

Arizona Shooting Victim Gives God Glory for His Life

As Doris Tucker scrunched down to the ground, chaos all around her, one thought was on her mind.

When will the bullets stop flying?

"I had my hands on my ears and I was screaming," said Tucker, who had just finished shaking hands with then-Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords on Jan. 8, 2011.

Thirty-two bullets were fired that day in front of a Safeway Supermarket grocery store in a Tucson, Ariz., suburb.

A total of 19 victims were shot, including Giffords and Doris' husband, Jim, who suffered bullet wounds to the upper right chest and right leg, but miraculously survived—despite the muzzle of the gun three feet from his chest.

Six people would eventually die on that day, and for a split second, Doris thought Jim could be one of the casualties.

"When I first saw Jim, he was lying on the ground spread eagle," said Doris, who along with Jim shared her testimony at last month's Billy Graham Rapid Response Team training at The Cove in Asheville, N.C. "But then he raised his head up and our eyes locked."

At that moment, based on a shared look, Doris knew in her heart Jim was going to live.

"When I saw her and she wasn't injured I laid my head back down and said, 'Thank you, Lord,'" Jim said. "It could've been a whole lot worse."

Doris instinctively rushed to Jim's side, only to be welcomed by the sight of his bloody chest and right leg.

"I said, 'Do you know you've been shot?' " Doris recalls.

But thanks to a pair of "Good Samaritans," plus a doctor and his wife, a nurse, who were shopping inside the store, and some heads-up thinking, Jim's life was saved.

A Safeway cashier grabbed a handful of butcher aprons on her way out to help stop the bleeding. She applied pressure on Jim's leg and used Jim's belt as a tourniquet. The owner from a nearby picture framing shop helped stop the bleeding on Jim's chest wound until the first responders took over.

Jim lay on the ground, his right shoulder blade throbbing from taking the brunt of the fall. He knew he had been shot, but he didn't know the severity. The bullet to his chest blew a two-inch section out of his clavicle, severing nerves to his shoulder, arm and hand.

He didn't know that two of the bullet fragments had lodged next to his spine. Had either traveled a couple millimeters further, Jim would've been paralyzed—if he had lived at all.

"I was stunned," he said. "I hit the ground hard. I hit the concrete hard. The next day my back was bruised."

But a strange thing happened amid the cloud of terror and chaos that hovered in the minutes after the shooting. Stuck on the ground, with extra aprons shimmied under his head for support, Jim felt a supernatural peace wash over him.

It was as if the world had slowed almost to a stop.

Jim, who works in fire protection, remembers: "I'm looking up at the fire sprinklers overhead thinking, Yeah that's about the right spacing. Focusing on something familiar helped to clear my mind," he said.

A man of subtle humor, it was the little things that kept him going that day and he knew that they were God's way of communicating with him.

One of the most comical events happened as he was getting medical attention. The woman helping stop the leg bleeding was unknowingly kneeling on Jim's fingers. Yowza.

"In my mind, my first reaction was, That is too funny," Jim said. "At least I knew I still had feeling in my fingers."

The Tuckers now have the luxury of looking back into an 18-month review mirror. They can tell you, without a doubt in their minds, that God was with them every step of the way.

Jim can quickly thumb off the blessings: From the first responders and Good Samaritans at the scene, to the comfort and prayers by friends and even total strangers at the hospital, to the chief trauma surgeon who had specialized in upper chest wounds in the military.

But it was during that time, lying in the hospital bed, not knowing how his body would recover, that led Jim to his deepest spiritual growth.

"That whole week," he said. "I used that time for a personal faith check.

"I remembered verses about God's love, His faithfulness, His sovereignty, His justice."

Matthew 5:43-46: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?" (NIV).

And all things considered, Jim's recovery has been nothing short of remarkable. He only has about 80 percent use of his right arm, and he deals with pain every day. But his scarred leg has healed enough that he and Doris were able recently to walk through the 90-minute Journey of Faith at the Billy Graham Library, a blessing to both Jim and Doris.

“He reminded me of His peace, His perspective and His provision,” Jim said of God’s work in him through the healing process.

Like Jim, Doris had to deal with her own faith struggle. Could she still trust God and thank Him for what had taken place? Could she forgive the shooter?

Jim has long forgiven the shooter, although his first reaction when he saw his mug shot on TV was “to wipe that smirk off his face.” But before he was discharged from the hospital, Jim began to pray for the salvation of the shooter, knowing that he was not beyond the reach of a gracious and merciful God.

And Doris has forgiven too. Although her experience has been quite different than Jim’s.

Two days after the shooting, she was cleaning out her purse when she found a bullet casing – the 32nd bullet dispatched by the shooter – she was that close to having been shot herself. (The police had only found 31 of 32 at the scene.)

“It was a little bit surreal,” she said. “I was scared to touch it because it was evidence.”

And there was plenty of other evidence that God was in the middle of the situation.

The Lord brought Scripture to her mind during the week Jim spent in the hospital. “Psalm 37: ‘Do not fret because of evil men’ and Isaiah 26:3: ‘You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.’”

“So many people were praying for us,” she said. “The Lord really met my day-to-day needs and we realized the power of prayer.”

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