Chapter 23
The Chardon, Ohio High School Shooting: Tertiary Victimization

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ABSTRACT

On February 27, 2012, at approximately 7:30 am, three students were killed due to injuries sustained during a mass shooting at Chardon High School, Chardon, Ohio. Three others were injured with one being permanently paralyzed by shooter Thomas Lane III. This chapter is an examination of the Chardon, Ohio High School shooting with a focus on the tertiary victimization (i.e., friends or family, not involved in/did not witness event, but may be negatively affected) of those removed from the primary event.

INTRODUCTION

One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it’s worth watching. - Chardon High School 2012 Senior Class Motto

Now! Feel death, not just mocking you. Not just stalking you but inside of you. Wriggle and writhe. Feel smaller beneath my might. Seizure in the Pestilence that is my scythe. Die, all of you. - Excerpt from T.J. Lane’s Facebook page

A student of mine at Edinboro University once likened her life growing up in Chardon, Ohio as living in a snow globe. I have often driven through Chardon since moving to the northeastern Ohio area 20 years ago and I concur. It is a vignette of small town America situated close enough to the urban areas of Cleveland and Pittsburgh for the convenience of work and play, yet situated far enough away to maintain its own personality.

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Slightly over 5,000 people call Chardon home. Little league soccer games keep children and their parents busy at the Chardon Township and Munson Township parks during the summers. While Ohio towns that skirt Lake Erie often boast about their vineyards, the last weekend in April finds Chardon celebrating its maple syrup harvest. Since 1926, the Geauga County Maple Festival is a four-day event with a parade, beauty pageant, and baking contest. Tucked firmly within northeast Ohio’s snowbelt, it is a peaceful, nearly bucolic, place to live and work. When the first snows of late November or early December begin to fall, one can easily see how the streets around the courthouse square could inspire an artist’s snow globe model.

However, snow globes are fragile things and, on occasion, they break.

FEBRUARY 27, 2012

At approximately 7:30 a.m., Thomas Michael “T.J.” Lane III entered the cafeteria of Chardon High School and opened fire using a .22 caliber handgun he stole from an uncle. Lane fired ten rounds and shot six students. Within the next two days, three died as a result of their injuries. The remaining three suffered wounds ranging in nature from requiring long-term hospitalization to minor emergency room treatment.

Chardon High School assistant football coach Frank Hall was serving as cafeteria monitor that morning. His bravery in chasing Lane from the school was credited in saving more lives.

I sat down at 7:31 and started taking attendance,” he said. “While I was taking attendance, I heard what I thought was a firecracker, stood up to looked to see where the noise came from and heard two more what I thought were firecrackers. I immediately saw him [Lane] and chased after him. He draws upon me and I dove behind the vending machine. He fires and I come back around and I see where he's at, and he had gone to the main hallway. I came out to see where he went and one of our secretaries happened to be in the hallway, and he had her at gunpoint and she was screaming (Warsinsky, 2012).

Students Daniel Parmentor, Russell King, Jr., and Demetrius Hewlin were flown to the MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland. Students Joy Rickers and Nick Walczak were taken to Hillcrest Hospital in Mayfield Heights. Nate Mueller was grazed by a bullet in his ear, treated onsite, and released. Parmentor, King, and Hewlin succumbed from their injuries in the hours following the shooting. Nick Walczak, who received several shots including one in his spine, is paralyzed for life (Copeland, 2018).

Teacher Joseph Ricci had just started lecturing to his mathematics class when he heard the shots. He too ordered his students to stay put and secured his classroom A few moments later, Ricci heard moaning from the hallway. He put on a bulletproof vest, entered the hallway, and dragged Nick Walczak inside. Walczak’s family later credited Ricci with saving his life (Fredrick, 2016).

Chardon High School went immediately into lock down. Once he realized an active shooter was on the grounds, teacher Tim Armelli immediately announced over the school’s PA system to “lock down.” A lock down is designed to keep students, faculty, and staff in secure classrooms and offices. Chardon High School’s lock down policy and Armelli’s quick actions have been recognized as preventing a greater loss of life that morning (Tim Armelli, n.d.). The effectiveness of lock down procedures was lauded by the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission that stated “the testimony and other evidence presented to the Commission reveals that there has never been an event in which an active shooter breached a locked classroom door” (2015).
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