

BEND

'Hero' killed in shooting remembered as kind man

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The Bulletin

Every week over a span of several years, Donald Surret Jr. would ask his co-workers in the floral department of Bend's east-side Safeway to set aside the nicest, biggest bunch of stargazer lilies so he could take them home to his wife.

The floral staff would set them aside in the walk-in cooler, and before he'd leave for the night, he'd pay for those flowers. It's a fond memory for Lisa Morrison, who worked with Surret for nearly three years at the Safeway store before retiring in December.

Now, it's a memory Morrison is holding onto tightly.

Surret was one of two people killed Sunday night, Aug. 28 when a 20-year-old gunman from Bend walked into the grocery store near NE 27th Street and U.S. Highway 20 with an AR-15 style rifle and opened fire on innocent shoppers. The 66-year-old Surret was shot as he tried to disarm the gunman, but police say his actions likely prevented further bloodshed. Moments before his encounter with Surret, the gunman also fatally shot Glenn Bennett, 84, of Bend.

What Surret did in his final moments was no surprise to those who knew him, especially after police called his actions heroic.

"Video surveillance shows that upon hearing gunshots in the Safeway, victim Donald Surret Jr., had ample time to flee the scene but instead moved a produce cart into position to hide from the attacker," Bend Police spokeswoman Sheila Miller said in a news release Tuesday. "When the suspect approached, Surret waited for the suspect to look away, then attacked the suspect with a produce knife he kept on his hip."

Still, none of this is easy for Morrison to reconcile. An active shooter was her worst nightmare, a scenario that had prompted her to plan escape routes when she worked at

Safeway.

"This is so surreal," said Morrison, 62. "I feel like I'm trapped in a nightmare. Don was a kind and caring man."

It was just a week ago when Morrison checked in with Surret while shopping. Since retiring, she's made weekly trips to the store for groceries. She always sought out Surret and they'd chat, sometimes about his wife, Jacky, who was on disability.

How was his wife? How were things? Often, Morrison and Surret chatted about mundane subjects, the things friends shared.

Morrison worked for seven years in the store's floral department. Surret worked in the produce department, a job he took after working at the U.S. Forest Service at Newberry National Volcanic Monument from 2013 to 2017. After that, he worked as a custodian at Central Oregon Community College for six months, in 2017 and 2018, forging ties with people there who would often drive across town to visit with their friend.

Surret would train the newly hired produce clerks in the produce department at Safeway, Morrison said.

"He had a lot of patience to train them on how to do the job well," she said. "He had ideas on how to make the produce department run smoother and cared about doing a good job. His motto was, work smarter, not harder."

An Army veteran, Surret was proud of his military experience, Morrison said. He'd wear military and union buttons on his hat.

"He was a total patriot. He had a strong constitution," Morrison said.

Surret's actions have prompted an outpouring of community support to help his wife. A GoFundMe account set up by Surret's sister-in-law, Jerilyn Morra, had an initial goal of \$8,000 but by early evening Tuesday had grown to more than \$56,000.

And 140 Safeway and Albertsons stores in Oregon and



A card thanking Safeway employee Donald Surret Jr. is displayed at a memorial where Safeway employees wait Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2022, to claim their possessions left in the store after the shooting at the Forum Shopping Center in Bend.

Dean Guernsey/
The Bulletin

Southern Washington will be collecting donations at check-out stands through Sept. 5 for those impacted by the tragedy in Bend, according to a company spokeswoman.

The outpouring of support is a testament to Surret's character, said Gail Whelan, who worked with Surret at the national monument. In fact, when Whelan and Surret were on the same schedule at the Lava Lands Visitors Center, they'd eat lunch together at a picnic table.

They called the table the Lava Lands Cafe.

"He was an all-around good person," Whelan said. "He was a kind person. He was funny. He liked everyone. He bent over backward to help people."

Surret enlisted in the Army out of high school, serving as a combat engineer during his 26 years in the military, according to his ex-wife, Debora Jean Surret.

He moved to La Pine more than a decade ago and became

involved in the local chapter of the Disabled American Veterans, serving as treasurer and secretary.

Veterans across Deschutes County remember Surret, in the brief moments they met him, as a dependable, hard-working man.

Robert Cusick, a 75-year-old member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars who worked with Surret, said he wasn't surprised by Surret's heroics. It was what he was trained to do, said Cusick.

"If it wasn't for him, there'd probably be a whole lot more dead people," Cusick said. "I feel he died too young."

On Sunday, about an hour before the shooting, Naomi Landon, a 38-year-old nutrition specialist for Bend-La Pine Schools, was shopping at the Safeway with her 5-year-old son. In her weekly visits over the past nine years, she has grown close with the grocery store staff, who are always asking about her three grow-

ing boys.

Among them was a man she would always see rushing to meet customers' needs: Surret.

It was no different Sunday. Landon and her son were discussing what kind of apples they should buy when Surret chimed in. Placing apples on display one by one, he told them that his favorites were the yellow ones. He named the different types, and he said he was sad because Safeway was about to discontinue the sweetest apples there are.

He told them that the secret to making a great apple pie was mixing a whole variety of apples together. His wife, he said, makes the best apple pie in Bend.

"It was just an innocent, passing conversation," Landon said.

Now, Landon is trying to help her son understand what happened to that nice man who spoke to them about the apples he loves. She tells her

son that he was brave, that he sacrificed his own life to save others.

"He totally was a hero, and it makes me sad to think of what happened," she said, crying. "He didn't deserve that."

It's no surprise that Surret's friend, Morrison, is thinking about the stargazer lilies the Safeway staff regularly set aside.

In the coming weeks, she and other Safeway workers plan to take a big bunch of stargazer lilies over to Surret's home in La Pine as a tribute to him.

No one wants Surret's widow to think her husband has been forgotten, Morrison said.

"We thought it might be a comfort to her," Morrison said. "Maybe later, we thought, we'd go after everything settles down. My grief will be with me for the rest of my life. This is a horrendous incident that we thought would never happen in Bend."

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