THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE:

JOURNALISM PHOTO EDITORS AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING TIMES OF TRAUMA

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

AMBER GARRETT

Dr. Keith Greenwood, Thesis Supervisor

DECEMBER 2017
The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE:

JOURNALISM PHOTO EDITORS AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING TIMES OF TRAUMA

presented by AMBER GARRETT,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

________________________________________
Associate Professor Keith Greenwood

________________________________________
Assistant Professor Brian Kratzer

________________________________________
Associate Professor Michelle Teti

________________________________________
Associate Professor Jackie Bell
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I’d like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor and committee chair, Dr. Keith Greenwood, for his endless support through months of research, rewrites, and unending frivolous questions, without whom, this study would not have been possible. I’d also like to thank committee member Brian Kratzer for helping me cultivate my love of photo editing and helping me jumpstart my research. Thanks to Dr. Michelle Teti, committee member, for her enthusiastic interest in my work and methodology support. Thanks to Jackie Bell, committee member, for her invaluable advice during the early stages of this study. Finally, I’d like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the fellow students, colleagues, editors, and coworkers who provided constant feedback and insight, contributed unending support, and shared numerous cups of coffee.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements......................................................................................................................... ii

Abstract................................................................................................................................................ v

Chapter One – Introduction.................................................................................................................. 1
  Rationale................................................................................................................................................ 3

Chapter Two – Theory And Literature............................................................................................... 6
  Experiencing PTSD and emotional trauma......................................................................................... 6
  Preparing for and coping with PTSD and emotional trauma............................................................... 9
  Photography as a powerful medium .................................................................................................... 12
  The importance of photo editors ......................................................................................................... 14
  Research questions ............................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter Three – Methodology............................................................................................................ 17
  Rationale................................................................................................................................................ 17
  Sampling................................................................................................................................................ 18
  Data collection.................................................................................................................................... 19
  Analysis................................................................................................................................................ 21
  Ethical and IRB considerations............................................................................................................ 22

Chapter Four – Results........................................................................................................................ 23
  Coping mechanisms.............................................................................................................................. 23
  Factors related to impact of traumatic events..................................................................................... 27
  Relationship between photo editor and photographers...................................................................... 30
Chapter Five – Conclusion .......................................................... 33

Methods and mechanisms ................................................................ 33

Kinds of traumatic events ................................................................. 34

The relationship between photographers and photo editors ............... 35

Professional implications ................................................................. 36

Limitations and future opportunities for research .............................. 37

References ...................................................................................... 39

Appendix A – Descriptions Of Photo Editors .................................... 45

Appendix B – Interview Transcripts .................................................. 47
THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE:

JOURNALISM PHOTO EDITORS AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING TIMES OF TRAUMA

Amber Garrett

Dr. Keith Greenwood, Thesis Supervisor

Abstract

Countless studies have been completed on the mental health of journalistic reporters and photographers after they cover traumatic events. However, no research has been done on the mental health of photo editors who must make editorial decisions for publications after looking at such images. This study aimed to uncover the effects of an intimate experience with traumatic imagery created by another individual in hopes of bringing light to an understudied population. After analyzing the recounts of seven photo editors from publications across the continental United States, it was ultimately found that photo editors experience symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress, which mimics those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Photo editors also had a tendency of avoiding confrontation with their emotional turmoil by focusing solely on work, and that they experienced an increased sense of responsibility toward their photographers who were covering trauma. These findings can open the door to further research into STS and understudied populations of working journalists, as well as help develop training programs that may lead to a more resilient workforce.
Chapter One – Introduction

Journalism is often viewed as a cornerstone of democracy, occasionally referred to as the fourth branch of government because of its ability and responsibility to act as a watchdog toward the three parts of the federal administration. But with such responsibility comes less-than-ideal working conditions. The long hours and irregular work schedule have the potential to lead to stress. In fact, being a journalist was the ninth most stressful job of 2016, with the salary comparable to that of a teacher and a -9% job outlook for the next 10 years (CareerCast, 2016), which ultimately means that there will be about 4,800 fewer jobs in journalism by the year 2024 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

In times of breaking news and emotional turmoil, reporters and photojournalists must put themselves in front of the action to tell the story through their written word or camera. As the former publisher and president of the Washington Post once said, “[Journalists] write 365 days a year the first rough draft of history, and that is a very great task” (Graham, 1953). Without the journalists who cover emotionally traumatic events, how would the public know what is happening in their world? Because of this high demand for breaking news, it is necessary to continue putting reporters in front of difficult situations. Without their recounts of the situation, the public would be blissfully unaware of any traumatic events, thus creating a less-informed population. Knowing that the world requires
journalists to shed light on tough times, it should be asked: “How are journalists taking care of themselves enough to continue doing their work?”

It is commonly known that journalists can experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, after covering a traumatic event (Smith, Newman, & Drevo, 2016). However, minimal research has been done on the editors that help journalists craft the narrative and how these editors may be affected by reliving the trauma through the eyes of the reporter or photographer. It is important to consider who helps the reporter or photojournalist decompress after covering a difficult situation, or who crafts the narrative to show the audience what happened, or who is responsible for being the last line of defense against errors when reporting on traumatic events. Knowing that an editor is responsible for all of these duties and more, the importance of photo editors in a news context can then be recognized, and the question shifts to ask: “How does an editor take care of him- or herself after witnessing a traumatic event through the eyes of another person?”

Because of the weight that a still image carries in comparison to written word (Childers & Houston, 1984), this study focused on the visual aspect of journalistic reporting, with the most emphasis placed on still images.

While PTSD may be common to those who directly cover traumatic events, Secondary Traumatic Stress, or STS, is a more common term for those who hear of another’s exposure to trauma (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2013). STS is known to produce the same kind of symptoms as PTSD, but it can also be known as “burnout” (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2013), “compassion fatigue,” “countertransference,” and/or “vicarious traumatization”
According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, even though STS is not recognized as a medical disorder, it shares many symptoms with PTSD, such as avoiding situations that may remind one of trauma, anxiety, depression, reliving the experienced trauma, or heightened reactions to stressful situations (2007).

**Rationale**

So why does this matter? Approximately 20% of adults in the United States develop PTSD after experiencing a traumatic event in their lifetimes, and an estimated five percent are currently experiencing it (Sidran Institute, 2016). Coupled with the four percent of people living outside of New York City that experienced signs of STS after the attacks on September 11th, 2001 (Zimering, 2006), and 19.2% of mental health workers that work with the military that experience STS (Cieslak et al, 2013), a large number of people just in the United States alone are being observed with these statistics, and that doesn’t even begin to scrape the surface of other professions that may be experiencing STS, such as journalists, much less any population on the worldwide level.

The purpose of this study aimed to understand how visual editors interpreted emotionally traumatic events, how they personally handled the psychological stress that stemmed from looking at photos of various emotionally traumatic events, and how the relationship between the photo editor and photographers affected the role played by the photo editor. The study comprised in-depth interviews with visual editors that have been in charge of staffs that were responsible for covering events that stemmed from or caused emotional trauma,
such as fires, motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters, and mass acts of terror. It included personal anecdotes from visual editors, and it was completed with the intent that minimal post-traumatic harm would come to its subjects after being interviewed about difficult times.

This study is vital to the understanding of how visual editors interpret traumatic events and how their own experience with traumatic events affects the narrative they help to craft for the public. This research idea came to me during the fall of 2015 when protests about race and race relations were common on the University of Missouri campus. During this period, I saw numerous photo editors visibly react to the emotionally charged images they saw captured by another photographer. Upon understanding my own reactions to such content, I began to search for resources designed for photo editors that edit images of trauma. To my dismay, I found no such resources. This inspired me to begin the research that may one day act as influence for programs or literature designed for this niche population. By designing more programs and applying them to the current journalism curriculum, future journalists can better prepare themselves in how to handle the emotional effects of doing their job, especially in today’s ever-changing political climate.

Chapter two will discuss previous literature and research questions around which this study was formed. Chapter three will define the methods used in this study, while chapter four provides results. Chapter five will analyze these results and place them in the aforementioned theoretical framework that provided the
basis of this study. Additionally, professional implications, limitations, and future opportunities for further studies will be mentioned.
Chapter Two – Theory And Literature

Much previous research has addressed the psychological effects that journalists feel after covering trauma, and it is easy to find such research. PTSD has become the most common effect in journalists who have covered difficult situations, surpassing both depression and substance abuse (Smith, Newman, & Drevo, 2016). Research for this study has been focused on how journalists have been affected by PTSD, the programs that have been developed for journalists, as well as the importance of photography in general, and the photo editors who work with photographers.

*Experiencing PTSD and emotional trauma*

PTSD and major depression are noticeably prevalent among journalists (Smith, Newman, & Drevo, 2016), and one study in particular even found that work-related stress was the highest predictor of PTSD (Aoki, Malcolm, Yamaguchi, Thornicroft, & Henderson, 2012). Not only does work-related stress seem to lend itself to PTSD, there is also a positive correlation for journalists between exposure to trauma and PTSD symptoms; exposure to trauma and feelings of guilt; and feelings of guilt and PTSD symptoms (Browne, Evangeli, & Greenberg, 2012). These three consequences of covering traumatic experiences are positively associated and demonstrate that being exposed to trauma is directly related to the onset of PTSD symptoms and feelings of guilt. This notion of guilt can be prevalent across many
segments of journalists. A number of journalists also said that they felt guilty due to the attachment they felt toward the victims when covering traumatic events, even though, as journalists, they felt as though they were supposed to remain detached and unbiased from their subjects (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2012). However, as stated, Backholm and Björkqvist have shown that journalists do feel some sort of emotional attachment or sympathy toward victims of trauma and that it can be extremely difficult to separate themselves from those sympathetic feelings (2012). When this attachment does happen, there is a strong chance that bias can occur when the story of the event gets published (Rentschler, 2010). Bias and subjectivity are frowned upon in journalistic settings, and the idea of remaining free of bias in reporting is found throughout numerous professional and academic outlets. For example, the Society of Professional Journalists requires that its members adhere to its Code of Ethics, with its primary responsibility being to serve the public, meaning that journalists should remain free of bias and act independently while working (SPJ, 2014). Knowing this, it is easy to understand that it is essential that journalists learn how to handle the emotional connection they may feel toward trauma victims, as well as how to properly balance their need to remain unbiased and their emotional responses as human beings.

Oftentimes, journalists are often one of the first responders to traumatic events, alongside medical and emergency personnel, meaning they often see the immediate physical and emotional results of distressing situations (Newman & Drevo, 2015). When a journalist is one of the first on the scene, not much has been cleaned up, which indicates that the reporter or photographer may see part of a
corpse strewn from a motor vehicle accident, or they might watch a building collapse from a fire knowing that someone may have been inside. While graphic and disturbing, this is commonly a journalist’s reality.

Some journalists might have the opportunity to leave traumatic work in one place and return home, however, others are not afforded this luxury, and they must live where the constant trauma lives (Feinstein, 2013). In Mexico in particular, it was found that journalists who cover the drug cartel have more psychological distress than journalists who cover war (Feinstein, 2013). Due to the potentially difficult nature of a conflict photojournalist’s chosen career path, leaving their work behind at the end of the day is not as simple as some might imagine – it really does follow them home, particularly in a scenario where a journalist may be living inside of a warzone. In comparison, Feinstein also found that war journalists experienced minimal psychological distress as a result of covering the Iraq war (2005). Through Feinstein’s research, it is clear that both theories, that journalists in high-crime areas experience more post-traumatic stress while war journalists experience less, are supported. When a journalist can leave the traumatic events in one place, potentially a different country, he or she is less likely to experience symptoms of PTSD, thus increasing that journalist’s quality of life outside of work. However, when a journalist cannot leave this work in another place or when there is the potential to be targeted while off-duty, that journalist experiences more psychological stress.

Aside from those in the United States, other countries’ journalists experience less post-traumatic stress. A survey of Japanese broadcast journalists showed that
while the majority had covered trauma in their work, only about six percent of the surveyed journalists met the criteria for potentially having PTSD (Hatanaka et al., 2010). Similarly, most Finnish journalists had little difficulty handling the emotional turmoil that could have resulted from reporting on a school shooting. One reason for this inability to handle stress may be due to how much more Americans work than those in other countries (Williams and Boushey, 2010). However, it was also found that had the journalist had previous lifetime exposure to trauma or mental illnesses, he or she would be more likely to be affected by the present trauma being covered (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2012). From here, it is concluded that if a journalist had problems with his or her mental health before becoming a journalist, such as something as common as depression or anxiety, they would be more likely to experience post-traumatic stress than a journalist who did not have such preexisting mental health problems. While it is impossible to limit who exactly goes into the field of journalism based on the quality of their mental health, it is possible to identify ways of how to properly prepare for coping with the psychological stress that can come with the line of work.

**Preparing for and coping with PTSD and emotional trauma**

When newly exposed to trauma, responding to and managing the emotional stress that accompanies may seem like the hardest task to successfully accomplish. During the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York City, journalists from numerous publications found themselves covering what started as a traumatic event, but quickly became the first draft of history. After nearly 3,000 people died from the act of violence, news outlets like CNN, The New York Times, and The Wall
Street Journal began providing mental health services for their employees, such as counselors and group sessions (Ricchiardi, 2001). Even though these services were available, some journalists found it easier to avoid confronting their pain by focusing solely on work (Ricchiardi, 2001). This shows that managing emotional trauma can seem like a strenuous task when a journalist has very recently been exposed to distressing situations. However, a number of journalists were able to positively cope with their negative emotions after covering traumatic experiences by focusing on the meaning they found in doing their job (Dworznik, 2006; Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2002). The positive emotions that these journalists could focus on ultimately allowed them to feel less psychological stress after covering traumatic events. However, some journalists in Canadian newsrooms reported using various negative coping strategies to handle the emotional stress that came from covering trauma, such as avoiding the problem, using black humor, or misusing substances (Buchanan & Keats, 2011). This problem was found to be more common than rare even though it does little to solve the problem, and rather, these temporary fixes simply prolong it.

In a comparative study, Western journalists reported coping with their PTSD symptoms stemming from covering war by consuming more alcohol, while Israeli journalists reported experiencing more depression, anxiety, and physical pain (Levaot, Sinvor, & Feinstein, 2013). These two studies allow for the conclusion to be drawn that journalists in western countries are more likely to turn to external sources to alleviate their problems, regardless of how negative the effects of those sources may be.
In other cases, a number of journalists felt as though they were able to speak up about the effects resulting from trauma. However, they also did not feel comfortable enough to open up about how they were feeling, thus perpetuating a so-called “culture of silence” (Greenberg, Gould, Langston, & Brayne, 2009, 543). By not feeling comfortable enough to speak about one’s experiences, a sort-of limbo was created for journalists who are experiencing psychological distress resulting from work-related experiences. This state of limbo does not allow for the journalist to express his or her feelings, no matter how strenuous they may be on his or her psychological health, nor how badly he or she may want to share those feelings. Additionally, as previously mentioned, STS can occur when professionals are exposed to the traumatic stress of others. While it is likely that the effects of STS, which can resemble PTSD, can decrease over time (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2013), those who are heavily involved in the impacted community may have more difficulty ridding themselves of STS (Shannonhouse, Barden, Jones, Gonzalez, & Murphy, 2016). For example, those who work with military personnel or traumatized individuals in a research or treatment setting may not be able to reduce their exposure to secondary trauma because of the constant interaction associated with the profession.

But how do journalists prepare to deal with the stress, rather than just cope with it in an unhealthy, unproductive manner after the fact? Some researchers have looked at the impact of reporting on traumatic events on photojournalists and how training programs might be implemented into schools to prepare student journalists for difficult situations (Gutkowska, 2005). Others have found that journalism
students do not just need training in how to cope with emotional stress, but they want it, too (Dworznik & Grubb, 2007). Students reported that they had minimal training in approaching the families of trauma victims and that having said knowledge would be beneficial to their work (Dworznik & Grubb, 2007). This desired training could help create a more resilient journalistic workforce in both written word and the still image.

**Photography as a powerful medium**

While the pen may be mightier than the sword, the photograph holds more weight than the written word. Photos have a tendency to stay ingrained in a person’s mind for far longer than a story might (Childers & Houston, 1984), and photography has the ability to eliminate disbelief and bring breaking news to the forefront of a person's mind (Zelizer & Allan, 2003). Knowing this, we can understand just how important it is for photographers to be on the front line when documenting heavy news.

Photographers must constantly report on breaking news, especially when considering just how high of a demand there is for breaking news, which is exemplified by the recent development of the 24-hour news cycle where news is published as quickly as possible (Saltzis, 2012). In journalism, it is not enough to merely tell the audience what happened, they want to see it, too. Approximately 98% of photojournalists who had responded to a survey had experienced an event that might be regarded as traumatic by mental health professionals, and something as common as car accidents had been ranked as the overall most stressful event to cover (Newman, Simpson, & Handschuh, 2003). Psychiatrist Frank Ochberg, who
helped found the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, 2017), even stated that “photographers process information at a highly intimate level, in order to convey it effectively to their audiences” (Ricchiardi, 2001, 38). Similarly, as a means of reminding his photojournalism students how important their jobs are, one of the sources from this study enjoys distributing this quote from photographer Brian Lanker, who reflected on his time working under Rich Clarkson, the former director of photography at the Topeka Capital-Journal in Kansas:

“The camera was almost incidental. You thought of stories. ... You went out and you had to be the smartest person in the room. He demanded that of you. You needed to know more than the reporter who was out there. You needed to know more than anybody else and you needed to dig deeper than anybody else” (O'Neill, 2010).

