GILROY STRONG

A Community Speaks

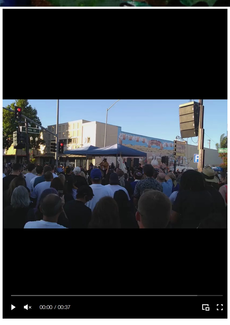
Introduction and Interviews by
Sarah Dalton

In the aftermath of the July 28, 2019 shooting at the Gilroy Garlic Festival, in partnership with the Gilroy Historical Society and the Gilroy Museum, Reed Magazine at San José State University will be organizing a community outreach project called "Gilroy Strong: A Community Speaks."

This community outreach project is a collection of oral histories and personal accounts of the shooting at the Gilroy Garlic Festival and testimonies about community grief and recovery after a violent tragedy. Through first person narratives, with opportunities for complementary multimedia such as photography and/or video, "Gilroy Strong: A Community Speaks" will create a patchwork quilt of testimonies, each bearing witness to the tragedy, grief, and/or recovery from their unique perspectives. To preserve the voice of the interview subject, interviews will be transcribed and edited only for succinctness and narrative flow.

Selections from the project are published in *Reed Magazine*: Issue 153.

After one year, all interviews, oral histories, and full transcriptions will be permanently archived at the Gilroy Museum.



Introduction
Roland Velasco, Mayor of Gilroy
Katiuska Pimentel, aunt of Keyla Salazar
Scot Smithee, Gilroy Police Chief
Adam Flores, Deputy District Attorney
Monica Sendejas, Recreation Manager
Robert Eliason, photographer
Dave Davies, food vendor
Melanie*, SJSU student

*name changed

Sarah Dalton is the Managing Editor for *Reed Magazine*: Issue 153 where she coordinated an oral history project about the aftermath of a mass shooting called "Gilroy Strong: A Community Speaks." She is a member of the Maconde Writers' Workshop. Her nonfiction has appeared on *River Teeth's* blog and *The Sun's* "Readers Write."

On Sunday, July 28, 2019, at 5:30 p.m., it was supposed to be the last half hour of festival delights at the 41st annual Gilroy Garlic Festival. The three-day community fundraising event had once again lived up to its reputation as one of the quirkiest, craziest, tastiest, and best local festivals in California and the San Francisco Bay Area. Kids were taking their last zips down the giant inflatable slide. Alcohol vendors had served last calls and were cleaning up or counting cash. Festivalgoers were purchasing their last mementos —garlic-infused pasta sauce, garlic olive oil, garlic braids. Henna artists were putting finishing touches on their designs, working through the last of their customers for the weekend. With the majority of afternoon crowds cleared out, it was the last chance to finger-feast on shrimp scampi, garlic calamari, garlic-topped fries, garlic kettle corn or get a free sample of garlic-flavored ice cream. It was the last chance to purchase a whipped cream–topped funnel cake. It was supposed to be the last half hour before cleaning up, driving home, and, come Monday, returning to normal life. But a nineteen-year-old young man cut his way through the chain-link perimeter fence. He wore a bulletproof vest and carried an AK-47-style assault rifle and several high-capacity magazines. Just before driving to the festival, he had shared social media posts which suggested a white supremacist ideology. At 5:41 p.m., he opened fire at festival attendees.

In less than a minute, there were twenty victims, nine men, seven women, and four children. Two of those children were killed: Keyla Salazar, who would have turned fourteen less than a week after the shooting, and Stephen Romero, who had just turned six. One young man, Trevor Irby, twenty-five, was also killed. Three Gilroy police, Officers Robert Basuino and Hugo Del Moral and Detective Eric Cryar, ran towards the rifle fire sounds, arriving shortly after the shooting began. The suspect then began firing at the officers, who took cover behind a barrel or near some vendor tents. According to an interview with Gilroy Police Chief Scot Smithee, these three officers, positioned a long distance from the suspect ("125 feet or so"), with handguns ("which are not designed for long distance"), fired eighteen rounds within about twenty seconds, hitting the suspect seven times ("It was incredible . . . truly miraculous."). Within seconds, the young man, Gilroy resident Santino Legan, used his gun and took his own life.

Though the definition of a mass shooting varies, depending on who you talk to, I felt angry and heartbroken hearing about what many, myself included, considered a mass shooting occurring at a festival I grew up attending, a festival less than 30 miles from San José State University, where I work as managing editor for *Reed Magazine*.

The idea for this project came from feelings of helplessness, anger, and pain. In August 2019, I was writing in my journal about how Keyla was the age of many of the students I teach at a local, public high school. Stephen was the same age as my oldest son. Trevor was close in age to my youngest cousins. I saw major media outlets descend like funnel clouds, then disappear in a voracious, incessant news cycle. I wanted to do something besides donate money, and since I was working on Reed, I felt our literary magazine could amplify voices from the Garlic Festival community.

Inspired by the *testimonio*-style literature of Svetlana Alexievitch and Elena Poniatowska, I informally met first responders and nurses who helped victims, and more formally interviewed city workers and leaders, county workers, victims' families, vendors, local press, and festival goers. I wanted to create a mosaic of voices to show the complexity and aftermath of a mass shooting, the day-to-day process of recovery that takes place after the media storm has moved on to the next story.

The last seven months working on this project have had me taking an honest account of how gun violence has permeated my life on so many different levels. It has been almost twenty years since my cousin, then in his early twenties, was shot and almost died. He recovered and was permanently disabled after the incident. Within a week of the Gilroy shooting, two more mass shootings occurred in the US. On Aug. 3, 2019, the El Paso, Texas shooting at a Walmart store was the deadliest attack targeting the Latinx community in modern US history. Less than thirteen hours later, there was another shooting in Dayton, Ohio. Bringing this national tragedy much closer to home, in early October, there was a school shooting graffiti hoax at the high school where I teach. I remember trying to assuage the very real fears of my students as the days led up to the threatened attack. That Thursday, I spoke to classes only half-full of young people, as many parents opted to keep their children at home. On Sept. 19, 2019, as I left a nonfiction workshop class at San José State, a shelter-in-place notification pinged on my phone, alerting the campus community that there was an active shooter at our MLK Library, and shots had been fired. On Oct. 31, 2019, five people were shot to death at a house party in Orinda, California, most victims in their early twenties. On Nov. 23, 2019, two boys, ages eleven and fourteen, were killed in the city where I live and teach. I returned from Thanksgiving break and talked with students whose homes were down the street, who attended the vigil, who were shaken by these latest murders. It felt impossible to keep track of so many incidents.

It *is* impossible to keep track of so many incidents, and there seems to be no end in sight. Violence of this magnitude forces us to question who we are as individuals and communities. And it makes us question our country and its willingness to permit this constant barrage of gun violence in our communities which invades even the most innocent pastimes—going to a festival, a trip to the grocery store, a night out with friends.

Some of these stories offer hope. When I interviewed Kasey Halcón, Director of Victim Services in the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office, she reminded me that for every one person driven by hate or fear or violence, there are a hundred people who want to help, who are helping. This was apparent when I interviewed Monica Sendejas, a Recreation Manager with the city of Gilroy, who, along with every other Gilroy city employee, worked in the Emergency Operations Center set up within hours of the shooting. Donna Pray, Executive Director of The Gilroy Foundation, shared the creative ways that people fundraised in the aftermath: kids' lemonade stands, car shows, selling blown-glass garlic art pieces, cook-offs, and GoFundMe donations from around the world. In partnership with the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, The Gilroy Foundation has collected and distributed over $1.3 million directly to victims and their families, and given about $300,000 in other hardship funds.

The most powerful voices in the gun-violence epidemic are not the politicians or journalists, but the victims, their families, the people in the moment helping, the community itself. After the major media outlets have gone, after the donations have slowed to a trickle or a stop, after the shock has eased, perhaps the most powerful thing we can do is listen. In this regard, oral history seemed the best format.

It's not easy to hear stories of grief, anger, depression, and trauma. These experiences and feelings are shunned in our society, pressured to keep private, or worse, mocked or judged as not being the "right way" or the "right timeline." Healing is a long, circuitous emotional journey that can change daily, even hourly. I hope the voices and stories in "Gilroy Strong: A Community Speaks" reveal the connection between vulnerability and resiliency and how one community begins to heal after being traumatized by gun violence.

A note on methods: The challenge in imposing a linear narrative when people share traumatic memories is that there is no linearity. In an interview, a story takes many associative leaps or goes into tangents. I've opted not to use ellipses to show gaps in a quote or sentence, but only to show pauses from the interviewees themselves. I also did not use brackets to show words or phrases I've inserted or changed to clarify a person's story. I've done my best to remain true to the intent of the speaker and follow oral history best practices from the Oral History Association. Names changed are noted in the text.

ROLAND VELASCO

Roland Velasco was born and raised in Gilroy. In 1999, he was elected to the Gilroy City Council and served until 2007. He rejoined the Gilroy City Council in 2014 and was elected as Gilroy's first Mexican-American mayor in 2016, receiving two out of every three votes cast. Just before the shooting occurred, at 5:41 pm on Sunday, July 28, 2019, Mayor Velasco had returned to the festival, after volunteering over the weekend, to help the Chamber of Commerce break down their beer booths. He has some Advanced First Aid training and assisted with victim triage in addition to his work as mayor.

I normally wasn't working that Sunday, but I told the Chamber, "Hey, if you need help, call me." I was on the Christmas Hill side of the park, when all of a sudden we see masses of people just running. My first thought was, "Shit, it's a fight." It's like high school—when there's a fight, then all of a sudden, ssshhuuup [*he moves his hand as if slicing the air*], everybody gathers.

Chamber representatives got a message over the walkie-talkie to shelter-in-place. Everybody piles into this refrigerated trailer, probably fifteen to twenty of us. By this point, I'm hearing there's a shooting. I try sending out a text message to my city administrator. My message won't go out.

I'm near the front of the door, and the door opens. So I say, "Okay, let me just open this a little bit more." I'm standing on the steps that go into the reefer unit, trying to send out my text message. Meanwhile, I get somebody calling me. It's a good friend of mine, a retired CHP officer. He was telling me, "Hey, Roland, go look for the girls. The twins are supposed to be near the front entrance somewhere."

To hear the panic in his voice because his girls were here somewhere really scared me. All I said was, "I'll go. I'll go look for them."

I ended up coming along a tree line. I saw a lot of people who were still running, trying to get out. I saw one vehicle that had a blanket over somebody. I think he was one of the first casualties that they were able to pull over. I saw a couple other people with cuts and bruises. A firetruck had just pulled up. When they got out of the truck, they put their trauma bag down on the ground. They were carrying a bunch of things. As I passed them by, I grabbed the trauma pack, and I followed them inside the PD command center. Meanwhile, I'm looking for the twins.

When I get there, I don't see the twins, but I see some triage that's going on. I'm not a paramedic by any means, but I knew enough to put on some gloves and assist where I could.

[*What did you see?*]

[*He takes a long pause.*] . . . Lots of blood. I ripped up a piece of a box, got a pen from somebody. I was just writing down "Victim One." If somebody called out their blood pressure, or their wounds or whatever, I just wrote that stuff down. There was one person in particular who had a really bad shot to the upper leg. A paramedic was there. He turned to me and he said, "Can you set up the IV?" I said, "No, I can't do that." He said, "Can you take blood pressure?" I said "Yes, I could do that." He threw the blood pressure cuff over to me. When I reached up the victim's arm to put the cuff on, I noticed a large bullet wound where the blood pressure cuff would go. I said, "He's missing part of his arm." The paramedic asked me to feel a pulse. At this point, I was just trying to get a good pulse. I could see he was alive. His eyes were partially closed, his breathing was shallow. I was just trying to feel a pulse, but he lost a lot of blood. I said, "It's not very strong." I think once he got transported to the hospital, this person ended up surviving. But for me, it was always . . . that was pretty scary.

