrote a final note to her parents, bidding them goodbye and leaving instructions on how she wanted her possessions cared for. She penned a final entry into her journals and left the residence. Just prior to committing the attack, she sent a farewell message to one of her middle school teammates, declaring her intention to commit suicide and bidding her goodbye.



## Attack Progression Timeline

- **2017**
  - **November 2017:**
    - First mention of Hale fantasizing about committing a school shooting. The fantasies were brought about after watching documentaries regarding school shootings and remembering her social struggles in middle school.
    - Began researching other mass killers throughout American history available on the Internet or documentaries she watched.
- **2018**
  - Research into other mass killers and school shooters continued. Began claiming an affinity with Harris and Klebold and a fascination with Columbine.
  - **December 2018:** wrote detailed fantasies regarding committing a mass killing at Creswell Middle. Also espoused homicidal fantasies about killing her psychiatrist for “prying” and killing her father prior to committing an attack at Creswell Middle. Claimed her motive for the attack was vengeance for the way she was treated while a student there, how she wanted to be feared for a change, and how she wanted people to no longer ignore her. Created a map of the school from memory, documented a detailed timeline for her attack, and detailed what routes she would travel through the school during the attack.
- **2019**
  - Research into other mass killers and school shooters continued. Continued to fantasize and make plans regarding an attack on Creswell Middle.
  - Began listing firearms and ammunition to procure, equipment needed for an attack, training goals, and locations to obtaining training and weapons. Listed the “Bedroom Tapes” she would create to document her planning and preparation for an attack.
  - **June 2019:** Hale began IOP program at VUMC. Postponed further planning due to treatment.
  - **August 2019:** resumed planning and preparation.
  - **October 2019:** created a new map of Creswell Middle based on her memories of the school.
- **2020**
  - **September 2020:** began visiting firearm retailers and shopping for firearms, particularly AR-15 style rifles. She simultaneously planned how she would hide firearms, ammunition, and equipment within her bedroom to prevent her parents from discovering her intentions and stopping her.
  - **October 2020:**
    - Gave potential attack dates as either 2021 or 2022
    - Purchased Smith & Wesson M&P-15 5.56mm caliber carbine from gun store, along with ammunition and spare magazines. Began seeking private instruction and training on her firearm.
  - **November 2020:**
    - Drew detailed diagram documenting what clothing she would wear during an attack on Creswell Middle. Also discussed entry plan for Creswell Middle and created updated maps of the layout of the school, locations within the school she would attack, the route she would take through the school, and where she would commit suicide within the school.
    - Recorded the first of her “Bedroom Tapes”, documenting her reasons for committing an attack.
  - **December 2020:**
    - Hale’s parents discovered she owned a rifle.
    - Conducted first site reconnaissance of Creswell Middle, focusing on entrances to the building. She managed to gain entry into the building and photographed the interior of the school’s library.
- **2021**
  - **January 2021:**
    - Hale set attack date for Creswell Middle as 4/13/2022.
    - Continued one-on-one training with firearms at local gun ranges. Continued practicing marksmanship with carbine.
    - Continued researching and downloading information of other historical mass killings.





- **January 2021 (cont.):**
  - Began referencing her depression as a “dark abyss”. Designed the “Dark Abyss” logo, which she began to use on materials and writings devoted towards the attack.
  - Conducted first live reconnaissance of The Covenant. Photographed exterior of several entrances to the building, focusing on locking mechanisms.
  - Began creating documents using Adobe Photoshop depicting her fantasies regarding the attack. Documents included photographs of Hale handing her firearms and prospective book and movie title covers memorializing the attack.
- **February 2021:**
  - Began researching group firearms training classes at different firing ranges in the greater Nashville area.
  - Purchased a Mossberg Maverick 88 12-gauge shotgun from a firearm retailer on February 4, 2021.
  - Hale’s father learned she owned a 12-gauge shotgun.
  - Continued practicing marksmanship with her carbine.
  - Recorded additional “Bedroom Tapes.”
- **March 2021:**
  - Hale shifted her preferred target from Creswell Middle to The Covenant. Still gave prospective attack date as April 13, 2022.
  - Continued practicing marksmanship with her carbine.
  - Recorded additional “Bedroom Tapes.”
- **April 2021:**
  - Purchased a Kel Tec Sub 2000 9 mm caliber carbine on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from a firearm retailer.
- **June 2021:**
  - Purchased a Mossberg Shockwave 12-gauge shotgun from a firearm retailer on June 11, 2021.
  - Hale’s mother discovered she purchased *The Columbine Diaries* from Amazon. Hale’s therapist was contacted, and a meeting was set to discuss the book and Hale’s ownership of firearms. Hale was convinced by her mother and therapist to surrender her firearms to her mother so they could be stored elsewhere. Hale was also referred to VUMC for a psychological assessment.
  - Hale’s parents located and removed firearms from her bedroom. The firearms were then stored at Hale’s grandmother’s residence.
- **July 2021:**
  - On July 6, 2021, Hale purchased a Smith & Wesson M&P Shield 9mm caliber semi-automatic pistol from a firearm retailer.
  - In late July 2021, Hale’s parents returned her firearms to her with instructions to sell those firearms. Hale reluctantly agreed.
  - Hale, through her mother, terminated her treatment with her therapist. Hale then sought out a new therapist.
  - Recorded additional “Room Tapes.”
- **August 2021:**
  - Hale explained she wanted to postpone her attack until her graduation from Nossi in May 2022.
  - Hale began reviewing AR pistols for sale with the intention of purchasing one after she sold her AR carbine.
- **September 2021:**
  - Hale began researching Green Hills Mall and Opry Mills Mall as potential attack sites. She travelled to each location to review security presence, identified preferred entry locations, and considered different routes she would travel during the attack in each location. She downloaded interior maps from the Internet to use as planning material.
  - Hale visited The Covenant during operating hours on September 14, 2021. She inquired about a tour but was told to call and make an appointment.
  - Hale revisited The Covenant on September 18, 2021, and participated in a guided individual tour. Hale videotaped their route through the school using her phone and took photographs with her cellphone of different locations she found interesting.



