

Survivor Rick Ardito's Description Of The Massacre

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Cassie promised those babies that we would be home in the morning. This was one of the first thoughts that ran through my head as automatic gunfire rained down on the crowd at the Route 91 Harvest Festival. Our kids, Reagan (4) and Rocco (2) were definitely missing us during the first vacation we had ever planned without them, so we had spoken with them frequently and they were eagerly awaiting our return the next morning. I also thought of the three other women we were with, two of them with children awaiting their return, and one celebrating her Brother's birthday on this hallowed evening...Her brother that returned from Afghanistan only to get senselessly murdered for no reason by someone who didn't even know him. My single and sole purpose was to get these women to safety as quickly as I possibly could.

Many of you have probably seen video of the concert and heard the gunfire and wondered what people were doing. The music still played and no one moved at first. I don't believe the first volley of gunfire heard was aimed at the venue. One of the things many people don't understand about gunfire is that there are actually two loud booms associated with almost all gunshots, except those few rounds that are designed to travel at subsonic speeds. The first boom is that which is caused by the rapid expansion of gas which is a direct result of the ignition of the gunpowder in a confined space known as the chamber of the firearm. The second is caused by the round reaching supersonic speeds, and is the same phenomena we all know as the 'sonic boom'.

These first rounds heard in the videos honestly sounded like firecrackers to us. I believe it was caused by the shooter blowing out the windows in his 32nd floor perch while not aimed directly at the crowd. Since the rounds weren't aimed in our direction, the sound signature seemed less intense, which is why I think many thought they were firecrackers. Whether this was planned or not, it had the effect of causing many people to delay reaction when the next volley of automatic gunfire rained on the crowd. Also, there is a psychological phenomenon called Normalcy Bias, which causes people to quickly rationalize things that are not normal, as normal. John Leach, a

prominent psychologist estimates about 75% of people find it impossible to reason during an event such as this one. This is why so many people freeze in place and don't react to horrific events unfolding around them.

At the time my group of five was sitting near the rear area of the main stage viewing. We had decided that day that we didn't want to fight the crowd up near the stage as we had done the two previous nights. We had a blanket laid out and many of us had taken our shoes off. As soon as that second set of gunfire went off, I yelled at the girls to get down and get their shoes on. I told them that we were getting out of there and to move quickly. As soon as everyone's shoes were on, I told them which direction we were going, to stay moving and to stay low. It was chaos. While we were taking cover during that second volley of fire, someone in front of me was hit. Their body flinched as the round struck them and I was kicked in the head by the flinch.

Remembering what I knew about normalcy bias, I was determined to ensure that everyone I was with moved, and moved quickly. I grabbed the girls and told them to move.

During the stampede we got separated into two groups. My wife, her friend and I being one, and two other girls being the second group. Thank God, those two girls kept moving. We moved away from the stage to the North East, as the Mandalay bay was South West of the venue. I told the girls to use cars and anything solid as cover as we moved away as quickly as we could. I believe we were outside the concert gates within one minute of the beginning of the shooting. As I looked back at the crowd frantically trying to escape, I saw the one image that I wish I had captured during this event. A small squad of Las Vegas Police Officers, 4-5 of them moved in formation similar to the below picture, but with only sidearms. They ran towards the automatic gunfire, not knowing any more about where the shooter was than we did. I'm positive this group of officers, and dozens like them saved many lives because of their quick action, and unrivaled bravery.

At this point my heart was torn. I know so many people needed help, but that one thought was louder in my head than any of the gunfire or screams. I have to get these girls home to their babies. I have to get my wife home to ours. At that thought we kept moving. I told my wife and her friend that we were moving towards the Hooters hotel, and we were going to use vehicles and

anything else solid as cover as we moved. By this time information was swirling from people in panic. We heard talk of multiple shooters in multiple locations. This was the point that I remembered how unreliable early information is in these situations. We didn't know what was true that we were hearing, and what wasn't.

As soon as I felt like we were a decent distance away from the original fire, I told my wife to call her other friend so that we could meet back up with them. Thankfully, near the Las Vegas strip there are many large signs to use as landmarks. It didn't take us long to find them, and as soon as we did we kept running East down Tropicana avenue. As we approached McCaren airport we heard rumors that one of the shooters had stolen a Police vehicle during the Chaos. Many people were funneling into the airport, and we briefly entered before we decided to exit and keep moving. Again, the information was just so sketchy at the time, the last thing we wanted was to be trapped in an airport that was also an intended target of the attack.

