

# Witnesses to Bend shooting describe chaos, fear

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The Bulletin

BEND — Ray Shields was walking through the parking lot of the Safeway on Bend's east side to buy a macaroni and cheese dinner when the rattle of gunfire filled his ears. The 62-year-old Bend resident, who walks with crutches due to his osteoarthritis, spun around and fled when a man nearby screamed: "live shooter."

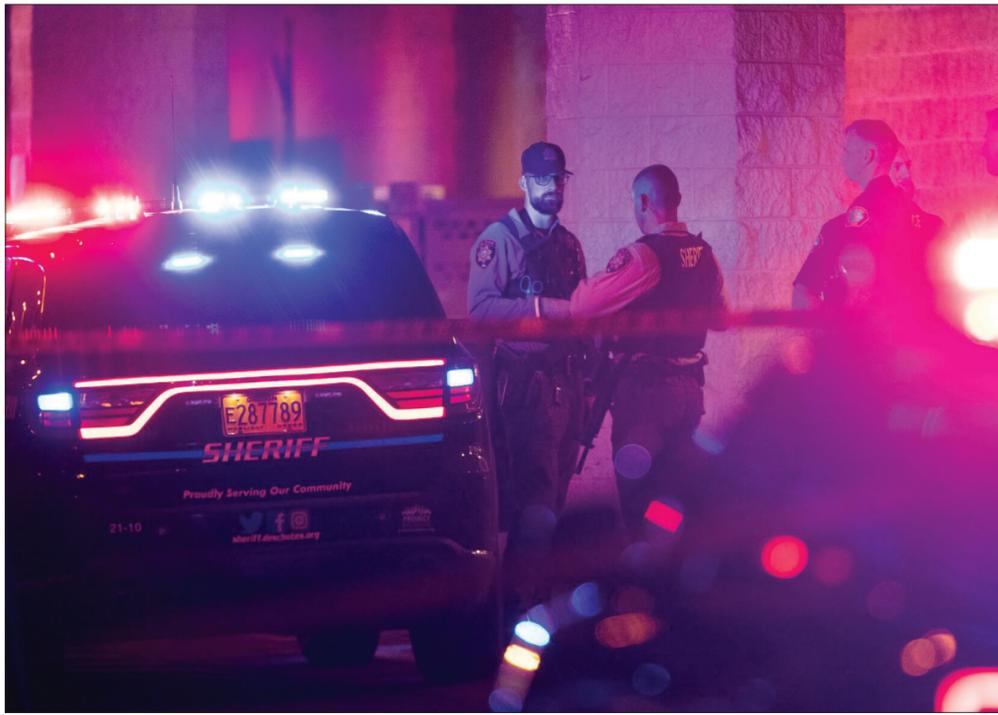
Shields could hear the words of his Marine Corps drill instructor in his head from decades ago, screaming and swearing at him to run faster, faster. Shields picked up his crutches and sprinted maybe 30 feet before his hips gave out. He collapsed to the asphalt and started to crawl.

Shields is among the witnesses to the Sunday, Aug. 28, shooting at Safeway who are still trying to comprehend what happened when a gunman entered the store and opened fire on shoppers with an AR-15-style rifle, killing two people and injuring two others.

Some witnesses stayed awake through the night, scrolling through the news articles and internet threads and reading the rumors, trying to find some way to make sense of the violence. Others returned to the scene Aug. 29 at U.S. Highway 20 and Northeast 27th Street to share their stories, wanting to speak to police, journalists and anyone who would just stop and listen. Some still bear the physical and emotional marks that come with the traumatic event and have only just begun what will be a long, perhaps endless, process of healing.

One woman in the store pulled a gun she's carried for years from her purse just for this possibility. Another man watched survivors stream out of the store, recalling another previous close call with gun violence.