- **October 2021:**
  - Hale changed her intended attack date to April 2022, though acknowledged she may have to postpone to either August 2022 or September 2022.
  - Recorded additional "Room Tapes."
- **November 2021:** Hale sold her Mossberg Maverick shotgun to a firearm retailer.
- **December 2021:** Hale sold her AR carbine to a private buyer she met through Armslist.
- **2022:**
  - **January 2022:**
    - Established The Covenant as her "Plan A" target. Established Opry Mills Mall as her "Plan B" target. Developed the area of Belmont Blvd. south of Belmont University campus in Nashville, TN as her "Plan C" target. Confirmed attack date for April 2022.
    - Began attending formal firearms training classes at Royal Range.
  - **February 2022:** Hale began personalizing her magazines with stickers and printed doodles.
  - **March 2022:** Hale attended additional formal firearms training classes at Royal Range.
  - **April 2022:**
    - Hale decided to postpone the attack at the last minute so she could participate in the Senior Show at Nossi. Reset attack date for May 2022.
    - Hale attended additional formal firearms training classes at Royal Range.
  - **May 2022:** Hale decided to postpone the attack until August 2022 or September 2022, due to her graduation from Nossi and her goal of attaining a job in art or graphic design.
  - **June 2022:**
    - On June 6, 2022, Hale purchased a Lead Star Grunt-15 5.56mm caliber AR pistol from a firearms retailer.
    - Hale began personalizing her firearms with stickers, hand drawn "Dark Abyss" logos, and writings.
  - **July 2022:**
    - Recorded additional "Room Tapes."
    - Continued practicing firearms at local firearm ranges.
  - **August 2022:**
    - One of Hale's closest friends from her middle school basketball team was critically injured and later died from a vehicle crash. Due to deep depression from this friend's death, Hale indefinitely postponed the attack on The Covenant.
  - **October 2022:**
    - Hale recorded additional "Room Tapes."
    - Attack date set for either January 2023 or February 2023.
    - Hale established an "emergency plan" in the event she was discovered by her parents. She planned to kill her parents and commit an attack immediately afterwards on Belmont Blvd. Hale ruled out attack on Opry Mills as alternate plan.
    - Discussed potentially recruiting an accomplice to help her ensure the attack was successful. Hale quickly abandoned the idea due to paranoia she would be discovered and due to her doubting she could find anyone suitable in time.
    - Began target shooting her shotgun at remote and wooded areas in the Nashville area. Continued shooting practice on other firearms at local firearm ranges.
    - Hale discussed an outdoor shooting at passing vehicles as alternate targets. Areas she specifically researched were Briley Pkwy. at Centennial Blvd. in Nashville, TN and N. Mount Juliet Rd. at Interstate 40 in Mt. Juliet, TN. Hale concluded the success of an attack at each location was too low to seriously consider.
  - **November 2022:**
    - Hale recorded last of the "Room Tapes."
    - Discussed NFD fire station next door to The Covenant and possible diversion plan using either a fire or explosion.
    - Created detailed timelines for attack on The Covenant. Discussed police response times and calculated how much time she would have to commit an attack once she was inside the school.
    - Continued shooting practice with her shotgun at remote and wooded areas. Continued shooting practice with other firearms at local firearm ranges.



