

## Tragedy in Tucson

*By Louis P. Solomon with Dick Van Orden*

A young man took his legally obtained pistol, appropriate ammunition, and walked to a meeting arranged by his Congresswoman to discuss issues with her constituents at a local supermarket. He calmly walked up to the Congresswoman and shot her in the head. He then proceeded to shoot and kill six additional people and would wound an additional fourteen. He was tackled and wrestled to the ground by several citizens. The entire event was over in a matter of moments. But the effects on the entire country will be felt for a long time; the effects on the families of the people who were killed and wounded will be for a lifetime.



The outpouring of national grief was enormous. Solemn events were held, with a meeting at the University of Arizona, Tucson Campus, presided over by the President of the University, and with invited speakers: The President of the United States, The Attorney General of the United States, The Secretary of Homeland Security, with two Supreme Court Justices (one active and one retired) attending, along with 26,000 other people.

The general tone of the meeting was unusual. While this was to be in support of the healing process, and appropriately somber, that was not quite the case. There were quiet, reflective, and somber moments. There were also cheers and yells from the many University students. And, all this was perfectly appropriate. The meeting was held in a Field House, and not a cathedral or chapel. In one sense it was a celebration of life and determination that the United States would live, and it honored those people, heroes all, who apprehended the assassin and helped all the fallen to the extent that they could. In another sense it was a solemn ceremony that was appropriately respectful to the wounded and in memory of the dead.

The word “heroes” was used frequently. What are heroes? I think that heroes are people who act out of conviction that they should be doing something to help others regardless of potential consequences to their own safety. In fact, it is my guess that none of the people who were truly heroes at that killing ground in front of the local Tucson Safeway even thought about their own safety. They acted instinctively to do what was part of their moral approach to life.

The speakers were all good. The President gave a magnificent speech, with just the right tone for praising the community for its actions, and trying to help a grieving nation, as well as calling for us to be more civil to one another. This is an important point. He did not suggest that we should all think alike and agree with him on politics, government, or any other subject. No, what he said was that we, as Americans, can and must be civil to each other in our disagreements, even passionate support of our beliefs, but it is necessary for us as a nation collectively and individually to allow free speech without rancor or belief that because the person next to you doesn't agree with you, does not mean that he is your enemy.

There have been lots of words from many sources since these events occurred. Some are wise, and some are not, but only one observation summed up the entire episode for me:

The people who were involved in the event—the dead, the wounded, the living, the heroes—were all different with diverse backgrounds. The Federal Court Judge was a Roman Catholic, and his fellow citizens who tried to help each other and overwhelm the assassin were Protestants and Jews. The young man who saved the life of the Congressman is of Latino origins. The triage surgeon is a former military medic of Korean stock. The person who gave the benediction at the meeting was a fifth generation Latino and also has roots from an Indian heritage, and they were all led by the first Black President of the United States. Perhaps there should be some inferences drawn from this rather amazing and varied fabric that all of them were there to try to help heal the hearts and minds of their fellow citizens. Something to ponder.