Over in my corner, I saw somebody else. Somebody lying down there. I saw somebody on their knees holding this person's hand. I was on my knees. I go over and I said, "Has this person been triaged?" He looked up at me and he said, "You're the mayor." I was just shocked and said, "Yeah." He said, "She's passed." I gathered, along with others. We grabbed hands and formed a circle and said a prayer for her.

While all this is happening, my phone is blowing up. I'm getting calls from national media, from around the world, emails, everything. I just felt them following me. They're ringing or vibrating, whatever. Text messages, everything is coming in. I couldn't answer because one, I'm in the middle of all this, and two, I'm wearing bloody gloves. The CHP officer who had called me popped his head in and he saw me down on the ground with one of the victims. I told him the girls weren't here. He ended up finding them inside one of these trailers. There was a bunch of green pesto sauce that somebody had spilled in the trailer, all on their shoes. He told me recently that he was making some of the sauce at home, and the smell from that sauce took him right back to that day.

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That first press conference at nearby Gavilan College was surreal. You see it in the news and movies, where you have all these cameras and people shouting out questions. When we got there, they were already formed in this half circle. There must've been a podium there because there was a bunch of mics. It's ten or eleven o'clock at night. Keep in mind, I'm wearing shorts and a T-shirt. I was just supposed to go there, help tear down the tent. It was starting to get cold. I was able to get my wife to at least bring me a jacket.

I go up before the microphone. All the light, they have all these bright lights on you. I could not see the faces out there. I don't even think I introduced myself. I just started talking. I can't tell you to this day what it is that I said. I remember holding onto the podium like this [*he grips the table*]. My hands were shaking still. Just moments earlier, I was trying to take the blood pressure of somebody who's got a hole in their arm. That kind of changing gears was just . . . it was difficult for me. That whole scene at Gavilan College is just a blur to me.

That first 48 hours, 72 hours, hell, even longer than that, I felt like my role as mayor should be that of Comforter-in-Chief. My first responsibility was to the community to see what I could do to help heal the community, but most importantly, what I could say that might express the feelings of the community.

There was a lot of raw emotion. People were hurt. People were just shocked and hurt. I know I was shocked. I knew it happened. I saw some of the results. This has always been a family focused event. People were really hurt that something like this could happen, and that something like this could happen at *our* event. Then to make matters worse, it wasn't an outsider, it was a Gilroy person. The older adults, they could tell you where they were for the first man on the moon or the JFK assassination. Well, there's a lot of Gilroyans who can tell you exactly where they were during the Garlic Festival shooting. That is burned in our collective memories. The community, especially a close-knit community at a family event, there is a tremendous psychological trauma. I don't think that ever really gets recognized.

When people do talk to me about it, it's really just listening. I can't say, "Oh, you're fine," or whatever. If they say something to me, then I think the only thing I could really do is listen.

I started getting all these letters coming in. I try to be good about responding, but as these letters are coming in, they're piling up. I didn't want to respond. It was just too hard. It always took me right back there again. It took a few weeks for me to start opening them up.

Some of them were on very nice stationery. Some of them were on cards. There was one letter in particular from a retired older couple in Texas. I think she was a teacher, he was a post-office worker, fixed income. They don't have any money to send or buy cards. They had a piece of paper and a handwritten note, saying, "Please know that we're thinking about you and the community." That letter really jumped out at me. They're not going out buying a nice sympathy card or anything like that, they're just doing what they can. I have a letter from a resident of Dayton. Then a week later, this happens to them. The letters I've received from all over the country have been . . . very, very nice.

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The Garlic Festival has changed how police departments are going to be responding to some of these large events. There are community events going on every weekend, all across the country. Whether it's the Garlic Festival, some sort of Watermelon Festival, Arts and Wine Festival, whatever it happens to be, and police departments are asked to provide the security sometimes. Well, now they're no longer going to want to show up with their sidearm. They're going to want to be armed to the teeth. I think that is really changing how our police departments are going to respond in the future to these large community events because they're such easy targets. I would hate to have a quasi-military operation have a chilling effect on people's willingness to go out and celebrate and have fun at events. Each community has to decide for themselves, what is their appropriate level of response? And, frankly, who's going to pay for it? Somebody has to pay for it.

I teach Political Science at Gavilan College. One of the students asked, "Well, President Trump went to El Paso and Dayton, but he didn't come here." I thought about it. I told the class, "Personally, I'm glad he didn't come here." If I got a phone call from the White House that says, "Mayor, hold for a moment while I transfer you to the President," my first thought is, "Well, shit, I'm going to talk to the President." When the President comes on and says, "I want to go to Gilroy," my second thought is, "Oh shit, he's coming here. I really don't want that for the community."

I knew that if President Trump came, it would no longer be about the Garlic Festival. It would be about President Trump, whether you like him or you hate him, or it would be about gun control. It would be about any other issue other than the victims. Gilroy would only be the backdrop of the visit. That's not what I wanted. I feel funny that we were overlooked. When I hear about all the other mass shootings and Gilroy's not mentioned, I'm glad that Gilroy was not politicized. I'm grateful that the President didn't come.

KATIUSKA PIMENTEL

Katiuska Pimentel is the aunt of Kayla Salazar, one of the children killed at the Santa Fe school shooting on July 20, 2019. Katiuska migrated to the US from Peru at age fourteen. In 2017, she graduated with University Honors from the University of California at Santa Cruz, double majoring in Legal Studies and Political Studies. She has not taken her three exams—Kayla and her younger sisters, Katiuska lives in San Jose with her extended family, including her parents, her sister Lorena, Kayla's mom, her brother-in-law, and nieces. In July 2020, she plans to start her JD studies at the University of San Francisco School of Law.

I was in San Francisco, going to a USF Law program, waiting to get a table with friends at a restaurant for dinner. I got a call from my sister. She was screaming. She told me, "Kayla's been shot—I don't know what hospital she's at. We need you to help. I need you to come, because I don't know where Kayla is."

I'm the person my family first calls when something happens. My family has always relied on me to be the problem solver. I called my friend Anezi [some changes], to be with my sister, who doesn't speak English. In those moments you need someone that can be an advocate. I was so desperate because I'm usually that person for my family.

I had left my car in San José, so another friend drove me back. I was calling every hospital that had an emergency room telling them, "Hello, I'm looking to find my niece Kayla. She is thirteen years old. Do you have anyone with her description?" I would be on the phone with the managers, the head nurses. I felt like I was dying in that car trying to reunite with my nieces and figure out what happened.

I was calling the line that the police department published. No one was answering or it was busy. When I talked to someone, no one would give you direct information.

I was so angry at that point. If you knew Kayla, she's someone that would be scared of the dark. She's so innocent. I knew she was going to be scared. I knew that she was going to want to have us there. I couldn't forgive myself that I couldn't find her. I thought, "How can we live if you're not?"

About seven thirty, I reunited with my niece, Lea [some changes], at home. She said, "We don't know what happened to Kayla. They took her. We don't know what hospital." I was freaking out, but I thought, "Okay, I'm going to see Kayla again."

I drove to Bascom Hospital Emergency Department to see if Kayla was there. Before I left, I packed a bag of clothes. I thought that I was going to see her, and she was going to need to change to go home. I talked to the security guy. One of the nurses saw me so desperate, my body shaking. She came to me. She asked about Kayla and went through every room. She came out and she said, "Kayla's not here."

I said, "I can't believe you. We are looking everywhere. Kayla is not anywhere. She can't just disappear like that." I sat down outside of the emergency room and started to cry. I couldn't believe a 13-year-old girl would get lost and no one would know.

I called a friend who lives in Gilroy. She said, "Let me call the city council members. I'll see if they can get any information." Gilroy PD called me and said, "Are you Kayla's family? Okay, we're looking." They would not give me any information beyond that.

Around midnight, my friend called me crying, screaming. I was still right outside the ER. I've never going to forget her words: "Kayla's still there." And I said, "Where?" Then she said, "At the festival." I said, "What the hell? Is she lost? Did she run away somewhere and the police didn't find her until afterwards? Does she need me to pick her up? And then there's this piece of silence. She said, "No, she passed away." I said, "No, I don't believe you. How can that happen when my sister's so sure she's at a hospital? How can that happen when we have not received any calls whatsoever that this has happened? Wouldn't the police let us know sooner if that was the case? I don't believe you." This whole time I had a picture of Kayla in a hospital bed, not dead. I was in shock and did not know how to react.

A family member called and he said that he thought Kayla had passed away at the shooting. He just didn't know how to tell my sister and he thought that I would be the best person to tell her.

I felt like a whole building of blocks had fallen on me. At that point I just broke down. I was screaming. I was thinking, "How come we don't get an official call? I don't think this is true. Maybe it's not." Every time I think about it, I can feel a knot in my throat and this heavy weight on my shoulders.

My sister sent friends to meet up with me. They sat next to me and tried to help me. I had this bag of clothes. I was crying. I couldn't drive because I was shaking. I felt like I was going to get in a car accident if I tried to drive anywhere. I said, "Okay, just take me home." Close to one o'clock, they took me back to the house. All I could think of were these two people that had told me Kayla had passed. I felt so much pressure. I couldn't tell my sister that Kayla had passed away. What if she didn't? What if they're mistaken? We had not gotten a confirmation.

My sister came back to the house, looked at me and said, "Can you tell me what happened?" I told her Kayla had passed away. She said, "No, this can't happen." Then she fell down to the sofa, screaming. I think for a moment she fainted. I was walking in circles around the house. I was trying to be strong but I felt like I lost a sister or daughter, someone that I'd raised. I took my sister to the hospital.

While I'm driving to the hospital my dad and my mom, who were on a cruise in Europe, were calling me every two seconds saying, "What happened? We heard Kayla is injured. Tell us what happened." I didn't know if I should tell them. They were in Greece, in the middle of the ocean. They couldn't do anything, but I was holding this weight.

We got to the hospital, then I went outside and had a conversation with my parents. I tried to say it in the sweetest way possible, but they still screamed. They said, "We need to book the plane tomorrow." My sister was under strong meds at the ER. Every time she would wake up she would start crying. I didn't eat or sleep or anything. The entire day I didn't eat anything, and I wasn't even hungry. The doctor saw me in the morning. He said, "Oh my God, you didn't sleep or anything." He brought me a coffee. I probably went three days without any food or an actual meal.

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In this time there was no one else. I was alone. My parents were not here. My sister and my brother-in-law were not available. I was holding all of my family together and being the one figuring out everything. I never had to deal with something like this. I didn't know how to plan a funeral, how to plan the cemetery. I didn't know how to claim a body. I didn't know anything. On Tuesday, I was Googling how to claim a body. Who do you reach out to? I was trying to YouTube it.

I didn't know where her body was. It was just a shocking moment. I don't think my brother-in-law asked, "Where's Kayla?" A mentor from UC Santa Cruz who is a police officer took the whole day off to help me out.

I was able to reach out to the coroner's office. They said, "We're only releasing the body to the parents." And I said, "My sister's unconscious on an ER bed and my brother-in-law can't talk. I don't want Kayla to be here for a lot of time."

The chief investigator got my number and said, "I need someone to come identify Kayla because she's the last victim that hasn't been identified. Can two parents come?" I said, "No, my sister's lying in a hospital bed and they just gave her more meds. My brother-in-law, I don't think he can do that either." She said, "How much do you know Kayla?" And I said, "Well, I lived with her since she was two years old." She said, "Okay, I need you to meet me at this location in 45 minutes."

I had never been to identify a body, never been to a coroner's office. When I recognized Kayla's body, I broke down. I think that was the moment where I really… fell down. I just started to cry. I was screaming. I couldn't believe it. Nobody's prepared to have to confront a situation like that. Your brain, your heart, your being, it's not prepared.

This year, she was going to graduate middle school. I taught her how to draw and paint. I'm an artist. I like to draw. I always love to paint. I taught my nieces how to draw and paint. Kayla got into drawing, and we would do art projects together. She had an amazing talent. She taught herself graphic design, how to edit videos. She wanted to be an animator.

