

Borderline: Coping 5 months later

By Haidyn Harvey

In the late hours of November 7, 2018, a [gunman entered Borderline Bar and Grill](#) where he killed 12 people and changed the lives of countless more.

It was college night at the popular country western bar in Thousand Oaks, CA. The room was packed with people line dancing, meeting up with friends and having a good time.

The evening was like any other Wednesday night at Borderline, until an armed man entered through the doors and began shooting. Among the victims were a soon-to-be-retired [police officer](#), a [hostess](#), [a college student](#).



Left: Survivors gather in the late hours after the shooting. Photo courtesy of Araceli Crescencio. Flowers and cards cover the sidewalk outside Borderline Bar and Grill in the weeks following the shooting.

The violence shocked the surrounding community. But the next day, the [Woolsey Wildfire](#) broke out and mourners were forced to put their grieving on hold so they could evacuate their homes.

Now, five months later, the victims' loved ones continue to grapple with their grief while the world moves on. Three people, a mother, a friend, a teacher, cope with losing their loved one to an act of violence shattering more and more communities.

Losing a son: Gloria and Sean Adler

Photos Courtesy of Facebook

48-year-old Sean Adler was working security at [Borderline Bar and Grill](#) when the gunman entered. He reportedly attempted to disarm the gunman, saving hundreds of lives but losing his own.

Sean's mother, Gloria Adler, received the news when she was home alone, 300 miles away in Henderson, Nevada. She describes the days following her son's death as unspeakable.

"They were beyond discussion," Gloria said. "Absolutely horrific. If they had continued like that I don't know that I would've wanted to go on. I can't describe to you the sharp aching pain in my heart and it was all surreal."



Sean had just started his own business, Rivalry Roasters, in Simi Valley.

The morning after the Borderline shooting, Gloria was getting ready for a luncheon when she received a call early in the morning from a friend, urging her to check on Sean after hearing the news. Gloria knew her son was working security for a sports bar but wasn't sure of the name.

"I said, 'I don't know what you're talking about' because I talked to him almost every morning on the phone," Gloria said. "So I said, 'If that happened, he wasn't there because I've never heard the word Borderline.'"

She hung up and immediately called her daughter-in-law. A close family friend answered the phone.

"I knew right away something was wrong," Gloria said. "I said, 'Is everything okay?' And she said 'No, Sean was killed.'"

Gloria asked to speak with her daughter-in-law and they cried together on the phone.

“Now I was here alone,” Gloria said. “I’m screaming and crying and shaking all over.”



Sean smiles alongside his wife and two sons.

Sean had recently opened [Rivalry Roasters](#), a coffee shop in Simi Valley. He worked temporarily as a security guard at both Borderline Bar and Grill and Azar’s Sports Bar while growing his business. Gloria said he planned on quitting his job soon.

“He was going to leave this place where this happened, Borderline, because apparently, they weren’t paying enough money, but he was there,” Gloria said. “I’m sure you must know that he tried to disarm the murderer. He was the first one, I believe he was the first one killed.”

Gloria describes her son as a wonderful father who loved his children and went to every soccer game he could.

“He and I were very very close ... he is a very - was a very kind, caring person,” Gloria said. “He tended to show people a rough exterior, but he was inside very soft-hearted.”

18 months prior to the Borderline shooting, Gloria’s husband died from a massive stroke. She said the pain of losing her husband and then her son is “beyond description.” But losing Sean was different. At 48, “he still had half his life to live,” Gloria said.

As the days turn into months, Gloria still sometimes feels like she's in a bad dream.

"I was walking around just in a daze, in a haze, every day waking up saying, 'This can't be real,'" Gloria said. "Even now, five months later, it's not as horrific as it was but it's something that you never get over."

As she navigates life after tragedy, Gloria hangs pictures and drawings of Sean throughout her house so that he is with her every time she walks into a room.

"It's painful and it's beautiful at the same time to see the pictures, but nothing will ever be the same for me," Gloria said.

Gloria fears her grandsons, ages 12 and 17, will never be the same as well.

"My older grandson, Dylan, he is having a very rough time," Gloria said. "Sometimes he goes to school and he's so stressed and so shaken, he has to turn around and come home. And the younger one seems to be coping better, but who knows what he's feeling inside."



An older photo, Sean wraps his arm around his oldest son.

In the future, Gloria said she hopes to see a change in "this insanity that's in this country, in this world. This insanity with the guns."

There is [debate](#) over whether the rate of mass shootings is increasing or if they're just receiving more media attention. However, one thing is clear. No town or place is safe from a mass shooter, whether it be a church, school, movie theater, concert or office



Mass shootings have claimed lives in churches, schools, bars, movie theaters, concerts and offices.

Gloria isn't sure if her story of loss will be enough to end the violence that has permanently disrupted her life and the lives of many others.

"It's horrific," Gloria said. "I don't know if it changes anything. It's a crazy messed up world, that's all I can say. Wasn't that way when I was growing up. Wasn't that way when Sean was growing up. Or his sister. So I don't know what's happened."

Losing a friend: Kelsey Anderson and Noel Sparks

Photos courtesy of Kelsey Anderson and Facebook

Noel Sparks was a curly-haired, bright-eyed student deeply involved in her church who loved music and dancing. She was a regular at the Borderline Bar and Grill, where she lost her life at the age of 21.



Noel Sparks was passionate about ministry and working with children.

Kelsey Anderson knew Sparks well. In fact, she knew almost everyone who died that night.

“I knew pretty much everybody on that list,” Anderson said. “And it just feels like it’s just the Borderline community still talking about it. And I wish more people did because I mean, that was our home.”

Thursday nights were Borderline nights for Anderson, who went every week to meet up with friends and have a good time.

“We would just dance, just dance and talk and drink and eat french fries until like one o’clock in the morning and usually at one we’d go home and then do it again next week,” Anderson said. “It was a nice escape. It was good music, it was good people, good memories.”

Anderson said she knew most of the victims by name. But she knew Sparks well. In addition to line dancing together at Borderline, they both volunteered at [Calvary Community Church](#) in Westlake Village.

“She just kept coming back and we just couldn’t get rid of Noel,” Anderson said. “She just wanted to keep coming back and keep helping and wanting to do worship. She loved the kids. She was a very serving person. She never really did anything for herself. It was always for other people and she just loved life.”



Anderson (left) and Sparks smile with friends.

Anderson describes the pain after learning of Sparks death as physical.

“There’s a physical aspect to it where your heart just feels like it’s ripped out of your chest and you can’t breathe,” Anderson said. “So I wish people more understood that it’s not just feeling sad. You physically feel pain and it doesn’t go away for a long time.”

On November 7, Anderson’s neighbor called her in a panic and told her there had been a shooting. She immediately began tracking all her friends’ locations to discover they were all located at Borderline.

“We found out that there was 12 victims and nobody could find Noel,” Anderson said. “Everybody was looking, searching, physically searching for her, trying to track her phone. I called her phone so many times. I had a text message that I sent that I was like, ‘Please be okay, please be okay.’ And obviously, there was no response.”

The next morning, friends gathered in Anderson’s living room while they awaited news of Sparks.

“My mom called,” Anderson said. “She was like, ‘They found Noel.’ That was the hardest moment ever because you never really think the last time you see somebody is going to be the last time. But it was heartbreaking.”

Later that day, Anderson attended a vigil for the victims when tragedy struck again.

“We walked out of Calvary and there was, it felt like hell,” Anderson said. “Everything was orange and smoky and scary. Ash was everywhere. It was raining ash and it was like we couldn't even grieve anymore. We had to pick up, go home, pack up our stuff and leave.”

Between the Borderline shooting and the Woolsey Wildfire, Anderson said there was no time to heal.

“There was no breathing time in between each tragedy,” Anderson said. “It was just constant heartache for a long time.”

Almost six months later, Anderson still feels that heartache.

“I still get it every now and again, but it's like this doesn't feel real,” Anderson said. “Like the people that we lost, they're not really gone.”

Before last November, Anderson never thought violence like this would strike Thousand Oaks, the town she's lived in all her life.

“You always think, ‘Oh, that'll never happen in my town,’” Anderson said. “And then it did.”

Anderson said losing Sparks taught her a lot about life.

“I wish we hung out more,” Anderson said. “I wish she knew how much I did appreciate her and love her. I've definitely learned to show and tell people that more because I could die tomorrow. Any of us could go and we have so many things left unsaid.”

As far as change goes, Anderson doesn't know the answer. But she hopes it comes soon.

“I hope nobody else has to live through it,” Anderson said. “It's a very uneasy, unsettling feeling and you don't get answers to it. So you're left just with the constant question of ‘why?’”

Losing family: Alaina Housley and Chris Doran

Photos courtesy of Facebook

“I mean the whole idea of time healing all wounds, I have found a real problem with that because I don't think there's any amount of time that is going to make this better,” Chris Doran said.

Doran and his wife Amy were friends with Arik and Hannah Housley throughout college. They attended Pepperdine University together and kept in touch long after graduation. The Housley's were their first friends to get married and when their daughter Alaina was born, they were their first friends to have a baby.

Doran describes Alaina Housley as intellectually curious, confident and a “tall woman who didn’t slump.”

“She was perfectly happy being her,” Doran said. “I think that’s the one thing that was so apparent to her is she was happy being herself.”



The Housley’s started [Alaina’s Voice](#), a foundation created to “make change in our society.”

Doran knew Alaina for her entire life. As she was growing up, he and the Housley’s visited whenever they had the chance.

“We’re sort of those friends that even if we don’t see each other just absolutely all the time that anytime we did see each other, we’d just sort of pick back up right where I left off,” Doran said.

When it came time for college, Alaina chose her parent’s alma mater, Pepperdine, where Doran is now a religion and philosophy professor. Doran and his wife were surprised when Alaina accepted their invitation to join a weekly Bible study they host out of their on-campus home. She visited once a week with other students to eat dinner, catch up and worship.



Alaina smiles with her family during parents weekend at her new school, Pepperdine, their alma mater.

On the night of Nov. 7, Alaina Housley left the Bible study at the Doran house to go to Borderline with her roommates. When the gunman entered, her friends were able to escape but Alaina was nowhere to be found.

“I knew that it was not good very early on, especially after they had found all the other students,” Doran said.

The Doran’s waited anxiously all night for details, debating when they should call the Housley’s.

“My wife and I were the ones that called them and told them that Alaina was missing and that they should probably plan for the worst,” Doran said.



Doran spoke at Alaina's memorial service hosted at Pepperdine University.

That night, Doran couldn't sleep.

"I slept on and off," Doran said. "I would get like 20 minutes, have a nightmare or wake up thinking about Alaina and [it was] sort of back and forth."

The next morning, Doran waited for news of Alaina while the Housley's took the first possible flight from their home in Napa, California to Los Angeles. When they landed, Doran hurried to meet them at the reunification center set up for families and victims in Thousand Oaks.

"We were probably 10 minutes from being there when Hannah called us and said, 'She's with God now.'"

The rest of that day was spent being with friends, crying, sharing memories, praying.

"There was about 20 or so people that drove through traffic to get to us, all college friends of Arik and mine and Amy's and Hannah's," Doran said. "Friends that we've all known each other for 20 plus years."

Due to the Woolsey Wildfire, the Dorans were unable to attend Alaina's first funeral in Napa.

"It was just really painful that there's a natural step to grieving and we weren't able to participate in that," Doran said. "And my wife and I, that really hurt us, to think that we couldn't be there for that."

In December, Pepperdine held a second memorial service for Alaina which Doran spoke at. Afterward, the Housley's met the Bible study group that became Alaina's home during her time at Pepperdine.

“Then we just told stories and we heard some recordings of Alaina sing that Hannah had never shared with anyone before,” Doran said. “And so we cried and laughed and you know, sort of got to do that.”

After so much heartbreak and interruption, Doran wishes he could of had one more week of winter break to grieve. Now, pictures of Alaina hang throughout his house, one on his fridge. Sometimes the photos bring him comfort, other times they bring pain.

“I just have to be honest with myself and with others that [it] doesn't mean I love her any less when it's hard to look at,” Doran said. “But it's just, there are days where there's happy memories and there's days where you're just sort of grief stricken by the violence that would just be normalized in our society that would allow someone like that to be gone so quickly.”



According to Gun Violence Archive, there were 340 mass shootings last year. This year, they report up to 120 as of April.

Since Alaina's death, there have been 120 mass shootings according to [Gun Violence Archive](https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/), which defines a mass shooting as a firearm incident resulting in four or more people who are injured or killed, not including the shooter. Doran said when he hears of one on the news, it now feels personal. He hopes to see changes made.

“The lack of like actual constructive dialogue is just really troubling where this happens all the time,” Doran said. “We just sort of accept it as part of our freedom rather than this is violent and

abnormal and in every other society around the world where this happens, there is swift measures to make sure it doesn't happen again.”



The Housley's first Christmas after losing Alaina.

As for Doran's friendship with his longtime college friends, things are different now. He calls them on days he knows will be especially hard; Christmas, the first day back to school.

"I mean [we're] very close college friends and this murder has changed our relationship in some interesting ways, but just deepened it in many others," Doran said.

Sometimes Doran remembers that Alaina isn't here and he tears up. He said it's good to cry, it's better than pretending.

"There's always going to be a scar," Doran said. "I guess it's just going to be a matter of how healed that scar is or how open it is."

