

Cheektowaga shooting victim speaks out

Dave McKinley , WGRZ 5:12 PM. EST November 24, 2017



CHEEKTOWAGA, NY – Amid the family, friends and food, the holidays remind us of all we are grateful for.

Especially John Schaeffer, who was wounded when a gunman opened fire at retail store on Nov. 14.

"I'm lucky I'm here," Schaeffer told WGRZ-TV on Thursday, as he helped prepare a Thanksgiving dinner at the home of some friends.

The 53-year-old night cleaner at Daemen College had gone to the Dollar General on Gardenville Parkway to buy Styrofoam coffee cups, where he noticed a man assaulting a woman in the parking lot.

"He punched her twice in the face, so I got on my phone and I called the police," Schaeffer recalled.

Put Down Your Goddamn Phone!

As Schaeffer described the unfolding scene to a police dispatcher, the man, **later identified as 29 year old Travis Green (<http://www.wgrz.com/news/crime/cheektowaga-police-investigate-shooting/491751008>)**, turned his attention to Schaeffer.

"He approached me and asked, 'Do you have a problem?' I said, no, and then he demanded to know who I was talking to."

Still on the phone with the dispatcher, Schaeffer told the man he was talking to "a friend".

"He told me to get off the phone, and I told him no, I was talking to a friend. Then he says, 'Get off your Goddamn phone!' and then he punched me twice in the face. I dropped my phone, and he kicked it away from me."

Schaeffer said after the man walked away, he was able to retrieve his phone and continue talking with police, while making a bee line for the store where he hoped to find refuge.

However, while he was able to get through the outer set of doors, he found that the second set of doors, leading into the store interior had been locked, presumably by staff which had taken shelter.

"So I couldn't get in because the doors didn't open," Schaeffer said.

Nightmare Scenario

At that point, Schaeffer recalls turning to look back outside where his assailant was, and witnessing an even more terrifying scenario unfolding.

"I saw him standing by the car, and he pulled out a black bag and he dropped it. And then he pulled the rifle out and he shot two shots in the air."

Inside the vestibule, Schaeffer hunkered down for cover as best as he could.

"The next thing you know, he just he started shooting up the store, and I ducked in a corner." Police later recovered two rifles and 800 rounds of ammunition from the scene.

The next part of the story, Schaeffer still can't recall and might not have believed, until police showed video tape from inside the store.

It shows Green holding a rifle on Schaeffer, and the two men jawing with one another.

"According to the tape, I told him, 'You probably think you're a big man with a gun, huh'?" Although I don't remember doing that at all," Schaeffer said.

Gunman Flees As Help Arrives

Schaeffer recalls the shooting stopped amid the sound of approaching police sirens, an account confirmed by **two witnesses, who rushed from a nearby business to assist** (<http://www.wgrz.com/news/two-hailed-as-heroes-in-cheektowaga-shooting/492151737>) when they saw Green place his weapon on the ground and start to walk away.

One of those witnesses, Mark Pinnavaia, used his car to hit Green as he attempted to flee the scene.

According to police, Green ran up to Union Road, and was apprehended about 400 feet from the shooting scene.

I'm Hit!

Schaeffer also went up to Union Road to where the police activity was now centered, saying he was curious as to how the event ended.

However, there was something else of which he was unaware.

"One of the detectives come up to me and says, 'Do you know your bleeding?' and I says no, and they cut my shirt and jacket off and I had a fragment of a bullet in my shoulder....I didn't even know it," Schaeffer said.

Doctors at ECMC quickly determined the presence of the bullet fragment lodged in the top of Schaeffer's left shoulder, where as of now it still remains.

Peeling back his tee shirt, he revealed a dark red spot perhaps a quarter of an inch wide.

"They said if it works its way out of there on its own, they may need it for evidence. But the doctors decided not to remove it because that could cause nerve damage," Schaeffer said.

Schaeffer also lost the use of his automobile as a result of the incident, which he says had been shot up to the point where his insurance provider totaled the vehicle.

No Excuse

The day after the shooting, Green's mother, who attended his arraignment, told WGRZ-TV that she believed her son had become despondent over the loss of his job combined with his marriage breaking up, and that he "just snapped."

"I understand that he may have been going through a lot," Schaeffer said. "But what about all these other people that go through a lot and are under stress. Are they out there shooting people up?"

He'd tell him that too....but in not so many words. "I don't know what I would really say to him," Schaeffer said when asked.

For now, he will save the most important words for his wife of more than 20 years, Cindy, who is still shaken by the ordeal.

Words of love, comfort, and gratitude that their life together can, and will, continue.

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