Kayla was beautiful, funny, charismatic, curious, intelligent, extremely empathetic towards animals and other people. I never met anybody as pure as Kayla. Her essence was so pure. I don't think she ever wanted to harm anyone or had bad intentions towards anybody.

Kayla and her sister Lea were really close in age, so they would always do everything together. They were best friends. They slept in the same room. They never saw me as an aunt because I was too young. They called me sister. We hung out a lot as sisters. We'd go get ice cream, do things.

The day of the shooting, they were eating ice cream. They did a Facebook Live and I saw Kayla eating ice cream. She looked so happy because she loved ice cream. Every time the ice-cream man called in the ice cream truck, she'd go outside with her birthday money and buy ice cream for everybody.

When I was studying for the LSAT, I sat at the desk for ten hours, reading really thick books. She'd tell me, "Oh my God, you're going to die because you're studying so much!" or she'd bring me ice cream to feel better, so I didn't die with the LSAT.

She had a sense of justice. I'm a community organizer and I do a lot of work, mostly on immigrant rights. When there were marches for immigrants, I'd take my nieces. She'd say, "Why do we have to take away people from their parents? Why do we have to separate families?" She'd always question stuff like that.

She also had so many pets: a chihuahua named Jacky, a cat named Rosie, a little guinea pig. She would take the guinea pig out of the cage and make it run in the backyard. Every day I would see her play with the guinea pig. And she wanted to get a golden retriever puppy. She'd send me screenshots of shelters with golden retrievers. She was so insistent. She said, "Okay, if I get an A can you get me a golden retriever?" That was her last wish. She fought for it so much. After Kayla passed away, we got a golden retriever. We named him Frosty because that was Kayla's artistic name, how she signed her art.

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Every day, the first couple of months, I was hoping, maybe she's going to walk into the house or maybe she's randomly going to come back. It took me weeks to be able to get that bag I packed for Kayla out of my car.

August is really broken memories. Even September. It was almost as if I was a zombie. I wasn't really there. For the first two months, every day we were reliving what happened. Every conversation at the house was, "What happened?" For months, we couldn't sit down to dinner. The first couple of months, every food tasted the same. I thought, "Why am I still here when Kayla passed?"

I was going to start law school the Monday after the burial. I'm a really driven person. I migrated to this country at the age of fourteen without my parents. I went through high school. I worked to pay for rent. I was really independent, strong. Law school was something that I'd wanted to do all of my life. I had to defer for a year. I needed to take time to come back home and grieve.

Deferring was a difficult decision for me. You don't want to give in. I thought, I'm going to let him [the shooter] win. If I defer, I'm giving in to him. I'm allowing him power over my life, to destroy my dreams for that moment. I also got scholarships. I didn't know if they would defer my scholarships.

But I was not sleeping. I was not eating well. I was having panic attacks from anxiety and depression. I was suffering PTSD. The desire of my law school allowed me to defer and keep my scholarships and my enrollment, but I still felt guilt, like I'm giving in to this. My family was supportive. I don't think they were ready to let me move to another city and go to law school. They needed help getting therapy. They needed help accessing resources. They wanted me to be there. I'm glad I did. My whole life, my whole family's life stopped. Our world was shaken. We couldn't just retake our life. It was too much pain.

Deep grief really sank in. A lot of pain and anger. I couldn't talk to people. I couldn't hang out with people. I couldn't be myself. I was going around thinking, "Why did it happen?"

I started to go to therapy, to a psychiatrist, to seek treatment because I had so many overwhelming emotions. It was as if I couldn't live through all the emotions at once. They had to take turns to experience.

There's so many confusing thoughts. Every day I would wake up and be like, "I don't understand what I'm feeling." I would forget things. For the first months, I couldn't make plans with people because I would randomly cancel or say, "I don't have the energy. Something just reminded me of Kayla. I can't see you."

Sometimes I contemplate my life, and I think it is unfair. I migrated to this country. I'm a Dreamer. I did everything. I was going to law school, and then this happened to me. There's this feeling that nobody can come and take someone you truly love away. You have no agency to say anything about it or change what happened. You have to live with the consequences.

My therapist said I was questioning fundamental values of my life. As an organizer, you need to believe that there is good you are fighting for. For the first time in my life, I couldn't see any good. I was vulnerable and scared. All of my life I thought there was equality, there's good in people.

Questioning things so deeply takes a lot of courage. You're afraid to be around people because you don't know how they're going to react. You have so low energy. You're constantly thinking. I would be talking to one person and other that, I'm tired. One time I forced myself to go for coffee with someone, and I couldn't drive home. Even that conversation, that one interaction, made me so exhausted.

People have great intentions, but that doesn't mean they make you feel good when you are grieving. They just don't understand what you're going through. People wanted explanations. People wanted to know or were curious. When it's public, people can be cruel in the way they talk about things. My family's Catholic. Some people would come hug me and say, "You have to resign to the fact that Kayla's never going to be here anymore." I wasn't ready to resign. I had to contain my anger because I wanted to push them. I even had a problem with the words, "I'm sorry," because I was like, "I don't want you to be sorry for me. We're not just these people you should feel sorry for. We're actually fighters."

When you're grieving, people cannot see it from the outside. You're not wearing a hat saying, "I'm Grieving." I don't want to go outside, but I have to work. I have to do things because who's going to pay my bills? Life doesn't stop. I would be late to things sometimes, and people would get mad. I wouldn't say, "I was late because I couldn't sleep all night because I was crying." People assumed I was lazy. I'm an outgoing person. Now it's harder for me to just talk to people. It depends on my energy.

We need to talk about hate. We should really have a conversation about how to prevent hate crimes, how to talk about racism, how to talk about these issues. I don't think this country has analyzed shootings enough. They're a symptom of a bigger problem. What are we teaching our children? How are we teaching them about hate? Why is there so many people hating so much hate or motivated to kill others that they don't even know and using a gun or a weapon of mass destruction?

Our biggest problem is recognizing there is an issue. They keep happening and we don't even think anything is wrong. It's almost as if we're just waiting for the next one to happen. It's like we're numb to this type of mass shooting. How come this keeps happening and we don't have conversations in schools? We should really have a conversation about what is driving them. Is this mental health? What is it? And also talking about gun control. Maybe talking to kids, really teaching children that this shouldn't happen. Or talking about acceptance and equality. I really feel that words influence people to act. And I think that when you spread hate, those words can influence others to act, especially young people. He was only nineteen.

We need to think about why these shootings are happening and really address that, otherwise they're going to keep happening.

For us there's no closure. I don't think there ever will be. There hasn't been a meeting with the DA or anybody. We don't have an actual investigation. The pieces that we're gathering are from the media. My family has been asking for the final investigation. It is important for us. The least they could do is tell us what happened.

They said they usually don't release it to families. I even asked the Victim Services Unit to talk to the DA. Because the FBI was involved and it was considered internal terrorism, they don't want to give it to us. So then it's private information. But can you imagine a mother, a caregiver, of someone that passed away, not being able to understand what happened? There might have been seconds or minutes that Kayla was left alone that we don't know about. Who took care of her? What were the efforts to save her?

There is a sense of abandonment with the fact that we do not know what happened. I don't know a lot of details that I would like to know, especially when it comes to my niece and who helped her. And we were not notified… there were things that are hard to understand. What happened? Where did he enter? How close was he? Who helped her? How come her body had to stay lying there for hours? Or how come we were not notified right away? Or why did we have to look for her for hours? The shooting happened at 6:00 p.m., and we did not get a call until 2:30 a.m.

We can't get justice because of how it occurred. He decided to take his life, so there's no restorative justice for us. The criminal justice system really focuses on prosecuting. There's a sense of humanity that is lost. There's so many complicated dynamics, but there's no closure because it's so random, so crazy, so unbelievable, and so tragic.

* * *

It has taken me months to recover from that first month, from everything I gave. It still feels like it was yesterday. Some days, I wake up in the morning and I'm like, "Wow, am I really Katiuska Pimentel? Am I really that person?"

With my birthday coming up, I'm turning twenty-five. I think about the fact that it's still alive, and Kayla passed. I'm turning one more year of age, which is a blessing, but I also feel like she shouldn't have been taken away. She had a whole life ahead of her.

Grief makes you learn about yourself, what you're sensitive to, your bad tendencies, your good tendencies, and also about the people around you. The people that are really there to help you, that are there for the role you play.

I didn't realize how much I didn't know of myself. All of my life I have been really independent, migrating to a country by myself, being a Dreamer, being self-driven. Going to college, getting into law school. I'm an ambitious person, but I also didn't know that I could be so vulnerable or that I could get hurt like that. I didn't know that I could hold so many emotions.

My goals have always been to be an advocate, to be able to represent people, to represent families, to really fight for justice for those who are vulnerable. That was the reason why I wanted to go to law school. My goals are still set, but I'm also sensitive about my feelings now. It's really easy for me to help everyone and be giving. I need to be able to take care of myself first. That's something I'm learning. I also feel I have become more protective of my family.

There's this aftermath that no one is prepared for, which is really grieving. The world will continue to change what the breaking story is, but for the people that truly love the victims that passed away, we're lost in a broken disk. We're living every day with the consequences of it. I was really thankful for the love and support we received. The community gave us hope and resiliency. We're trying our best to honor Kayla, but it's overwhelming. It's a neverending cycle of grief.

Every day we wake up. We try to add+ adelante. We're trying to keep going. Everyday it's a new day, it's a new feeling, a new struggle. I don't know how I'm going to feel tomorrow.

SCOT SMITHEE

Gilroy Police Chief Scot Smithee started as a reserve police officer for the Gilroy PD in 1984. He became Chief of Gilroy PD in December 2016. Chief Smithee has lived in Gilroy and Hollister for 37 years, where he and his wife have raised five children. In addition to being chief of police, Smithee is involved with volunteer service in the Gilroy community. As president of the Gilroy Rotary Club, Chief Smithee volunteered all weekend at the Rotary Wine Garden. On Sunday, July 28, his wife and youngest daughter worked alongside him, as they have for the past few years.

Probably close to five, we made our trek back from the Rotary booths to the police compound. I checked in with the commanders to see how the day had gone, then my wife, daughter and I headed back to the police department where we had parked. My wife and daughter drove home in a different car because I never know when I'm going to actually get to leave. I checked in, turned in all my stuff at the office, and then got in my car to start heading home.

Within a few minutes of leaving the police department, I heard the call on the radio that there was an active shooter at the Garlic Festival. I remember almost a sense of disbelief for the first couple of seconds. It's like I heard the words, and I knew what the words were, but you're waiting for something else. It was hard to believe that it was actually happening.

I turned on my lights and sirens and started driving back towards the park. I remember coming through the various checkpoints to get to the emergency access road that takes us down to the police compound. I remember watching a couple of guys dragging somebody that had been shot in the leg. I could see him bleeding as they were dragging him. I remember a pickup truck with people in the bed of the pickup truck clearly doing CPR on someone.

Seeing those things, the reality of the whole thing started sinking in. I had no idea how bad this was. I had no idea how many victims there were. I pulled into the police compound. I was one of the first outside units to actually get there.

As I got out of my car, I tried to get an assessment of what was going on. It was chaos. People were running every direction. They started dragging people who had been shot through our gate into our police compound. Our police compound is a large fenced in area with a mobile command vehicle, like a big motorhome, that said "Police" all over it. It looked like a safe place. That was not really ideal from a command and control perspective because you wanted to keep that area for your police resources, but at the same time, it was the first place that people saw when they were running or carrying injured people. Once that tide started, we were not going to stop it. We had to take care of these people. You couldn't say, "Stay out."

The first people that came in were not injured as badly. People were helping them or dragging them. Then the more severely injured people were getting drug in by our own officers. When I first got there, I saw one of my captains. Every year, he takes a week of vacation to volunteer from sun up till sundown at the Garlic Festival. He was wearing his Garlic Festival shirt. He slipped into his police command mode really, really quickly. He took control over what was happening.