So, according to this line of thinking, not only do photographers need to be at the forefront of any traumatic situation, they also must understand what is happening better than anyone else who may be covering the story. All of that being said, if so many visual journalists are saying that something that happens as frequently as motor vehicle accidents can cause so much psychological stress, it should be asked what is being done in the journalistic society to help these photojournalists cope, how they can be helped, and who in particular is helping these photographers manage their stress.
The importance of photo editors

The number of hands that touch and work with a photograph or series of photographs before publication can vary widely, and this has the potential to drastically change what the audience sees (Zavoina & Reichert, 2000). Photo editors have become highly important to the success of a photograph. Photo editors act as a photographer's advocate in the newsroom, an advisor during difficult times, and as an arbiter when there is a disagreement between the photographer and the publication for which he or she is working (Loengard, 1991). An editor can be there to guide the photographer through their assignments without micromanaging, and after the photo shoot, the editor is there to work alongside the photographer to craft the final narrative for publication (Loengard, 1991). The editor could bring up ideas about the shoot that the photographer might not have originally noticed, and the two can work together to create a photo story that accurately represents the assignment or subject(s). As the images move throughout the newsroom's workflow, the final selected photos have the potential to change both in online presentation and in print based on how many other people work with those images. The photo editor is often responsible for ensuring that his or her original selection and editing of images remains the same throughout the publication process. This ultimately means that it is the photo editor's job not just to work with the photographer and edit images, but also to maintain the integrity of the photographs and the photographer. While Zavoina and Reichert highlight the number of people that work with a photograph, it also briefly associates photo editors with the ideas of being gatekeepers or decision makers. This connection is mentioned once in
passing, but it brings light to the idea that the photo editor has so much power in
deciding what to publish. It is not merely color correction and cropping that a photo
editor does, but they are also in charge of deciding what to reveal and what to
withhold from the public’s eye, as well as being a resource for a photographer while
that photographer is working on an assignment in the field.

In a discussion of how powerful photography can be during times of trauma,
Zelizer and Allan state that photos of war and terrorism that have been published
over the years have changed drastically (2003). While it was once common to see
graphic images of corpses in World War II plastered across newsstands, it is far less
normal to do so in modern day presentation of traumatic news (Zelizer & Allan,
2003). This causes some to wonder what has changed over the years, as it is
possible that people are still photographing the same graphic subjects, but news
publications are no longer releasing these photographs in mass production. It has
also been said that written words can help the viewer understand what traumatic
event happened, while photographs have the ability to disturb the viewer (Sontag,
2004). The chilling factor of graphic images could be the potential reason as to why
photo editors are minimizing the number of graphic images that are published, but
this minimized number does not necessarily mean that photo editors do not see
these sorts of images as often. Photographers could very well be making such
images, but the photo editor’s burden of deciding what others will see may be
weighing in on the decision making process for publication.

Knowing that the photo editor is responsible for so much while a
photographer is on assignment, it is interesting to recognize that minimal research
has been done on photo editors. A simple Google Scholar search of keywords like “photo editor,” “journalism,” and “mental health” returns fewer than 1,000 results and only one article of relevance. This lack of information exhibits how understudied this population is, even though more than 117,000 people were editors in 2014 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), roughly the same population as Columbia, Missouri, where this study was conceived and cultivated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

**Research questions**

Understanding how trauma affects photo editors will expand the depth and breadth of knowledge surrounding journalists and PTSD by exploring a previously understudied population.

RQ1: What sort of methods or mechanisms do photo editors use to cope with the emotional effects that come with editing photos of traumatic events?

RQ2: What factors lead editors to identify some types of traumatic events as having a greater impact than others?

RQ3: How does the relationship between the photo editor and the photographer affect the role played by the photo editor?
Chapter Three – Methodology

Rationale

Because the nature of this study concerns itself with the personal anecdotes and reactions of real individuals, these results cannot be easily quantified, and thus a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study. While quantitative work aims to predict and confirm relationships and hypotheses (Mack et al., 2005), qualitative studies allow for the researcher to “[explore] and [understand] the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, 4). Additionally, qualitative research can be particularly applicable when the researcher is seeking information that may be specific to a certain population, such as “behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships” (Mack et al., 2005, 1). It also relies on semi-structured, rather than the quantitatively rigid, methods for collecting information, as well as textual data collection, which may be in the form of written notes, recordings, or otherwise (Mack et al., 2005). What is most applicable about qualitative research is that it aims to understand and describe human experiences (Mack et al., 2005). These three primary aspects of qualitative research lend to my study, as it is specifically targeting the outcomes, such as human thoughts and behaviors, which result from secondary exposure to traumatic events. This study aimed to understand and describe a phenomena particular to a certain group of people that had previously not been studied.
**Sampling**

As this area of research has not been previously studied, sampling was done purposively, beginning with a local source who had edited images from a natural disaster that happened in the Midwest a few years prior. From there, the snowball sampling method was used because of its known ability to access information from those privy to certain sensitive experiences (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). At the end of the interview, the first source was asked if he knew of any other photo editors that may have similar experiences. This study was focused on photo editors who had edited images from at least one large-scale traumatic event that gained national coverage, and who had approximately 10 years of experience on the job. Because this area of research has not previously been studied, sampling was intentionally limited to the continental United States as opposed to looking at trauma abroad. Additionally, some editors were identified as potential sources that fit the aforementioned criteria after a brainstorming session of recent large-scale traumatic events.

Of the seven photo editors’ responses that were analyzed, two were female, five were male, and all of them were white. Professional editing experience ranged from about 5 years to greater than 30, and all of them had edited images from at least one large-scale traumatic event to which the photo editor was local that had gained national coverage and recognition. The local traumatic events happened between 2 miles and 250 miles from the photo editor’s newsroom.¹

¹ See Appendix A
Data collection

After identifying likely candidates for the study, each photo editor was sent an email message to introduce the study and request an interview. Due to the geographically diverse locations of the editors, interviews were conducted via Skype. A public lecture given locally by a photo editor who fit said criteria was also attended and recorded.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with sources because of an interview’s known ability to provide insight on an “individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored” (Mack et al, 2005, 2). Countless other studies have also shown the importance and efficiency of interviews, which ultimately allow a researcher to “study social and social psychological processes,” as well as somewhat direct how data is collected and analyzed, and “develop an abstract theoretical framework that explains the studied process” (Charmaz, 2001, 675). In-depth interviews also employ a “discovery-oriented method,” thus facilitating a way for a researcher to thoroughly explore how an interviewee feels about a particular subject (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions have been proven to be most effective in allowing the researcher to understand and comprehend the source’s subjective experience with a particular phenomenon (Leech, 2002; Charmaz, 2001).

As the majority of my sources were not local, most interviews were conducted via Skype or Google Hangouts, and a screen and audio recording of the
interview was created for later transcription. Each interview spanned between 30 minutes to an hour.

The following list of questions acted as a foundation during the interviews:

• Describe a large-scale event that you edited images from.
  o What was the event? What was the day like? How did you feel at different points in the day?
  o How late did you stay at work after the event happened? What happened after you left the newsroom? Did you keep working?

• How long did it take for you to process the event?
  o What did you feel while processing?
  o Did you use any specific coping mechanisms? What were they?

• What was your relationship like with the photographer(s) you were working with? (i.e. strictly coworkers, stringer, friends outside of work, etc.)
  o Did this relationship affect how you interacted with the photographer during the event?
  o Did you feel more or less responsible for the photographer and his/her photos because of or despite this relationship?

• Did you find it easier or harder to handle the images knowing someone else photographed them?
  o Would it have been easier or harder to process the event if you had photographed it? Why?

• What kind of narrative did you craft for publication? Was it focused on the event or the aftereffects?
• What was it like having to live where the trauma happened?
• What is harder to handle – large-scale events that happen occasionally, or smaller-scale events that happen more frequently?

**Analysis**

The aspects of the interviews that were relative to the study were transcribed and re-read. By reading over the transcripts and identifying common themes, categories using the thematic analysis method were built, and common characteristics between responses were identified (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The characteristics were quantified, and from there, the constant comparative method was used to create categories because of the method’s flexibility and ability to allow the researcher to regularly analyze new responses against older comments (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2001). The constant comparative method added another layer of credibility to the categories, thus helping this study maintain integrity. Responses were sorted into these categories, and themes emerged that help construct a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2001). Another study recently used a similar methodology as it analyzed data using the constant comparative method while studying militaristic leadership under severe stress (Larsson, Johansson, Jansson, & Grönlund, 2001). This particular study has striking similarities to this area of research, and it also accomplished its ultimate goal (Larsson, Johansson, Jansson, & Grönlund, 2001). Because of the successes of these researchers, this study was entered anticipating similar results.
**Ethical and IRB considerations**

Following IRB protocol, the visual and aural recordings that were made of the interviews were kept securely on an at-home external hard drive, which is only accessed by one computer using a password-protected login. Skype was the preferred method of conducting video interviews because of its encryption services on all voice and video calls (Skype Inc., n.d.). However, if sources did not already have a Skype account, it seemed unnecessary to ask them to create a profile on yet another social media site, so Google Hangouts was the backup method for conducting these interviews. While Google is generally trusted for its safety and security, the company’s Director of Law Enforcement and Information Security Richard Salgado said in a public forum that Google Hangouts employs “in-transit” encryption (Salgado & Reddit Inc., 2015), which means that conversations are encrypted until they reach Google. Beyond that, the company has the power to release conversations to governmental bodies requesting wiretap access. However, to remain transparent, Google does release how often they receive these requests (Google Inc., 2017). Regardless, this information was not of high concern due to the low likelihood that my research would be considered worthy of being wiretapped by a governmental body.

Additionally, all participants were reminded of their ability to leave the study at any time without consequence. An application for IRB consideration was filed at the University of Missouri in May 2017 and was approved the following month.
Chapter Four – Results

The interviews with the photo editors revealed that nearly all of them either could not physically leave work during the trauma, or if they did, they continued working outside of the newsroom. Most of the editors said their publications ended up focusing on the aftereffects and the victims of the traumatic events, rather than solely the events themselves. Additionally, the majority of the photo editors specifically mentioned that they are still reminded of the traumatic events when they are physically near where it happened. Some said they don’t feel as though they will ever fully process the events they witnessed, but that it was easier to do so as the photo editor rather than the photographer, especially when considering the tactile stimuli, such as sounds and smells, that photographers experience while covering trauma, but photo editors do not.

Coping mechanisms

The first research question asked what methods photo editors used to cope with the emotional effects that came from editing images of traumatic events. The interview results revealed that editors employed a myriad of methods after the traumatic event had occurred. All seven photo editors felt unable to leave their work in the newsroom, either because they felt as though it was their responsibility to keep working from home, or, in some cases, because they physically could not leave due to how big the traumatic event was. Some photo editors chose to stay
connected to the news and continue working after they had left the newsroom, while others pursued external sources of relief, such as using counseling services or taking breaks from their work. One photo editor who works for a national wire service had extensive experience editing images from traumatic events that were not local to her, but she used similar coping mechanisms for these events and those local to her. She also mentioned that she occasionally has nightmares inspired by traumatic images she sees from foreign countries, where she dreams that she is actively experiencing the trauma from within a different country.

**Continuous work**

Photo Editors Three and Five were unable to return to their homes while the event was occurring. Photo Editor Three evacuated his home with his family and stayed in the newsroom for a few days before moving to an offsite, makeshift newsroom about 80 miles away, where he stayed for five weeks as he edited images from the trauma. His two daughters were sent to live with family members on the other side of the country for about five months while he and his wife stayed to cover the trauma. Photo Editor Five was only able to leave to shower at a nearby hotel before returning to work. She was the only visual leader in the newsroom at the time, and her publication was producing a special section covering a mass act of terror. From the time of the traumatic event through publication, she was at work without a break for roughly 48 hours.

The other five photo editors physically left their newsroom at the end of the day, but they mentally continued to work by looking for images of victims, catching up on other publications’ coverage of the trauma, or checking in with their
photographers to ensure their mental and physical safety. Photo Editor Seven said she constantly worries about what stories and pictures her publication may be missing, and Photo Editor Two said he feels the need to constantly check in with his photographers after a traumatic event due to their general inexperience in the field. All seven photo editors continued working, even though their shift had technically ended, and they continued to do so anywhere from days to months after the traumatic event.

**Work-sponsored aid**

Four photo editors described their news organizations as ones that provided free counseling services to their employees; however, only one of those four actually made use of that service. He said he found the service “incredibly beneficial” and that the service helped mitigate the potential long-term effects that traumatic events can cause (Photo Editor One). The other three photo editors had employees that made use of it, but they themselves did not feel the need to do so. One of the four photo editors who didn’t make use of the complementary counseling services said his publication brought in therapy dogs about a week after the trauma as an additional source of stress relief.

There were just puppies running all around the newsroom, and everything just stopped in the newsroom for 30 minutes. Everybody’s hugging puppies, loving on them, and taking pictures, and it was the first time I had seen anybody smile, laugh, or, in some cases, step away from the computer. (Photo Editor Six).

**Taking breaks**

While every photo editor indicated not being able to mentally step away from work, they also discussed the ability to take breaks and speak to loved ones for an
hour or two, which was a common theme in terms of stress relief. One photo editor said he hadn’t seen his wife much during the week of the trauma because of how busy he had been at his news organization, so they each took a break from work to partake in a community vigil together. By attending this vigil, he said he was able to feel a connection with the community and “be a human being for an hour or two.” He instantly returned to work after the vigil, but he said attending the event helped him emotionally process the trauma.

One editor found that taking breaks and speaking to loved ones wasn’t sufficient on its own, and she recalled purchasing a bottle of wine after editing images from the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, especially after reading the last words between a mother and her son, who was inside the club at the time of the shooting.

I don’t think it looks elegant, but I went to a wine shop, got a bottle of rosé, and called my mom, and told her about the text messages. I just wanted to hear my mom’s voice. I wanted to tell her that I loved her. It’s just like... that’s what I wanted to hear when I was out of there, after seeing those text messages with the son and his mom. Those were the last words to his mom, and it just ripped my heart out, and I wanted to talk to my mom right then (Photo Editor Seven).

These forms of connection either with one’s community or with their family remained a common theme throughout the interviews, and many photo editors mentioned personal anecdotes involving family members when describing handling the emotional effects of the traumatic events. However, working continuously was the most common theme in the responses from the photo editors, suggesting an
inability to avoid the trauma, as exhibited by Photo Editor Seven’s occasional nightmares.

Factors related to impact of traumatic events

The second research question asked what kinds of traumatic events most highly affected a photo editor, especially in regards to scale of the events. Most traumatic events can be categorized into two groups: smaller, more frequently occurring events with fewer victims; and larger, isolated events with more victims. Ultimately, both affected the photo editors, with one outweighing the other. When comparing smaller-scale, more frequent traumatic events, such as car crashes, building fires, or shootings with fewer victims, with larger-scale, less frequent events, such as natural disasters and mass acts of terror, one photo editor stated definitively that the smaller-scale events affected him more heavily, while three said that the larger-scale events were more impactful. Photo Editor Four said that the story behind the trauma affects his response to that question, rather than the scale, and data for Photo Editors Two and Five were not available for this research question.

Smaller-scale, frequent events

Photo Editor One said that the proximity of the trauma victims affects his response to the event. Because an event didn’t garner national or regional attention, there is less of a buffer, and photographers can more easily approach victims to gather first-hand accounts of what happened, which Photo Editor One then edits for publication.
At these national events, there’s more media, there’s more cops, there’s more first responders. So media and victims tend to push apart because there’s more filter in between media and victims. So the smaller scale things, you can walk right up to them and talk to them, and you can really connect with their pain and grief. You know, the majority of the time, people are willing to talk to you about what it is that they’re feeling, and they’re grieving, and they don’t really try to hide that grief. So you’re exposed to their grief and the circumstances that cover them. (Photo Editor One).

**Larger-scale, infrequent events**

Conversely, Photo Editors Three, Six, and Seven all said that the larger-scale events tend to impact them more heavily, especially when the trauma is local. Photo Editor Three, who edited images from Hurricane Katrina, said, “nobody was unaffected” during the natural disaster and that “nothing could ever compare with a big story like Katrina.” He felt like he built up a tolerance to looking at trauma because of the nature of his job, but knowing that the people in the images were in his hometown made his job harder than he anticipated.

Photo Editor Six, who edited images from the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, said the large-scale events aren’t more impactful just because of the number of victims, but also because of the proximity of the trauma. He said that having worked on trauma from all over the nation, nothing had ever made him cry at work before editing images from this particular shooting.

Both Photo Editors Six and Seven mentioned feeling extreme pressure during these bigger traumatic events because of how infrequent they are. Photo Editor Six said that he didn’t want to miss anything, especially considering that his staff had one chance to properly document anything related to the Pulse nightclub shooting.
Similarly, Photo Editor Seven credited the source of her pressure to her publication’s credibility, stating that many newsrooms and the public interpret what the Associate Press produces as fact.

Photo Editor Seven also said her responsibility as an Associated Press photo editor is to cover the top story of the day, and that she wants to know everything that happened during a traumatic event to produce better content, which ultimately impacts her personally more so than the smaller, frequent events. She said that the impact is relative to the job the photo editor has, such as at a national publication versus a community publication. However, in her experience, the traumatic events with more victims tend to affect her more heavily.

*Story-dependent*

The story behind the trauma is what most profoundly affected Photo Editor Four’s response to this question. As a father of two girls, he found himself reacting most strongly to tragedies involving young children. He specifically mentioned a six-year-old girl who died during the 2012 Aurora theater shooting as one that stuck with him the longest, but he also mentioned another unrelated killing of a 12-year-old girl that affected him just as heavily.

To me, that story is just as tragic as the many more people that died in the theater shooting. ... It’s usually because a specific person pops out at you or has an impact on you. It may not be as many people dead, but any individual story can really hit you hard. It doesn’t really matter on the number of people affected. (Photo Editor Four).

While Photo Editor Three maintained that large-scale events seem to have more of an impact, he also mentioned similar sentiments to Photo Editor Four. Being the father of two girls, Photo Editor Three also experiences some stories
revolving around young children that cause him to pause and reflect on life, such as one involving a 10-year-old girl and a drive-by shooting.

Ultimately, more photo editors found the large-scale traumatic events more impactful than the small-scale, but personal interaction with the community and the victims is what affected that decision. It should also be noted that four photo editors mentioned that they edit images of trauma from around the world and that the process is similar, no matter where the trauma happens.

**Relationship between photo editor and photographers**

The third and final research question focused on the relationship between the photo editor and photographers, and the impact this relationship played on the role the photo editor held. All of the photo editors felt a personal connection with their staff photographers, as most had been working with their photographers for years prior to the traumatic event that identified the editor as a source for the study. Many photo editors mentioned having personal, friendly relationships with their photographers outside of work, which ultimately led to greater feelings of responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of those photographers while on the job, as well as someone who acts as a source of information.

...When they're out there, they need someone who is responsive, and they need someone who is going to get them the facts and the answers and buckle down when it's time, and they know that that's going to be me as well (Photo Editor Seven).

Four photo editors definitively said that the personal friendships they had with their staff photographers increased their feelings of responsibility while the photographers were covering the trauma, which could be viewed as an added
source of stress on the photo editor. Photo Editor One said he felt “at minimum big
brother-ish” with his staff photographers, and he emphasized the importance of
having a trusting relationship between the photographer and the photo editor that
allows the photographer to admit when he or she has seen too much recent trauma.
However, Photo Editor Three said that knowing his staff outside of work helped him
coordinate coverage better while keeping in mind his photographers’ preferences.

I think the difference it made knowing them personally, you know
their quirks, and the stress points that some people have. You know
some people don’t like certain things. Like one photographer was
afraid of flying, so I wouldn’t put him on a helicopter to shoot aerials.
We knew we had to send somebody else to do it. So you knew that
stuff about their personal lives, and you kind-of pointed them in the
right direction so they felt comfortable. (Photo Editor Three).

Photo Editor Two had an unusual situation, as he acted not only as a leader,
but also as a teacher. Because his staff comprises mostly college-aged students with
little professional experience, he felt even more conscious of how his photographers
may be feeling.

As a photo editor, I actually find it more important to talk with the
photographer afterward to really make sure where their headspace is.
I want to do no harm to these young minds, and I’m very conscious
that we may have somebody who may have just witnessed something
for the first time. It’s one thing to work with the 30-40 year olds that
I’ve worked with in other newsrooms and [acted differently], because
we’ve all been there. But with this group especially, it’s a unique
situation. I want to make sure that when we walk out of here, we’re
cool, or as cool as we can be. And then I might text that photographer
later in the evening [to check in] or something like that, just like a
touch point (Photo Editor Two).
Ultimately, the photo editor is seen as the obvious leader of the photographers, but he or she often acts as a confidant for the photographers when they are unable to cover more emotional turmoil after a recent traumatic event.
Chapter Five – Conclusion

Photo editing and the psychology behind the process have long remained understudied. This study set out to discover if photo editors were affected by the potentially graphic imagery found in photos of traumatic events, how photo editors handled the psychological stress that stems from editing such images, and how a relationship between a photo editor and photographer affects the photo editor’s role during the traumatic event. This particular report lends itself to theories that STS can be prevalent amongst photo editors, especially when considering Photo Editor Seven’s nightmares inspired by traumatic photos as described in the first research question. Additionally, when considering the amount of work done by a photo editor that often goes unnoticed, it is necessary to consider how important a photo editor’s job is, and how much work might not be done without them.

Methods and mechanisms

It was anticipated that methods such as counseling or taking breaks would be most frequently employed. However, it was ultimately found that most photo editors preferred to work through the trauma, and that doing so was a sort of therapy itself. This concept suggests the idea that photo editors may be overworking themselves as a means of avoiding a confrontation with emotional turmoil. Photo Editor Four acknowledged that by doing so, he might one day experience a larger emotional reaction upon retirement, but he doesn’t believe that
he has allowed himself to fully feel the tragedy. This avoidance is in line with and supports the results found in both Ricchiardi’s 2001 study, and Buchanan & Keats’ 2011 study. Additionally, as mentioned, one photo editor mentioned an alcohol purchase after editing traumatic images, which is in line with Levaot, Sinvor, & Feinstein’s 2013 study on Western journalists and their coping mechanisms. This method of coping was anticipated to be more prevalent due to the previously established research, which could perhaps be due to an unwillingness to give a candid response to a stranger.

**Kinds of traumatic events**

Because of the scale that nationally recognized trauma seems to employ, it was anticipated and supported that large-scale traumatic events would be far more impactful for photo editors. A larger event causes a need for more photographers to cover the trauma, which produces more images for a photo editor to evaluate, thus increasing the frequency of exposure to the trauma. However, Photo Editor Four’s notion that the situation determines how impactful the event will be was insightful and unexpected. By considering personal experiences as a framework when interpreting traumatic events, the scope and impact of trauma may be widened. Because one photo editor stated that smaller, more frequent events are more impactful, it may be interesting to determine how widespread this sentiment is, and what factors led to this decision. Photo Editor One mentioned that the lack of buffer between victims and media, as typically seen in nationally-recognized events, allows for a greater understanding of grief, but it could be argued that the same understanding of grief comes regardless of how large the aforementioned buffer
may be. This variability between responses indicates that the effects in photo editors caused by traumatic events may be based more on personal experiences, rather than the traumatic event itself. Characteristics of the event that resonate with one photo editor could trigger certain responses, even though those characteristics might not resonate with other photo editors. Ultimately, this means it may be near impossible to distinguish exactly what causes photo editors to react a certain way, meaning any sort of training program designed for photo editors would need to be highly tailored to its participants. Another training program option would be to help photo editors understand their reactions to traumatic events and identify what might cause these reactions. Further, those training programs could educate photo editors on numerous ways to respond in a mentally healthy manner, even though the individual applications would be varied.

**The relationship between photographers and photo editors**

The relationship between the two roles was found to be a cherished, trusting one. By cultivating a personal relationship between the two, photo editors largely felt more responsible for their staff photographers, and in some cases, photographers felt more comfortable expressing their concerns to their photo editors. By acknowledging this relationship, the importance of the photo editor is emphasized, and the role of the photo editor is demonstrated as not just a photo selector, but also an advocate for the photographer, which supports the previously mentioned literature (Loengard, 1991). By having a contact in the newsroom that they trust, the photographers could feel liberated enough to make pictures that might not normally be selected, knowing that if those different pictures are selected
for publication, they will be handled with care by a trusted photo editor, no matter how many hands might touch the photos before publication (Zavoina & Reichert, 2000).

Furthermore, these results indicate how frequently photographers rely on their photo editor for information about the event they are covering, which could be regarded as an additional source of stress on the photo editor to perform at the highest possible caliber and minimize mistakes or false information. The relationship between the two does not only cause stress on the photo editor by requiring a sense of responsibility for guaranteeing that the images are treated with care before publication, but also for ensuring another human’s safety. The combination of the photo editor acting as an advocate for the images as well as a resource for the photographer exemplifies a potential added source that could lead to the development of STS.

**Professional implications**

The results of this study can be used to develop training programs specifically for photo editors not just in how to properly and accurately edit photos of trauma, but also how to work with photographers who might not know how to best handle their own emotions after covering a traumatic event. This particular area of study has not previously been researched, so it is believed that this knowledge and the potential future training programs will create a stronger, more resilient journalistic work force that can better serve the public during stressful times due to newfound abilities to cope with traumatic events. However, as previously mentioned, the characteristics of a traumatic event that trigger certain
responses in photo editors vary widely, meaning the training programs will either need to be tailored to the participants, or they will need to be broad enough to cover all forms of trauma.

Additionally, because the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders does not recognize STS as its own mental disorder, rather than as a subsidiary of PTSD, this study may aid in the recognition of the disorder by mental health professionals (Levin, Kleinman, & Adler, 2014).

**Limitations and future opportunities for research**

Because this study was one of the first to research the mental health of photo editors, it was limited to a smaller pool of photo editors that worked and edited images from traumatic events located within the continental United States. Future studies can expand to study a greater number of photo editors, or studies could include text and video editors to see if similar results occur across different forms of media. Other studies may focus on traumatic events that happened outside of the continental United States, or some may concern themselves with the relationship between a photo editor and a photographer when the two do not typically operate within the same newsroom. Additionally, in a survey of professional news photographers, 85% of respondents identified as male (Hadland, Campbell, & Lambert, 2015). Because the responses of five of the seven photo editors analyzed for this particular study were male, this study remained relatively representative of the field. However, it would be interesting to revisit this area of research in decades to come to see if more females were working in this field, and to see if the results differed from this study.
Another possible future study would look at further understanding the butterfly effect caused by traumatic events. For this, researchers could look into the tertiary traumatic stress that a photo editor’s family may or may not feel as a supporter of someone experiencing secondary traumatic stress (Stamm, 1997).
References


Salgado, R., & Reddit Inc. (2015, May 8). We are senior members of Google’s public policy and legal teams. AUA about the current status of US government surveillance law reform and how Google thinks about these issues. • r/IAmA. Retrieved October 23, 2017, from https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/35b6bt/we_are_senior_members_of_googles_public_policy/


Appendix A – Descriptions Of Photo Editors

1. Photo Editor One works in southern California and is a former military photographer with roughly 20 years of experience. He edited images from the 2015 shooting in San Bernardino, California.

2. Photo Editor Two works in Missouri as the Director of Photography for a community newspaper. He frequently works with newer, college-aged photojournalists. He discusses editing images from a local suicide and the 2011 tornado in Joplin, Missouri.

3. Photo Editor Three worked as the primary photo editor for the local newspaper during the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana.

4. Photo Editor Four works as the Senior Editor of Photography in Denver, Colorado. He edited images from the 2012 movie theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado.

5. Photo Editor Five works as the Director of Photography at the Washington Post. She was the primary photo editor at Time Magazine in New York City during the attacks of September 11, 2001.

6. Photo Editor Six is the Assistant Managing Editor for Visuals and Multimedia at the Orlando Sentinel. He managed a team of about a dozen photographers, videographers, and editors during the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting, which was down the street from the newspaper.
7. Photo Editor Seven is a photo editor at the Associated Press in New York City. She has edited images from traumatic events across the United States, including the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, the October 2017 Las Vegas shooting, and November 2017 truck attack in Manhattan, New York, amongst others.
Appendix B – Interview Transcripts

*Photo Editor One interview transcript:*

So if you wouldn’t mind just describing December 2nd for me – how did it start, how did it end?

So there were nine newspapers [in our newspaper group], and at the time I was the photo editor for three of those newspapers. I was working out of the Ontario office that day which is about 25 miles from San Bernardino and started hearing scanner calls, and at first, when you hear on the scanner something of that magnitude, it’s usually training. But as it started to progress, you could tell in the voices of the police officers and the dispatchers that it was not training. So I started making calls to photographers who were working in the area and getting them on the scene. So then... usually what I’ll do is I’ll pull up a Google map and look at where [the event] is at and start asking where [the photographers] are and sending them to different locations. ... We [as photographers] kind-of like to clump together during things like this because there’s comfort there to know that people that you know and trust are there next to you. But as an editor, we want to spread them out and send them to different areas. So then it just turned into a very long day and long night, but that’s how it started. And then I started calling editors at the other newspapers and borrowing photographers and having them send photographers to me from the rest of the group. So at that time I had four [photographers from our group] working, and I asked for another four photographers to be sent so we had eight
photographers by the end of the day working. And as it progressed, we found out that we needed to be at three different cities... so we were trying to staff those three different ones. They're not that far between. So that's basically how it started.

How much time spanned between hearing these calls and thinking it was training, and actually calling photographers?

Oh, five minutes.

How did you feel at different points in the day? Such as, when you first heard about it versus when you first heard about the death toll versus the end of the day... And when did the day end?

So I think the impact of these things, I think about them through the years, and I think about having covered them and managing them. You're just thinking about things you need to do. So that's where your first thoughts go – we need photos ASAP. So we need the photographers to tweet, right? We need photos, we need video, and we need it right now. So the photographers who are shooting stills are also tweeting the incident, and we're trying to get that up on the web right now, because that's what we think about now. Our readers don't wait till tomorrow morning at 6 a.m. when the paper hits the driveway. They're going to the internet, and they are going to our site cause it's happening [here]. So I'm not really thinking about that impact on me personally, or how I feel about it emotionally. I am thinking about getting images turned around as quickly as possible, even to the extent that, "Just send me your photos, and I will caption them. Just send me raw images, and I'll take care of them," and that basically runs into late at night. After you've fed the web and you've got photos in for print and you're selecting a leading image for A1, you're
opening inside pages and you're also trying to find photos that marry with the narrative. Photographers and reporters aren't always together, so sometimes the story, the narrative, can look different from some of the photos, so you're searching through by now hundreds of photos and trying to figure out, "Well, we've got a photo on survivors, we've got a photo on families being reunited, we've got photos about the dead, we have photos on the victims, survivors, and police..." So trying to find photos that are [different] ... and encouraging my editors that the best photo of the day may not necessarily fit their narrative like they think it's going to, but the photo will tell the story itself. So this extends well into the evening because as you're selecting photos and you're rotating photos on the web as you get fresh photos, you're also planning for the next day. "What's the next thing?" On an event this big, you really don't stop to consider the impact of what you witnessed from that part of it for days or weeks down the line because you're so involved in the story as it unravels that you're simply looking to the next day.

How late did you stay at work, or did you even leave before the next day? And what happened when you left work?

I probably did not leave the office until 11 that night, and then I was in the next day by probably 7 o'clock. But even when you go home, you're still working. You're monitoring what's going on. By this time, the media world was here. All of the major outlets had [local bureaus]... they basically don't go home. They're camped out at whatever spot. So you're kind-of up all night anyway monitoring anything that might be relevant to the next day's story.
So what was your relationship like with the photographers that you were working with? Were they direct employees? Were they stringers? Were you friends outside of work?

So there were some freelancers in the area who had called me after they had heard and asked if they could help. So there were two freelancers in addition to the eight staff photographers that were in the group. So the freelancers... one or two of them I'm friends with outside of work, and of the staff, some of them I've known for probably 20 years because I've worked in this area since 1988 as a staff photographer for various newspapers, as an assist photo editor at one of the other newspapers and eventually photo editor. So I've known a lot of the photographers for 20 years or so. A lot of them have become friends and some of the younger photographers are sort-of like my kids. I feel at minimum big brother-ish toward them, so I kind-of feel protective of them, especially younger ones that haven't been involved in something this magnitude before.

So does this relationship affect how you interact with the photographers during the event or after? Maybe did you feel more or less responsible for them based on your relationship with them?

Yes. I think, first of all, to be a photo editor, you have to establish trust with photographers on a day-to-day basis. You have to be that filter when your assignments are sort-of bull**** assignments, and you turn down a lot of assignments that come your way, and you don't give them to the photographers. So imagine all these people that were killed, eventually we're covering all of these funerals. The funeral is the most visceral form of grief, especially when somebody
dies tragically. You know how emotionally draining it can be. I'm still a working photojournalist, especially with breaking news because our staff is spread out so thinly that if we have breaking news close to the office I'm at, I'll go to the breaking news [until another photographer can get there], then I'll leave. So one of the things that we do, and we all do it differently, is that we go to these things and disassociate or compartmentalize. "I'm just here, I'm photographing what I see in front of me. Yes it's sad, it's tragic, but I'm looking for the sad and the tragic, and I'm looking for the human element that's compelling – that people will look at these photos and feel something." And I think those things, when you send people out to photograph these things, that it has a cumulative effect on them. Some of us are able to accumulate more of it over a longer period of time before we say "I can't, I can't do another funeral." And some people, less time. I think as a photo editor, you have to be able to determine who is better able to weather this event over others, and check in with them too. Just simply asking, "How are you doing? How are you feeling? Are you okay? Yeah I looked at your images. Man, that was heart wrenching. How are you?" And that's why I talked about trust before – establishing that trust so that they're able to call me up and say, "Hey I see you have me on that funeral tomorrow. Is there anybody else who can do it? I can't do another funeral." So I think that's an important part of it as well. Just as an aside, I was a military photographer, and one of the things that myself and some of the other photographers established was a wingman program, and we looked for PTSD from some of our photographers coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan. So being aware of that fact what it can do, and the cumulative effect it can have.
How long did it take for you personally to process the event, and if any, what sort of coping mechanisms did you use?

Our company has something... it’s basically free counseling. As an employee, you can get six free visits to a counselor, a mental health professional. You can use it for anything, and it doesn’t have to be work related. It’s free and available to employees. This is a stressful business outside of covering something like this stuff, so kind-of noticing not only myself, but also the employees you know when they’re having trouble. And one of the best people that helped me was my wife, because we don’t recognize it in ourselves a lot of times. And she would say, “Hey are you okay?” ”Oh yeah, I’m fine.” “Hey are you okay?” ”Oh yeah, I’m fine.” ”Hey are you okay?” ”Yes, I’m fine! Shut the hell up!” You know? You notice when something’s wrong when your behavior is different from what it normally is. You get more anxious. You get nervous. You don’t handle the line at Starbucks as well. That’s when you seek out counseling, and yes, I have used that service myself. It is incredibly beneficial, and I think if you recognize it early, and you try to deal with it early, you’ll mitigate the long-term effect from it. So it’ll be just stress versus PTSD.

About how long did it take for you to feel okay with what happened?

I don’t think you ever feel okay with it. I think you... you know after 30 years of being a photojournalist and a photo editor, you witness a lot of tragedy through the years, and some things tend to stay with you more than others. It’s that way with all of us. Some people, covering this they’ll look at it and say, ”Yeah it sucked, but I made some great photos,” and it’s not as cavalier as that sounds. That sounds unfair, and it sounds like they’re not affected by it. They are affected by it, but to a lesser
degree than other people. So I guess what I'm trying to say is you never really get okay with the tragic events you cover. Some of them affect you long-term more than others. And on something like this, it helps to talk about it with your colleagues that you experienced it with, and it helps to know that what you saw, what you were part of, that you're not alone.

Do you think it would've been easier or harder to process the event if you had photographed it versus someone else? So, because you were acting as the photo editor, was it easier or harder to process the image versus if you had shot them yourself?