- **December 2022:**
  - Purchased automatic knife with glass-break tool. Intended to use the knife to either stab victims or break out glass in doors and windows during the attack.
  - Purchased a tactical vest from a military surplus store.
  - Created her “will,” detailing the distribution of her possessions, thumb drives, writings, and artwork.
- 2023:
  - **January 2023:**
    - Postponed attack until February 2023.
    - Continued shooting practice with her shotgun at remote and wooded areas. Continued shooting practice with other firearms at local firearm ranges.
  - **February 2023:**
    - Postponed attack until March 27, 2023. Set alternate attack date in April 2023 in the event she had to postpone again.
    - Conducted research on faculty and staff of The Covenant through open-source Internet sources.
    - Continued practicing with firearms at local firearm ranges and remote outdoor areas.
  - **March 2023:**
    - Made final preparations for written material and thumb drives to be preserved and viewable after her death.
    - Ruled out using her shotgun during the attack due to her lack of confidence in her accuracy.
    - Interviewed by police at a firearm range in Gallatin, Tennessee, after another shooter was injured from an accidental discharge.
    - Loaded her magazines, equipment, and firearms in a duffle bag on March 26, 2023.
    - Committed the attack on March 27, 2023.





## Offender Behavioral Analysis

During the investigation, detectives interviewed Hale's family members and friends to gain their observations regarding her actions and behaviors. Detectives also sought out records related to the mental health therapy and treatment she received throughout her life to determine Hale's state of mind and reconcile some of the information found in the materials she left behind. Detectives were able to obtain records from the first two therapists Hale saw (which spanned the period from 2001 through 2021), records of psychological assessments Hale underwent during her life (which occurred in the years 2001, 2011, 2019, and 2021), and records from the neuropsychologist who treated her and managed her medication regimens from 2019 until her death. These records were obtained with the assistance of Hale's parents, who provided their consent to have the records released to law enforcement on the condition all of this information be kept in the strictest of confidence and never be publicly disclosed. Even though Hale's writings indicate she saw a psychiatrist prior to 2019, who was responsible for managing her medication regimens, no information was found either in Hale's writings or any other records regarding the identity of this provider. As such, no records were able to be obtained from this source.

As detectives were preparing to obtain records from Hale's third and final therapist, as well as an eating disorder clinic which treated her in 2017, events which occurred outside of the control of the MNPD Homicide Unit derailed the process. After information from the case file was leaked to the media, which included information regarding Hale's medical and mental health treatment that was to be kept in the strictest of confidence, Hale's parents no longer had confidence in the ability of the MNPD to safeguard this information. After being unable to devise a mechanism to satisfy their concerns and obtain their consent, and without any other legal mechanism being available to obtain those records, further attempts to obtain those records were abandoned.

Using the material Hale left behind, the available mental health records, statements provided by Hale's family members and friends, and forensic findings from the crime scene itself, a forensic behavioral analysis of Audrey Hale was conducted to help determine the motive behind the murders and whether or not anyone else would likely have been involved. It should be noted a forensic psychological analysis wasn't completed in this case. This would have required Hale being available to be interviewed, which wasn't possible. A forensic behavioral analysis, however, can be completed based on the available information and materials.

During this analysis, the MNPD Homicide Unit sought out the assistance of the Behavioral Analysis Unit of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI – BAU) due to their advanced training in offender behavioral analysis and to access the professional insights of the forensic psychologists they have access to. With their assistance, detectives were able to answer questions regarding Hale's mental competence, her motives, her state of mind, and the likelihood Hale received or requested assistance from others regarding the attack.

Based on the available mental health records, Hale was diagnosed with major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social phobias, and other emotional disorders. At times, Hale suffered from anorexia nervosa. Her therapists often remarked how Hale suffered from severe anger and demonstrated difficulty in controlling it. Nothing was found to show Hale was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, despite Hale's insistence to the contrary in the material she left behind. No evidence of psychosis was found in the available materials nor in her mental health records. Based on the materials Hale left behind and interviews with those who knew her, it's certain Hale suffered from those diagnosed conditions up until her death, despite medication and treatment.

Hale was without question highly depressed and highly suicidal throughout her life. She embraced her death at the end of the attack and considered any other outcome as failure. Despite the medication and therapy she received, none of this appeared to affect her outlook on life, as none of the social or environmental factors that drove her depression ever changed. Even without her constant mentions of depression in her writings, artwork, and videos, clear indicators are present throughout the other assembled materials. Her struggles with eating disorders, low self-esteem, lack of assertiveness in interpersonal communication, and low self-confidence are all indicative of depression being the driving force in her life.

Despite her suicidality, it appears the attack and her death were at times not her primary objective. The regular postponement of the attack and the reasons she gave for them are an indicator of ambivalence in Hale's life. Hale sought out ways to change the course of her life and to avoid committing suicide. These events included graduating from college, seeking out gainful employment, and participating in events with friends and family. Despite this ambivalence, Hale continued to plan and prepare an attack, and only after those alternatives failed to develop did she carry it out.



