

JULIE BUTCHER

My name is Julie Butcher. I've been in California since 1979. Matthew [my son] was born in 1983 and he graduated [high school] in 2001. His first word was "ball," and his second word was "dog." He was smart, precocious, athletic. He was small relative to his peers, so I was always answering, "the little one" [when asked] "which one is yours?" He played every sport – fearless. He liked hiking, snowboarding, golf. He was the firstborn, so he was really, really competitive. It was just me and Matthew for a while and then we blended the family and added a little brother. Matthew was protective – a great big brother. Steven [Matthew's little brother] called him when he first spoke words, "mine big brother." They had a seven-and-a-half-year age difference.

Before he was murdered, [Steven and Matthew] were spending a lot of time together. They were finally old enough to be friends. They'd fight with each other. I used to threaten to send them to Philadelphia and I'd say, "You know, the City of Brotherly Love." That was our little joke. They'd argue and then I'd find them curled up sleeping together. There's nothing like the relationship between two brothers.

Matthew was killed when he was 27, he was murdered at work. He was working at one of the first medical marijuana dispensaries [in Los Angeles]. They clearly didn't have enough security. There were three people that shot two staff. They came in pretending to be customers, stole everything, took the security stuff, and then came back and shot them. They had everything they wanted. They had pot, they had money, and they had the security cameras. There was no reason to come back, and [the staff] hadn't resisted. They weren't going to resist. One of Matthew's co-workers was shot in the back of the head. Junior – they called him Junior – managed to survive. They think because the bullet hit his ponytail.

That same night, there was a big union membership meeting. Before the meeting, I was sitting outside at apparently the time that Matthew was killed. You know how the sun goes behind the clouds, and you get a little chill? I think he said goodbye. I'm agnostic, but it was somehow comforting. He was always such a loving boy. I know that if he could have said, "It's okay, Mom," he would have. Maybe I'm just imagining that. Hours later, after the meeting, when I finally got in the car, my husband had called me 27 times. He said, "You have to drive over here. You have to be here now." I drove and they had the street blocked off. I knew. You deny it. You think, *no, it's somebody else. It's someone else. It's a mistake. It's impossible. It can't be.*

The police drove me down [closer to the dispensary] and we stood in the street for the longest time. And thank God for the Mayor's Crisis Response Team, those folks were amazing. [A team member] stood there in the middle of the street with me while we waited to see if it was my dead son inside. I'm a stranger, but she was compassionate. She talked to me about herself and about her dog. I'll never forget her.

The other magic person that arrived in my tragedy was [a woman] from the Los Angeles County Victims Assistance Program. Her son was murdered years before around the corner from where we lived in Highland Park. Somehow, I had this idea that I needed to see the body, and she's like, "No, you don't. There'll be pictures. There is no need. You don't need to remember him like that." And I have never wondered about it since. It's one of those myths that people should [see the body] but there's no closure. The steps [of grief] are not steps. The steps happen all at once. And some of them don't happen. It's never linear.

They caught and prosecuted two of the killers. There's a third out there somewhere. I don't imagine we'll ever find them. We did the whole court thing. The prosecutor was wonderful. The police, the detectives really stayed at it. For us, it took a while. LA City did a reward for information, and it somehow ended up on the news, and the killers were found right by Dodger Stadium. Elysian Park. They were caught at the end of the summer, so a couple months [after the murder]. Then it took another year to a year-and-a-half to get to trial cause stuff takes time. And that's hard.

'This was a senseless murder.'

The Victim Assistance folks, I can't say enough [good things]. In the restroom, the mother of one of the killers tried to hug me. I don't know what she was thinking. She was like, "Can I hug you?" I'm like, "No, you can't." [Victim Assistance] literally got between me and her. It's so helpful having somebody that's there for you, helping to explain how to write a victim impact statement and just everything. This stuff is complicated, and it takes time. We didn't have any restitution. But at every step, there was somebody that was helpful.

This was a senseless murder, and it's just a simple numbers thing. There are just too many guns. Even in a place that regulates guns as much as we try, there's just so many. A simple robbery becomes a murder, as opposed to a simple robbery. There was no reason for Matthew to be killed. At my first meeting of [Parents of Murdered Children](#), I was welcomed to a club I never knew existed, certainly wouldn't ever want to join. It helps to connect with other people that understand.

Anything the county can do to focus on the sources of violence and preventing it is important. Keep funding programs like the Victims Assistance Program. The Mayor's Crisis Response Team is one of those things that gets underfunded. You know, safety and training when there's a crisis are the first things to get cut out of budgets. But they are wonderful.

The morning after Matthew was killed, the president of the union I worked for was at City Hall to make sure that I didn't show up for a 7 a.m. meeting. I had 107 vacation days or something and I don't think I went back into work until October. