

**AURORA THEATER SHOOTINGS. THE VICTIMS**

JON BLUNK



AJ BOIK



JESSE CHILDRESS



GORDON COWDEN



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ALEX SULLIVAN



ALEXANDER TEVES



REBECCA ANN WINGO

# “EVERYBODY IS HURTING”

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Introduction by Karen Augé; profiles by Karen Augé, Lynn Bartels, Karen E. Crummy, Lindsay H. Jones, Patrick Saunders, Jordan Steffen and Erin Udell

All across the country Thursday night, thousands of people put on capes and costumes, rounded up friends and family and raced off to experience a celluloid fantasy about a tortured hero who devotes his life to fighting evil.

Inside an Aurora theater, though, the greatest evil wasn't on the screen.

It came instead in the form of a man who swaddled himself in a cocoon of armor before taking aim at a theater full of unprotected teenagers, moms and dads, and little kids.

When the shooting in theater 9 early Friday stopped, 24-year-old James Eagan Holmes was in handcuffs, and 70 people were wounded.

Twelve of them died.

As their names trickled out over the past two days, in friends' social media tributes, in anguished families' pleas for information and, finally, Saturday afternoon, in an official list, portraits emerged of the lives they had lived, and would have lived.

Of the 12, the youngest was 6, the oldest 51.

Nearly all those in between were young adults, old enough to be crafting careers, serving in the military, raising families but young enough to get a thrill out of being first to see the summer blockbuster — and energetic enough to do it at midnight.

One was two days shy of his first anniversary, one a single mother.

One of them had just earned his master's degree and wanted to be a counselor. They had all gone out for a night of fun, but more than one died trying to save someone else.

The greatest heroes weren't on the screen.



### **JON BLUNK: Shielded girlfriend, saved her life**

For Jansen Young, 21, the two constants during the movie-theater massacre that ended 12 lives were the sound of gunshots and the feeling of her boyfriend, Jon Blunk's, hands on her back.

Blunk, 26, was shot to death while protecting Young, according to NBC News.

Young declined to discuss details of the shooting with The Denver Post, saying she was "trying to work through it."

Young told NBC News that when the shooter started his attack, Blunk knew to throw her to the floor.

On the movie-theater floor, Blunk kept pushing her with his arms as she heard shots being fired.

She eventually noticed that he had stopped pushing her under the seat, but she didn't think he had been killed.

"I guess I didn't really know he had passed, up until I started shaking him and saying, 'Jon, Jon, we have to go. ... It's time for us to get out of here,' " she said, her voice trembling.

Young said she tried to get up and lift Blunk by the shoulder but he

didn't move. The couple had been dating since October, she told NBC.

Blunk's estranged wife, Chantel Blunk, who lives in Reno, Nev., with their two children — a 4-year-old girl and a 2-year-old boy — told NBC News that she was notified of his death by the FBI.

"He always talked about if he were going to die, he wanted to die a hero," she said.

He probably imagined that would happen in the military and not in a suburban movie theater.

Jon Blunk went to Proctor Hug High School in Reno, where he and Chantel met. After his 2004 high school graduation, he enlisted in the Navy and served aboard the USS Nimitz in San Diego.

Blunk left the Navy, separated from his wife and moved to Colorado in 2009. He had been working at a hardware store at the time of the theater shooting.

Blunk's funeral will be at 1 p.m., Friday, August 3 at the Mountain View Mortuary in Reno. He will receive a full military funeral and burial.

A Wells Fargo account — "Jonathan Blunk Memorial Fund" — has been set up for contributions, which will be used for his funeral and two daughters.



### **ALEXANDER "AJ" BOIK: "A warm and loving heart"**

His name was Alexander Boik, but to the hundreds who stood on the Gateway High School football field to remember him, he was AJ.

His family called Boik a young man with "a warm and loving heart."

On the day after he was killed in the Aurora theater shootings, friends recalled a guy who made people laugh, who loved softball and who loved movies so much he never missed a premiere.

"He was the life of the party. AJ could bring a smile to anybody's face," said one of a dozen speakers who paid tribute to their friend outside the high school Boik graduated from just two months ago.

The young man, who declined to give his name, said he had known Boik since they were freshmen at Gateway.

His girlfriend, identified by friends as Lasamoa Cross, surprised everyone by saying she and AJ were secretly engaged.