Her obsessive compulsive disorder is manifest throughout the writings and recorded videos. Hale compiled numerous lists, diagrams, and charts regarding the attack. She also compiled extensive “to-do” lists related to her hobbies and interests. The amount of research she did of other mass killers, the manner in which she created material to study those offenders, and the amount of time she spent on this research was certainly obsessive. The attention to detail she devoted to the attack could be seen in the plans and timetables regarding the attack, which she designed to be rigidly adhered to. These detailed plans and research appeared to be therapeutic to her to some extent, even if they became practically addictive.

Throughout the writings, Hale demonstrated a high degree of narcissism. She believed she was far more intelligent and creative than others, felt she was entitled to having the things she desired in life without having to work for it, and she felt she should be fully accepted and embraced by other individuals and groups without question or reservation. She showed a high level of selfishness by regularly expressing how she was the true victim in an attack she carried out, how others had to die to give her death meaning, how she would become a “god” in the aftermath of the attack, and how she should be emulated by others. She regularly manipulated others into giving her what she wanted, and she railed against those who saw through the manipulation.

Her rigidity and narcissism were certainly handicaps when it came to carrying out the attack. She often remarked how her plans were perfect and destined to succeed, even though her expectations of what she would find when she entered the school were overly optimistic. During the attack itself, she showed an inability to adapt to changing circumstances and conditions. Despite all her research, she never realized schools have developed active killer response plans, which include them barricading within classrooms in a manner which would make it difficult for her to kill others. Once she failed to find easy targets, she appeared to wander the hallways of the building, angry and confused about her lack of success in meeting her goals. She demonstrated her frustration by shooting television sets, doors, and windows in places where nobody was present.

Hale’s self-isolation can be attributed to a combination of her anxiety, social phobias, and depression. As time passed, Hale considered herself as being “at war with society” and above everyone else. This led to pervasive loneliness, which in turn fueled the sense of hopelessness she experienced in life. Her social phobias were manifest in the way she selected potential targets for an attack. After initially identifying Green Hills Mall and Opry Mills Mall as suitable targets, she eventually rejected them due to her fears she would become “overstimulated” amongst a large crowd of people.

Hale’s anger was present in most of the material she created. Her “rage storms”, which touched upon a number of social and personal topics, were extensive and belied a lack of control. She repeatedly harped on topics or events in her life where she felt wronged, whether those wrongs were real or imagined. It’s doubtful her writing down her feelings and emotions were completely therapeutic or fully relieved her of her anger. She often blamed others for situations she perceived negatively impacted her life, particularly her father and the friends she felt “abandoned” her. This anger also appeared to have directly influenced her desire to self-isolate from the world, which increased her loneliness and low self-esteem.

At times, these conditions rose to the surface, despite Hale’s best efforts to control her inner turmoil. This led to situations where her parents and therapists sought more intensive treatments to manage her assorted mental health disorders, including partial hospitalization programs. These methods ultimately failed to successfully treat Hale, though it can be said this was due to Hale herself not wanting to be treated. Instead, these attempts led Hale to becoming very paranoid, more secretive, and to further self-isolate herself from the world. This also led to Hale becoming more manipulative towards her parents and therapists as time progressed. Hale’s paranoia grew to the point where she seriously considered and planned to kill her mother to prevent her attack plans from being foiled, despite her strong emotional attachment to her mother.

Despite all her assorted mental health disorders, Hale was certainly sane. She was capable of adjusting her plans as needed, manipulating others into seeing her as meek and nonthreatening, and fully understood her attack was not only criminal but morally reprehensible.



## Motive

In short, the motive determined over the course of the investigation was notoriety.

Even though numerous disappointments in relationships, career aspirations, and independence fueled her depression, and even though this depression made her highly suicidal, this doesn't explain the attack. As Hale wrote on several occasions, if suicide was her goal then she would have simply killed herself.

Throughout the writings and videos, Hale frequently commented that her death needed to matter and be remembered. Throughout her life, Hale experienced loneliness and disappointment. She felt abandoned and ignored by those she longed to befriend and engage with romantically, which angered her more than anything else. She believed that by simply committing suicide, she would be quickly forgotten and not even worthy of a footnote in history. She craved the notoriety Harris and Klebold attained following Columbine. This can be seen clearly with the frequent references in her writings and videos of how they became "gods" following their attack. This led to a deep desire on her part to become a "god" like them and other mass killers who attained notoriety, even if it meant infamy.

