

Stockton school shooting leaves impact 25 years later

By Josh Richman and Mark Emmons, San Jose Mercury News

STOCKTON – The graves of the children buried here long ago in the cold January ground are about a mile from Cleveland Elementary School. But except for the passing cars, chirping birds and the occasional freight train rumbling nearby, the resting place is mostly silent.

Twenty-five years ago today, Cleveland Elementary was the scene of one of the nation's worst school shootings – years before Columbine, Virginia Tech and Newtown. Former South Lake Tahoe resident Patrick Edward Purdy's three-minute shooting rampage left five children dead and 30 teachers and students wounded. All but one of those killed were offspring of Cambodian refugees who had survived the murderous Khmer Rouge.

"This just doesn't ever go away. I think that's something the outside world just doesn't get," said Judy Weldon, 65, a retired teacher who tended to the wounded that day. "Yes, we all grow and move on and change. But we never, ever forget."

The scars aren't just emotional. Rob Young, then a first-grader, still carries a bullet fragment in his chest after being shot twice. The shooting, he said, "will forever be a part of me."

But amid a renewed national gun debate reignited by an even deadlier school massacre 13 months ago in Connecticut, those who survived Stockton's horror can add an epilogue to Purdy's deadly lesson: Painful memories never go away but don't necessarily define the course of people's lives.

Read the whole story