“We were crazy in love. We had big plans. We were going to have everything,” she said. “We are still going to have everything because he’s still here. AJ lives (in everyone who knew and loved him),” she said.

Boik’s plans included attending Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design in the fall. His family said his dream was to become an art teacher and open his own studio.

A memorial Facebook page was created for A.J., a site now bursting with messages of condolence, photos of hand-drawn messages etched in sandy beaches, and memories of the young man whose vivacious life was abruptly ended.

“AJ was loved by all that knew him,” his family said. “We want to try and focus on the beautiful lives that were ended and not the evil that is responsible. This is a time for us to remember our loved ones and cherish the memories we have of them.”

The family asked that their privacy be respected.

“We are trying to move through this horrible ordeal,” the family said. “Our thoughts, prayers and love go out to the other families of the victims and all those who have been touched by this senseless tragedy.”

A memorial fund has been set up for AJ, with the money going directly to his family.

Boik’s funeral is being held at 10 a.m. on Friday, July 27. The service will be at the Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Aurora, and the family has requested that media not attend.

## **JESSE CHILDRESS:**

### **“A great man” to his Air Force colleagues**

Nearly every day of the week, Jesse Childress spent his evenings playing sports with friends. Monday it was softball. Tuesday it was bowling. Another night, it was flag football.

He trained for a Tough Mudder race, which he completed last month with nearly 30 other Air Force airmen from Buckley Air Force Base. Chil-



dress, who served in the Army before joining the Air Force Reserves, loved the obstacles, but hated the running.

“Jesse was really big into sports,” said Alejandro Sanchez, a friend and fellow member of the Air Force Reserves stationed at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora.

In the fall, Childress, 29, spent his Sundays cheering for the Broncos — he had season tickets, and would wear his No. 92 Elvis Dumervil jersey — and throughout the winter and spring, he watched his beloved Los Angeles Kings and Los Angeles Clippers. Childress, whose parents live in Palmdale, Calif., dreamed of visiting every Division I football stadium.

But Childress was also a “big nerd,” his friend Kevin Thao said, in the most endearing way possible, because of Childress’ love of comics and superhero movies. Childress had recently purchased a new black Scion, a car he nicknamed the “Batmobile.”

Thao and Sanchez had tickets to “The Dark Knight Rises” in theater 8, and tried to convince Childress to sneak in from theater 9 to join them. Childress declined in order to stay with another friend.

Thao said Childress was fatally wounded when he dived in front of the friend, a female Air Force member from Buckley.

“He would have done that,” Thao said Saturday evening at the makeshift memorial erected across the street from the Century 16 theater.

Sanchez and Thao gave their witness statements to the police, and then spent nearly 90 minutes wandering around the parking lot looking for Childress.

“We were all calling the hospitals, the police department,” Sanchez said. “Almost every hour, to every hospital in this area.”

Three other Air Force colleagues traveled from the Air Force base Saturday to honor Childress. Two women and a man, all in their Air Force

uniforms, placed flowers at the memorial and then straightened the Air Force flag that was already in place.

The male airman, who declined to give his name, then turned to face the crowd of mourners.

“We lost a great man, you guys,” he said.

Childress lived in Thornton, and was one of two military members stationed at Buckley killed in the shooting. The other was John Larimer, a sailor in the U.S. Navy. Another airman and another sailor were injured.

According to the Air Force Reserve Command, Childress worked as a cyber systems operator and was on active duty orders in the 310th Force Support Squadron. His friends said Childress worked with the base’s computer systems.

“He was a huge part of our unit, and this is a terrible loss. The person that did this was an incredible coward,” Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Schwald said Saturday at the memorial site. She declined to give her first name.



### **GORDON COWDEN: Slain father “loved life”**

Gordon W. Cowden, 51, of Aurora was the oldest of the victims killed in the theater.

His family released this statement:

“Loving father, outdoorsman and small business owner, Cowden was a true Texas gentleman that loved life and his family. A quick witted world traveler with a keen sense of humor, he will be remembered for his devotion to his children and for always trying his best to do the right thing, no matter the obstacle.”

Cowden had taken his two teenage children to the theater the night of the shooting. The teenagers escaped unharmed.

A spokeswoman said the family “wishes to express appreciation for the

concern and prayers offered us during this very difficult time. Our hearts go out to everyone that has been harmed by this senseless tragedy.