I had to keep from being drawn into the heat of the moment. Help this one person, help that one person. I had to think about the big picture. One of the first things I did was call for the activation of our Emergency Operations Center which bring in lots of resources to support a big operation. If I needed something, it was the EOC's job to figure out a way for me to get it. For instance, if I needed buses, if I needed food, if I needed barricades, if I needed whatever, we notified the EOC and they took care of it, so we didn't have to worry about resources at the command post.

Lots of firemen started coming in. One firefighter raised his voice, yelling, "Everybody, eyes on me," and he went through the process of how we were going to triage all the patients, tag them, and get them ready for transport. Once that occurred, it was like clockwork. It was pretty impressive to watch them working on all these people.

Ambulances started rolling in. I don't know how many, but it was a lot. They brought the ambulances in from the bottom of our compound and looped them in a horseshoe shape from the bottom of our compound to the top. Ambulances lined up all the way down and around the compound and back out onto the street. They pulled up to where they were triaging the people. When that ambulance pulled away, boom, next ambulance, next victim, and then next ambulance.

After the first thirty minutes or so, we started getting significant numbers of officers from other jurisdictions. Some command staff members from other police departments, chiefs and captains, people I knew. That was a huge relief. Up to that point, we had myself and one captain, who was technically on vacation for a week and dressed in Garlic Festival attire.

We had pretty reliable information from not one but *multiple* different witnesses that said there was a second shooter. Some people told us he went back into the creek. Some people told us he ran south into the park. We had to worry about where this other shooter was? Was somebody going to start shooting our officers or start shooting more people? As we called for help, more and more police officers came in from the surrounding areas. We created four-officer active shooter teams. I couldn't even tell you today exactly how many of those we deployed, but it was a lot. We blanketed that entire park with these teams of officers to protect the people that were still there, and to try and find and/or mitigate the risk of any potential second shooter. That took a while because it's a big park and there were thousands of people still in there as you moved around.

If there was a table, a hay bale, a truck, a trailer, a booth, there were people hiding in it. Then you had the vendors that had all their belongings and their vehicles there. They all ran and left everything. You had families that ran in different directions or were not immediately together at the time of the shooting, and they couldn't find their family members.

My fellow Rotarians wound up in the back of a refrigerator truck. There were a whole bunch of them hiding in there. It wasn't until one of the active shooter teams swung the door open to check inside, that they were found. That's just one example. Just one little example. People were hiding everywhere.

As those other police officers started to show, I was able to give them assignments. For instance, a captain from an outside agency rolled in, and I said, "We need to set up a reunification location for all these people. They're all separated from their families." We needed a phone number for people to call. We chose Gavilan College. Now how were we supposed to get all these people from the festival to Gavilan College? So we called the Emergency Operations Center and said, "I need buses. A *lot* of buses."

Over 300 people came in that first night from dozens of different agencies. That included federal agencies. The FBI, the DEA, the ATF, Homeland Security. If there was a federal agency or even a state agency, they were there. Other police agencies included the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office, San Jose PD, Morgan Hill PD and Salinas PD to name a few. They came in with whole SWAT teams and special units.

We were lucky. We had personal relationships with agents in all these different organizations. The agents in charge of these various federal organizations, I know all of them personally. They have my cell phone number; I have their cell phone numbers. We meet, we have a relationship. I think that really, really helped. When something goes bad, you have those relationships already established. You're not calling the big unknown FBI, you're calling a person you know.

I talked with an evidence tech supervisor for the FBI about how we were going to manage the crime scene, because it was a crime scene. We couldn't leave it unprotected. So, not only did we have all these groups doing all these different things, but now you had to set up a perimeter around the entire thing. I think it was about sixty officers to get line of sight coverage around that perimeter. I realized right away that this was a huge crime scene with lots and lots of victims. There was going to be a lot of evidence. For an agency our size, even really for our entire county, it was going to overwhelm our capabilities to process.

Very early on, the FBI offered to process everything. Four or five teams were on airplanes from all over the country flying to get here to start the process of evidence collection. The FBI had over one hundred crime scene techs on scene, and they spent eight or nine days, sunup till sundown, processing that park. They told me when they were done that geographically, it was the largest crime scene ever processed in the history of the FBI. Twenty-seven acres of processed crime scene, which was big. It's big.

Think of the logistics, too. We were used to working with 105 employees total, and they all took care of themselves because they lived and worked in our community. Now we had multiple times that out there. They weren't from here. They didn't have a locker room. We had to figure out how we were going to support and take care of all those people. We had hundreds of people there every day for over a week. Well, you got to feed them, you got to have restrooms. It was an incredible logistical undertaking.

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A three-officer team engaged the suspect within about twenty seconds of the first shot that was fired. It was a very quick response. When you consider the area they had to cover out there and the number of people that are out there, that's pretty darn fast. Most people we talked to, including a lot of our own staff, when they heard the first shots, they thought it was firecrackers of some kind. But one officer, who's got some prior experience in Afghanistan and other places, he recognized the very distinct sound of that weapon. He immediately took off running towards the sound of the gunfire, and his two partners took off running after him. When they came in sight of the gunman, the gunman turned and started firing at our officers.
Those three officers all returned fire. They were a long distance from this guy, 125 feet or so. And they had nothing but handguns, which are not designed for long distance; they're designed for close distances.
And *that guy's* got a rifle that's very high powered, designed for long distances.

When they're taking the rounds from the suspect, they're shooting back. They didn't get excited and shoot everything out of their gun, *buh, buh, buh, buh*. It was take a breath. Get your sight picture. Boom. Come back down. Get your sight. It was very, very controlled. And they were also concerned about the backdrop - what innocent people were around that could be hit by their rounds?

Between those three officers, they fired a total of eighteen rounds, which was remarkable in and of itself. Eighteen rounds between three people under those circumstances. That was pretty incredible. They hit the suspect seven times out of those eighteen rounds, which was even more incredible that the rounds were that accurate.

It was truly incredible. I've said it before, but I am so proud of the fact that those guys were able to one, get there as fast as they did, and two, keep their calm and be as deliberate and accurate as they were.

There were all these people down, and our law enforcement officers were the only ones there to render aid. At the same time, we were being told there was another shooter so they were worried, "Am I going to get shot while I'm out here in the open rendering aid to people?" Once the suspect was down, once they had him handcuffed, they immediately started running to the victims that were down. There were people that would've died within a matter of a couple minutes, but the officers started putting tourniquets on people to stop the bleeding and dragging them to the compound for more formal medical help beyond what we can do.

The trauma doctors at Stanford Hospital called. They wanted to thank our staff for doing an incredible job. One of the injuries where a person was shot; they were telling us they reacted so fast to save this person's life. They said that was the first time they actually had a person with that kind of injury show up in their trauma room alive. Nobody had ever made it there alive before.

I don't know of another festival or fair that has security as tight as the Garlic Festival. We have a controlled perimeter. We have controlled access points. We have lots and lots of security and police and EMS. Most festivals don't have all the stuff that we have, and yet we were still vulnerable to somebody that wanted to do bad.

The fact that our officers took this guy down and it worked out the way it did is miraculous. It's truly miraculous. Very easily it could've been the officers were all killed and then that guy could have just kept on shooting because we didn't have the capacity to meet his firepower.

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The day after the incident. We started to develop more information. We did not have a second suspect. We had the crime scene locked down. Now we needed to focus attention on our own people. My biggest concern moved from the investigation of the crime to taking care of our own people. That was a very quick transition for me.

I am super concerned about secondary trauma. It's significant. We have a Peer Support Team here in the police department. They do critical incident stress debriefing. We have a chaplaincy program. We also have outside resources available to us. You always have one-on-ones available for people because this affects different people in different ways. We've done group debriefings and group counseling sessions where everybody who was in it together shares their perspectives and how it's affected them.

Sometimes people think that police officers have no emotion, but we're people just like everybody else. We do this job because we care about people, and when people get hurt or people die, that's hard…. It's hard, particularly for the officers that worked on the victims that passed away. Two of them were children. There's nothing worse than that. The worst possible thing you could ever deal with is a child that passes away. That never goes away. I don't care how much counseling you go to. I don't care how much you say you got to put that out of your mind. Those things stay in your mind as fresh as the day it happened. I remember every single one I've dealt with like it was yesterday, and some of them were thirty-some years ago. It's even more rough when the officers have children that age. It's not something where you go to a couple of sessions or you talk about it a couple of times and now you're all better. It's a long-term thing.

I've talked to people that were in the San Bernardino shooting a few years ago. All the professionals down there said the worst time for your people is going to be that two to three year mark. I talked to the manager for that division that was attacked and shot up. She was in the room when it happened. She said they lost more people in that two-to-three-year anniversary mark because of psychological stuff.

We need to stay really, really keen on offering help and making sure people have a way to work through that trauma. The downside is that we still have a police department to run. You deal with trauma. That's part of our job. You have a compounding effect. We know it's going to have long-term consequences. We know that it could end people's careers. We don't want to lose those people who have trauma. We just … knowing you need to help them and offering services, and actually having it all work out well are two different things.

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We do what we call an After Action Report, like a debriefing, to look at the whole picture from all the different perspectives. Hundreds of officers did thousands of tasks, and you have all this evidence. Compiling all that data into some sort of a meaningful thing takes a long time. How did we handle it? What did we do well? What could we have done better? How do we plan better for the future? It not only benefits us, but it benefits everybody else in our profession. I want to be able to provide information to other agencies. Here's what we did, but here are other things that we could consider for the future. In our line of work we can all learn from each other.

ADAM FLORES

Deputy District Attorney Adam Flores grew up in South Santa Clara County and joined the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office in 2012. He currently works in the Community Prosecution Unit of the District Attorney's Office and serves as the Chair of the South County Youth Task Force where he creates collaborations between government organizations, schools, and community-based organizations to prevent juvenile crime in the South Santa Clara County community. Flores was the lead of operations at the Family Assistance Center, a multi-agency victim assistance center, which operated immediately following the shooting, from July 29, 2019 to August 9, 2019.

I was driving home. My wife and I were visiting her parents and our phones started getting a lot of text messages. She checked our phones and saw that the Garlic Festival shooting had happened. We came home and watched everything on the news. It was very surreal to think, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe this is happening." Because I'm the South County Community Prosecutor, I contacted some of the on-call DAs to see if they needed assistance.

My role entered the morning of July 29, 2019. I received a call at about 7:15 from Assistant District Attorney, James Gibbons-Shapiro who said that the District Attorney's Office was going to be starting what's called the Family Assistance Center, but it needed a location. I said, "OK. Give me ten minutes. I'll call you back."

Two members of the Victim Services Unit were familiar with FACs, but I had never heard of what an FAC was. I thought, "Well, okay, we're going to do this. Let's do this." I didn't have any knowledge about what this was, but we were going to do it because it needed to get done.

I called Dr. Flores, no relation. She's the Superintendent of the Gilroy Unified School District. I said, "Dr. Flores, we're the District Attorney's Office. We're going to be establishing a Family Assistance Center. The focus is a center that essentially serves the victims of the shooting." Unhesitatingly, just so quickly, she said, "Rucker Elementary is the school. We can have it available."

After I got ready, I went to the Gilroy Police Department. I sat in on the media briefing that was going on. Shortly after, Dr. Flores had made it such that I could go to Rucker and meet with the principal to check out the place.

[*What were you looking for in a space?*]

I didn't know at the time. [*He laughs a little, as if to himself.*] But I knew we needed a place. The folks who would know - a supervisor from the Victim Services Unit, an FBI Victim Specialist, County Behavioral Health, Red Cross- they would be there to tour the school, to make sure this would be an appropriate location. The principal welcomed us, showed us the entire location, and all the partners said, "Yes, this would be great for an FAC."

That was about midday-esque, 12:30-ish, on July 29th. From that point until about five o'clock, we transformed the school into an FAC. It happened very quickly. There were so many people there transforming the school into this place that was going to help victims of the Garlic Festival shooting. The principal even was hand-making signs, putting them up on rooms.