Hale longed for her name and actions to be remembered long after she was dead. She wanted absolute control of the narrative surrounding the attack, particularly her motives. She saw herself as a victim in the attack, and even though at times she saw herself equal to those she would kill, there were occasions she considered herself to be "the true victim" in the attack. She expected there would be books and documentaries dedicated to her and the attack, how her bedroom would become a museum dedicated to her memory, and expected her firearms, artwork, and writings to be prominently displayed in museums worldwide. She wanted her mental health to be a prominent topic of discussion and debate. Most disturbingly, she wanted the things she left behind to be shared with the world so she could inspire and teach others who were "mentally disordered" like her to plan and commit an attack of their own.

Hale felt she would be a failure if she killed less than 10 people during the attack. In that respect, she did fail, in no small part due to the actions of the faculty and staff at The Covenant. But she managed to attain the notoriety she craved simply by self-documenting her life and actions in a way no other mass killer has done before. She often complained how she didn't know enough about the mental health history or motives of most mass killers, as nothing was publicly documented regarding their struggles. She hoped her attack would be different simply by providing years of writings, artwork, and digital media files which explained her motives and actions. In this respect, she succeeded.





## What It Isn't

There have been numerous theories proposed by parties outside the investigation as to why Hale committed the attack. Some theories have been based on snippets of Hale's writings leaked to the media, while others have been wildly posited for no other reason than to elicit controversy or attention. Based on the available material, those theories can easily be debunked.

### Why The Covenant

Regarding why she selected The Covenant, many have speculated Hale selected this location for racial, religious, or economic motives. It is certainly true she raged over these topics at times in her writings. But none of those motives impacted her decision to attack The Covenant.

Hale used three criteria in selecting a location for her planned mass killing: (1) it had to provide a sense of infamy so great, it led to her being easily remembered; (2) the targets within the location would likely not put up much of a fight and give her a high likelihood of success; and (3) she had to have a connection to the location. At no point did she claim she was targeting specific individuals within any location, and the only demographical factor she considered in target selection was it had to involve children.

Despite Hale researching mass killers of all stripes across American history, Hale focused on school shooters. Hale recognized how school shootings were a topic that immediately gained society's undivided attention and inherently shocked the conscience. She saw the notoriety Harris and Klebold have received in the decades following their deaths at Columbine and longed for the same. She also recognized the violent deaths of younger children quickly garnered attention and were remembered by society well after the fact.

As for the second criteria, Hale fully understood her social and physical limitations. At the time of her death, she was 5'2" in height and approximately 120 pounds. Though she exercised regularly, she wasn't particularly strong and had no confidence in her ability to win a physical fight. Her social phobias and lack of assertiveness in communication also increased her fear in being unable to control individuals. She frequently remarked how her greatest fear in an attack was a "hero" who could disarm her and allow her to be taken alive. Though she researched how to retain her firearms if someone tried to grab them from her and discussed steps she would take to keep possession of her weapons, she doubted her ability to be successful in those situations.

The third criteria was equally important to Hale, as it added a sense of comfort to her own death. Hale frequently believed her life had to travel in a full circle, and she felt a personal connection to a place was necessary when selecting the location where she would die. Though her residence certainly fit that description, Hale felt miserable at home. As such, she sought out a place that was beautiful, peaceful, played an important role in her life, and made her genuinely happy.

When Hale selected Creswell Middle as her initial target, all of those criteria were met. She felt that children of middle school age were small enough to be easily dominated while old enough to understand what was happening. She knew a mass killing inside a school would automatically grant her the notoriety she craved. She also possessed deep personal connections to the school, having attended there for four years. Hale also liked the idea of attacking the school where she first felt ostracism, shame, and disappointment, even if none of her intended victims were responsible. She also recognized the school represented the most success she ever attained in social standing and friendships. It was only after Hale realized she couldn't control the narrative of the attack that she abandoned Creswell Middle as a viable target.

In her fantasies of attacking other locations, Hale demonstrated how the criteria she established were important to her. She immediately discounted attacking Harding Academy, Harpeth Hall Academy, and Hillsboro High School due to a lack of connection with those locations. Those fantasies were purely driven by her anger towards categories of individuals she associated with those locations who she felt wronged her in the past. Regarding NSA, Hale's fantasies appeared driven solely by how it would have been easier to commit the attack while she was student there. Furthermore, at NSA and Nossi, Hale would encounter students and faculty members who were larger than her and more assertive. This increased the risk she would be overpowered and disarmed, which would result in the attack ending in failure.

With The Covenant, she recognized the benefits far outstripped the drawbacks. Even though she was concerned the layout of the school would give students and faculty more places to hide and more time to flee, she was emboldened by the idea the students were too young to effectively fight back or flee far. She believed the Christian faith of those



within would make them meek and afraid, which further assuaged Hale's self-doubts. The age of the children and the school being considered a Christian school made her recognize the instant notoriety the attack would bring. The physical isolation of the school from the surrounding neighborhood led her to conclude she would have ample time to achieve her stated goals.