"Nothing justifies this. That's it," Travis Connor, a 31-year-old employee at a local solar company, said. "If we give him the



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Emergency personnel respond to a shooting at The Forum Shopping Center in east Bend on Sunday, Aug. 28, 2022.

wrong type of attention, it's just going to inspire more people."

Connor was approaching the Safeway when he saw Shields running in a zig-zag pattern, apparently trying to avoid bullets flying through the air. Nearby, Connor saw Safeway employees pouring out of the grocery store. Connor took off his noise-canceling headphones when another burst of gunshots rang out. He leaned down to Shields and said: "Don't hate me for this."

Connor threw Shields over his shoulder and sprinted down the street. They ran nearly 100 yards before they ducked behind the tires of a parked Ford F-150.

## Neighbors shelter fleeing survivors

A woman, speaking loud and urgent orders in Spanish, pulled Connor and Shields into an apartment, where nearly a dozen more people stacked chairs and mattresses against the doors and walls as a sense of terror and foreboding filled the room.

Inside, a woman in her late teens told the group that the

shooter had pointed his AR-15 style rifle directly at her. She repeated to them again and again: "He pointed the gun directly in my face." Then, she began to vomit in the bathroom.

"There's no amount of therapy that can fix that," Shields reflected. "She's going to be messed up for life ... When she closes her eyes, that's all she's gonna see."

Another man was in the apartment with his wife, his 2-year-old daughter and his 4-year-old son. He panicked that they were now trapped in the apartment and their only exit, the front door, was blocked. Connor and Shields opened the window for the man, took the screen out and helped his children out of the apartment, and they ran.

The group kept the lights off in the apartment as the sun went down and the light faded. As the night wore on, they were able to exit the apartment. But the next day, both Shields and Connor came back to the scene, arriving in different parts of the shopping center, hoping to

speak with someone.

The two are processing the moment differently. But in that chaos, the adrenaline and horror seem to have created a bond between Connor and Shields.

"We had never met before in our lives, but we became very good friends. We got each other's phone numbers and everything," Shields said, adding: "When you're over someone's shoulder and running from a live-fire situation, you get to be friends real quick."

For Connor, he knows that it was actually Shields who saved his life. Without seeing Shields running away, it's possible that his noise-canceling headphones would have prevented him from hearing the gunshots, sending him directly into the line of fire.

But on Aug. 29, standing near the caution tape outside the Safeway, what stuck in Connor's head was not running across the street with Shields over his shoulder. It was the sound of the woman's voice in the apartment as she told them, again and again, about the man who aimed

the gun directly at her face.

"I wanted to go back and help more," he said. "I did all I could in the situation. I wish I could have done more, but it needed to be done. That family sprung into action as quickly as I did. Bend's got good people."

## Shopper was armed, ready

Molly Taroli, 40, had been shopping with her husband for about 10 minutes before the shooting started. They were walking down the store's front aisle, behind the registers, when they heard shots, followed by a woman's scream.

Taroli bolted for the back of the store while her husband ran out the front, to get his own weapon from his truck. As she went, Taroli gripped the gun she kept in her purse. She said she's been carrying it for the past several years.

"This is the exact reason why," Taroli said. "It's because we live in a very unsafe, unpredictable world."

As the shooting continued, Taroli heard it moving closer. When she felt the vibration of a round near her, Taroli said she threw her shopping cart to the side, in the hope of distracting the shooter for enough time to get away. When she got to the back of the store, Taroli stood behind an open door to the store, holding her gun in case the shooter came in that direction.

Neither Taroli nor her husband, who she found safe at the front of the store when police arrived, fired any shots at the shooter, who police said took his own life. She pointed to mental health systems lacking resources and being too forgiving, and not the shooter's apparent access to guns, as the cause of the shooting, alluding to unconfirmed rumors that Ethan Blair Miller, 20, had posted disturbing journal entries for months leading up to the shooting.

She also lauded the bravery of first responders who ran onto the scene.

"It made me appreciate even more those whose duty is to protect and serve. This is what they do every day," Taroli said.

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