Rooms were going to act as counseling places, investigation rooms, the nurse's office was going to assess physical trauma. The library was transformed into an area where there was victim intake and assessment. There was Santa Clara County Behavioral Health. Red Cross volunteers did mental health, had a nurse, and also provided food for the first week to the people working at the FAC, also, if desired, to victims who were there for long periods of time, and of course the FBI Victim Services Division. The FBI started to use a host of classrooms where they were going to be doing their operations and getting ready to accept personal effects, personal property that was left behind in the chaos of the shooting, and bring that over to the Multi-Purpose Room of Rucker. By five o'clock, we opened the doors to serve victims.

As you start to see it come alive, it takes more form. I've learned through this process that a Family Assistance Center is established within twenty-four to forty-eight hours of a mass shooting. An FAC is essentially a place where victims can receive wraparound services- counseling when they're in a current state of crisis or they can apply for California Victim Compensation Board benefits.

A victim of a shooting is broadly defined. It was anybody who was there, whether you saw the shooting or not. It also included immediate family members or close family members of someone who was there. Those are all considered victims and welcomed and encouraged to come to the Family Assistance Center.

That's the idea. You come to the Family Assistance Center and you're connected with all these services based on whatever you're seeking and they try to be all-encompassing. Everything from your counseling, to your physical trauma, to lost wages and medical expenses, to property.

Victims would be welcomed at our greeter table, a very quick assessment—"Hey, what can we do to help you?"—to get a sense of what they needed. Often they were taken to the library, which had been transformed into a victim intake area. Our Victim Advocates would do an assessment of what the needs were of that particular person and try to assess how we could best help them. When something happens, Victim Advocates from other DA Offices can help and respond to that county. There were Victim Advocates outside of Santa Clara County, from San Mateo, Monterey, on-call from San Francisco. Two support dogs came too. Who doesn't love support dogs?

The FBI and the FBI Victim Services Division came in to help with the investigation. They are specialists in working with victims and they also focused on property return. In the chaos of the shooting, people were fleeing for their lives. Anything you could imagine that people would drop—from your flip flops to kids' shoes, because it was right next to the kids' play area, to bikes, to strollers, to hats, to wallets—anything you could imagine, just left. The crime scene was extremely large. We're talking about the Gilroy Garlic Festival, which is acres. After everybody fled, they locked down the scene. It's a crime scene and everything stays there. The property was not leaving because it was a combination of property and evidence. Part of FBI Victim Services' job is to recover that property, document it, and then make it in such a fashion that it can be returned to an owner that's identified.

When someone comes in and says, "I was there," they would provide a description as detailed as possible, location as detailed as possible, and then the Victim Specialist with the FBI would go and retrieve the property and provide it to them. It's not just, "Here's your property, have a nice day." There is a possibility that being reunited with your property re-triggers the memories associated with what had just happened. It's a process taken very seriously, and there's a lot of care. A victim would come in to seek their property. They would fill out paperwork and then they give it to the Victim Specialist. He or she would go and try and get the property. The victim would then be taken to another room, a private room if they requested, and be given back the property. The Victim Advocates are trained in how to work with victims who are suffering from a traumatic event.

Some of the FBI Victim Specialists actually got rotated out and sent to another area because there were also two shootings that happened that week. That was very much on their mind as well. Unfortunately they are specialists now in these mass shootings. This was not the first time they had done this. They have a lot of experience.

The Community Prosecution Unit took on the role of overseeing the operations of the FAC. I was lead of the operations because this is South County and I was the Community Prosecutor assigned to this area. I helped to oversee the operations, assisting each agency, making sure everything was going okay for them. As the lead, there needs to be some kind of help and guidance. The challenge was making sure that the team took care of themselves because they are interacting with victims who are suffering from trauma, and so they themselves are now suffering from secondary trauma. Making sure they take care of themselves, so they can help, and fostering that culture was very important.

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You could divide the memories into two thoughts. Walking through the Family Assistance Center and seeing various victims receive services, being helped, whether it's someone just walking the grounds, needing a quiet place, to someone sitting at one of the tables and filling out an application with the dog there. That sense they were there and they were receiving help is very rewarding and positive to see. We're helping these people, giving them an opportunity to receive these services because otherwise would they have? I don't know. Then there are the thoughts of working with my colleagues and the partners. You thrive off of working with your colleagues and knowing that you're working through it together. It reaffirmed what I already knew, that I'm doing what I should be doing, public service.

We were able to use the school for about a week because then the school needed to transition back to being a school. We wanted to respect that part of the healing process, getting back to the normal business of life and part of that is children going to school. We had to transfer from the Rucker FAC to another location.

You can see how that would be a challenging endeavor because you still have the whole "Ranch Side" of property to return. It's only been a week and people are still suffering and still are needing services. We needed to stay open to provide that service, also wanted to get back the Ranch Side property. So all the partners on Friday, August 2nd, went and toured Wheeler Auditorium, Wheeler Gymnasium, the library, and City Hall Annex. They're all right there like a horseshoe. Each one of those buildings fit the need of each of the agencies.

Monday the 5th was that transition day. The library Reading Room B served as our general admin room where we had meetings. The Community Room served as the victim intake room, much like the library in the Rucker location. The Wheeler Gym served where the property was held and there were rooms where victims could be reunified with their property. We also incorporated vehicle reunification. The week before the Emergency Operations Center had been facilitating the vehicle re-unification process at Antonio Del Bueno Elementary. They moved vehicle reunification to the library and we incorporated that service into the FAC.

There was the Old City Hall Annex which hadn't been used in like ten years. That, eventually, was going to be where Red Cross and County Behavioral Health were. I think it was also the old police department. It had an old jail cell. It hadn't been vacuumed. It's like you had been living in an apartment for a really long time, you left, and you just said, "Hey, see you later." That's how it was. It was dirty, like it hadn't been used, but the space was perfect for what was needed. It had the rooms, the entryway. The County Behavioral Health folks and the Red Cross transformed it into a very welcoming space to support victims. It had a waiting room. It had individual rooms that were decorated. The carpet was donated. They got paintings and hung them up, nice furnishings that really made it welcoming. One of the behavioral folks told me that there was no air conditioning in the old City Hall Annex. I was like, "Oh gosh, it's August in Gilroy." It's not like you could just open a window and it's going to make the place cool. They were able to bring in portable air conditioners to set up.

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We served over 700 victims over the two weeks, and that doesn't include the amount of victims who came in and just wanted property. We filed over 500 California Victim Compensation Board applications over the two weeks.

We still continue to receive victims and help victims. Even just yesterday, [*October, 29, 2019*], one of the Victim Advocates said they had spoken with a victim. I can't recall if that was someone who was checking in or a new one. It wouldn't surprise me if it was a new victim that was now seeking some kind of help. You learn that the trauma doesn't go away for these victims. People may not realize initially how traumatic it was, and it may take time. That's something I've learned through my experience and learning about mass shooting incidents and what occurs after. I did not know about these important services until learning it on the job.

It shows how strong the community is and how powerful that is when people really seek to help others and come together. Then you step back and you look at the tone and tenor of how people were really desiring to support one another, all the fundraisers, and it re-affirms something I already knew about the community. Gilroy is a strong community, a close community. Same thing about South County. It's separate from the rest of the county, kind of its own little area, and so, it is a tight-knit area. Santa Clara County rallied behind Gilroy as well. All these people came together within hours of this horrific event. You look at the agencies that were on the scene: the FBI, Behavioral Health, our office, local governments, the city, the library, the school district, and all the people that work for those agencies coming together.

I constantly describe it as an absolute collaboration. There's a large, invaluable element of selflessness. There were so many people coming together. I never had a doubt that we were going to it, as we were doing it. There was never a doubt. There were always so many people who wanted to help. So much collaboration, so much selflessness by so many different people. From the moment I called Dr. Flores [*he snaps his fingers*], just like that, all the people who made everything happen at every step of the way just absolute selflessness, and collaboration, and dedication of service.

Editorial Note:
Now that the FAC has closed, Deputy District Attorney Flores and the Santa Clara County DA's Office are establishing a Resiliency Center in Gilroy, a permanent location where victims can receive services and resources. The Gilroy Strong Resiliency Center opened Jan. 28, 2019, the six-month anniversary of the shooting.

MONICA SENDEJAS

Monica Sendejas has lived in Gilroy since she got married in 2008 and has worked in the Recreation Department for the City of Gilroy since 2012. As a California government employee, she is a sworn disaster service worker and must report for duty if called in the event of an emergency. She drove the City of Gilroy Recreation truck as a shuttle for the city's Emergency Operations Center (the EOC) beginning on Sunday night, July 28, 2019 until Tuesday, August 7, 2019.

My husband and I didn't attend the Garlic Festival. We had just gotten home. We were in our living room hanging out. I started to hear a lot of sirens. My first thought was, "There's a fire," because it was a really hot day. I looked on my PulsePoint app to see where the emergency was. I could tell by the address location that it was Miller Avenue, Christmas Hill Park.

I turned on the feature where you can hear the dispatching back and forth between communications and the fire department. That's when I first heard that it was a shooting. My husband turned on his police scanner to hear what was going on. I thought about what scale it was on. Is this like the Las Vegas massacre that happened, or is this something smaller? How many people are being affected by this right now? I knew it was severe when they were calling for CALSTAR, the emergency airlift, to respond. It took a while to get to that point, but your heart just breaks for them. You hear a play-by-play of what's happening, but there's pieces missing. It was hard. You could hear on the dispatching too, one person was deceased.

As a lifeguard instructor, my training is I wanted to get in there and help, but I knew that wasn't my role, so I just stayed and listened until I got the text message that EOC had been activated. Before that text message actually came in, my supervisor had alerted the team, "Be ready. We might be called in."

I ended up being called in at nine o'clock Sunday night. I was supporting the EOC. I did everything they needed me to do. I ran around and got food for Emergency Operations working in the park … I had to make several runs, so I went to Christmas Hill Park to deliver to Public Safety. Then I also had to deliver food to EOC, and I had to deliver food to Gavilan College, to their Emergency Center there.

When I drove into the park it was surprising to see how many law-enforcement people were there. I wasn't prepared for that picture, but I also felt very safe. When I pulled up in the Recreation truck, it was like one or two in the morning. I was bringing food from McDonald's. McDonald's donated all the food that night. Your heart breaks, because you know what happened there. You know the pain that people saw and the fear that they experienced. Then you see tons of law enforcement investigating. There's some firefighters that I've worked with over the years doing emergency drills at the pool and different interactions. So you check in, "How you doing? Everything okay?"

EOC got the shelter opened, and I was involved with that process. We contacted the Red Cross. They bring a trailer down with equipment, with cots and food, and little individual bags of toiletries and blankets. The majority of people were able to get either hotel rooms, or they had friends pick them up, or they were able to get their own accommodations. But there were like twenty-seven people that didn't have somewhere to go. Some people weren't even able to get their vehicles out of Christmas Hill Park. Some of them were vendors. There were even people in the shelter that didn't have their purse and their medicine because it was in their vehicles. When they evacuated Christmas Hill, they left everything behind. Everything that they had. Some people just had what was on their back and that's it. It's amazing people's kindness and understanding in situations like that. They just went with it. One little boy that was with his parents didn't even have shoes. We were able to get them those kinds of supplies. We opened Wheeler (1) for them. They spent the night there. They slept in the gymnasium. The Red Cross brought their cots, and we set them all up. I think it was three o'clock when we had the cots set up and people were able to sleep. By this point, they're exhausted, right? They've been working all day at the festival, and they experienced this traumatic event. They evacuated to one of the schools and then they evacuated from there to Gavilan. This was their third time being transported. They were just exhausted and wanted to sleep.

I've always considered myself a strong person, but I hadn't pulled an all-nighter since college. I worked until 8:30 Monday morning. I pulled an all-nighter and I was okay. I didn't fall apart at the end of it. I worked a god-awful number of hours that week and I was okay. I'm stronger than I thought I was. I didn't lose it because I was so exhausted. You get that adrenaline going, and you want to help and be a resource. I was willing to do whatever people needed me to do to help.

* * *

The majority of that first week, I worked as a shuttle driver. I drove most days into the park to take vendors and volunteers to retrieve their vehicles as the FBI released cars. They would release sections of the park at a time as they completed the process. They had to inventory the whole scene and (complete) their clearance. The busiest days were the first two days. The first night when they opened up the cars was the busiest because we were taking vanload by vanload in. Most days, there were two vans driving. We would go back and forth from Antonio Del Buono School to Christmas Hill Park. Later in the week, vendors could start breaking down their canopies and all their equipment, but in the early days, it was just the vehicles that they were getting out.

We drove them to the rendezvous point. Then the FBI would get information from them, retrieve their vehicle, and bring it out to them. Communication is definitely hard when you are out in the field because you have so many moving parts at once. You've got to make sure that they're all communicating the same way, and some things change on the fly. People were so amazingly patient. They were understanding. They had compassion for the victims. They were inconvenienced beyond what any normal person would tolerate, and they were still like, "I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to be alive. I understand that things are moving at the pace that they need to move for the investigation to continue."

And then hearing their stories. What they were willing to share. We didn't ask questions. We just let them share with us what they wanted. Some of the stories were pretty profound. One of the ladies, a vendor, had been informed that there were bullet holes in her car. And she was like, "Well, that's what insurance is for." She wasn't livid. I think on a normal day, people would be furious, right? But it wasn't a normal day. It wasn't a normal experience. It wasn't a normal week, and people were just grateful and compassionate and kind. There was one moment, on Tuesday or Wednesday, when we were at Antonio Del Buono. Two ladies who hadn't seen each other since the day of the shooting and had gotten separated were crying hysterically because they were glad the other was okay. It was their first time being reunited. My favorite part was shuttling people because you got to hear their stories. You got to be that fly on the wall and see what's happening. I got to experience their story and be part of it. It'll be moments that I will never forget.

* * *

When you work with people for a long time, you see the best, and sometimes not the best in people. When situations like this happen, and you're working long hours, you wait for that moment when people are cranky, or they're going to snap at you, or they're going to say, "No, I can't." That never came for me. No one ever told me, "I'm too tired, I can't." I didn't hear anyone say, "I don't want to do that." I didn't hear anyone say, "No, don't ask me." It's like if someone runs a race, and people get tired and fall behind, someone picks them up and keeps going, but no one complains along the way.

I remember one night having a conversation with our City Administrator. A few of us were taking a break in the kitchen over by the Annex and getting a snack. I remember saying to Gabe, "Gosh, I didn't realize how nice most of our city employees are." We don't get an opportunity to work with all the departments on that level every day. With Emergency Operations, we're working with Streets, we're working with Finance, we're working with Community Development, we're working with Fire and Police, and we're interacting for the same goal. Everyone was so positive and helpful and willing to do whatever it took to help. The city people were at their best without being asked to be at their best. For the immediate emergency, when you want people to be at their best because you need them to be, we were pleasantly surprised because they were.

Everyone had their job. The collaborations that were happening with the county and the DA's office and the library and the fire department and the police department and the FBI. You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child? Well, it takes a community and all the resources within it to survive an incident like this. Without each party coming in, like all the restaurants that helped support things, volunteers coming forward and helping, without everyone doing their part, we wouldn't have come through as strongly as we did. That's why I tell you when people say, "Gilroy Strong," those are two words, but the profound meaning behind them is exponential. It's not one person, it's not the city, it's not me, it's not the library. It's all of us coming together and doing our part to lift us up. In tragedy you find community and you build community. I was able to see the resilience, determination, compassion, and support. Community's the best way to say it. The way that people came together. When you say, "Gilroy Strong," those are just words, but for me, what I saw this community do was show their strength.

I don't know when Gilroy really became my home and my community. I've lived here since I got married in 2008. I've always considered myself a girl from Watsonville. Watsonville's my community. Watsonville's my home. But in this instance, this was my community, this was my home. I wanted to help my neighbor here, and I realized how much I love Gilroy. When you're willing to do whatever it takes to help people in your town, you know it's your town.

1 *The Red Cross set up a shelter in Wheeler Community Center in downtown Gilroy the first night. The shelter later moved to Christopher High School.*

ROBERT ELIASON

Robert Eliason is a freelance photographer for South Valley Media, whose publications include the *Gilroy Dispatch*, *Morgan Hill Times*, *Hollister Freelance*, *San Benito Magazine*, and *South County Magazine*. After returning home from covering the initial eight hours of the shooting, he wrote a Facebook post about media coverage of the Gilroy shooting that went viral. Robert lives in San Benito County, south of Gilroy. His website is http://roberteliasonphotography.com/.

I was supposed to have gone to the Garlic Festival that day. I'd gone on Friday but I was going to go again in the late afternoon on Sunday to try to get more photographs for the issue. We were going to do a full-page spread on the Garlic Festival, and I wanted to get more events in other areas. I was waiting for the shuttle bus. It was hot, and I was tired because I'd already shot a couple things that day. I thought, "Oh, the hell with it. I'm going home." So I got in the car and left. A student from Sobrato High School newspaper called me up and said, "Are you out at the Garlic Festival?" I said, "No, I'm home. What's going on?" "There was a shooting."

As soon as I heard about it, I texted my editors and said, "If you don't know about this, get ahold of this story because it's happening right now." I immediately got a text back from my publisher, Dan Pulcrano, and he said, "We're sending everybody out to try to get information. Could you head out to the hospital and see what's going on out there?"

The hospital was supposed to have a media center being set up. As I was driving, I saw two people just talking in a group by a van in the parking lot. I asked them what was going on. We talked back and forth, and they mentioned that their child was one of the people that had been hit by shrapnel, and that the hospital was only letting one person at a time per victim. They weren't allowing people into the waiting rooms. They weren't allowing anything like that. Everybody was outside. I parked the car and I saw these three guys walking towards me. I asked them if they knew what was going on. They were ministers who had just come back from offering their help at the hospital and they were leaving. They were the ones that had told me the child had died. They had just come from the family of that child. I sat in the car for a while. The view that I had sitting in the car was this line of people standing in front of the hospital, sitting at the hospital, and the ambulance lights going, and the ambulance guys standing there. People who looked totally lost. All families and friends. I talked to a few people there. I talked to one of the ambulance drivers who told me that they had just brought somebody in who was airlifted off to another facility. I offered condolences to the people that were there. I didn't question them. I didn't talk beyond saying, "I hope things are going well for you." I felt intrusive just standing there waiting to be told what was going on. I felt intrusive particularly because of the fact that I was media and didn't want to be viewed as a vulture waiting for a story. I was waiting for a story. I was waiting for the media center to open up.

One of my editors texted me and said that they were going to have a press conference at the Gavilan parking lot and I should get over there. So, I took off.

The Gavilan parking lot is where people were meeting up with their families after being ripped apart at the festival. And there were still people waiting for family, people on edge not necessarily knowing if their friends or family were okay, or where they were going to meet up with them, or what was going on. There were still people there that were at a loss.

It was a circus when I got there. I don't know how many people were there. It was insane. By this time it was really dark, but you could see cameras set up all over the place. These little oases of light, little pockets of light where they had corralled somebody to interview.

I could hear somebody behind me saying, "I don't want to talk anymore. I don't want to talk anymore. I need to take a break. I don't want to talk anymore," and them continuing to ask questions. "I have a few more questions for you. Just a few more questions and then you can take your break." The person was so rattled by the press that she continued talking even though she kept saying over and over again that she didn't want to. That bugged me.

I got my place in the line of people that were interviewing these two women. Two women that were completely surrounded by media. They were giving their account of everything. Everybody had lights and cameras. There were ten guys with video cameras and photographers. I just shot over their heads, which is how I got the shot with all the microphones. And I have another shot that I took that's from behind them, when you can see all that.

I've been in situations where national media has shown up before. Important court cases, US Women's Open over at CordeValle. I'm used to that kind of press gaggle, but this was so intrusive, and really out of control. There was nobody in charge. There was nobody controlling the situation.

Everybody was grabbing their position for the press conference, which was going to have the chief of police, the mayor was going to be there, and somebody from the Garlic Festival. People were beginning to jockey for position. I found this spot next to a cameraman. We were talking about his equipment and video camera. I didn't talk to him about covering any of this stuff. I didn't want to be aggressive.

I was getting texts from people I knew. I was checking Facebook for people I knew and getting reports back from Facebook, or people texting me. One guy came over and he basically told me to move because he wanted my spot for his video camera. I was stunned. I was pissed because I was being swatted away like a fly. I told him, "I am not moving. It's not going to happen." He looked like he couldn't believe it, that I would defy him that way or not bow to the authority of the massive camera.

I got the photographs that I wanted to get, but I was really, really angry at that point. It had been building. Just the fact that it happened in Gilroy, and having talked to some of the people that were involved in it.

When I got home I had to go through the pictures that I shot to get them to the editor because they were going to put stuff on the website immediately, then the next day was the day the paper went to press. I got all that done and I was so angry and stressed out that I couldn't sleep. At 3:30 in the morning I wrote that Facebook post. It was all my anger and all my frustration put down so I could go to sleep. And when I woke up the next morning, I had suddenly hundreds of people following me on Twitter, which is something that I never use, and tons and tons of requests for friends, and thousands of views and reposts on this thing. I mean, it went sailing out there really, really fast.

Then all of a sudden I'm hearing from Poynter (1) and *The Washington Post*, and it shows up on the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Out of all the people that talked to me, and all the people that wrote about this, only four people verified that I actually worked for the *Dispatch*. Somebody told me that this thing had been read 100,000 times. To think that you can have that kind of visibility online with nobody even bothering to check who you are.

I had people privately message me. There was a small number of people sending me really ugly hate messages. I was invited to join a Facebook group called Journalists and Trauma. I was getting messaged all over the place by people who had covered the Pulse nightclub shooting, and Parkland, and the Oakland warehouse fire, and war correspondents saying, "I get what you're talking about. If you need somebody to talk to, you can text me."

* * *

The City Hall Memorial Vigil was a real breaking point for me. The stage was set up between the library and City Hall. When I got here, about an hour early, there was a solid row of cameras lined up in front of the stage. The whole area had filled in. I went to the organizers and I said, "Are you actually going to let them set up in front of the stage like that?" And they said, "No, no, no. We're going to move them. We just haven't figured out how to tell them to move." I said, "Well, just go and tell them to move." Some of them lined up on the sidewalk near the parking lot where no one was going to be anyway. The parking lot was nothing but media trucks, fifteen, twenty media trucks with satellite uplinks.

The vigil started, and as soon as they started talking, all of the camera guys came out and formed a solid line, standing right in front of the crowd. As the vigil went on, more of them showed up. So they ultimately ended up with about nine people standing in front, including some people who set up directly in front of a guy in a wheelchair. There were probably twenty photographers with their cameras pointed straight at the crowd taking pictures through the entire thing of people mourning. There were photographers on the right side, including a guy with a video camera on his shoulder that was coming up to people within three, four feet of their faces, running the video camera, putting it in people's faces, and going right down the line at head level.

It was outrageous because the media had created this solid barrier in front of the people who were here to mourn. And while they were mourning, while they were trying to light their candles or whatever, they were having photographs taken of them constantly. You could see some people shying away from the cameras. Other people playing to the cameras. No one was ignoring the cameras.

I just kept getting more and more angry. I was just fuming. My editor was here and he left halfway through because he was so upset by what was going on. He didn't want to make a scene, so he took off. Behind me, maybe fifteen feet, was the family of one of the victims, the parents I had met at the hospital. Somebody set up a video camera in front of them. Dropped the tripod in front of the mother.

I sat for a big chunk of the memorial service asking myself if I was going to take photographs of the two people I knew who were parents of victims. And running it over in my brain, "Should I do it? Are they going to view this as me taking advantage of the fact that I knew them?" Because nobody else there recognized them. I ultimately decided that I had to, but I did it by going over to them and saying, "Can I take a photograph of you with your candles?" "Yes." I showed them the photograph, and then I said, "Can we run this?" And they agreed.

Right behind me was this kid wearing a red shirt. He was probably five years old or so. He was with his father. They were sitting on the ground cross-legged. At one point, there were three photographers pointing cameras at him, less than two feet from his face. I honestly wish I had taken a photograph of those three guys sitting around the father holding this kid. It's one of the most shameful things I've ever seen in my life. This kid who doesn't really seem to know what's going on, he's trying to get away, he's squirming in his dad's arms, trying to get away from all this stuff, and they're just at him because he's responding. People are going to assume the photograph is this traumatized child, who's traumatized by this event, but he's traumatized by the people taking photographs of him.

People are here to have an honest expression of community involvement and mourning. They're here because they want to show that the community is strong, that we will survive, that it is a community that's going to support everybody in the community. You're invading people's personal space. You're publicizing them nationally, publicizing them at a very, very weak moment, and you're not giving them the choice as to whether they want to be subjected to that. There are people there, victims, the police who went after the guy, and in the middle of it you have the press being the show. Front row and the entire center. It's something that you can't avoid observing as you're standing there. You can't help but feel you're under the observation of the camera. It was really, really difficult to watch.

What I was thinking about the entire time wasn't the Gilroy shooting at all. It was about journalism and how I felt about being a journalist, wondering myself, when I'm out on assignments that are of some kind of sensitive nature, am I being sensitive? I'm sitting there watching this, it's one of the things that's rolling through my mind, "Have I done this? Am I guilty of this? And am I guilty of that by being here taking photographs of this? Am I guilty of this?"

The idea that the community is not allowed to naturally mourn, and the local press isn't good enough to cover the story or is not significant enough in the wave of national media coming in. It dehumanizes the community. That's part of the edge that somebody local has. That you have a level of empathy which the national media doesn't have. I think as a local reporter you can do it with much, much less impact on the community than the national media has, because they're simply looking for a face and a story. And if your face and story aren't the ones they want, they will move on to the next face and story. One of the aspects that they miss is who the people are instead of just what the story is.

1 *Poynter Institute for Media Studies*

DAVE DAVIES

Dave Davies and his wife Leticia have been working at various festivals throughout California for more than twenty years. Some of his favorites include festivals in Bishop, Lone Pine, Sonora, the Stanford Powwow, and the Gilroy Garlic Festival. In addition to his festival business, he runs another business doing sales and distribution of craft sodas. His wife also has a full-time job. Their eight-year-old son, Paul (sometimes called Pablo), often joins them and has sold his artwork at festivals since he was five.

I make funnel cakes and seafood. I do calamari, shrimp, chicken strips, lemonade slushy, corn dogs, churros, fried zucchini, and onion rings. It's a big menu, but at Gilroy I just do funnel cakes. To do the kind of menu we do, most food vendors would have five or six people. But my wife and I, we do it ourselves. For two or three people, you have to be speedy. Things have to fly, and you step in and help the other person almost intuitively where needed.

We've been to Gilroy for almost thirty years. We used to do a game for kids. It was a lot of fun. This would have been our fourth year making funnel cakes (1). We like the location. I've always tried to pick festivals that are in a beautiful area because I want it to be a nice experience for us. Gilroy is a nice town. It's pleasant driving through the 152 (2) and looking at the mountains as you approach the city.
I come all the way from Orange County where I have a warehouse. It could take a couple of days of preparation. I pull a big 8' by 16' trailer. I load up the freezers, then we drive all night to get there. It's very grueling. The first day is really hard because we haven't had much sleep. The second day is usually the nicest day where we've had some sleep and the booth is all set up. It's very demanding. Normally, the end of the day could be very busy for us. A lot of people like funnel cakes later in the day after they've had some food. A lot of times we get slammed the last few minutes.

Normally, they provide a big mountain of garlic, and my wife and son would go out and buy some T-shirts or get some garlic. We didn't even know there was a bouncy house down where the shooting occurred. My son might have wanted to go over there. We've been doing the Garlic Festival for thirty years. This was the first time that we actually stayed in our booth.

I heard some firecracker-type sounds. I suspected right away that they were gunshots, and really quickly I jumped on top of my wife and son and hit the ground with them. I said, "Get down, get down." Then we tried to find better hiding places in our booth.

The people in the neighbor's tent, their kids were crying and making noise. My son was making some noises at first too. I told them, "Be quiet. Don't say anything." I wanted everyone to be quiet and concealed as much as possible, in case he would come into the back of our tent.

The shooting was about forty feet down from us. In fact the tent next to us had a bullet hole in it. Behind our tent, they were transporting people who had been shot, even the shooter, after they shot him. We saw different kinds of carnage. Images that were very disturbing for us.

It seemed like they were kind of roughly handling someone. I think that was the shooter. I believe the shooter was kind of thrown on one of those little golf carts and then whisked away. I saw about three or four people that had been shot. There was one lady who was shot in the calf of her leg. I think she was another vendor. Twenty minutes before the shooting, she had popped her head in the back of the booth and was so excited to get a funnel cake. It was jarring to see her so excited and happy to receive her funnel cake, then learn that she was involved with persona injury and severe trauma.

We were in the booth for about seven minutes and, fortunately, the sound of guns stopped. We were still hiding 'cause we didn't know there might be more gunfire. Somebody instructed us to come out the back and run to the right. There was a big sense of fear. People thought there was a second shooter. Our neighbors jumped in a truck that backs up to their booth. They sell chocolate-dipped ice cream and chocolate-dipped bananas and stuff. They took shelter in the back of their box truck. After that they ran down through the riverbed. Everyone had their own idea of what's best to do.

We were told to exit and run to the right. It sounded like somebody who knew what they were talking about. We just ran out to the right. There was a big river of people going by. Then Leticia said, "What about the money and stuff?" And my son said, "Leave it behind, we got more important things."

So we left the wallets, all the cash in the cash register, all the cash that we had saved. Our IDs, our credit cards, our laptop, our cell phones were left behind. We just ran out and then ran to the right. We got to that main entry road, then we turned left. That's where I saw. . . I believe it was the 25-year-old [*Trevor Irby*], in the back of a pickup truck. They were doing deep compressions on his chest. A lot of frantic behavior, trying to help people as fast as they could. Ambulances and police cars everywhere. I remember seeing the guy that sold the chocolate-dipped bananas and his crew. I looked at him and gave him a big hug.

We were all walking together out of the park, my son, my wife, and myself. We just kept walking straight. There's a sense this whole time, that there could be a second shooter. We felt it. We were definitely in questionable territory.

About ten houses down, there were some people having some kind of festivity in the front yard. They knew what was going on. We stopped at their house and several other people stopped at this house also. They gave my son a Gatorade. Eventually, I just collapsed on their front lawn. There were maybe ten or fifteen people from the incident that were hanging out at this house. Nobody knew where to go. We're all in their front driveway, in their front lawn. They were trying to comfort us.

One of the owners of the house offered to drive us to the elementary school where they were coordinating buses. After about a half an hour of being there, we were put into a bus. This bus was for if you didn't have anyone else to help you. We went to some other parking lot where the police asked us questions. There was a lot of media there, trying to get interviews.

Eventually, we got back in the bus, and I think we were taken to another elementary school. It was nighttime by then. They had a bunch of food for us, pizza and different things. It was strange, being in the cafeteria. We were sitting on the ground for a while because there weren't enough chairs. Then we got back in the bus again. We spent the night on a gym court. In the morning when we woke up, it was a beautiful area with trees. We hung out in the different rooms where they had breakfast for us. Eventually we were transported to Christopher Ranch High School. We stayed in the gym there for another two or three days.

It was a strange feeling being put into a completely different scenario from what we're used to, breaking down and rushing home. Normally, the whole mood of the festival changes when the event is over. It shifts from serving customers to all of a sudden focusing on breaking down your little home you built—your tent and all the nice setup—and cleaning up everything. It turns into a logistical situation of breaking down the whole tent city that was constructed for the festivities. The whole landscape of the event changes—poles everywhere, boxes, and people pulling up their trucks and vans, working to pack up and get out. A lot of times we're the last one to get out. Sometimes it could take five or six hours from the time it's over to the time we pull out. Then we start driving home. We try to make it home anywhere from 8:00 a.m. till noon the next day. All of a sudden, we hit this huge detour.

When we first arrived at Christopher, the principal of the high school invited my son to participate in a basketball training they were doing. My son was shy to get involved, but there was an African-American man there who knew what happened to my son and took special care of him. He would pass the basketball. Eventually, he got my son going back and forth.

My family was not able to talk to me for three days or even know what was going on. They saw all this stuff on the TV. The Red Cross gave me a simple, little cell phone, and that's when I called my family. One sister in particular, when she heard my voice she couldn't talk, she was crying, for about a whole minute. It was a huge sense of relief that we were okay.

The Red Cross people were exceptionally compassionate, and friendly, and helpful, always asking, "You need something to eat?" They provided all kinds of drinks and food and moral support. Some of these Red Cross people would even cry with us.

Certain aspects of it were refreshing, like being taken care of by other people. It's a very pleasant experience to be fed and cared for, provided a place to sleep in beautiful surroundings, to have people interested in us and wanting to hear what we had to say, wanting to comfort us, providing a bed, providing a place to sleep. In a certain sense, it was somewhat of a break from my daily struggles, just to be able to stop and reflect on everything that's going on. We were very upset about everything, but they were trying to comfort us. That was actually, in many ways, a good experience.

At the gym I was able to connect with the other vendors that went through the shooting experience. It was nice just to be with them, to talk to other people. The question always was: when can we go access the place to get our stuff? Can't they just let us at least get our wallets and our cell phones? It was difficult to manage without those things. After about three or four days of being at the Christopher Ranch High School, eventually, the FBI arranged us to take a plane back to Orange County without IDs or anything. We left and went back to Orange County with nothing. All our clothes and everything were in the truck.

We took another plane back to San José. The FBI provided tickets for us. My friend, Mark, picked us up at the airport with his van, and then we drove back to Gilroy. We were able to get access to the park and had to go to the tables where the FBI agents could identify who we are. They even helped us to pack out.

The stench was overwhelming. Our neighbors were doing alligator and catfish. All that stuff was left there for ten days, and it was hot, like in the 90s. So, all this fish was next to us. We had ice cream and strawberries in our freezer for ten days. We emptied it into these gray water receptacles. This stuff was really obnoxious. It was a very strong odor. It took us about three hours to pack out with the help of the FBI people. We packed everything up and went to Denny's with our friend. That was very nice to be sitting down at Denny's with our friend after all that, our truck and our trailer, packed up and ready to go. Finally, we had our wallets and all our stuff. It took about ten days.

I was planning to go to another fair, so that was another problem. My truck and trailer were not available, so I couldn't go. I was losing business with my distributing business. Leticia was missing work. I was out of production for a while. I have all kinds of expenses that occur. If I had to estimate, it went into the thousands, about $10,000 that I would normally make just to keep business going.

I found the government food process for victims to be almost impossible to deal with. You fill out these forms online, and if they don't like what you say, you don't get anything. You didn't get to sit there and explain your situation. I was really disappointed. It's more for somebody who works full-time for a company. It doesn't address at all somebody who's self-employed or who doesn't have a regular salary. It was just a nightmare. I was angry with the government system. It was ridiculous. It wasn't on a personal level. Whereas with the other funding, the private fund that was able to help me out, I talked to somebody who asked me questions directly. They could understand what I was going through. I was grateful for those private donations. I really needed it. It was only the private funding that was able to help me out financially.