Cowden is the son of former Texas State Representative George M. Cowden, according to the Austin Statesman.

“The family respectfully requests privacy as we cope with the loss of our loved one. Thank you for understanding that we will not be granting interviews or speaking to members of the media. Again, our thoughts and prayers are with all who are suffering due to this tragic event.”

His funeral will be on Wednesday, July 25, at Pathways Church, which is located at 1595 Pearl Street, Denver.



### **JESSICA GHAWI: “She wanted to help”**

Jessica Ghawi grew up a hockey fan in football-crazed Texas.

She followed that passion to Colorado to forge a career in sports journalism. It probably took her to Toronto, where just weeks ago, she walked out of a shopping-mall food court moments before a gunman shot seven people.

Writing as Jessica Redfield in a June 5 blog entry, the 24-year-old described how the experience reminded her “how blessed I am for each second I am given.”

Early Friday in Aurora, Ghawi did not escape the gunfire.

Jessica Ghawi paid the bills by working as a waitress until she was laid off recently, said Adrian Dater, who covers the Colorado Avalanche for The Denver Post. But her goal was to earn a living as a sports journalist.

When fire destroyed the homes of so many in Colorado last month, Ghawi decided to start collecting donated hockey equipment for kids.

“She wanted to help. That’s the type of heart she had,” her brother, Jordan Ghawi, told 9News.

According to a tweet sent on Monday by her brother Jordan, her memo-

rial service will be held at 10 a.m., Saturday, July 28, at Community Bible Church in San Antonio, Texas.

The family has set up the Jessica Redfield Ghawi Foundation and are directing donations to a scholarship fund, which they have established for aspiring sports broadcasters. So far, nearly \$23,000 has been donated in her memory.

Late Thursday night, as Ghawi waited for the show to start in sold-out theater 9, she tweeted her excitement and impatience, and ribbed friends who weren't there.

“MOVIE DOESN'T START FOR 20 MINUTES,” she tweeted before midnight.

It was her last message.



### **JOHN THOMAS LARIMER: Sailor was an “outstanding shipmate”**

John Thomas Larimer's last act was a heroic act. It was not, however, an act of bravery performed in his role as a Navy sailor — it was an act of love and sacrifice performed as a boyfriend.

Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Larimer was killed early Friday in the Aurora movie theater massacre while protecting his girlfriend, Kelley Vojtsek, from the barrage of bullets.

“John and I were seated in the middle area. When the violence occurred, John immediately and instinctively covered me and brought me to the ground in order to protect me from any danger,” Vojtsek said in a written statement provided to the Chicago Sun-Times.

“Moments later, John knowingly shielded me from a spray of gunshots. It was then, I believe, John was hit with a bullet that would have very possibly struck me. I feel very strongly that I was saved by John and his ulti-



mate kindness.”

Larimer, 27, joined the Navy in June 2011 and was a cryptologic technician 3rd class. For the past year, he had been stationed at the U.S. Fleet Cyber Command station at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora.

“I am incredibly saddened by the loss of Petty Officer John Larimer,” Cmdr. Jeffrey Jakuboski, Larimer’s commanding officer, said in a statement. “He was an outstanding shipmate. A valued member of our Navy team, he will be missed by all who knew him.

Larimer was from Crystal Lake, Ill., a suburb of Chicago.

A family member told the Daily Herald newspaper that Larimer was the youngest of five siblings. He was a 2003 graduate of Crystal Lake South High School and trained at the Great Lakes Naval Academy.

Julie Gates, a neighbor in Crystal Lake, described Larimer as a man with a good sense of humor who took time to stop and buy lemonade from her daughter’s lemonade stand.

Vojtsek, in her statement to the Chicago Sun-Times, said that she and Larimer had a conversation about his military advancement just weeks before the shooting.

“He wanted to be deployed for two simple reasons: He wanted to protect his country, and he wanted to save others from danger and harm,” Vojtsek said in the Sun-Times statement.

His funeral and burial will be private.



## **MICAYLA MEDEK:**

### **Hinkley grad was “trying to get life together”**

Everyone knew her as Cayla.

Micayla Medek, 23, worked as a Subway “sandwich artist.” “I do everything lol,” she said on her Facebook page.

