

Editorial: What's your first thought when the mask is pulled off?

June 20, 2019

A 22-year-old man was lying in a downtown Dallas parking lot with law enforcement all around him. Tom Fox, a seasoned photojournalist with the *Dallas Morning News* who witnessed and recorded what led to the man dying in the parking lot, continued to photograph the scene. It's what he was trained to do.

[Sharon Grigsby](#), metro columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, reported Fox's point of view. "As the officers examined the man and pulled off his mask," Grigsby wrote, Fox thought: "'He was just so young. All I could think was 'why?' There's just too many questions I haven't processed yet. But this young man, what was it all for? Was it really worth it—for this?'"

I was several blocks away when the young man opened fire on the Earle Cabell Federal Building and knew nothing about it until the *Dallas Morning News* notification came up on my phone.

How much of our lives are lived this way—unaware of other's pain until after it's too late?

"As a man thinks, so is he"

I'm in awe of Fox's response. Despite literally being in the line of fire, despite a legitimate fear for his life, despite standing over his potential murderer, Fox responded to the horror with an expression of grief for the shooter: "He was just so young. All I could think was 'why?'"

What would we do in that situation? I'm almost certain we don't know, and I'm positive we don't want to find out.

But we might get a glimpse into such a moment by considering our reactions to people who make us angry, who irritate or annoy us, who we think are taking advantage of us or are seeking to harm us. If someone swung open their farm truck door into the side of your pristine luxury car—or vice versa—leaving a gash, what would your blood pressure do? What thoughts about that person would cross your mind?

I don't know the condition of Tom Fox's heart, but the fact he could grieve so quickly for a young man he honestly thought was going to kill him says something about Fox's character.

“Trouble in mind, that's true”

In addition to wondering why, Fox has many more unanswered questions about everything that happened the morning of June 17. And he's not alone. Many are wondering what the shooter's motive was. What causes someone to do what he did?

On June 19, [the shooter's family spoke publicly](#) about the incident. They believe their son had suicidal intentions.

Paul Clyde, the shooter's father, said his son knew what would happen if he fired at a guarded federal building and believes his son was hiding “his inner turmoil.” Clyde attributed the turmoil to his son's time in the Army.

Unfortunately, inner turmoil is common in American society. All too often, it is buried under the surface until it erupts in some violent act. Fox seemed to understand the violent act he witnessed was just as troubling for him as it was for the actor. And he grieved.

Thinking of others before it's too late

Investigators are piecing together a profile of the shooter. They are scouring his social media posts and interviewing people who knew him. They are just as interested in a motive as many of us. In the end, they may find his family's thinking to be true, that he was hiding inner turmoil.

But I have to wonder if all our interest in who the shooter was isn't like suddenly becoming interested in something you never cared about until it is gone.

A famous saying, attributed to many sources, is: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

On Monday morning, the last thing first responders and Tom Fox thought was how they could be kind to their assailant. In those circumstances—when an active shooter has sights on you, bullets are flying and lives are in danger—the first responders did what they needed to do.

But what about the Sunday before Monday? Who was concerned about that 22-year-old young man then? Who was able to connect with him and to help him with his burden? Maybe Sunday was already too late. But Sunday was preceded by Saturday and Friday and scores of days, months and years. At some point, he thought he was left to fight his hard battle alone.

The time to become interested in others is not after their inner turmoil comes to light but before.

When the mask comes off

Paul Clyde tried to help his son. The Army tried to help his son. They knew what to look for. Clyde even asked his son about suicidal thoughts just days before Monday, and his son said he was fine. He needed more of us to try,

too. He needed us to try in all our interactions with him, in the way we treated him and talked to him.

He's not the only one.

If you feel you are fighting a hard battle on your own, you are not alone. Maybe your efforts to find help have come up short, but *you* haven't come up short. You're still here, and the fact that you've tried to find help is a triumph all its own. Keep resisting the inner turmoil. Don't let it win by giving in to it.

If you are near someone fighting a hard battle—and you are, whether you know it or not—you have a vested interest in caring about people before it's too late. How you care for others has a direct effect on you, those you love and everyone else.

Be kind. Be gracious. Be compassionate. Be engaged. Be patient. Be proactive.

In the way you perceive others, in your own mind pull the mask off the hurting people around you. See them as beloved by God and filled with all the good potential God has put into them. And show them the way to redemption. At least one family in Plano could use that today.

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