A final factor that led Hale to select The Covenant was not only her prior attendance there in elementary school but the fact she was happy there. Hale often remarked her time at The Covenant was the happiest she was during her childhood education. She never remarked of being bullied and ostracized there; on the contrary, she remarked on a couple of occasions how she established friendships, which included play-dates at the homes of other children and a sense of acceptance. She gave no examples of how anyone at the school belittled her or harmed her, as she did in other places she attended school. Because of this, Hale felt The Covenant was the perfect place to commit an attack, as it was the perfect setting for her death.

### **Why Those Victims**

Many theories have been proposed regarding why those six individuals were killed during the attack. Some parties outside of the investigation have speculated it was based on religious and/or racial reasoning, while others have suggested a personal motive existed. As previously mentioned, there wasn't a personal history between Hale and any of those she killed or harmed during the attack.

The only factors Hale used to identify prospective targets were their age and the potential level of notoriety she would obtain from their deaths. She felt the murders of children would greatly increase her renown. She also felt targeting a school or location known for economic affluence would also garner her more attention. Beyond those factors, she didn't care who she killed. In short, she killed those she encountered along her path without regard of any other factors.

### **Why That Date**

Some theories have been proposed to suggest the date of the attack had significant meaning to Hale and was meant to memorialize another incident. Though it's incorrect to suggest the attack on The Covenant was meant to memorialize another, the date had some significance to Hale.

When selecting an attack date, Hale first considered the school calendar for The Covenant, which she downloaded from the Internet. She eliminated from possibility dates that occurred when school was out of session for the summer months. She then excluded dates from the months of November and December due to the amount of holidays present in those months, which resulted in students not being present.

Hale then created complicated formulas to create prospective attack dates. In these formulas, she used numbers significant to her, which included the basketball jersey numbers for her and her middle school teammates, her lucky number, her birthdate, the date Columbine occurred, and the number of close relationships she had with family members and friends. She used those numbers in formulas that only made sense to her and created a list of dates for consideration. After cross-referencing those numbers to the dates school was scheduled to be in session, she created potential attack dates for The Covenant.

Regarding her alternate targets, Hale never specified a date for those locations, as those were intended to be "emergency" targets. Those locations would only be targeted in the event attempts were made by family members and therapists to stop her from committing an attack. If those attempts occurred when The Covenant wasn't in session, these locations were a substitute so she could attain the notoriety of a mass attack that would result in her death.



## Other Parties Responsible

It was apparent early in the investigation Hale acted alone during the attack itself. What wasn't immediately apparent was the level of responsibility or culpability of any other parties. This could include anyone who provided Hale with material assistance or support in the commission of the attack, including but not limited to aiding her in procuring weapons or equipment, providing her with intelligence or other inside information, or providing her with instruction and training with the knowledge an attack would take place. Under Tennessee law, this assistance and support must be shown to have occurred with the knowledge an attack would take place or with reckless disregard for criminal charges to be applicable.

### Family Members

Hale's parents and brother were interviewed during the investigation regarding their knowledge of the attack. The information garnered from those interviews was then compared to the other information gathered during the investigation to determine any culpability regarding the attack.

Hale's parents and brother claimed ignorance towards Hale knowing she would attack The Covenant or having prepared and planned for the attack. Even though Hale's parents were aware she had fantasized about school shootings in the past, they believed the mental health therapy Hale underwent since then had removed those thoughts and desires from Hale. They were aware she had purchased firearms in the past but believed she had sold them off as they directed. None of them showed any awareness to the writings, artwork, or digital media Hale created regarding the attack.

After reviewing the material Hale left behind, it was determined that Hale's family would likely not have known about the attack prior to it occurring. Hale often wrote about the level of secrecy needed to carry out the attack and the steps she took to conceal her firearms, ammunition, equipment, and the material she planned to leave behind as her legacy. She frequently deleted her browser histories and removed material dedicated to the attack from her computer and cellphone to prevent her mother from finding it. She was careful to avoid paying for anything related to the attack on her credit or debit cards, as she knew her mother had access to her account and could see how she was spending money.

Hale frequently discussed her concerns over her mother finding out about the attack and expressed the need to carefully manipulate her mother into believing nothing was amiss. She often reflected how her mother could "read her" and how she had to be careful how much anger she displayed to prevent her mother arranging with her therapist to hospitalize her. Hale's written "rage storms" actually increased following the IOP in 2019 as her anger was what triggered the IOP in the first place. It's likely Hale considered the "rage storms" a safe venue for channeling her anger in a manner her mother couldn't detect, and it appeared to be successful.