So, we kept moving East down Tropicana Avenue. By this point the girls were having a very hard time moving fast, and their emotions were starting to take over. They were crying, and frequently trying not to vomit as we moved. We had decided that if we just kept moving away from the event, we could eventually get a cab and feel safe about driving around the strip to the West side where we were staying at a time share, the Tahiti Hotel. As we hurried East, everyone was trying to use their phones to contact loved ones and tell them that we were okay, but also check on other friends that we knew were in the venue when the shooting occurred. I called both my Mom and my Dad to let them know what was going on, and asked them to watch the news and keep us updated on the information coming out. When I was talking to my Dad at this point, I made the estimation that I had heard a minimum of 300 gunshots during the event. At this point I am unsure what the round count was and I don't know if the Police have made a statement on that fact, but I am sure that at least 300 were fired.

As we moved East another event occurred that will forever stand out in my mind. One car driving East down Tropicana had a young, brown skinned girl who I could not determine nationality hanging out the passenger window

yelling at the crowd. I honestly could not make out what she was saying, but it was clear to me that she was taunting us. Whatever was coming out of her mouth was hateful based on how she was saying it, but I am unsure if she was speaking English or not. The sinking in my stomach from that image will be hard to forget.

The next location we approached was across Tropicana to the North. There was a small parking lot with several small stores including a Subway, a pizza place and liquor store. We decided to cross Tropicana and head that way. As we entered the parking lot Cassie reminded me of my Uncle Manny who works in Las Vegas and travels back and forth to California. At the time, we really were feeling like we had no idea who we could trust. The information making its way to us sounded like there were several shooters in many locations, some may have stolen emergency vehicles, and this was what seemed like a coordinated attempt to devastate the entire city of Las Vegas. The one person in town who wasn't on the strip that I knew I could trust was my Uncle Manny, and I'm so grateful he picked up the phone and helped us find a good location to meet. That location was probably another mile down Tropicana at a Vons, which he originally referred to as Safeway. During this conversation, we moved towards the Liquor store where the owners allowed us to have some water bottles. The girls very much needed that water at the time, and I will be forever grateful to this liquor store just North of McCaren airport that was so gracious through the confusion.

Once we had information from my Uncle Manny we had a plan. Keep moving East, past UNLV towards the Safeway. At that point some young men who were in the parking lot didn't know what was going on and had briefly made fun of the Girls for their panic in telling me that they had gotten water and we could continue moving. When the girls let them know that there was a terrorist attack on the strip, they offered us a ride. Still skeptical of anyone we didn't know we told them that we had a ride coming and that they should help someone else who didn't. We kept moving.

The girls were having a really hard time keeping a swift pace by this point. We knew East was our destination, but we could not see the Safeway that we were heading towards. At one point during the conversation I had with my

Uncle, he had mentioned an Arco gas station. We were approaching one that was back on the South side of Tropicana. I called him to see if he could meet us there, and that became the new plan, but he was at least ten minutes out still. As we approached the intersection, there were multiple empty cabs and limos. One surreal part of this experience is that almost everyone on the road still didn't have any idea what was going on. Us and another group plead with the limo driver to let us in and get us out of there. I'm not sure what he was saying, but it became clear that he wasn't going to pick us up. We found a Mini-Van cab that was originally going to let us in, but then she told us that she could only give a ride to four people, so we continued moving and crossed back over Tropicana to the Arco. Once we got there, I got back on the phone with my Uncle Manny.

By that time, the Westbound lanes of Tropicana had been closed, and it became clear that the Safeway, now correctly identified as Vons was going to have to be our rendezvous point. As we began to exit the Gas station parking lot to the East we spoke briefly with someone who had a truck and offered us a ride. The five of us climbed in the bed, and then learned that their plan was to head back towards Hooters to find someone's sister. We had already determined that we were not going to go back towards the strip, so exhausted, the five of us climbed back out of the truck to keep moving East. I remember Cassie helping her friend who seemed like she couldn't move anymore get out of the bed of the truck so we could continue walking. As we moved further East, Cassie spotted a young woman who was visibly shaken and holding her stomach as only pregnant women do. Although she wasn't visibly pregnant, Cassie picked up on this and asked her if she was pregnant and if she was okay. Cassie stopped and said a quick prayer while laying hands on her, we told them good luck, and the man and I briefly hugged before we were on our way.

As we continued moving we ran into a middle-aged woman who was by herself. After speaking with her as we moved, I learned that she was working the concert and didn't know what she was going to do. She was not permitted to bring her cell phone into the venue and she had no way of contacting anyone. I asked her if she knew a number to call and dialed it in my phone. She briefly arranged a meetup with a local friend, and we kept moving. Every

emergency vehicle that passed made us nervous because we were informed that the shooters had stolen emergency vehicles. We looked for any cover as we moved east, but there was none to be found, so we began running again. The girls did so well, but I could tell that we were reaching their limit. Fortunately, after maybe another hundred yards we could see the intersection where we needed to be. We kept moving and finally found Vons. We did not immediately see my Uncle Manny so we had to call him, as we had unknowingly passed him in the parking lot. He drove over to us and we piled 5 of us into his Toyota 4-Runner. We finally felt safe, or at least much safer than we had in the last hour or so. I felt like I had accomplished my purpose, at least for now.

We drove South from Tropicana to try to avoid anywhere near the strip as we tried to navigate to the West side of Tropicana where our hotel was. I decided by this point that we were not going to stay the night in Vegas, and the plan became to get to our rooms, pack our stuff and drive home as soon as possible. As we navigated closer to I-15 all Northbound ramps were closed. We saw tactical trucks full of swat or other types of special forces officers being let onto the ramp and heading full throttle towards the area of the shooting. We were finally able to cross over the freeway, and head towards Tropicana. Once we arrived at our hotel, the girls did great. Everyone grabbed water to rehydrate, and packed up stuff as quickly as we could. We were ready to hit the road 10 minutes later. This required more navigation South on Decatur all the way to Blue Diamond Avenue before we could get back on the interstate. We communicated and decided not to stop for gas until we reached state line, which is about 40 minutes South of Las Vegas. Still nervous and skeptical of everyone I saw, I observed intently as we got gas and got ready to head out and make the rest of our trip home.

I realize that a lot of this information may not be interesting to some, but I felt important to me to document my feelings and experiences so that I could reference them. This horrible event has changed our lives forever, and I'm sure the emotional and mental aftermath will be devastating for years to come. Remaining on high alert and on a mission to get those girls home safely did not allow me to process the events as they were happening the same way the girls did. Today has been extremely emotional for me as I

unpack the things I saw and felt as the event unfolded. One of the strangest things is that conversations that I had last night, before the shooting started feel in my mind like they happened weeks ago. The adrenaline dumps de-prioritized normal events in my mind.

I am so grateful that we were in a position that we could get out of there. We could have just as easily been near the stage as we were the previous two nights, and if we were, I have no doubt this event would have had much direr physical consequences for at least some in our group. Also, we were fortunate to not have anyone separated from us when the shooting started. We could have easily been searching for someone who was in the bathroom or getting food when it all unfolded. For us, many things were aligned that allowed us to escape without any lasting physical harm. For many others, including people we know that wasn't the case. I will forever remember and be grateful for the people who responded, like that small LVPD tactical squad, placing the lives and safety of those they did not know above their personal needs. That kind of heroism deserves nothing but respect. God bless them and everyone else affected in any way by this horrific tragedy. I pray that healing and peace can find these people and our Nation.

-Rick Ardito

EDIT:

Thank you to everyone who commented and shared my story over the last day. I'm not sure why, but Facebook is having a hard time letting me add information. So I wanted to add some additional details for those who might be interested.

In the aftermath of the shooting due to things reported by the media I had convinced myself that the initial pops were actually gunfire. After reviewing these memories, really thinking about what I saw and heard, and talking to my group, I am convinced that my initial gut instinct was true. The first pops were a string of fire crackers. One of the distinct differences about these pops versus the gunfire that followed is that the sound came from directly on the ground at the venue, and not far from us. Maybe 40 feet. There are additional details I have remembered that I may add in the future. I know this doesn't

agree with the media reporting, but I am 100% convinced the shooter was aided and signaled from inside the venue with these firecrackers.

The next important detail is that once we had passed Hooters hotel things we're starting to seem a little more calm, if only for a brief moment. This is when we were trying to meet back up with the other two members of our group. We had considered sheltering in Hooters, then all of the sudden there was a massive panic and stampede of people trying to get away from Hooters. We started running again as fast as we could, unsure exactly what the panic was about.