

Witnesses to Bend shooting describe chaos, fear

BY ZACK DEMARS, BRYCE DOLE AND ANNA KAMINSKI

The Bulletin

Ray Shields was walking through the parking lot of the Safeway on Bend's east side Sunday, Aug. 28, 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 shooting at Safeway who are 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, 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.

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

"If we give him the 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 the shooter



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

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

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, Shields and Connor came back to the scene, arriving in different parts of the shopping center, hoping to speak with someone.

"We had never met before in our lives, but we became very good friends. We got each oth-

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

But 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.

SHOPPER WAS ARMED AND 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," Taroli said. "This is what they do every day."

DELIVERY DRIVER HEARD SHOTS FROM PARKING LOT

Minutes before Taroli reached for her gun, Jordan Campbell, 34, walked out of the same entrance the gunman used to enter the store.

Campbell said the scene reminded him of his experience near a 2017 mass shooting. He lived in Las Vegas at the time and was working at a Verizon

Wireless store, just 2 miles from where a gunman shot and killed 60 people at a music festival in what became the country's deadliest mass shooting. Had Campbell taken his normal route home the day of that shooting, he would have been right in its path, Campbell remembered.

"It's just crazy to me personally that this is the second one I've been so close to, I guess," Campbell said.

Campbell on Aug. 28 had been filling an Instacart order at Safeway, where he said he usually shops. He'd parked in a different spot than usual — farther away from the store than his typical spot — and went through the self-checkout lane since the other lanes were busy.

By the time he walked past the shopping cart return, he heard the first few shots ring out from behind him, inside the store.

"That's when I heard what I thought was fireworks," Campbell said. "I started thinking to myself, 'No way, that can't be fireworks from inside the store.'"

By the time he got to his car, Campbell heard a "barrage of shots."

"Then people started spilling out of both entrances there," Campbell remembered.

He stayed at the edge of the parking lot as people continued rushing from the store and as the scene lit up with the lights from dozens of emergency vehicles.

Campbell said the shooting in Las Vegas five years ago heightened his awareness in public places.

"From that first instance in Vegas, it's not paranoia, but it's being super aware of all the exits, all the entryways, how to get away if something were to happen," Campbell said.

The Safeway shooting heightened that awareness even further.

"I'm looking around way more. Today it's been more paranoia, like now it can happen again," Campbell said, speaking to a Bulletin reporter on the phone after having just finished a shopping trip at Target with his 4-year-old son Monday. "I just feel like I'm looking over my shoulder a lot more today, and it's definitely directly related to yesterday."

Fire kicks up again at Pendleton flour mill

BY JOHN TILLMAN

Hermiston Herald

Fire kicked up again Saturday, Aug. 27, at the Grain Craft flour mill in Pendleton, sending black smoke steaming into the sky.

Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley said there are a few reasons why the fire continues after the blaze that tore through the structure on Aug. 10.

Multiple hot spots remain that are inaccessible, he said, particularly in the basement. Wind often causes the hot spot to flare up, which is what happened Aug. 27.

Firefighters are trying to put out those deep-seated embers, he said, but they probably will remain hot until the building comes down and crews can access the basement.

The basement's dirt floor is another problem. Critchley said the water seeps through, so the room does not fill up. All firefighters are doing then, he said, is sending water back to the aquifer.

He also said Grain Craft's insurance company and the Oregon State Fire Marshal are investigating the fire, and he anticipates receiving a report in a couple of weeks.

"I'm pretty sure the cause of the fire is going to be undetermined," he said.

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