You know as a photographer, they're shooting the images and they're picking their best and sending them in. And as a photo editor, I'm going through that times eight or 10 with a big event like that. I think not being there, you're able to effectively disassociate a little bit better, and just look at the best image. So when you're kind-of going through, you've got Photo Mechanic up, or Lightroom or Bridge or whatever. And you're just going through, "Nope, nope, nope, nope; ooh that's a good one – tag. Nope, nope, nope; oh, that's nice – tag." So you're just kind-of filing through images looking for what is visually the most compelling. So I think I was able to disassociate from that experience a little more effectively than if I was [there]. And I don't see the sights, hear the noise, smell whatever's there... all those sense triggers that you have when you're at these events that might trigger something later on like noise, sound, smell, or something tactile. I think I was better able to process the experience as a photo editor versus the photographers.
So what kind of narrative did you ultimately craft for the publication? Was it more focused on the events or the effects? Or something else?

So we have a meeting, and a lot of times they’re phone conferences. We’re looking at photos – myself, my editor, my senior editor, and the VP of news. We’re all looking at photos. Everyone has their favorite photos. Everybody likes photos of cops with guns. And sort-of my argument against that is, look, we see photos of cops with guns all the time and they’re sort-of indistinguishable from one event to the next, and I always will go toward the human experience. We are trying to communicate a tragedy here, and if we use as our lead image on the page cops with guns, that’s not going to [show] the tragedy. So what we used was a photo of family members reuniting, and they’re hugging and crying, and that really goes to that day. When you think about that day and you personalize it... What if one of my family members was in there, and what would I be doing? What if I was in there, and I was reuniting with those family members that were waiting on me? What’s the experience? I will always go toward the emotions, you know, the human experience. And then, you know, you do have to include the cops and the first responders because they were a big part of this. So you look for the compelling images, and one of the photos I really like was shot by one of our photographers. She shot this swat vehicle with cops just hanging all over it, just draped on the side, hanging off this thing. And so that’s what I like to look for with these cop photos. What are the cop photos we don’t normally see? You always see a cop with a gun, right? A cop standing there behind yellow tape, a cop talking into a radio... these are kind-of generic photos that we tend to pull up if we have a crime story and we use file art. But these are just kind-of evergreen
photos that we can use with anything across the country. So that’s the second thing I look for - what’s different? Like when you look at it and say, "Oh you don’t see that everyday." And kind-of the coup de grâce is an emotional cop or cops looking really freaked out. That’s the other thing you look for, like, "Man if a cop is freaked out, may be I should be freaked out." So that’s how I evaluate at the end of the day. And as a photo editor, I like to think that it’s not about winning the decision about what gets played dominant, it’s about having the best argument. At Poynter, they have an online university. One of the free courses you can take is called the language of the image, and what it does is it basically teaches photographers and photo editors how to argue for their photo. And they teach you how to argue for that photo in a way that word people will understand because photographers generally go to, "Because it’s a cool photo." You know, as a student of photography, you can look at it and know that’s a great image, but you have to be able to take that emotional visceral response to an image and turn it into a narrative, into a language that word editors can understand. As photographers and photo editors, we’re outnumbered in the newsroom. The majority of the people in that newsroom have no photo experience other than consuming photos like the general public does.

**What is it like having to live where the trauma happened?**

I live in the city where the shooters lived. They lived in these condos that my wife and I looked at when we first were living here and were looking for a place to buy. You see things like that. The newspaper had just moved their office downtown. The old building was a block and a half from where the shooters lived. Where the shooters lived was about a mile and a half from where my kids went to school, so
you think about things like that. When I drive by there now, I still think, "Oh yeah, that's where those shooters lived." so in terms of San Bernardino, I can disassociate from it because I don't live there. I work out of that office a couple days a week, but I don't really think about it all that much. There's a street corner that is near Inland Regional Center where the shooting happened that has turned sort-of into a memorial, and it's kind-of a sad memorial. It's not kept up real well, but occasionally people will still go by there and drop off flowers or stick a cross in the ground or hang a balloon off the fence. So that's sort-of a reminder. And once again, as a newspaper we tend to drag these things up annually, so you have to relive it, and you look for a new way to cover it when that happens. So yeah, you don't forget it, and there are daily reminders. It just kind-of tends to get lower and lower [in terms of priority level in your mind] the further in time that goes by.

**What do you think is harder to handle: larger-scale traumatic events like this that happen every now and then, versus smaller scale events like car accidents or building fires, that happen more frequently? Which is more difficult?**

I think it's the circumstance. Of course something large scale like this, we tend to cover longer, so you're in it longer. So the larger events like this, you tend to get more emotionally exhausted because you cover them for so long, and you tend to want to put it out of your mind. You don't want to think about it as much – you're just done with it. I think maybe it's these isolated incidences where car crashes, shootings, fires, where it's not national or even regional news. It's local news, but you're more exposed to the victims and their families and their emotions because there's no barrier between you and them. At these national events, there's more
media, there’s more cops, there’s more first responders. So media and victims tend to push apart because there’s more filter in between media and victims. So the smaller scale things, you can walk right up to them and talk to them, and you can really connect with their pain and grief. You know, the majority of the time, people are willing to talk to you about what it is that they’re feeling, and they’re grieving, and they don’t really try to hide that grief. So you’re exposed to their grief and the circumstances that cover them. So probably the smaller scale things that have more long-term effect on you as a photographer and as a photo editor.

**Do you have anything else you’d like to add?**

I think probably something we had talked about earlier is that I think it’s really important as a photographer to make sure that you can trust your photo editor or editors, that you’ve developed a good relationship with them... where you feel safe to surrender, to wave the flag and say, "I can’t do this," because I have photographers that have told me just even on funerals and stuff not related to these bigger events, "I can’t do this." You know, we have a lot of violence in San Bernardino, a lot of shootings, and kids get caught in crossfires. And we cover these events, and I do have photographers that they’re fine on one, but the next one they’ll say, "I can’t do this," and I’m okay with that. Their mental health is important. They’ve got to come back tomorrow to work. So I’ll say that about the photographers, but I’ll also say for photo editors that you have to engender trust with the people that work for you, that they should be able to come to you when they can’t carry on anymore, when they can’t shoot one more car crash, or when they can’t shoot one more funeral. And as a photo editor, we have to take care of
ourselves as well. We have to be able to say, “I’ve had too much,” and seek counseling. Most newspapers or companies have some sort of plan where you can seek counseling. And I think the sooner you talk to someone, the sooner you get it out of your head and say it verbally, that right there is half the battle, because it’s not clunking around in your head and creating anxiety.
Photo Editor Two interview transcript:

Has there been some sort of traumatic event that you edited images from?

Quite a few, from car accidents, to shootings, to suicides, to fires. As a photojournalist on the street, there's me and my individual experience in photographing some of these, but as an editor, now you have maybe five or eight photojournalists on the street. So that increases your odds for seeing more variety, different type, and in a general sense, more breaking news pictures. So I think of the first time we covered... this may have been the second or third suicide where someone had jumped off that garage downtown. What is it, 12 stories? And it's really easy to get to the edge and jump off. So it's a really easy place to [die by] suicide. So it's about 4 or 5 o'clock; it's rush hour downtown. And it happens, and you know, covering suicide, you're kind-of [experiencing] mixed emotions anyway because if you cover it, does it put the thought into people's minds more so that they will then also duplicate those efforts? This person decided to jump off, and the body was clearly visible, and there were many people watching. If someone hangs themselves in their home or poisons themselves in their bathroom, it's a very private, very easy-to-ignore event. So you have a body on an awning, and there are 50 people gawking at it with their cell phones and everything. And the photojournalist shows up and starts taking pictures, and because they're a young photojournalist, she calls and says, "I don't know if we can run these pictures, because all I'm seeing is the body." And through our conversation, I realized she was using a long lens just looking at the body. So I said, "Stop. First off, you're right, that's probably not a picture that we can run. It's good you shot that. But start
looking around at the people who are gawking, and shoot the scene." And she does and comes back, and we edit. Of course, there are the detail shots that are so tight that we can see heart monitoring devices on the person’s torso. And of course, you see the body, and then the body’s covered up, but you still see the arm hanging out. Looking at it, I’m removed. And of course you think, "I wonder who the family members are, what the history is," and all of that, but at the moment, [you have to ask] what the most tasteful images are, and then we have a discussion about that.

As a photo editor, I actually find it more important to talk with the photographer afterward to really make sure where their headspace is. I want to do no harm to these young minds, and I’m very conscious that we may have somebody who may have just witnessed something for the first time. It’s one thing to work with the 30-40 year olds that I’ve worked with in other newsrooms and [acted differently], because we've all been there. But with this group especially, it's a unique situation. I want to make sure that when we walk out of here, we’re cool, or as cool as we can be. And then I might text that photographer later in the evening [to check in] or something like that, just like a touch point.

And there’s no manual for this, you know? I think empathy, having been in the situation myself and really caring about everybody who walks through here, I don’t want anybody to leave too mentally scarred. The fact of doing journalism is somewhat scarring anyway. You just get over the fact that we’re going to be talking about sexual assault, murder, abuses, fire, and racism in every form. That’s what we talk about in this business, and this may be the first time that any of the people in this newsroom are actually witnessing an experience like this, so I want that first
time to be gentler. You learn from experience, so I guess I’m trying to make their experience a little less harsh than my experiences at that time.

**So how did you feel at different points in the day when you were editing images from this?**

I think when I’m talking to the photographer, I’m like the 911 dispatcher. You don’t want the dispatcher to get all excited, you know? She has the most calming voice in the world. So I say, "Okay, channel the 911 dispatcher, the person who receives that call." If you're a 911 dispatcher, the worst thing you could probably deliver is the news "officer down." And you don't want to say that with full-heightened emotion because that’s just going to inflate and pour gas on an already horrible situation. I’m the same way. I don’t want to yell at a photojournalist in that situation so they [start to freak out]. I don’t want to add fuel to that. So during the day when I’m talking to that photographer, it’s like, "Well, let's get away from looking at that body and look around. Can you tell me what you see?" All the sudden, I’m asking them a question and that’s kind-of a way for them to maybe calm down. They begin to tell me, and I'll be reinforcing and really nurturing in a way. And again, it's this group. I would probably be less nurturing with a 40-year-old. I don't want to claim ageism; I'm not sure what I’m trying to say there. I just think there's a lesson in experience there. But the whole time I’m really thinking, "I hope nobody gets mad at the photojournalist." If anything, I have a little bit of fear and hope that it all goes safely for the photojournalist in the field, because the last thing I ever want to do is have to deal with somebody getting arrested or hurt or really screamed at, and just making sure that experience goes as well as possible while still trying to tell the story. There
are so many levels to what's going on there. And meanwhile I'm sitting here saying, "Well what do we have on the front page tomorrow? What's on the website tomorrow? And how will this play into our schedule of coverage right now?" So there's a lot of emotional and practical going on at the same time. It's a really weird balance because you have a mission to accomplish, and you want the people in the field to come back as safely as possible. In the editing, then, I guess you can say that I'm looking at the picture and listening to the photographer talk about the situation. I've maybe brought another editor in. In fact, I remember the executive editor was actually taking a look and asking me what I thought. And it's funny because everyone kind-of goes through these same checklist of, "What will people think? What will family think? Do we have identification?" We all ran through them at different cadences, but we were all kind-of going through that ourselves. "If we run this, what happens?" I think in the end, because it was a suicide we went really tame with the edit.

**So you ended up focusing more on the aftereffects of the suicide, rather than the suicide itself?**

I would say we focused on the spectacle. So we had the overall shot that showed the response, and then we turned the cameras around and looked at the people staring. We had two photographs, and in total, they probably showed maybe 15-20 out of the 50 or so that were kind-of there to take it all in, and I thought that was really important to show, the spectacle, rather than the body. In this case, I think the body may have been a touch sensational. I hate to go there, to say that word, but I just don't think that it was in the proper context especially with the suicide. So I thought
it was more of an interesting comment on us as a society when you have all of these people staring at the cameras and taking cell phone photos. I mean, I know why we’re there, you know? Y’all are there by choice. I told someone to go there, whether they really wanted to or not.

**So after you left the newsroom, did you keep working? How did you feel while processing afterward? Did you process, or were you too removed?**

I kept going back to the fact that it was rush hour, the fact that all those people were gawking. I kept thinking, "What sort of bad news did this person get?" And whenever I see this, I think sometimes the safest thing to do is attempt to ask, "What is it like to be in their shoes?" and trying to figure out the empathy with people. I do that to everyone, before a critique, whether it’s with anger or praise, you know? What’s it like in their shoes? And naturally, you wonder what was going on with this person’s suicide. And there’s no apples-to-apples here because my framework for reference in life is totally different than yours or hers or anybody else’s. It’s flawed, totally flawed, but it’s about the only way you can help make sense of the world. So as far as processing, I’m thinking about that photojournalist and about that victim, and just what that person may have been going through to push them to that extreme. And then you think about the act of doing it: what floor would they have chosen? How would they have gone about that? You walk through about 10 different scenarios. What was the news that drove them to do this? What was their mental state? How was it done? And meanwhile, you might think back and wonder if the photojournalist is doing okay. And that’s probably, you know, as those different emotions go through, you think, "Well I better check back in with the photographer
just to make sure things are still okay." What's really interesting is there was another photojournalist who had shot two completely different styles of death. It was these slower, extremely personal stories, and I feel like, because there was such an emotional connection to those, that was not a breaking news situation, but where she told more of a warming story, and death was somehow a part of that. When you show up and there's a suicide on the garage, you have no connection. You're just showing up. But with a story that's long-form with death involved, you know the characters well. That actually I think can be even more difficult because you've made a connection. So if the character, my subject, or an element of the story has passed away, I know the person, and I know how that affects my subject, and it puts it in context. That will actually affect the photographer and the edit differently. So there are so many levels to this, and you don't know where these so called traumatic visuals will come through. They could come through [snap] now, or a photographer that might have been following somebody for three weeks, their subject could be dying today, and we are there. Hospice would be a great example. ... I get more emotional about the connection, because of the love, tenderness, empathy, and respect for a fellow human being, as opposed to, "Dammit, someone decided to end their life today via suicide." And that is a tragedy, and there's so much there, but it's harder to have as much of an emotional connection.

Do you think the relationship you have with the photographer affects how you edit?

Yeah, I think even with the photojournalist who dealt with that, when it's all over, you check in, and they know what I mean. I just want to somehow stop them and
check in, and it’s not a confrontational thing. I think a lot of students probably know what I’m talking about. Really fast, you’ve got to gut check, especially with all of the emotions or thoughts. It’s a good way to calm things down. You find these little tricks, but they’re not like rocket science. It’s things I’ve just figured out as we go.

We do need to process things. I think the stages of grief are probably like the same thing. At first, you’re in disbelief, and then you’re pissed, and you cry, and man I don’t know what those processes are but I feel like a news cycle is a lot like that. You have a whole lot of adrenaline trying to get there, and then all of the sudden, reality hits you in the face. Because it was all about getting there, and when a photojournalist is sitting there and you’re looking through their work, you also want to make sure that they are okay. You’re looking at the photography very critically now, but it’s just also what you’re looking at is very hard to ingest. A person saw it when they shot it, and now they’re kind-of maybe reliving it, so I check in more frequently. And then, if I’m dealing with a photojournalist who has been on staff for quite a few years, maybe toward the end or if there’s a quiet moment, I’ll check in. I mean, you don’t do that with football.

**Do you think that the relationship you have with the photographer, how long you’ve known them, etc... Does that affect the narrative that you craft?**

Oh quite possibly. I think the longer I know somebody, the more I can read them and know signs of when there’s higher or lower stress, or I understand them better, I think. Logically, it makes sense.
So does that cause you to pick different photos than you would if you didn't know them as well?

No, I don't think so. I think the editing is going to be the same, because the one constant here is what I understand, what I see, how I've experienced photography, and how readers experience it. I think the one constant there is that I have to trust myself, but I also know that I have to listen really carefully to what people are saying. And sometimes, if you're looking through and the person you're talking to doesn't say anything, that's just as powerful. And sure, I get to know these people, and by week three or four, I have a sense. I mean, I've sent two photojournalists to Joplin on day one. I'm meeting both of them, and they go to Joplin, and my anxiety is very high because I have two very green individuals going into the worst disaster this state had seen in years. And they saw a lot of destruction, but they didn't see any death. And I was talking to them each night, doing a lot of texting during the day, going over everything, and doing a lot of rehashing. I was worried they'd see bodies. We hadn't talked about traumatic journalism and traumatic situations and how to digest this kind-of stuff. I was concerned I was sending these people into a real nightmare of a situation. So I knew upfront that I was in this deeper than I would normally be. First off, if you send two people to Joplin, you're in this [pretty deep], but if you send two green ones to Joplin, you're in even deeper, and high anxiety for me. The thing I kept asking was, "How are you doing? What are you seeing?" And I'll never forget this: they said, "We talked about this on the way down, we thought, 'what are we going to see?' We mentally prepared ourselves and did exactly what we were supposed to do. I think we were really ready to see dead people, but we
weren't prepared to see nothing. We can stand on the street, and there's nothing left." That's powerful. Their trauma was actually from seeing complete obliteration, not from seeing what we all expected. And I've gone back and read accounts of the wounded walking to the hospital in Joplin. The accounts from the nurses and the doctors that day talked about people walking back to the hospital carrying their arm in one hand or with things impaled into their bodies – just some really horrific stuff. And I think that somewhat there's this expectation that we might see these horribly wounded or dead people, but it was just this aspect of nothing, and that actually kind-of tripped them out a little bit.

**How did it make you feel?**

When they told me that, it kind-of sucked the air out of me for a minute because you're kind-of like, "Whoa, that's not what I expected to hear either." And the first thing I said was, "Well, I guess you have to figure out how to photograph nothing." I told my wife, "This is deeper than I thought." I've been to tornado scenes. I grew up in KS. I've covered a lot of tornadoes and had these expectations. I covered an F4 or F5 that went through part of Kansas, and that obliterated all kinds of stuff, but at least there was stuff. I think we ran a picture [of Joplin] that kind-of summed it up. There were a lot of broken things in this picture, but nothing identifiable, and that was probably the worst blender of a tornado that you don't want to be near. So that was eye opening. I think it's the things you don't expect. I didn't expect them to say that, so it sticks with me. What I wouldn't expect is to show up at a burning car wreck and suddenly see screaming children trapped. That would probably be pretty horrible. I think that having children changed me. It took the whole empathy thing
and turned it up to volume 10 or 11. Suddenly, I thought of everything in the context of parents and children, and that actually complicated doing journalism for me. I don’t know; it changed it all.

Is there anything else you’d like to add?

I don’t know. We could talk about situations for a long time, but I feel like as an editor in some ways, especially in this situation... I’ve never tried to incite more energy into an already energetic situation. I always want that photographer to have that calmness about themselves, and to know that when they’re in the scene, that I’ve got their back. I want them to do what they need to do, and we both have this deep understanding that whatever we’re doing here, we don’t know where this is going. It could go bad or south really fast, and you could witness something that you never really wanted to. And I think that this is that, "Welcome to journalism. We’re not going to talk about puppies and kittens here, we’re going to talk about sexual assault, racism, death, destruction, mayhem, lawlessness, and all the things that are horrible that go with it. And you’re going to hear people. I mean I’ve sat in interviews where you’re just like, "Okay, I cannot cry along with this person right now. I’m just the photographer, and this reporter is doing the interview and we’re talking." ... I specifically remember an interview where we were doing a story about U.S. 63 and the white crosses on the sides of the road. So we were trying to humanize those white crosses in some sort of highway safety story, and we find ourselves in a living room with a mother talking about going to the scene of a wreck where her kid is dead. A teenage driver is dead on the highway and ends up being a white cross, and I’ve got to think about something because this mom’s crying, and I
I don’t want to join in and throw fire on this already emotional situation. But me, my emotions can get pretty excited pretty quickly because I thrive off of the youth in this place, and that’s just really hard. So you just don’t know on any given day or assignment just where it’s going to come from, and I think that those are the ones that catch you off guard. What no one ever did for me that I did for the Joplin folks was prep me. So with Joplin, it’s just like, "Talk to each other on the way down. Have a conversation. What are you going to see? Be ready." The fatality count was high and climbing at that point. With that many, you may just end up seeing something you never thought you’d see.
Photo Editor Three interview transcript:

So if you wouldn’t mind just starting by reliving the day of when Katrina hit.

What was it like? How long did you stay at work? How many people were you organizing?

Well we had about three days to plan because it popped into the gulf right away, and we learned that it was heading straight for us. I spent a good part of Friday and Saturday organizing the staff, making sure everybody was positioned in a place where... we cover the entire gulf coast, so we go to Mississippi and then just west of Lafayette. It was supposed to hit New Orleans but you never know. Those things have always [curved] and kind-of went off east, but this one didn’t. Plus it was our daughters 10th birthday the day of Katrina so we were having a birthday party for her on the Saturday before. We were at a pool with a bunch of our friends, and we were all talking about it like, "What do you think?" One guy goes, "Oh nothing’s going to happen, we’re going to be fine, and it’s going to disappear." So we cut the party short, and they all left town. We went to the newspaper on Sunday with the kids because the newspaper is a fortress – it’s like the safest building in town. So Saturday was spent making sure everybody was in position. Sunday was just clarifying stuff and loose ends. You show up at the paper and do last minute stuff. We published early because we wanted to get the paper out, so we just hung out until Monday morning and then it hit. Of course we lost power Monday night, and in a building that’s sealed, it gets really, really hot. So it was miserable, but the girls were having fun. All of the families were there of the people who worked at the newspaper. So we had a staff of 20-25 people. I had three photo editors beside
myself, and only one of them showed up. The other two took off with their families, which was fine. And most of the photographers stayed except for a couple that left with their young children. So we were well covered and well planned, but nothing could prepare you for what happened. It wasn’t the worst thing that could happen.

So what was it like managing so many photographers? And did you have to deal with photographers coming back shaken up? What was that whole process like?

Well all people are different. Some react differently than others. That’s not untrue with our staff. We had a couple of guys that were gung ho, police-type guys that would do anything, and they thrived on that moment. One photographer embedded himself with the police department so he was able to go anywhere they went. Another photographer was in Mississippi, and then there’s a couple other guys that stayed here in harm’s way and covered it. One guy broke down after a couple months. He had an episode and ended up having to be hospitalized... He tried to kill himself by running over a policeman. He wanted to get shot dead. His wife also worked at the paper and she had a breakdown also, so there were many people like that at the newspaper that were broken. They were fragile, you know, because a lot of people lose everything. A couple photographers lost everything, a couple photographers, editors... half of their houses were destroyed. The entire staff, there wasn’t anybody that wasn’t affected. So you had to deal with people putting their lives back together but also trying to get them to do their job, too. So it was a tricky little balance of, when do you push a person and when you let off? When do you make sure they take care of their lives before you worry about them taking care of
the paper? So it was a little balancing job on my part. And at the same time trying to take care of myself and my family. So nobody was unaffected. Most of the staff were heroic and went through it. They were fatigued mentally and physically. They were living in brutal conditions in the streets, walking through water, no place to stay. They couldn't go to their homes. Half the city was underwater so they couldn't go to a lot of places. They did everything they could to get boats and hook up with military guys and deal with flooding and deal with their personal lives – just an unbelievable experience for a newspaper staff. They were pretty much as much a part of the story as the one they were covering because something like this had never happened in American newspapers before where the city that the journalists were covering was destroyed, including their own homes. And having the ability to cover a catastrophic event while dealing with your own personal turmoil is just amazing to watch. And you know, some people who were very, very affected, it showed up later. Because during the first few weeks, you're working on adrenaline and getting things done and then you just... if you stopped and thought about it, you'd just break down. It was horrible.

What was it like seeing all of the trauma happen through other people's eyes? So instead of being out there covering it yourself, you're actually watching it happen through photos. Was that different than covering it yourself or similar or...?

Well it's different and similar because... similar in that I've covered a lot of stuff like that myself, been through a lot of stuff in my career, but when you see image after image coming in from a bunch of people and showing just the enormous human toll
on our citizens... You know, it's one thing to see death and destruction in Indonesia or a mudslide in Ecuador or something like that. People are dying and it's horrible, but when it's your hometown and some of these people are people you know, you see the despair and terror on their faces, especially at convention center and the super dome where people were left. One photographer shot a picture of a guy holding a baby next to his mother who had just died on the sidewalk. You know? Just a horrible experience, and you saw that all the time. I'm not going to say you get used to it, but you have to deal with it because its a common thing to see for an editor to look at this stuff all the time. So you sort-of build up a tolerance, but knowing that it's people that live only a mile from your house just makes your gut kind-of sink a little bit and gives you a knot in your throat. So it was harder than I thought, and the longer it went on, the harder it got because it just never ended.

After the ruin, it was the recovery, and it took weeks just to pump the city out and for the ability for people just to go back in their homes. And the images of people seeing their houses for the first time, it's just heart breaking.

**Did you find your days lasting longer at work? And if so, how did that affect your home life in addition to dealing with all of the aftereffects of Katrina?**

Well of course it was non-stop working from Monday to until... I can't even remember. You'd work that first night up until 2 a.m. still putting stuff on the web. So it was just all day long with no power and trying to get images out. We abandoned trying to publish a newspaper because there was no printing facility, so we just did an online edition. We did that for three days, but we worked non-stop. You slept when you could. The other issue was that we had our children with us. Our
daughter had just turned 10 and her sister was 8. So we had two young children there while trying to work, so it was a very difficult situation, thinking about taking care of them while you're trying to do your job in the dark. Luckily there were some other children from the other staff that was there, so they hung out with them and played. Then Tuesday, the waters came up. We had to evacuate the building and head to Baton Rouge. One of the photographers at The Advocate took us in, and the girls stayed there. I stayed there for five weeks, but the girls stayed there until that Saturday. My wife's sister flew in from Wisconsin and picked up the girls and took them back to Wisconsin to stay with their aunt and their cousins. They went to school there, and they lived there for five and a half months while we worked. There was no power, no gas, no nothing. There were no schools. The school had nine feet of water, and our house wasn't flooded, but it was damaged. There was no place for them to stay here. So luckily, the family came through and basically raised them for five months while we got our professional life in order and tried to get the house ready for them. But as a person... I was in San Francisco in 1989 during the earthquake. I remember that. I've covered forest fires where I got so close to the fire, my ID badges were melting. That's the only time I ever thought I was going to die on the job. I've seen poverty that'll make your stomach turn. I planned Super Bowls and World Series' and national championship games – all that sort of stuff I've done in my career. The hardest thing I've ever done in my life is putting those girls on a plane to Milwaukee. That is something I'll never forget. They're adults now, but I hope I never have to deal with that again. That was very difficult because I didn't know how it was going to end. We didn't know if we were going to have to move to
Wisconsin or... we didn't know what we were going to do. But everything turned out all right in the end.

**What was your relationship like with the photographers you were working with? Were they stringers? Were they friends outside of work? Were they full-time employees?**

We've always had a good relationship. When you're younger, and you're on a staff, you're always doing stuff together. It's interesting. The single people were always hanging out – going for beers after work going to Tippetina's to listen to some music... they're all energetic. Of course, New Orleans is a hell of a news town, so there’s always something going on. And then there was always sugar bowls and super bowls and things like that to cover. So we're all connected, having fun doing your job, and growing up together. And you know, the older you get, people start getting married, having kids, they start not doing things together. So our staff was starting to get a little older. Everybody was married and had kids, and they don't play football on Saturdays anymore or drink beers at 11 in the morning (laughing). They don't hang out socially as much as they used to. It was mostly a professional relationship during Katrina. And of course being their boss, you're not entirely welcomed to join a party, but I never felt like I couldn't do that. Like if they were going out for beers after a game, I’d show up after putting the paper to bed. They’d be at a bar at 12 o'clock, and I’d join them, and we’d drink for several hours. It was fun.

**So do you think that having this friendship with them outside of work, did you feel more or less responsible for them during Katrina?**
I don’t know if our relationships personally outside of work made any difference. My primary responsibility was to make sure the staff was okay, as a manager, to make sure they were good, and then that the newspaper was taken care of. So I made it a point. Right after Katrina, the guys are just in it, literally up to their waists in water, and the issue at hand was no communication, nobody telling them where to go. They just figured it out themselves because we had no communication. So just trusting their journalistic instincts, and I had no doubt. I had an incredible staff, totally professional. I think the difference it made knowing them personally, you know their quirks, and the stress points that some people have. You know some people don’t like certain things. Like one photographer was afraid of flying, so I wouldn’t put him on a helicopter to shoot aerials. We knew we had to send somebody else to do it. So you knew that stuff about their personal lives, and you kind-of pointed them in the right direction so they felt comfortable. Then we rotate photographers. After five days, I brought several people in and said, "Take a couple days, 3-4 days off. We’re going to rotate." And we did that for the first month or so. So people were able to sort-of reclaim their lives and take care of personal stuff, too.

**So how long did it take for you to process what happened? What did you feel?**

**Did you use any specific coping mechanisms?**

How long did it take for me to process it? I’m still processing it! It never goes away, ever. And unfortunately our daughter’s birthday is on the 29th of August, so we always look for a way to celebrate her birthday, rather than remember Katrina. I think Wednesday when we made it to Baton Rouge and set up our remote newspaper there, that’s when I first started to realize. We finally had phone service,
and people were calling us. People thought we were dead, and they were just checking on [us]. It's amazing how many people say, "Hey, you alright?" The neighbors were calling up asking if the house is okay, because they all evacuated. At times, I just felt overwhelmed. I remember feeling overwhelmed on Monday because it was just one other photo editor, and myself, and one lab tech. And [we were] just trying to get stuff done, get the photos edited and into the system, and doing all this without power and no air conditioning. The thing I remember most was how hot it was. It was just unbelievable. It was 95 outside, and it had to be 120 in the building. So sometimes you'd go outside knowing it's 95 degrees, and it felt like it was air-conditioned. So I tried not to think of the destruction, and I tried to think of a way to manage people, because if you stopped and thought about it, it was just too overwhelming, and that just takes over your emotions. And I can see how people would break down. So it was very different processing. So early on Monday night and starting Wednesday when we were setting up our remote paper, those first few days, I was really like, "What am I in for?" The long haul. It's when you realize it was not going to be a three-day event as most of these big storms are. Literally, we thought that there was no end in sight, and we didn't know if the newspaper was going to survive. So we were worried about whether or not we were going to have jobs. So all that sort of stuff is feeding in the back of your mind, and it's always there, and you're always thinking about it in addition to trying to get your job done. So it's very difficult, trying circumstances, mentally. Fatigue-wise it was fine. I was kind-of living on adrenaline, and I lost a lot of weight, which was great. And plus, being at a
remote satellite, everyone showed up in shorts and a t-shirt, even the publisher. It was great!

What kind of narrative did you end up crafting for the public? Was it more focused on the event itself or the aftereffects? Which photos did you choose to show the public, and what kind of narrative did that form?

To me, you want to put a face on it. It's one thing to show a broken building but when you show broken people, that will connect with your readers, but you don't want it to be one-sided either. So we're looking for areas of destruction that told the story about what happened to the city. Like the roof of the super dome half gone, all the mayhem at the convention center, and just complete vast miles of the city underwater. Eighty percent of the city flooded. So there was just water everywhere, and it stayed there for weeks. But you know, that for the first few days you start telling people, "This is what happened, look at what happened." And you have kind-of the story-telling storm coverage event, like you would cover a football game. But after a couple days, it was mostly about the human toll, what the people went through, how they were suffering, and what was going on at the convention center and the super dome and other places in the city who were without food, supplies, and water, trying to deal with their lives. So it was like, "Here is the narrative of the city, ruined and underwater." The bigger narrative is the reason why – because of the inadequate levee systems built by the government, the Army Corps of Engineers. If the levees hadn't failed, New Orleans wouldn't have been a story. It wouldn't have flooded. They would've had water. I mean, there's always water because it's below sea level, but you know three days later, everybody would've been back home, you'd
get on with your life, and everything's cool. There was none of that. So the narrative was on two different parallel tracks: it was what happened to the city and the people, and what happened to the U.S. government and its response to Katrina. You can't have one without the other when you talk about Katrina. It was a complete screw up on all levels of government, knowing that it affected disproportionately the poor and minorities. It was microcosm of what's wrong with relying on government to take care of you. Everybody thought the government would take care of people, and that was proven wrong during Katrina. And it wasn't necessarily government, but it was about the people managing it and how incompetent they were. So those two storylines were always together - government's response, and the people suffering. And then it later on, it's recovery – people moving back into their homes and rebuilding, and people getting their lives together. In the meantime, I'm covering more and more stuff on what went wrong and finding out that the Army Corps of Engineers did a haphazard job of building the levees, and they knew it. So we were kind-of fortunate it didn't happen earlier. It was just a ticking time bomb waiting to happen. I'd say the first full year after Katrina was nothing but what we call "ruin and recover." Mostly, recovery is dealing with the politics and bureaucracy and everything like that and program after program: government trying to figure this out, FEMA, housing, the trailers, the formaldehyde leaks and stuff like that – it was just a disaster. There's been a lot of studies done on it. I've read a lot of stuff. My daughter did a research paper on it – she did it on race and Katrina, and how it disproportionately affected the poor. And it's playing out again in Puerto Rico. Katrina taught the U.S. how to deal with hurricanes, but you have all
these problems in Houston and Florida, and there’s only so much you can do, but they were able to respond to it much better. But the same thing that happened during Katrina is happening in Puerto Rico – sort-of like a government indifference because it's a U.S. territory. But it seems that the color of your skin seems to make a difference in the U.S. response. I don’t know how else to put it. It's kind-of sad.

**What do you think is harder to handle between these large-scale events that happen once every now and then, or the smaller more frequent traumatic events, like car crashes and fires?**

Well New Orleans is a little different. They don't deal with car crashes that much or house fires and stuff like that. They're news, but they're metro page kind-of news. But nothing could ever compare with a big story like Katrina. So like 2010 with the BP oil spill. That was off the coast of Louisiana, and we had to cover it, and that was a logistical nightmare because it had to basically be covered by air or boat. So bigger events are more difficult to cover because you have to throw more resources at it like people and money. Fortunately, the newspaper was committed to that. But we're working with considerably fewer photographers for the BP oil spill than we had during Katrina because a lot of the people left eventually. Quite a few of the staff moved on and took jobs elsewhere. We just lost them to attrition. We didn't replace them. So you go from a staff of 25 to 15 trying to cover something like the BP oil spill and also cover everything else that goes on in a city. So it's a logistical problem, and it's much more difficult than covering a car crash because that can be done by one person.
I'm curious though, what's harder to edit pictures from: the stuff that happens so frequently that's traumatic, or the stuff that's not as frequent but more traumatic? Would you still say Katrina was harder to edit pictures from than anything else?

Well, I'd say in general, yes. But there's always specific differences or specific events that make a difference. So New Orleans has a pretty good crime murder rate, and there have been several instances with people shot at... Particularly this one girl who was celebrating her 10th birthday or something. These drive-by guys were aiming at some dude at this party and literally chopped her in half, and that was just unbelievable covering that. The photographer was crying in my office. It was horrible. So that's a specific event that could really take its toll on you. We have a lot of crime in New Orleans, so we're used to seeing it, but every once in a while, you'll get something like that happen. But I think that the daily log of photos from a disaster like Katrina far outweigh a smaller event. And every once in a while, I'll [think of] that girl who was killed, and it'll just make you stop and wonder about life. That was difficult.
Photo Editor Four interview transcript:

So if you want to start by talking about the day. What was it like? When did your day start? When did it end?

I was actually one of the first people here that night, or that morning. I had received a phone call from the only editor that was left in the newsroom at the time when it happened, and he said something about a shooting at the theater. I didn't quite understand or believe that there was a serious shooting at the theater. I thought it was probably perhaps some minor thing – maybe someone got shot. I started looking at Twitter, and right away, I could tell it was something really big going on. I jumped in my car. I think I was driving 100 miles per hour on the interstate just to get here. I got here first. That editor who called me was still here, and eventually others followed, but initially it was just a few of us here. I remember just trying to get a hold of everyone I possibly could to get over there. We had one photographer over there pretty quickly after the news was breaking, and many more following. We pretty much had the whole staff working on it for the next couple of weeks.

It was so hard to believe. I'll never forget it. I was always grateful that I wasn't here for Columbine, that I didn't have to be a part of that coverage just because of the sadness of it. It was one of the first mass shootings that really touched so many people because it was inside of a high school. I was so thankful that I never really had to deal with that, you know? And then this happened, and this kind-of affected people in the same way I think because it was a public place. It was a very vulnerable place, a place where you wouldn't expect something like that to happen.
So the day that it happened, how late were you working? Did you even go home?

The first couple of days it was pretty much... I think it was 48 hours straight. I was just here for two or three days. Then eventually my boss at the time was here, and he cut me loose and sent me home to have some time to decompress because as a journalist, you're really kind of on autopilot. I don't want it to sound insensitive, but that's really what you're on. You're so focused on, "We have to be here, we have to be there, and we have all of our bases covered. We tell the story we need to tell."

You're just so busy; so overwhelmingly busy sending people all over the place. And even when I finally had the chance to go home and rest, I wasn't really resting because then you felt like you needed to be helping. The tragedy all these people are dealing with is nothing compared to me having to work and cover it. What we're doing pales in comparison to what these families are going through. I started working from home not long after I got home because one of the big things we were trying to do was find photos of the victims. They were just slowly materializing on the wires. A different publication might have one face, while another might have another. So I really spent my day at home compiling those, trying to find as many photographs as I could of the victims because we wanted to publish them as soon as we could.

So you didn't really stop working after you left.

Not really. I don't think any of us really stopped working for... I don't know, the whole 6 months to a year after that because there were so many stories. Any time a
tragedy like that happens, there are so many different things to delve into, story-wise.

**So how long after the first day did it take you to really fully process what happened?** I know you mentioned going on autopilot, which I think is pretty common for that kind-of scenario.

I don't know, I think after covering these types of things... I'm trying to remember other things I've covered like this. I don't want to say you get desensitized to it; it's just that you cover news every day. There's tragedy every day that doesn't get the coverage of [the shooting] because it was a mass shooting. I'm not sure you ever truly allow yourself to feel all of it. Maybe there will come a day after I retire, you know. I'll look back and think, "Ugh, I had to live through that. I had to cover that."

You see things as an editor that other people don't see, photos and things like that. Not so much with this story because so much of that was hidden for so long. We only fairly recently obtained some of the evidence, like photos inside the theater after bodies had been removed and things like that. That was kind-of my first look at that.

You know, other shootings like this, like Virginia Tech was almost kind-of similar, like where there were a couple visible things about it but most of the tragedy you never really saw. It was inside buildings, but people still don't believe how many people died at Virginia Tech. It doesn't hit them quite in the same way because it wasn't quite as a visible thing. I'm not sure if I'll ever allow myself to fully decompress and feel it.

**You must have done some sort of processing because it's been so long, so were there any specific...**
You know, there was a moment... we just conducted a photo workshop here. We had about 25 participants, and it was a two-day workshop. One of our speakers was a photographer who got the incredible Page One photo that we ran the first day of a man and, I believe, his wife and maybe his daughter, the three of them embracing outside of a gathering place for victims' families. And after all the trial was over for the shooter, he came out and gave a press conference, and he mentioned that photo. He said, "Our grief will live forever in that photograph." So for him, that was almost his time of release. He became really emotional about it. He actually pointed out other famous historic photos of tragic situations and said that for him that was the photo that’ll hopefully help people remember that pain comes with something like this. So maybe it was about the same time for many of us. Once the trial was over, I think then we can sort-of [deep breath]. You know, we all asked ourselves the question, "Why couldn't the shooter just have shot himself?" You know? We're human beings so we ask that question. Instead, these families have to go through this really long trial that was delayed many times. I think a couple years [later] probably was the end of the trial, when it was all said and done. I'm not really sure, but I think that was the first time that we all kind-of stopped. Because the thing about a story like that is... well like the Las Vegas shooting that just happened, see that's the thing, too. You're talking to me because I’m the photo editor here where it happened, but the thing you got to remember is we're a big paper. Anything like that that happens, we cover it almost like it's our own story. We didn't go to Las Vegas, but we still have to live through those tragedies because we have to photo edit those stories whether they happened here or not, like we went to the theater shooting. It
was right here, it was local, so certainly it impacted us more, but I guess that’s part of what your survey work is. It’s not just one tragedy for us; it’s every single one we have to cover. Like when I woke up in the morning of the Las Vegas shooting, I was thinking, "Uh oh, another one we have to go cover." We have to photo edit the photos, we have to tell the stories all over again.

So during those few years until you felt that release, did you use any specific coping mechanisms? Or does your paper provide any kind of therapy?

I think we did. I’m trying to remember what we offered as a newsroom. I think we did. We certainly offered counseling because we offer that anyway through an employee assistance program. I never have. I don’t know why. I don’t want to sound like this tough guy. There are certainly times I become emotional, but I didn’t take advantage of any of that because I didn’t really feel like I needed it at the time. Again, maybe one day... it might just be one of those things that has a long delay for me. Maybe it'll really hit me one day.

I always try to look at things as though there was some reason. I don’t know if anybody can say there was a reason for the theater shooting. It just doesn't make any sense, but maybe one day something will happen. So that’s probably my way of coping with it. I don’t want to make it sound like my way of coping is not coping because, again, one day, it may hit me harder. But I think we’re just so absorbed into doing the work, that’s sort-of the therapy. Being so hands on with it. Like with the theater shooting, even when I went home, working on it trying to find photos of the victims or other information about the shooter and helping any way I can. You
become so absorbed into the work, and I think maybe that helps somewhat, knowing more details and knowing more about it, rather than hiding from it.

Would you say that your coverage more focused on the events themselves or the aftereffects?

Initially, the events. Initially, you're just reacting to this thing that happened way past deadline that you couldn't do anything about. The paper's already out for the next day, so you really have to plan and create something special just to kind-of have as much info as possible in print, and you're looking ahead to say, "What can we do for this Sunday? Can we put together a special section?" which is what we did. We put together a special section. We found people who were in the theater, people who rescued other people, and we tried to tell those stories. We tried to have some good come out of that, like heroic stories, profiling specific people. That was a really great special section. We interviewed lots of people, and it was a really nice piece. But even then, you've got a team working on a special section, but you still have new stories coming out every day. So much of the story is hard to get to as well. We learned fairly early on about all the police officers who didn't wait for an ambulance. They literally just put bleeding people in the back of their patrol cars and rushed them to the nearest hospital on their own because they knew that was the fastest way to get people there. So two to three years later, we finally got some of those details and were actually able to talk to some of those police officers. So some of the stories you don't find out about until much later. There's stuff even now still popping up.
What was your relationship like with the photographers? Were you friends outside of work or strictly coworkers? Were they stringers?

All staff photographers [that were working] on this. I don’t believe we had any stringers. We were a larger staff then. Like a lot of newsrooms, we've kind-of gone through buyouts every year, so we're definitely smaller than we were then, but we had already been reduced some in size when that happened, so it was definitely a smaller staff even then.

So would you consider them just your coworkers, or did you have a personal relationship outside of work?

Oh yeah, like we sometimes socialize outside of work, absolutely. We're a pretty tight group here, for sure.

Do you think that that relationship affected how you interacted with those photographers during the event? Did you feel more responsible for them during this time?

The same way my boss looked out for me and gave me some time off, we definitely did that with the photographers as well. One photographer in particular, he's one of those photographers who will cover the daily story, but he always wants to look a little deeper and follow up on that story and sort-of be behind the scenes. He worked for the next few days to get really good access [with a woman whose estranged husband died in the shooting]. So he did that. We kind-of cut him loose to work on making that connection and getting close with that family. So you become much more emotionally tied in that situation as a photographer because that family is taking you in and letting you into their most private moment, a funeral for a loved
one. We also had a photo intern as well who participated. I think he was stationed most of the time outside of the shooters apartment building.

**But overall you’d say you definitely felt more responsible for your photographers because of the personal relationship you had?**

Yeah. I would think that most photo staffs in most newsrooms sort-of have that close relationship.

**So as a photo editor, did you find it easier or harder to look at the images knowing that someone else shot them? Would it have been easier or harder to look at them if you had shot them, versus someone else?**

I always enjoy editing my own work as a photographer. I mean, the first paper I worked at, we didn't really have a photo editor. But some photographers just can't edit their own work, and others can. Some of the best photographers I've ever known are the worst editors of their own work. Some photographers I've known that may not be the greatest photographers are great editors on their own work. But I don't know, I think on something like this, the photographs that rise to the top are such an instant emotional pull. There's not too much controversy or question about what the best pictures are. They're just so powerful, and they rise to the top pretty quickly. At least here, we try to do it as a team. The photographer might do an initial edit, but then a photo editor will sit down and edit from that, and that's usually a discussion between the two. But of course, a lot of this coverage was sent from the field. There wasn't time to come in and be edited. So in that case, they're putting in a lot more effort to make those decisions. And sometimes we had to call the photographer to find out more information. On a story like this, you don't want to
mess up. It’s just too important, but you want to do the right thing by the families and give them your full respect. I was terrified. It kept me up at night.

*When it comes to processing and understanding what happened and why it happened, would it have been easier to be the photographer, or was it easier to be the photo editor?*

Well, maybe. Like I said earlier, when you're so absorbed in the work, and you're getting all the details so you know everything, that sort-of helps, I think, as a therapy to know as much info as you possibly can. But as a photographer, you may not know as much actually because you're not in the newsroom, hearing all the information flowing in. You’re at the scene, you know what it looks like, and you know what’s going on. One of our most intimate photos was shot from the helicopter. It was an aerial shot looking down behind the theater, and what you saw was the entrance of the back of the theater where all the victims and the shooter came out. And all you saw was a long trail of blood along the sidewalk...

I'm sorry, I really haven't thought about this stuff in a long time. And maybe that's part of it, too. You really don't try to think about it when it's all over. You don't try to look back on it so much.

*Being a photo editor, we live the trauma that happens everywhere, but is it any different having to edit pictures that happened in your own neighborhood? And how so?*

It is different. I think you're a little more sensitive about things like body photos. I'll never forget this. There was a big explosion, I think in Turkey. Really graphic images. I really advocated strongly for putting one of those photographs on the front
page, even though it was extremely graphic. But the point I was trying to make was, "Let’s not sanitize it. This is an IED. This is terrorist action. We need to show readers what that means, what that looks like." I would say now, we aren’t nearly as resistant to running graphic photos as we once were. The photo we picked from Las Vegas was of a woman cowered over on the ground. She looked like she was dead, and there was a man hunkered over her, protecting her. And we chose that photo for the front page, not knowing if they were dead, but we were going to run it on the front page anyway. They could’ve been local people; they could’ve been from Colorado. We didn’t know. There were no names on there; we didn’t know anything. But we felt like it was the most powerful photo. I think now, I would say even now, it’s totally a case-by-case basis. If we had another mass shooting here, and we had a really graphic photo, and it was a local person dead in the photo, it wouldn’t be an automatic "no." It would be a discussion. I think the way we treat everything is [with] a discussion. It’s worth putting on the front page if it tells the story, if it shows the reality of what happened. ... Sometimes we anticipate how people are going to react without knowing how they’re going to react. You don’t know how your readers are going to react. They may react totally the opposite of what you think, whether good or bad. You have to consider that and talk to people.

What is harder to handle: large-scale events that happen every now and then, or smaller-scale events that happen more frequently? Such as car accidents, fires...

For me, that all comes down to the story. The thing that touches me to this day about the theater shooting, the thing that kind-of haunts me, is the little girl who was shot
and killed. And the only picture we had of her for the longest time was a picture when she was maybe five years old, eating an ice cream cone, and that's the picture we had to publish every time. I'm the father of two girls, so that to me, even now, brings me the most emotion. I don't mean to discount all the other lives lost because it was all a tragedy, and it didn't have to happen, but man that one touches me the most. I remember the story. Her mother was severely injured, she was in a wheelchair for life, and she was in the hospital for almost two years before she finally got out and started making public appearances at ceremonies and such.

That's the one that touches me the most from the theater shooting, and that kind-of applies to daily stories, too. We just had a story, this 17- or 18-year-old boy shot his brother and sister while they were sleeping, and he was going to shoot his dad, too, but the dad didn't die. There was another story almost at the same time as the theater shooting where this young girl went missing. There was a massive search; almost everybody in the city was out looking for this little girl. And it turned out that a neighbor of hers, some 16-year-old boy... His parents were off on some trip and somehow, he convinced this 12-year-old girl to come into his house, and he just had it in his mind that he was going to kill her. He killed her, and he literally took her apart and hid her in his basement. To me, that story is just as tragic as the many more people that died in the theater shooting. In the news business, you have to be on top of this stuff, and unfortunately so many people I know don't look at the news. They don't watch the news. They don't read a paper. You have to remember that "normal people..." that we're not normal people at all because we have to know all that stuff. Normal people don't do that. They don't stay on top of the news. So is it
impacting me in some negative way that I’ll feel down the road? Probably. Maybe. But man, I don’t know, you just remember stories like those. It’s usually because a specific person pops out at you or has an impact on you. It may not be as many people dead, but any individual story can really hit you hard. It doesn't really matter on the number of people affected.

There was a story south of us, too. Two high school kids... their bodies were found on the side of the road. I think one was 15, one was 16, and they were found on the side of the road, shot point blank in the head. And it turns out, it was some silly little drug deal, and they’ve arrested up to six people who were involved or knew about it. You just think to yourself, "That can go on in high school?" So all those tragedies pop up on any given day. So they all have some impact on you, it just depends on the story.

We [as photo editors] kind-of have to see it all. We have photographers that are still on the staff that covered the theater shooting, but it’s not like they covered Las Vegas or all of the other things that happen. The photo editors are kind-of the ones who are.

When something happens now as photo editors, we deliberately don’t run the shooter’s mug on the same page as the victim’s mug, or anywhere near each other. We kind-of learned that from life lessons from actually doing that and hearing from the public. We separate them now, deliberately.

**Is there anything else you want to add?**

I think I was being honest when I said I hadn’t really thought about this stuff in a while. You try to put it out of your mind, but then there are always the
anniversaries. Even Columbine we cover every year, even to this day, all these years later. We don't always cover it with a story every year, but we always send a photographer to the memorial site. I feel like it's our job to always document that, because who else is going to do it?
Photo Editor Five lecture transcript:

So I think this is the singly most important historically significant event in my professional career. I was the deputy director of photography at TIME magazine and my director of photography was on vacation the week that this happened. So on Monday morning, we had a magazine that came out on T.D. Jakes – still a very well known minister in Texas. And it was a beautiful picture of T.D. Jakes who's African American with his hands holding a white dove. And I think nobody remembers that cover. But everyone remembers this one. So the events of 9/11 happened on Tuesday, and by Wednesday evening we were going to press with this special edition, and it's the only time in history of the magazine that the border was black.

I worked straight through for 36 hours with a team of about 14 people, and we were still in the transition between digital and analog photography at that time. So we had people walking in off the street bringing in film of the events that transpired on 9/11 and taking them to our photo lab, and we took everything. We crashed our servers four times with the material that was coming in from all the different people who were photographing the events of that day. But within 36 hours, we put out a special edition.

I do remember I want to tell one story from that day. I do remember it very well because I had been awake for 36 hours. I had not slept. We had found one hotel room. It was fashion week in New York when this happened, so all hotels were booked in midtown and our office was in midtown. The offices of TIME now are in the financial district way downtown, but we were in Rockefeller center. So I found a hotel room. I had been calling, calling, calling, calling, calling, and I found one, and I
said, “Well, listen. I have a team of about 20 people who are working for me, so basically what I want to do is pay you double for the room, and I’m going to have a steady stream of people coming over and they’re going to need towels because basically they’re going to come in, and they’re going to shower, and come back to work. So we’re going to use this as like a gym basically for the people are there.” And so I went to the hotel room twice to shower in 48 hours and put back on my same clothes because I didn’t know I wasn’t going to be going home for a while. And so on the morning of the day we closed this, I had gone to take a shower to do the presentation of the pages for the inside, and I wanted to be fresh, and I’m super, super tired. So I came back to the building and Jim Kelly wanting to be inclusive, Mr. Kelly, invited everybody who was there into the conference room. So it was one of those situations where those of you who are journalism students understand this, that there were way too many cooks in the kitchen.

So there were all these people in there saying, "Oh I like this one, and I like that one, and I like the other one." So all this stuff was going on, and then everybody walked out, and I was like, “I can’t believe what just happened here.” So I went outside the conference room, and I was exhausted, and I burst into tears. I mean I was sobbing. And Arthur came out and he asked, “What’s wrong?” And I said, "We’re screwing this up! This is the most important issue of our lives, and we’re screwing this up. There were way too many people in that room. There’s pictures that should be in that are out. It’s not good, and we’ve got to do something." And Arthur said, "Go in the bathroom. Wash off your face. Dry those tears. March yourself into Jim Kelly’s office and you tell him what you just told me."
So I did. I washed my face, I dried my face, and I went into Jim's office and he goes, "We have to close!" And I said "Not before it's good!" And we got into a big fight. And then Jim called in this group of people into the conference room. He closed both doors, and we remade the layouts on the wall, better. And closed it, an hour later than we said we were going to close it. And when Jim accepted what's the Pulitzer for magazine journalism, the ASME, the national magazine award for the best single topic issue, for that particular issue of TIME magazine, the first person he thanked when he got up there was moi [sic]. So I felt pretty special. He said sometimes I want to kill [her], but without her, this issue would not have won this prize.

So the second single topic national magazine award that I was a part of at TIME Magazine was Hurricane Katrina. And once again inexplicably my boss was on vacation, so I was running the place. This is from 2005, which you'll all recall we won a national magazine award. This was the devastation, one of the pictures that I really loved. We did a fold out in TIME, which was very innovative at the time, in 2005, with a series of these panoramic pictures in print. So that was one of the pictures from that. But then at the Washington Post, I was asked to look into a decade later of Hurricane Katrina. So on the left here are portraits that were done for me as an editor at TIME magazine by a photographer who was down there, and I sent him back with his 8x10 behemoth camera for portraits. And I said let's go back and find some of the most interesting characters that he photographed for me when he was at TIME. So this is a print presentation that I'm showing in front of you. But this is 2015. So it's a couple of years ago, but it was ten years after Katrina, and I was
able to call a bunch of the subjects, people that we had actually done stories on 10 years before and revisit them and find out what had happened with their lives.

I want to tell one interesting story about this man, Lionel. He was somebody who really got my heart because it was his fourth hurricane. And he looked so devastated in this [2005] portrait. But Chris called me, the photographer, and said, “Oh you're going to die.” And I said, “Why?” And he said, “Lionel died.” And I said, “Do you know where he's buried?” And he said no, and I said, “Go see if you can find out where he's buried and maybe that picture will be even more poignant, maybe we'll take a picture of his grave.”

...

Someone was asking me earlier if I think there's any creativity in picture editing, and I think that's like a moment where the photographer thought there was nothing he could do and I said, “Oh BS, go and find his grave.” So look at that grave. It was beautiful. Like some people didn't make it 10 years later. I thought it was an important piece of the puzzle.
Photo Editor Six interview transcript:

If you wouldn't mind by just starting off, what was the day like? How did it start?

It started very early. We first got reports of the shooting around 3 a.m. We had some major news with club shootings in the previous month or so, so we were kind-of monitoring it. I woke up to see what was going on, but I didn't think it was what it ended up being. By 6 o'clock, we had some idea, and we were hearing 20 casualties, and that's when we started mobilizing people out into the field and into the office. At that point, by 8 o'clock, we still didn't know the scope and scale of what it was. So we were calling... everybody in my phone got a call of some sort, to either go out into the field, come into the office, or some combination thereof.

How big was your staff that you were managing that day?

The photo/video team is probably 10-12.

At what point did you get to work, and how late did you stay?

I got to work about 7? It's a little foggy for me. We left about 2 in the morning. So 7 to 2, and we worked probably the first two weeks without any break whatsoever.

We were pretty aggressive in some of our digital and print plans. We were doing special sections the Sunday after. We were doing truly expanded, expanded coverage, 24/7 coverage. I oversee photo, but video is just as important to me, and one of the things we tried to do right at the get-go was to try to do a video obituary, remembrance, whatever you want to call it, on every one of the 49 victims, and we pulled that off within two and a half days of the shooting. So we had a lot of stuff we were juggling. We tried not to sacrifice ambition, because I think it was pretty clear
late on day one, I think I may have even talked about this with my deputies, that this is the most important story I'll ever be a part of. This is the most important story I'll ever be part of telling, and that was a very powerful realization for me.

So I know you mentioned you left work around 2 a.m. Did you stop working, or were you still monitoring the situation?

Yeah, I was still working. I think what I really did when I got home was... I hadn't seen a lot of the TV coverage. I had seen some here and there, and I was talking to people out in the field on the phone and watching stuff they sent in, but I hadn't seen a lot of the national coverage: CNN, Anderson Cooper, that kind-of stuff, so I was kind-of curious. It probably wasn't the healthiest thing, to continue indulging in more and more of that stuff, but I wanted to see what they were saying, what they were doing. There was no way around it. I couldn't go home and watch [sports] or something like that. It just didn't seem right.

How did you feel at different points during the first day? Between organizing and finally going home, what were you feeling throughout the day?

It was a range of emotions. I think the moment I most remember from that day, and I can't tell you the time, but it was as early as 8, 8:30, maybe 9, we were watching the live press conference with our mayor and chief of police, and they said the number of casualties was 49. And the way they said it was a little weird, like "There are 49 casualties." And there was this moment in the newsroom like, "Is that deaths? Is that fatalities? Is that injured?" And they, at the scene, I think quickly corrected that to be 49 deaths – fatalities. That number still, to this day, is the hardest thing for me to say. It's the number that I've struggled with. That was the, "Oh s***," jaw-
dropping moment when we realized this isn't 10 people, this isn't 15 people. This is 49 dead Orlando people. That’s when we really realized what the hell we were in for, and that this was going to be a story that wasn’t a one-day, two-day, or weeklong story, that this was a story that we would be telling for months and years. So I think that really kicked us in with a little bit of adrenaline. So it’s Sunday morning. We hadn't heard back from a lot of people, so we were still trying to track down a lot of people to get into the office, and I think that that just ramped up our scale in terms of what we’re trying to be and trying to do. Emotionally, I think it was disbelief, followed by a burst of adrenaline. I mean there are moments when you’re watching a video report, listening to an interview, editing photos, whatever you’re doing, that the scale and gravity of this can hit you. But I don’t think it really truly hit me until day three. I remember vividly, I’ve never cried in the newsroom before. I remember, my mother... everybody’s texting and calling cause they know what I do. And the thing about Pulse is the very street it’s on is the street we work on. It's a straight shot about two and a half miles down the road. So everybody was texting and calling, and I wasn't returning texts or calls except for people I work with to help get the story out. But I talked to my mom on day three, and we were talking about it, and I just crumbled. It caught me off guard. I wasn't prepared for that. I was surprised by that. My mom knew I was okay, and she knew I was working hard, but when I had to say the number, or tried to say the number 49, that was a mental block for me that I still have to this day.

Would you say that you’re still processing what happened?
I think after the year anniversary, I think I’ve fully processed things. You know, some of the things we do as journalists and editors is therapeutic in a weird way, in terms of helping tell the story, doing good work. Those are powerful motivators. We did special sections for the six-month and year anniversary, and the process of making those and doing some more victim tributes, it was a little further away from the actual incident of the shooting. I think those were kind-of therapeutic moments that helped me get through it. But yeah, it took a while. I would say once we got past the year anniversary, because we recognized right away that that was going to be a big story for us to tell, too, once I got through that, it helped. I would add, one thing that did help me... We had vigils every night. The gay and lesbian community was obviously affected by Pulse, but it was also Latin night, so the Latino community was feeling the pain, as well as everybody in downtown Orlando, so we had vigils every night. But the biggest one was a week after the tragedy at our big downtown lake. There were like 50,000 people there. And again, this is all walking distance from where we work. I was working and had worked nonstop for seven straight days. I said, "I’m going to take an hour, two hours, to walk down to the vigil just to be a human being for an hour or two." And I had met my wife down there. And she and I hadn’t seen a lot of each other those days just because of what she does and what I do, we work a lot. So I went down there to be a human being for a couple hours and participate in the candlelight vigil that week after, and I think that helped me a lot in terms of feeling the connection with the community, you know, hugging friends that I hadn’t seen all week. And I think that was the important break that I forced myself to take. Of course, I went to the vigil and came right back and helped put out the
website and paper and all that good stuff, but just finding time to get that two-hour break helped me feel like a part of the community again, just for myself, seeing people that I loved, friends and family, was just good.

So I've talked to other photo editors who have mentioned that their paper provided a counseling service. Does your paper provide that and did you make use of it?

We did offer it, and I had employees that took advantage of it. I did not. What I tried to do as a manager was try to figure out what each person needed and how to address those needs. So, some needed some time off for their families. Some people wanted to go knee-deep on this particular angle on this story. Some people wanted to work out of the office for a little bit or weird hours, or needed a middle-of-the-week day off. I just tried to be in tune with that a bit, and make sure that they're all taken care of. But there were people who took advantage of that service. I mean, I think it sounds so trivial when I say it but the Friday after, which is basically day six, and it was just go, go, go, go – 18 hours a day. They brought in therapy dogs into the newsroom. And there was, I don’t know, 10 or so of the cuddliest, cutest little golden retriever puppies. There were just puppies running all around the newsroom, and everything just stopped in the newsroom for 30 minutes. Everybody’s hugging puppies, loving on them, and taking pictures, and it was the first time I had seen anybody smile, laugh, or, in some cases, step away from the computer. So that was a pretty cool moment. You know, you become part of this family of news organizations that all send gifts and care packages to the next unfortunate member of our club, and when Las Vegas happened last month, we sent
therapy dogs to the Las Vegas Review-Journal like a week afterwards. It was cool to see some of those pictures they sent back, and moments like that, I think, are just good for your sanity. We still talk about that. We brought [the therapy dogs] back at the year anniversary, not because everyone was still traumatized, but just because we were recognizing our work, and we now like therapy dogs.

Shifting gears a little bit, what was your relationship like with the photographers? Were you friends outside of work, just coworkers, stringers?

It's such a small staff. We're all very close. I would consider all of them friends of mine. Several of them were at my wedding; lots of them come to my every-other-month parties that we're throwing for some reason or another. So there's a tightness on the staff, and especially as the staff has gotten smaller. A lot of these people worked together for, in some cases, decades. So it's a very close staff. We were all communicating pretty openly. What helped, I think, for us was the scene where the vigils were, where the actual crime took place, city hall... the majority of stuff is very, very close, and proximity made things a lot easier. It's funny, the one person I didn't call the morning of the shooting, because I don't remember who the first person I called was, but I know I didn't call this person, it was our summer intern. He wasn't in my phone, and I couldn't have told you if we had an intern. I was close to him, and I liked him, but my head was in other spaces. But he showed up at work that day, and he got the A1 picture. We sent him to something we didn't have high expectations for. We were sending people left and right, and he just showed up about 11 o'clock in the morning. We sent him to a couple things that evening, but the front-page picture the day after was our intern's picture. And he wasn't the person I
called, and it wasn’t the first event it thought would lend itself to that, but that’s why I always tell interns: the best thing you could ever do if you’re not sure what to do is to just go into work. And I guess that applies to professionals as well, but yeah, I would say that we’re a very close staff mostly because a lot of us have worked here a good number of years.

So based on this close relationship, do you think that affected how you interacted with the photographer? Maybe, did you feel more or less responsible for them because of that?

Yeah, I think that did. You know, it brings a level of humanity to it. They weren’t just chess pieces on our board that were placed at different parts strategically. We talked a lot to them in terms of what angles they were interested in pursuing. The story was very raw, and there were different ways we could tell the story. I think the best thing we did as a management staff was listen to what they were telling us, what they were seeing, who they were talking to, and try to respond accordingly. But they were great because [I was] in a million different places. Again, I oversee photo, video, multimedia, design, editing, and graphics... anything visual. So I have my hands in a lot of different pots. One of the photographers actually said, "You know, we should be flying a helicopter over the scene." Of course we should be flying a helicopter over the scene! It’s usually one of the first things we think about, so we should probably fly a helicopter over the vigil the following Sunday. I said, "You’re absolutely right. Can you set that up?" And you know, it took listening to him say that and then not being afraid to make suggestions. You know, [photographers] calling us up saying, "The thing you sent me to right now is okay, but I saw this
[other thing] on my way in, and this looks like way more potential." So I think just listening to them, and that can be a very nice guide, I think, in many ways.

**Did you find it easier or harder to look at the pictures knowing someone else had shot them? So, did the buffer of having someone else shoot the image make it easier or harder to process the event?**

I don't know if it made it harder or easier. It was tough because you're seeing city landmarks in there and very young faces. So I guess it was probably a little bit easier to have a little bit of distance from it, but I don't feel like I had very much distance from it. This was a very, very personal story for us. I worked at San Antonio Express News for six years before I came here. I had never heard of Sutherland Springs, although it's 30 miles away, not to negate any emotion they're going through. But this place, Pulse is on the street we work on. It's two and a half, three miles down the road. It's a very personal story. I shouldn't say this, but it's not the Denver Post covering Columbine, which is out in a suburb. This is right in our core, core, core region. I think that made it even more powerful for us.

**So the narrative that you ended up crafting for publication: was it more focused on the event itself or the effects?**

I would say the effects. When we talked about print design, the front page of the paper the day after Pulse was not a news story. It was a front-page editorial and one small photo. There was no blood, murder, mayhem, you know, traditional news fronts. So we took a very non-traditional front. As we were reading the stories, looking at the stuff come in, the most powerful thing we came across was our editorial board writer wrote this really thoughtful piece about, "This will not define
us." We thought it set a nice tone for healing, and we will heal, and we will heal together. So that kind-of set the tone of coverage we were going to do throughout. And we made a decision on day one that the shooter’s picture would not appear on the front page of the paper, and it never has. In a year and a half, we've used his name a couple times, but I don't think it's even been in a headline. But his picture has never appeared on the front page of our newspaper, and that's a very conscious decision. That's a streak I'm very proud of. So we didn't want to draw attention to that. We wanted to write 49 obituaries, to do 49 video memorials of each victim. So it was very much community- and victim-focused. We did cover the crime and the actual, "This is what happened." But we wanted our tone of coverage to be one of healing and remembering the victims, and I take a lot of pride in the fact that that guy's face has never appeared on the front page of our paper. I doubt most of our readers know that, but it gives me satisfaction knowing that.

What was it like having to live near the trauma? Do you still drive down that road and see it and think of it?

Yeah, you can't drive by it without thinking about it. Still every day that I've ever driven by it, there have been people outside in some form or fashion, either kneeling, leaving stuff, praying, hugging, and taking pictures... I've never seen that site empty. They're still trying to figure out what to do with the memorial, and that'll come in time, but the actual club has never been open and will never open again. It's impossible to drive by it without thinking about it. So yeah, it's a constant reminder.

What do you think is harder to handle between these large-scale events that happen infrequently versus smaller-scale, still traumatic events, say house
fires, car crashes, things like that... Which one's more difficult to look at and process?

Well it's definitely the large-scale ones if only because... I didn't want to miss anything. I didn't want us to have gaps or holes in our coverage. If I miss a house fire or something like that, it sucks for a day, and it's all over. Certain parts of this story, we only had one opportunity to document, and I just wanted to make sure our coverage was complete. So that's the pressure I mostly felt. That's why we overstaffed almost every assignment. If we think we might need to send two people to something, we'll send three. We didn't want to miss any of those signature moments or potential signature moments. So I feel a lot more pressure on stuff like that because I truly believe it's the most important story I'll ever be part of telling. There are always weird crimes in Florida, and there's something happening every other week here, but I guess the penalty for missing an opportunity there is gone in a flash. But Pulse is going to define this community for a while. I felt extreme pressure, and I think we did a pretty good job at it, but I didn't want to miss anything.

You mentioned that you felt extreme pressure to get it right while it was happening. The images, however... you'd say the larger-scale events were harder to look at versus the smaller-scale?

Oh absolutely. You know, we'd get aerial photos back, and you'd see a body halfway outside of the club. You've got these very powerful interviews we're doing on video that are first-hand accounts, and it's way more different because it's way more emotional. It's 49 dead versus 3, or whatever the smaller-scale event might be. It's
just a scale at which you never expect to be talking. So I would say definitely large-scale events are much more difficult, much more emotional. And I would say proximity matters because I’ve designed and edited stuff for 9/11, all the shootings up until now... I’ve seen Sandy Hook, Vegas, Sutherland Springs... I’m not saying those images weren’t powerful, even 9/11 images were powerful, but I never cried in the newsroom on 9/11. There’s something about it being in your backyard that raises the stakes. I mean, 9/11 is 100 times worse than what happened here, and that was a tough day to work, too. But the only times I’ve cried in the newsroom were around Pulse. I think even if I didn’t know the people in the pictures, even if I’d never been to that club, it’s still part of my home, and I think that’s what made it so tough. That’s what makes it tougher.

**Is there anything else you’d like to add?**

I mean, the one thing I would say is, I say stuff like 9/11 was tough, but this is tougher, and that’s a popular sentiment in the newsroom, but every tragedy since Pulse has rang a little truer, clearer, more heartbreaking to me. Vegas slayed me in a way nothing had since Pulse, and I think it’s changed my perspective on these things. It brings back flashbacks to what we went through as a newsroom, as a community. Even with Sutherland Springs, I worked in Texas for a while. I don’t know if I approach my work any differently, but the feeling in the gut of my stomach when we talk about how to play and cover these stories is much more personally affecting now after Pulse than it probably would have been before Pulse.
Photo Editor Seven interview transcript:

So we're going to be talking about the Manhattan truck attack that just happened four or five days ago.

I wasn't actually the lead editor on that one just because it kind-of happened as I was leaving. So I didn't edit a lot of the aftermath. But usually there's a point person, it's usually the supervisor who kind-of oversees like the initial aftermath. You know, usually the first thing you're wondering is who died, what happened, and who are the bodies. That was not my main focus the next morning. I was just there for about an hour into it. It was physically uncomfortably close. We could see it from the office actually, so our camera on the roof could actually shoot the aftermath, so that was actually the first photo we moved on the wire. It was literally from our roof camera which we... It's like a space that we run out to companies.

Did you do a lot of editing with it in the few days afterwards?

Yeah. So you know, it used to be like how quick you can get someone and how fast they can get you a photo. But nowadays the first photo that we typically move on the wire is actually often live video. I mean, in this case we had a camera on the roof. We turned it on, and we pointed it that way. It was maybe like two and a half, three blocks from my office. So I mean, as I was leaving, I could see it all happening. And at that point, we thought it was a shooting. I mean, there was a shooting, the guy who was shot, but we thought he was the one shooting. That's also really interesting, like hen news breaks, how it comes in. It's often unclear what is happening, and you have to be so vague and careful in the captions. In this case what really saved us is, we said in the first photo of the frame on the roof, “Police responded to reports of a
shooting.” And that’s what they were doing. They were responding to reports, but had we said, “A man shooting...” I mean that would have been incorrect, so it’s pretty hard to know [what’s right] when all the details aren’t in.

So throughout the week as you’ve been editing images, when it was happening with all the after effects, how did you feel at different points? Was it surreal having it happen in your own backyard?