A graduate of William C. Hinkley High School in Aurora, Medek took classes at Community College of Aurora through last fall.

“I’m a simple independent girl who’s just trying to get her life together while still having fun,” she wrote on Facebook.

She attended the midnight showing of the new Batman movie with friends and was wounded, family members told the Los Angeles Times. Nearly 20 hours passed before authorities confirmed to the family that she was one of the 12 killed in the shooting.

The Micayla Medek Memorial Fund is accessed through Fitzsimons Credit Union. Contributions can also be routed through local credit unions by calling 800-919-2872.

A visitation for Medek will be held Wednesday, July 25, from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Newcomer Funeral Home & Crematory, 190 N. Potomac, Aurora. The funeral is at 11 a.m. on Thursday, July, 26, at New Hope Baptist Church, 3701 Colorado Blvd., Denver.



### **MATT McQUINN: Ohio native protected his girlfriend**

Matt McQuinn died protecting his girlfriend.

As a gunman calmly walked up the aisle of an Aurora movie theater Friday firing at moviegoers, the 27-year-old Ohio native dived on top of Samantha Yowler. Her brother Nick, 32, also tried to shield her, said Robert L. Scott, attorney for the McQuinn and Yowler families.

Samantha Yowler, 27, was shot in the knee. Her brother escaped without injury. But McQuinn, from St. Paris, Ohio, was not as fortunate.

McQuinn’s mother, Jeri Jackson, flew to Colorado on Friday as family members in Springfield tried to get information about what happened to McQuinn, according to the Dayton Daily News.

McQuinn's stepmother, Stacie McQuinn, said the hospital would not tell Yowler, who underwent surgery Friday, about her boyfriend's condition because the two were not related.

Matt McQuinn graduated from Vandalia-Butler High School in 2004. He met Yowler while the two were working at a Target store in Springfield, the Dayton Daily News reported. In November, the couple transferred to a Target store in Denver, joining Yowler's brother, who had lived in Colorado for the past few years.

Co-workers spoke warmly of McQuinn on Friday when the news began circulating among the staff. Diane Behling worked with both McQuinn and "Sammy" and said they were all a close-knit team. She said McQuinn was "just a really good person" and that she loved having his "company and laughter" at work.

McQuinn's funeral is set for 10 a.m. on Saturday, July 28 at Maiden Lane Church in Springfield, Ohio. His burial will be at Lawrenceville Cemetery in Clark County.



### **VERONICA MOSER-SULLIVAN: 6-year-old just learned to swim, "loved to dress up and read"**

Veronica Moser-Sullivan will always be 6 years old.

The "vibrant, excitable," blond-haired, blue-eyed little girl, who was bragging five days ago about learning how to swim, was one of the 12 people killed in the Aurora theater shooting Friday, said her great-aunt Annie Dalton.

"She loved to dress up and read and was doing well at school. She was beautiful and innocent," Dalton said of Veronica, who attended Holly Ridge Elementary School in Denver. "It's a nightmare right now."

Veronica's mother, Ashley Moser, remains in critical condition at Aurora Medical Center. The 25-year-old was shot in the neck, and doctors have been unable to remove the bullet. She also suffered a gunshot wound in the abdomen.

Moser passes in and out of consciousness, asking about her daughter, Dalton said, and does not yet know that Veronica died.

Moser, who was recently accepted to medical school, might recover with some use of her hands.

"They expect her to have some paralysis but don't know how extensive it will be," Dalton said.

Veronica was a comfort to her grandfather, who died two months ago after suffering from a terminal illness over the previous year.

"We were just rebuilding our family," Dalton said.



### **ALEX SULLIVAN:**

#### **First wedding anniversary would have been Sunday**

Sometime late Thursday, Alex Sullivan posted on his Facebook page: "#TheDarkKnightRises OMG COUNTING down till it start cant wait going to be the best birthday ever."

Sullivan died on his 27th birthday. He and co-workers from a Red Robin restaurant had gone to the premiere. Sullivan was killed, and seven co-workers were injured.

Sunday would have been Sullivan's one-year wedding anniversary. Recently, he wrote on his Facebook page: "Just took the wife to DIA going to be gone for 3 and a half weeks going to miss her a lot. I love you cassie."

Cassandra Sullivan returned home Wednesday.