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Leticia's brother said, "You just need to get out of this business." He later apologized. He was just trying to be protective. We felt right away that we wanted to go back again. It's our business and as hard as it is, in a lot of ways we really enjoy it. It's fun to get in the truck and get away and separate ourselves from all the pressure that my wife has from her job and the pressure I have of driving all around for what I do.

The next fair was the Eastern Sierra Tri-County Fair in Bishop for Labor Day weekend. I did that one by myself to unwind. It is a very peaceful place with a creek, pond, along with a lot of green grass, trees, and ducks next to beautiful views of the Eastern Sierra Mountains. Bishop and the Sierras are so beautiful and so pleasant. It feels safe there. But I noticed when we got into subsequent events, more of a metropolitan-type of environment, we sat for fifteen or twenty minutes and tried to analyze: what would we do if a shooter came. We strategized. We talked about how sometimes it might be more important just to hit the ground and crawl. Just hit the ground and crawl. There's never any perfect way to handle it, but we strategize anyway. We never used to do that kind of stuff. The busyness of a festival makes it so that you can forget about some of this stuff. You're working so hard. But when you're setting up, even when you're driving to the festival, you're thinking what it is you're getting into. You have to deal with a certain amount of fear as you're going to a festival now, for us at least.

You never forget about the people that died. Stephen Romero was the six-year-old, and Keyla Salazar was our thirteen-year-old, and Trevor Irby, the twenty-five year old young man that did very well in college. It's burned in your mind about the three victims that died and the people that got shot and injured, two dozen people. You never forget about the lady that got shot in the foot who just asked for a funnel cake a few minutes before it happened. The little six-year-old's mom got shot through the hand. It became a lot more personalized, just being right there. My heart goes out to them and their families.

You always see stuff on the news. It's just one news story to another. People a lot of times forget or minimize the previous incident. They have this feeling that it's okay now because a week went by, when in fact people's lives are changed permanently. It doesn't always work on the timescale of the next story. It never ends. Having lived through that ourselves and personally heard the gunshots that were killing people, that leaves an indelible image in your brain. We carry with us things that cause us to cry later. We carry with us those people that were injured and killed.

1 *The 2020 Gilroy Garlic Festival, like many others, was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.*

2 *The Pacheco Pass Road is a scenic section of California State Route 152 between Interstate 5 at Santa Nella and US Highway 101 at Gilroy.*

MELANIE

Melanie* is a twenty-two-year-old student studying chemistry at San José State University. She is originally from Santa Clarita in Southern California and moved to San José in Fall 2018. She, her boyfriend, and several of his co-workers went to the Garlic Festival on Sunday afternoon. They were present during the shooting, and, like many, found their way out of the park to escape.

**name changed*

I wasn't initially planning on going until my boyfriend had mentioned that he wanted to go with some coworkers. I like going to festivals. I like food. I like garlic. I wanted to check it out. I always like to see the cool little knick knacks or craft stuff whenever I go to festivals, so I said, "Yeah, sure. Let's go."

The day of the Garlic Festival, my boyfriend bought me a sterling silver ring. [*she takes it off her finger to show me*] It's got a little bit of scroll work, like a Celtic design. We got some drink tickets, had some mimosas. We had the garlic ice cream. I had just finished getting a henna tattoo, and my boyfriend's coworker was about to get hers, so he and I walked over to a tent selling garlic olive oil and garlic cooking things. It was like twenty feet away. We thought, she's right there. We'll just buy that thing and come back.

I bought some garlic olive oil for my mom who likes to cook. I'm standing at the edge of the tent, putting my wallet away and I heard *a pop, pop, pop*. I remember thinking, "I thought there was no fireworks." Then we saw a crowd of people start running at us.

The workers encouraged us to come into the tent and hide behind some apple crate displays. I remember kneeling with my boyfriend and one of the workers between the back of the crates and the back of the tent wall. We didn't see what was going on, but I heard people screaming.

I moved a couple of boxes and lifted up the back of the tent and crawled out from underneath it. My boyfriend followed me. There was a big gap, an open space. I didn't hear any more gunshots, so I ran towards the exit gate. I was running and looked to see if my boyfriend was next to me. He wasn't exactly where I pictured him to be, and it freaked me out for a second. Then I saw him and kept going. We bumped into one of his co-workers by the exit. We asked each other, "Have you seen so and so? What's going on?"

People were running out the exit. It was a long, narrow stretch of chain link fence. We ran halfway down and stopped. I thought, "What about the girl at the henna tent?" She was closer to where the shooting was and now we didn't know where she was. I started crying and my boyfriend held me. More people were running, so we kept going.

We tried to get on the first couple of shuttle buses and they said, "We're full. You can't get on." I didn't start to be consciously scared until then. I knew I needed to get out of there, but I couldn't. I went to where I should be and the bus was full. What was I going to do?

Eventually we got on one of the handicap buses. Everyone was crouching below the windows. I was leaning on some guy. My boyfriend was leaning on top of me. Once we were out of range, everybody started to come up. We didn't know what was going on, but we could hear stuff from the bus driver's radio.

We sat on the bus for a while. They didn't let people off. As soon as we got to the other lot, I started Googling for info. Nothing was coming up. I remember texting my mom, "A shooting just happened. We're okay. We're on the bus." I texted my dad or my stepmom too. My boyfriend was texting his coworkers trying to get updates. Everybody in our group was okay. A couple of people had left before the shooting happened. The girl who was getting the henna tattoo had to hike out of there. She was hiding with other people. They said they would give her a ride home.

At some point in all of that, I lost the bottle of olive oil for my mom. I didn't realize until we were driving home. My boyfriend felt bad that in the chaos he managed to hold onto his bag of kettle corn. He said, "Why did I hold onto this? All I know is I didn't want to get out of there without you and I guess this bag of kettle corn." He felt dumb.

We were really quiet on the drive home. I don't even think we listened to music. I kept checking news stuff. We got to his house. I called my parents. I said, "I'm fine. It was crazy, but I'm fine." I was talking about how I felt proud that I didn't stay hidden behind the display. Then I felt bad for being proud, because it's a terrible situation, why am I feeling proud about anything in this situation? My mom, my dad, and my stepmom all said, "No, you thought on your feet. You didn't freeze." The shooter was already dead at that point, so I almost felt silly for doing that, but I didn't know.

Normally on Sunday nights, I spend the night at my place, but we decided that I was going to spend the night at his. The reality of it started to kick in when we went to bed. I couldn't stop playing the picture of us running across that empty gap before we met up with his coworker. The edge of the tent, running across, over and over. That's all I could see in my mind. I started to cry. We lay there, and he let me cry. I couldn't see because it was dark, but it felt like he was crying too.

I had a hard time sleeping that night. I was checking news articles. I was on Reddit. I just kept looking at stuff to find more info. Eventually, I went to bed.

When I woke up the next day, it was noon. I pulled out my phone and checked news articles. Then I found out about the six-year-old boy who died and I fucking lost it. I started sobbing. I felt so bad. I still do. He was so young. The thirteen-year-old girl, the twenty-five-year-old man. It's just awful.

I got angry a lot after the event. Not like for a reason necessarily. I was irritable and had no patience, just mad at almost everyone. I was angry about what happened. I was mad something like that could happen, that there are gun laws in place, sure in California semi-automatic guns were banned, but anybody can cross the border, go grab something in Nevada. As long as you don't drive like an idiot, you can come across and no one will know. That's how the shooter got his gun.

I already don't have the best patience with people, but it had gotten a lot worse. You know how you have those days where just a bunch of little minor inconveniences set you off? It was that, but it wasn't a day. It was constantly. Any minor little thing would just make me mad. Sometimes coworkers would ask something, and I would snap at them, just, bam, I'm angry. Or I would be driving and somebody'd cut me off, and I just started yelling in my car. I'm not one to do that. I might say something, but it's usually in a joking way like, "I'll watch out for you, don't worry about it." But I was full-on just yelling in the car. It felt good. It felt very cathartic, but it just pissed me off. The thing is, I almost didn't even care. I knew that it wasn't good. But I was like, "So what. F off. I don't care."

I remember being angry, just this quiet anger. Almost dull. I really couldn't sleep at all afterwards. I felt bad for being bothered because I wasn't directly impacted. I didn't know anybody that got hurt. I didn't see anything. I didn't get hurt. Nobody in my group got hurt.

One friend who's a nurse recommended that I try to find groups of people with similar situations. Honestly, I didn't feel like I *deserved* it. It's like save those resources for people who really need them. Plus, I've dealt with anxiety and depression for a long time, but this was definitely the straw that broke the camel's back.

About a month after the shooting, at the end of August, I started school again. I went to all my teachers that semester to give them a heads up in terms of my academic performance. Most of them were pretty nice about it. One teacher rubbed me the wrong way about it. She was very *whatever* about it. As we were walking back inside the classroom, she whispered, "Get help." The way she said it, just felt mean, like she didn't believe that I could be affected by it.

About two weeks into the semester, I started having panic attacks, out of the blue, just sitting there. It got tight right in between the collarbones. I wasn't nauseous, it just felt like I was going to throw up. You know the way your throat tightens up right before? I was having to step out of a couple of my classes and compose myself in the bathroom. That was when I realized, "Okay, I got to get help for this."

I did see somebody at CAPS. It was a one-session crisis counselling kind of thing. I felt rushed. The person was pushing me to find someone through my insurance. It's difficult because I'm on my mother's insurance. She works in Southern California. My primary care doctor's in Southern California. Same with my dentist, my optometrist. I waited about two weeks, then found a local psychiatrist. I started medications for anxiety and depression in mid to late September. That was the first time I had ever gotten medication. The panic attacks stopped. I wasn't so angry all the time.

My mom sent me an email about the Victim Assistance set up by Santa Clara County. Initially I was on the fence about it. I didn't need any medical bills paid. I lost a bottle of olive oil. It was $12. I'm not a "victim" [*she makes air quotes with her fingers*] in regards to that. Eventually I applied, but I felt bad using it because almost all of my therapy sessions now are not related to that. I don't want to claim aid for something that's not directly related. I got a phone call in January. They sent me an email saying that it's being reviewed and to send them any of the medical billing. I probably won't follow up on it. My wallet's not being drained dry. I don't want to take money away from those who need it.

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This is going to sound weird, but you know how sometimes after an event you might be nervous about going to other things? When I go places, I think, how can I get out? What's going on around me? I've always kind of done that. My dad really ingrained that into me when I was a kid. I'm very small. I'm kidnappable size, so I've always been aware, but I'm extra aware now.

My boyfriend and I went out to a comedy show about a month later, and I remember being nervous while we were there. Where are the exits? If people are going to leave, it's going to be a stampede. We went to the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in San Francisco. I was a little nervous about that. The stage was fenced in on three sides. The side that wasn't fenced in was a giant, steep hill. I do remember initially being nervous thinking, "Man, we'd have to fight through all those people," but once we were there for a while, I mellowed out. At the very least, we were right by the chain link fence. As long as I feel like I can get out, I'm not that nervous.

Then I started worrying that I'm going to put my bag down, grab something out, and somebody's going to think I'm trying to do something when I wouldn't ever do something like that. I don't look aggressive. I don't look like I'm going to do anything. I mean I can look like a bitch sometimes, but I don't look like I'm going to do anything. I have a backpack with me a lot or I wear a jean jacket that has inside pockets. They're cool. [*She shows the inside pocket of the jacket she's wearing*] What if I'm reaching inside to grab something normal and someone thinks I'm pulling something out for some reason? I don't know where that thought came from. I worry about that often. That's something that has happened only since the event.

Fall semester was a very packed academic semester. I managed to snaggle all A's, and I was extra proud of the fact that in the beginning I was dealing with these panic attacks. The meds, just talking about it and time have helped. I talked about it with one of my friends more often than anybody else. It was never anything groundbreaking, just her listening and saying, "Yeah, that makes sense."

The other day, I saw a Gilroy Strong window decal on a car. I thought that was cool. Even though I don't know anybody else who was at the event, if I were to bump into somebody who was there for it, I would feel connected in some capacity.