I think the first time... I mean, we deal with so many of these, and often they’re at a distance. I don’t feel like they’re impacting you because... Well, you can’t let it impact you, otherwise you would never make it through a day. I think the first incident that felt really close to home was... If you remember the New Jersey/New York bombing, I think there was one in Jersey, and that evening, there was one in Chelsea. And I got to the office, and I’m editing the early photos. I was supposed to go to a cycling studio that night. And I’m looking at a photo I’m like, “Oh my gosh. I don’t think I’m going cycling today.” The studio was in the background. So that was the first time I thought, “Wow.” I mean, I’m often in that area, but it still felt so far. It turns out there was A reporter who lived on the street who ended up, on her day off, there because she was just physically the closest. But now, this is the first time... I actually run on that bike path, a lot. And I worked until 3 o’clock. And we heard about this thing at like 3:20, I want to say. So it physically felt close because, had that been 30 minutes later, I happened to still be in the office, but that often would have been when and where I would have been running. So that was really surreal.

Do you feel that you stop working after you leave the newsroom when these kind-of things happen?
No, it’s really hard to cut off. You’re kind of wired and I mean, AP has such a far reach and the things we send, more than half the world’s population sees AP content every day. So it’s my job to make sure that people are seeing and getting the right photos, and if our photos aren’t being used, then there’s an issue with what we did that day. So I’m constantly, like I can’t stop. I’m wondering what stories we missed. I’m wondering what photos we missed. Vegas was a big one because I mean, Getty kicked our butt because they were inside. I mean, those photos from inside will rip at your heartstrings. I was lying in bed and texting a photographer [in Vegas], like I should probably get up and get to the office for [those photos], and it’s all about being at the right place at the right time. You know that was one where we had to say, “All right, we weren’t there. What can we do now? And how do we get our photos used? How do we show this emotion even if we weren’t at the primetime?” So I find myself having a hard time turning it off. I think I reach a point during these days, I’ve learned that I have to tap out, where I’m mentally and physically exhausted, and I have to go.

The Pulse nightclub shooting... When we took the language that our story was using and we put it in a caption, that really hit home. We said it was the largest mass shooting at that time in modern American history. And I don’t know, for me, I started the day thinking that was a tiny shooting. I remember walking down the street thinking, “Another day, another shooting in America.” I was not moving quickly, to be honest, because we didn’t know the scope. And when the first news conference happened... you know, news conferences are very valuable when there’s a tragedy, but visually, it’s so boring. It’s an old white man, usually a police officer,
speaking. It's like visually, I don't care, but I remember just listening to that news conference and the room going silent when they started saying the death toll. And the first time they did, it was in the teens. It was like 19 people died at Pulse, and that was maybe close to 9 a.m., and most of the world was just learning about that. And obviously the number dramatically increased. And I remember the second news conference, I messaged my boss and I said, "Oh, this is really something." And he said, "You're going to stay there for a long time so I hope you're okay to stay at work." As the evening came in, you dissociate from what you're doing. We had someone fly [over the scene] and we were up there, looking for bodies, looking for how gruesome that is, and you're looking for how much of this can we show America, especially America, because we're one of the most sensitive out of the world. You know, the rest of world, dead bodies they're like, "Yeah, all right, we want to see that." Americans cannot handle that. We [photo editors] see a lot of it, and then we have to decide what everyone else can see. And with that, I remember... Usually, photos need to show us something that the rest the world wouldn't see otherwise. And at the end of the day, someone asked, "Can we move text messages on the wire?" And I was said, "That's not a photo, but show it to me." I look at it, I read it, and it just hit a spot with me. Even though we're dealing with tragedy, you have to find humor, and you have to laugh. You have to not get too involved mentally. And this was the last conversation between her a mother and her son, and it said, "Mom I love you. There's a shooting, and I'm hiding in the bathroom." It went back and forth and it was just... I moved that on the wire, I went to the bathroom, and I was like, 'I'm done, just like I can't do this anymore.' That was when I realized
what really what was going to be ahead of us this week. And unfortunately since then, there's been way too many.

**What do you notice the differences are between editing images from a shooting in Vegas or Pulse or something, versus something that's happening literally in eyesight of where you work? How are those different or similar?**

I think the difference is I can put myself in that situation. The bike path is one. I’ve run that path a million times. So I knew I was going to have to physically walk by there, and actually the next day, I walked by there when you could start to, and it was just covered in news cameras. I walk by there all the time, and it's just like a normal... you know, it's never looked like this. And then, when they reopened the bike path on Thursday, I went to leave work. It was a beautiful day, and I walked by the Metro photo manager and was like, “I really want to go for a run, but they opened the path. I feel conflicted, like how do I run by this now and just forget all I’ve ever seen, and what happened, and the people whose lives were lost?” And he’s like, “If you don't run on this path, you’re letting them win. You’re letting hate win. This is a beautiful day. You should get out there, and you should run on the path.”

And I found myself like every five seconds... like it was hard to focus because I was running past so many flowers, so many signs, so many Argentine jerseys, so many areas covered with people who were just out trying to see the same thing. And then there was. I was trying to visualize how it happened, which is probably not healthy. I was picturing where the truck came through.

The next morning, when I got in, the manager had sent me a video. I don’t know if you like how much footage of this you’ve watched. I recommend not
watching it if you don’t have to. It was horrifying. I was like a truck ramming into a school bus with handicapped kids on it, and you could see the kids’ faces in the school bus, and it runs through your head as you can physically walk by. And that’s something that I hadn’t experienced before because when it’s in Orlando... I’ve never even been to Florida. It still feels far away. It almost feels like when I cover for the Middle East [photo desk]. It’s tragic, it’s sad, and it’s a lot of “How gruesome can we show?” It always feels distant. And I think that’s an interesting thing with Americans is they have a hard time with tragedy when it’s close to home, but when it’s far away, it doesn’t impact them. And I like to say that other Americans think that, but I realize how much it really does impact you when it is physically close. I think like a good example of… do you remember the on-air shooting? It was out of Virginia. So right around that time, if you remember, a little refugee boy had washed up on shore, and the photo was everywhere. That little boy was lying on the beach dead right around the time that the on-air shooting happened. I wasn’t there that morning, but I came in that night, and I answered a phone call from a newspaper in the U.S. and they were very, very upset about a photo where you could see the body of the journalist, but it was obscured. Because, if you remember, there was a wrap around porch, and we had some [other] stuff where [it contained graphic content], but this one, the body was obscured. There was obviously this discussion in our newsroom, and we decided that this is a photo the world needed to see. So this newspaper editor called me, and he was livid. He was like, “How dare you move this image.” A lot of our stuff gets routed to newspapers websites automatically, and they don’t even have to put it up. So [the editor] says, “What if the wrong person saw
this, and we didn’t take it off? How do we tell our customers?” All I could think was, “So that dead baby on the beach is fine because it’s not here. It’s so far away, but this isn’t okay.” This is a constant problem, and no one’s ever going to agree. And if you ask a million different people what we should show, they’re going to give you a different answer.

So while you’re editing pictures from these large-scale traumatic events, how long does it take you to process them, or what coping mechanisms do you use? I’ve talked to photo editors whose newspapers have provided counseling services for them. I don't know if the AP does something like that. I’m sure they do. But [the thing] is I’m seeing this through a screen, and I’m not standing next to it. And that’s something I do think makes a big difference. And I think that it’s a lot easier to move forward from it when it’s not right in front of you. And these photographers, they go out, and they see this. Someone’s job was to babysit Las Vegas, and wait for bodies to be removed. I mean that was this photographer’s job. And so I think it’s different when you’re in that group of people in the comfort of your office. I have found it easier to process. But I mean, I just feel emotionally drained after. I think it’s important to remember what you’re doing. And I tend to, when I’m working, put the news first, and I think that’s how I process it. I can’t think about the families and the kids and the loved ones. I just have to think that we have to get the best photos out first. And I’ve learned that that’s how I process.

A couple years ago, there was a car crash. Our office is at 34th. The crash was at 35th. So it was the next street over. I called our photographer, who was in the
office, and she got there, and this is when I first started supervising this desk and I felt this pressure to never miss a moment, to make sure that when I’m on duty, we have the news, we have it first, and we have it best. This is photographer got there, got the photos, and I was like, “Hey, great photos. Like you can see how this guy died.” I was just in it with her, and she was like, “Hey, you can’t say ‘great photo’ like this. You need to remember it was a journalist who died. It was a video journalist, and I knew this guy. For me, this wasn’t a photo that I ever wanted to get.” And it really put it in perspective, because I tend to be focused on getting the best photo and not remembering what really happened. And I don’t know if that’s the best way to go forward, but I realize it’s the only way I can go forward in these situations. You know, let’s get the best photo, and let’s get it first. I tend to process it when I leave, I think.

**What does that look like after you leave?**

After the Pulse nightclub... I don't think it looks elegant, but I went to a wine shop, got a bottle of rosé, and called my mom, and told her about the text messages. I just wanted to hear my mom's voice. I wanted to tell her that I loved her. It's just like... that's what I wanted to hear when I was out of there, after seeing those text messages with the son and his mom. Those were the last words to his mom, and it just ripped my heart out, and I wanted to talk to my mom right then. I mean I think that's how I processed it in that sense. I think my coworkers joke that when you start, you should probably be given a bottle of vodka or wine. It's just funny. I also have a horrible habit of binge watching horrible TV but for me, that's how I just got out of the news. Otherwise I will sit here and continually flip through photos and
look at news and wonder what else we could have done, what we could have gotten, and I will keep reading the stories. I think the hardest part for me is the victim's stories. I got wrapped up in one from the Texas shooting the other day, and I just had to tell everyone about it. I couldn't get it out of my head, and seeing those kids faces. I think finding out who these victims are... That process alone is insane, going through their Facebook, their photos, reading messages from their loved ones...

That's what gets me. That's what sticks with me when I leave.

**What is your relationship like with the photographers that you work with? Do you know them personally? Do you hang out outside of work or are they just coworkers? Are they stringers?**

It really depends. It's a mix of all of that. I feel very lucky because I have the opportunity to go to a lot of assignments and to meet these people face-to-face, for the most part, especially my first couple years here. A lot of the people that I worked with, I was just a screen name to them. They knew me, and they knew a little about me, maybe. I'd say since I've been there four-and-a-half years, I call a lot of these photographers my friends. When Las Vegas happened, I was not quite awake yet. It was, I don't know maybe five in the morning here. And I was laying in bed, and I was like, “Oh my God. Is there a photographer there?” And I'm checking my email, “OK he's there. I should text him. I should see how he is. Hey John, are you okay? How are you doing? All right. I'm going to the office.” And then, of course my boss texts me: “Are you on your way to the office?” “Well, I am now!” I think it's a big mix, and I feel very fortunate. I just had a photographer come in from Singapore and one from Washington D.C., and they had never met, and I've never met the D.C. one, so we all
arranged to meet up. So I would say I feel very lucky that I'm with the staffers for the most part. I do feel like I am very close. I call them my friends, but there's also a big age gap between me and all of them. So the editors in New York, there is a close knit group of us. I remember, I missed a dinner one time, and my friend asked, "Are you sad you're not at your coworker's dinner?" And I was like, "Yes, because I like them, but I see them all the time." Also I'm the youngest one by about 20 years. So you know that's, I think, challenging but I think having a personal relationship with these people does make it better. When they're on the frontlines and you're putting a lot of pressure on them, you're like, "I need this. I need this. Can you get me this? Can you check this?" I mean I'm constantly, constantly asking questions of these people, and they're often going through something.

I mean, even covering Hurricane Harvey in Texas... our photographer, with all his gear, fell off a boat when it hit something on the ground. He got stuck under the boat, and his leg was caught by the engine. Four firefighters had to pull him up. And I talked to him after. I didn't know anything happened. He didn't tell me. I was bugging him, and it reminds me I should have been like, "How are you doing?" And then I got a picture from some other people of like his leg, and I was like, "What am I looking at?" And everyone was like, "You didn't hear?" So I think, as an editor, you always have to try and remember what these people are going through to get you the work that they are. I mean I'm exhausted, and I feel mentally drained, but I have to think about what they just saw. I mean a lot of them take that really personally, especially the ones with kids and families. I mean it really weighs on them.
So do you think that this friendship that you have with the photographers, does that affect how you interact with them during trauma? I mean, you kind-of touched on this, but maybe do you feel more or less responsible for them because of that relationship?

Yeah I mean, absolutely I think that. I feel so lucky to have a close relationship with a lot of them. I feel like I can be candid and be myself. And I think that it does help because when they’re out there, they need someone who is responsive, and they need someone who is going to get them the facts and the answers and buckle down when it's time, and they know that that's going to be me as well.

I remember Ferguson was probably the first big news thing I did by myself when I used to work nights. And I remember, during some of it, one of our photographers, who’s actually our Kansas City photographer, was out there, and he messaged me. I was asking him, “Do you have this? Do you have that?” And he was like, “Sorry got to go, heard gunshots. Bye!” And I didn't hear from him for like an hour. And I just sat there like, “Do I tell someone this is happening?” I felt personally responsible for anything that was about to happen. I mean, he was fine, but you do feel completely responsible for what they’re going through and what's happening, but yet unable to control any of it. I think it's worse obviously in warzones. I always feel like whenever a photographer messages me, and they’re in Iraq, I drop whatever I’m doing. I cater to the most important story, so I think it's that connection that they feel comfortable reaching out to you is so important. I also then push myself to start, even regardless of the tragedy, no matter how hungry I am for photos, I really do try to start with like, “Hey how are you doing?”
So is it easier or harder to be the photo editor versus the photographer? So is it easier to look at the photos because you're the photo editor, or is it harder?

For me, I think it has more pressure. It's a hard question because at the same time, if they don't get the photo, it's going to be their fault. I can't create something, and I can't work on something that doesn't already exist. So I feel like the pressure really does start on them. I feel so much of it because I have to make them look good. I am the person that presses a button, and no one will see what they do if it's not for me. So I feel that it's not necessarily harder but sometimes it's harder to explain. A lot of times with breaking news, we just don't know what's happening. And [the photographer is] there, and they often don't even know what's happening. And so I'm trying to communicate and sometimes I ask them questions that the answers just are not known. And you have to be so careful with how you communicate the news, and I feel so much pressure working at the AP because what we say and what we move, what we transmit tends to be what people believe. I take that to heart because if we transmit something wrong, it really wrecks our credibility. Take the church shooting in South Carolina. We had a photographer nearby – one of our best. If I could, I would duplicate 100 of him and send him everywhere. This guy is who you want on the front lines working. However, he's the best caption writer ever, but it was so hard to articulate what was happening in that situation. I remember at one point, we thought there was a bomb in the church. That night, people were reporting that it was a bomb and he wrote, “People respond to a bomb in a church...” And I was like, “We haven't confirmed that.” So I felt that moment could have been really bad had I said that, had we moved that. And so I don't know if it's easier. I think we
probably equally feel the pressure, but it's a position I have grown, fortunately, it's one that I've grown to love. The adrenaline is like nothing else.

**So what about when it comes to processing the event? Is it easier or harder to be the photo editor?**

I think it's probably easier just because I do feel some separation where like these photographers don't get to go home, a lot of times. They can't sleep in the comfort of their bed, or see their loved ones. They're stuck where they are who knows how long. I remember when the Charleston shooting happened, that photographer was there for a campaign event. The campaign event was canceled, and he was supposed to go home that day. And little did he know he was there for another week or two. So I mean, I think it's physically grueling for them to process. A lot of times they are close to these situations. And for me, it's through the screen and the comfort of the office with other people.

I do think it's something that I find myself bringing back. I have had nightmares, and I've realized that I'm dreaming about a photo, and that's horrifying. It started when I started working here. I've noticed that it's one of the weirdest things that has happened. But I know it's an effect of what I've seen and what I'm reading. I don't know, maybe that happens to other people who are knowledgeable in the news. I really believe it's because I'm staring at all the photos all day.

**Does it still happen?**

Yeah, it doesn't happen that often, but I've had it a couple times. Usually it's something overseas, but I feel like it's triggered by what I'm doing here. I talked to a photographer in Israel a couple years ago, and that was the first time I remember. I
woke up in the middle of the night, and I thought I was in Israel. And I know it was because I talked to the photographer that day who was in the war zone.

**So as a photo editor, what do you think is harder to handle between the smaller-scale events that happen more frequently, versus the large-scale events that happen less frequently?**

The sad thing is, when you're in a community, those small things are big things. So I think it's hard to say. A perfect example would be on Thursday, there was a shooting, a highway shooting in Rhode Island. You probably don't even know about it. That's how small it was. We have to process all the stuff. The local paper was very protective. They didn't want to give us their highway shooting photos. To them, that was big news. That was huge. That impacted that community. To us, it was like one guy got shot. It was American daily life. My coworker said, “You know, this isn’t even my first shooting today. This is my third shooting.” I think it’s different because on the small scale, when it’s your community, when you see the people it impacts, you know the people, and you’re around them, it’s different. For us, it’s the small ones that really don’t hit us because it’s so spread out. It’s so frequent. I cannot tell you how frequent this stuff is. I cannot tell you, since I started working at the AP, how many small plane crashes I have done just this week. I mean there was a big one recently, but I have done so many plane crashes. I mean, but someone usually dies, usually the pilot, and usually a passenger. It’s constant. So for me, it’s the big ones because whatever the main, top story is that day, that’s my responsibility, and that’s what I take very seriously. As a supervisor, I really try to take ownership of those and know everything happening. And those tend to take the biggest toll on me
because that’s when we really dig into [the story]. If there’s a plane crash, we care about the victims, but when it’s this big scale like in Texas... I mean, it was all hands focused on that, and we ask, “How do we cover this community of 400? Or how do we... highlight their lives? How do we show what is left?” And that I think takes a bigger toll on me. The small ones are easy. It’s the big ones. But I think when you work for a paper, like in Rhode Island – that highway was a big deal. And some of them probably knew the cop that was killed. So I mean, I think it’s all relative to where you are.