

California letter carrier saves woman's life during Las Vegas music festival shooting



Paul Gallegos

“I was really enjoying the atmosphere,” said Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member **Paul Gallegos**. With his wife, two sons and other family and friends, Gallegos was in Las Vegas for the three-day Route 91 Harvest country music festival when disaster struck on Oct. 1, the closing night of the festival.

As musician Jason Aldean performed, “all of a sudden, I heard sounds that sounded like gunshots,” Gallegos said. The carrier wasn’t sure it was a gun he was hearing, and even if it was, the gunshots didn’t seem to be coming from inside the concert, so he ignored the sound—until he heard what sounded to him like an automatic weapon. Gallegos, who served in the Army during the Gulf War, knew that sound meant danger.

He was in the middle of what would become the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. More than 500 concertgoers were injured and 59 lost their lives.

Aldean and his backing musicians soon stopped playing and fled the stage. “When the music stopped and it went quiet, you could hear people yelling,” Gallegos recalled. The sound of gunshots stopped briefly, but then returned. The shooter was firing into the crowd from the 32nd floor of the nearby Mandalay Bay Hotel.

Though he couldn’t tell where the shots were coming from, Gallegos and his companions joined other concertgoers running for cover. As he ran, Gallegos found a wounded woman on the ground who was having trouble getting up to flee. “I just reached down and pulled her up,” he said. With the help of a stranger, Gallegos picked her up and sent her running to safety.

“The look on her face was pure terror,” he said.

It was then that Gallegos noticed that he had lost contact with his two adult sons, Austin and Nico, and their two friends. He learned later that all were unharmed. Gallegos and his wife, Jamie, along with his wife’s cousin made their way to his pickup truck parked in a lot across the street. As they fled, the shooting continued and panicked concertgoers ran everywhere.

“As we got in our truck and tried to drive away, people were banging on the window,” he said. “I unlocked the doors and people just started jumping in.” He could see people running, with some falling, all around his truck.

A man wearing a concert staff T-shirt asked Gallegos to take a wounded woman to the hospital. The man put the woman in the back of the truck. She had gunshot wounds to her back and cheek and needed immediate medical attention. Two more people with less serious wounds joined her, along with his son Austin, who had found his way to the truck. Gallegos worked his way around the traffic jam headed for the exits and into the street.

“Then I sit there and think, I don’t know where the hospital is,” he said. “I’m not from Las Vegas.”

As he drove, he saw police officers and asked for help. They directed him to an ambulance being used as a triage center to accept the wounded, and Gallegos took the three shooting victims there. They were the first to arrive at the ambulance.

After dropping off the injured passengers and driving further from the tragic scene, Gallegos and his wife communicated with his other son and friends by phone and reunited with



them, and then helped several strangers who had hitched a ride to safety find their way out of the area.

The next day, Gallegos learned through Facebook the identity of the most seriously injured woman, and her friends and family told him he had saved her life. “Had she gone to the hospital a minute or two later, she would have died,” Gallegos said.

Gallegos credits his military service and his upbringing in the San Pedro, CA, area for his quick, level-headed action that night.

“I grew up in a pretty bad neighborhood. I know what gunshots are,” he said. “I just went on auto-pilot.”

After traveling home to California, Gallegos went back to his route just three days after the shooting. While he was safe and back to his daily routine, his recovery from the trauma had just begun, he soon learned.

Out delivering the mail the following Saturday, it all came back to him as he approached a house where he could hear workers using nail guns to install a roof.

“I begin breathing faster, trying to walk faster, and telling myself, ‘It’s only a nail gun, it’s only a nail gun,’ ” he said.

Then he heard the siren from an ambulance. “I just lost it,” he said. “Fighting the tears, I finished the street because I have to fight through this. Getting back to my truck, I can hear the nail gun over and over and over. I

sat in my truck and I just completely lost it then.”

Despite the challenge of dealing with the emotional aftermath of the shooting, Gallegos said that surviving the massacre and helping others flee to safety has also had a positive effect on him by making him value each day of life with his family more.

“It’s definitely a life-changing experience,” Gallegos said. “I enjoy life a lot more.” A few weeks after the shooting, he celebrated being alive by going to see his beloved Los Angeles Dodgers play in the World Series. “I’m thankful for every day,” he said, “and the love that I have for my wife and my family is intensified.” **PR**

The shooter fired from the Mandalay Bay Hotel (gold, at r) upon the Route 91 Harvest country music festival (the festival grounds were green, at l).

A makeshift memorial was set up to honor those killed during this mass shooting.