The morning of the shooting, Alex Sullivan's father, Tom, showed his picture around and asked if anybody had seen his son, an image that reminded some of 9/11 and grieving people amid that tragedy.

Friends on Saturday talked about the big-hearted, good-humored guy they knew.

Derek Smith, who worked with Sullivan at Red Robin on South Havana Street, said the two were movie buffs.

“In ‘Animal House,’ there’s a part when they go to the bar and one of the guys screams across the bar, ‘Hey, Otis!’ ” Smith said. “When I walked in, it was always, ‘Hey, Otis!’ No one knew what it meant, but because we’re both into movies we got a kick out of it.

“Ah, man, I’m going to miss that dude, I really am,” Smith said, his eyes welling with tears.

Bryan Beard first met Sullivan during their freshman year at Grandview High School.

“We just clicked,” Beard said. “We’re both big guys, and big guys stick together.”

Beard said Sullivan stood 6 feet 4 inches and weighed about 280 pounds. He played football and wrestled before graduating from high school in 2003 and later going to culinary school, Beard said.

Maneka Singh, another high school friend, said Sullivan was “always smiling and the type of guy who had too many friends and loved them all.”

“I’m just trying in a way to make sense of all of this. I don’t know that you can really even do that,” she said. “Why a movie theater? Why so many innocent people?”



### **ALEXANDER TEVES:**

#### **Recent master’s graduate a fan of Arizona, Spider-Man**

Shooting victim Alexander Teves recently earned his master’s degree in counseling psychology from the University of Denver.

Friends of Teves, 24, began posting on social media Friday night after learning Teves was among the 12 people killed in the Aurora movie theater shootings.

A friend, identified only as Caitlin on Twitter, posted messages on the social media network early Friday from the Century Aurora 16 theater, and wrote on Twitter early Saturday that Teves was, “One of the best men I ever knew. The world isn’t as good a place without him.” She also described Teves as a fan of the University of Arizona and Spider-Man.

Teves’ aunt, Barbara Slivinske, told ABC15 in Phoenix that he had also attended college in Arizona and had wanted to pursue further schooling in order to become a physical therapist.

According to his father, Tom Teves, the 24-year-old blocked his girlfriend, Amanda, from the very bullet that ended up killing him.

“He always put everybody else ahead of himself and that was typical of his behavior yesterday. He was a hero,” Slivinske told ABC15. “He was a wonderful nephew. He was a wonderful person. Loving, caring, intelligent, and had a good sense of humor. Everybody loved him who met him.”

Slivinske told ABC15 that he would wear the same outfit to high school everyday — clean blue jeans and a crisp white T-shirt.

It became such a trademark joke among his classmates that they would have “Alex Teves Day” where everyone would show up to school in the same outfit, reports ABC15.

A University of Denver spokeswoman said Teves, from Phoenix, graduated in June. The university officially notified its students and faculty of Teves’ death Saturday afternoon.

The University released the following statement:

“The University extends its deepest condolences to his family and friends, including the many current students and faculty who knew and worked with Alex.”

Teves’ personal Facebook page lists him as a 2010 graduate of the University of Arizona, and a 2006 graduate of Desert Vista High School in Phoenix.

Funeral arrangements are still being made.



### **REBECCA WINGO: Mom of two “lost ... to a mad man”**

The father of Rebecca Wingo, 32, confirmed that his daughter died in the Aurora theater shootings in a post on his Facebook page.

Steve Hernandez wrote, “I lost my daughter yesterday to a mad man, my grief right now is inconsolable, I hear she died instantly, without pain, however the pain is unbearable.”

Friends said Saturday that Wingo’s parents also posted a message about her death on Wingo’s Facebook page. That page shows a picture of two young girls.

A friend, Gail Riffle, brought two teddy bears, one pink and one white, to the memorial site near the CenturyAurora 16 theater for Wingo’s daughters, as well as roses for Wingo’s parents.

“Everybody is hurting right now,” Riffle said. “She was a gentle, sweet, beautiful soul.”

Wingo listed Joe’s Crab Shack as her employer on Facebook, and a manager at the restaurant in Aurora confirmed that Wingo worked there. He deferred comment to the restaurant’s corporate office, which was closed Saturday.

Wingo had been enrolled at the Community College of Aurora since fall 2009 and had been working toward an associate of arts degree.