The obvious concern to many were Hale's firearms. It's known Hale's parents discovered she had purchased a firearm in December 2020, with her mother becoming highly concerned due to her history with depression and suicidal ideations. It was only after Hale's father interceded that she was allowed to keep the firearm. Hale then acquired three other firearms over the next six months, of which Hale's father was only aware of one of them (a shotgun). Hale's mother naturally became concerned after learning Hale purchased *The Columbine Diaries* and brought her concerns to Hale's therapist. At this point, her parents' attitudes changed regarding her having access to firearms, and they compelled her to sell off her firearms. They seized firearms from her, with Hale writing they took multiple firearms. Hale's parents claimed they only located and removed one firearm (the Smith & Wesson M&P-15 5.56 mm caliber carbine). They never knew, however, Hale had purchased a fifth firearm (a pistol) shortly after agreeing to surrender her firearms to her parents.

Hale wrote her parents returned the firearms a month later, with clear instructions to Hale to sell those firearms. The rationale provided by her parents was they felt it was best for her to show them her homicidal and suicidal thoughts were fantasies well in her past, and because they didn't have the legal right to sell her firearms. Arguably, the first reason is strange, considering the risk to Hale and others of her having firearms even for a single day. This is not, however, a criminal act. The second reason is legally sound because, indeed, they didn't have the right to sell her firearms. At the time Hale purchased those firearms, she was of legal age and had never had her right to firearms stripped from her by a court. If Hale's parents had sold or otherwise disposed of those firearms and Hale ever complained to law enforcement, a strong likelihood exists they could face criminal charges under Tennessee law.





Regarding why Hale's parents didn't further search her bedroom for firearms, it must be remembered no expectation existed for them to do so. In fact, based on Tennessee's residency laws, Hale could argue such a search and seizure was unreasonable, as her bedroom was occupied by her alone and she had the expectation of privacy. It should also be noted even if Hale's parents located firearms within her bedroom, with no court stripping Hale of her right to firearms, there would be no legal standing for her parents in removing the firearms from her against her wishes. Law enforcement officers would also be unable to force her to dispose of her firearms without a court order.

Regarding Hale's mental health therapy, the available information confirms Hale's parents paid for the therapy out of pocket, even though no legal requirement existed for them to do so once she became an adult. As for why Hale's parents didn't enroll her in an IOP in 2021 per the recommendations of VUMC, neither Hale or her parents had insurance to cover her mental health treatment, and the cost of the IOP was beyond their means. Hale's parents did continue to pay for her to attend therapy up until her death. If Hale had let slip her true intentions at any time during therapy, the expectation would be the therapist could escalate the case to VUMC for a decision regarding treatment, including involuntary committal.

Based on these facts, no evidence has been found to show Hale's parents or other family members bear any criminal culpability or responsibility for Hale's actions.

## **Firearms Retailers**

Information has been obtained during the investigation regarding all the firearms purchased by Hale during her life. This was made simple in Hale having purchased all her firearms from licensed retailers. Those retailers were interviewed by detectives following the murders with the assistance of the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). Interviews were also conducted with those parties known to have provided Hale with firearms training prior to the attack.

Regarding the firearms purchases, documentation regarding those purchases were obtained from the retailer, including the federal Firearms Transaction Record completed during each transaction. One of the questions asked on the form is whether the person purchasing the firearm has been adjudicated as mentally defective or committed to a mental institution. On each of the forms for respective firearm purchases, Hale indicated she had not. Each retailer then conducted a criminal background check to determine if there was anything which would legally prohibit her from owning a firearm. Nothing was found during this check on any firearms purchases made by Hale to suggest she wasn't legally allowed to purchase a firearm.

It should be remembered Hale had never been determined to be mentally defective by any court, nor had any court adjudicated she was prohibited from owning or possessing firearms. Regarding her untruthful answer on the Firearms Transaction Record, there would be no way for the retailer to know. The background checks they are required to complete prior to purchase only reference the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) computer system to determine someone's eligibility to obtain a firearm. The only time mental health information is entered into NCIC is if a court adjudicates a person as mentally incompetent to own or possess a firearm, and such information is entered into NCIC. Furthermore, no database exists that a retailer could possibly access regarding the mental health status or treatment of a potential buyer in general. As such, nothing would be on file to show Hale couldn't own or purchase a firearm, and her answer to the question regarding prior hospitalizations would be on her honor.

As for the training she received, nothing was found to show it was designed or intended to commit a mass attack or contained any advanced tactical insights which would have given Hale an edge during an attack. On the contrary, the training she received was designed to teach new shooters how to properly handle their firearms and basic marksmanship principles. Nothing in any of the individual training sessions or group classes was designed to teach or encourage anyone to act offensively while using a firearm or prepare someone to commit a mass attack. Most of those identified as having provided Hale with any firearms training didn't remember her. The ones who did remarked they remembered her simply because she seemed meek and shy, which runs counter to the typical personality of someone attending firearms instruction. They also noticed she was small for her size and age, which raised obvious concerns regarding if she could handle a firearm safely. As such, she was monitored closely until they were certain she could participate in the training safely. None of them remembered any statements or actions by Hale which indicated she was a danger to herself or others.

After reviewing information extracted from her digital devices, it was learned Hale visited several websites



dedicated to marksmanship and shooting principles. She downloaded instructions and targets for shooting drills to increase her accuracy and efficiency. After reviewing the available information, nothing was found to suggest these instructions were designed to aid her in committing a mass attack or provide her with suggestions or guidance on using a firearm to commit a mass attack.

## **Mental Health Providers**

Much has been discussed regarding the role played by those who offered Hale therapy and treatment for her assorted mental health disorders. Some of the discussions have revolved around whether those providers were criminally culpable for failing to intercede at various points in Hale's life. It must be pointed out that not all of Hale's mental health records were able to be obtained during the investigation due to factors outside of the control of the MNPD Homicide Unit. An assessment can only be made based on the information detectives were able to obtain during the investigation.

Based on the available records, it's apparent the first two therapists who treated Hale did the best they could. The available session notes showed they focused on what they considered to be Hale's most serious issues, which were her anger, anxiety, and depression. Hale was under the care of a psychiatrist and neuropsychologist at different periods, who were responsible for prescribing and monitoring Hale's medication regimen. Whenever Hale showed indicators of her mental health deteriorating, her therapists addressed those issues quickly, including referrals to other providers for psychological assessments and treatment.

The available records showed Hale was regularly prescribed medication to treat her assorted mental health disorders, with the prescribing physicians monitoring her interactions with the medication regularly. The only records found to show Hale had a negative interaction with those medications were either shortly after medication was adjusted or if Hale consumed alcohol while taking the medication. In those cases, the negative interactions appeared to have been rectified quickly.

As for VUMC, they conducted psychological assessments in 2019 and 2021, with Hale participating in an IOP following her assessment in 2019. During each assessment, they concluded Hale wasn't suffering from psychosis at the time of the assessment and confirmed the diagnosis of the other providers. Based on the information available to the assessing physicians at the time and the medical viewpoints of the providers who assessed her, the best course of action for her conditions was an IOP. It should be pointed out mental health treatment requires a higher level of honesty between the patient and the provider than any other form of medical treatment. Conditions such as those Hale suffered from don't often have physical symptoms which can be used to aid the provider in accurately diagnosing the patient's condition, even if the patient is being less than honest. It's well documented in the material Hale left behind she had no intention of ever telling her providers everything she was experiencing, no matter how harmful. Though she generally appreciated the therapy she received, she was adamant about not being hospitalized, and she recognized early in her planning and preparation that complete honesty would be detrimental to her plans. She had enough experience with the mental healthcare system to understand which topics to avoid with her providers and how to manipulate them into believing her documented issues with homicidal and suicidal ideations were well in her past. Based on the available records, Hale repeatedly denied to her providers of having current homicidal or suicidal ideations and learned how to be convincing with her denials.

After reviewing the available information, nothing was found to show any criminal culpability or responsibility on the part of any of the providers who treated or assessed Hale.

## **Anybody Else**

After a thorough review of all the available material, nobody else has been identified as having provided Hale with any form of material assistance and support in the attack. As previously stated, Hale was highly paranoid of anyone interfering or interceding in the attack she was planning. She used a great deal of manipulation to convince those she interacted with she wasn't a threat to anyone, including herself. She obtained all the firearms, ammunition, and equipment used in the attack herself and with secrecy.

Nothing was found to suggest Hale communicated with anyone, either in person or digitally, regarding her plan



to attack The Covenant or any other location. Even though she theorized recruiting an accomplice in the fall of 2022, she quickly discounted such a notion as being unrealistic and never took steps to recruit anyone. This was due to a combination of paranoia and the desire to achieve notoriety on her own. Considering how much she documented her life and how much of a digital trail she left on her devices, it's unlikely any communication or interaction with an accomplice in the attack would go completely unnoticed or undocumented.





## Conclusion

Upon reviewing the assembled evidence, information, and materials collected during the investigation, no evidence was found to suggest anyone other than Audrey Hale took any part in the planning, preparation, or execution of the murders at The Covenant. No evidence was found to show anyone aided Hale after the fact by concealing, destroying, or otherwise manipulating evidence and information related to the crime in a manner that would hinder or negatively affect the investigation. After conferring with attorneys at the Davidson County District Attorney General's Office, they confirmed no information or evidence currently exists to suggest anyone living is criminally culpable or responsible for the murders.

As such, the case is being cleared by exception, as the only chargeable offender is deceased.

MNPD Homicide Unit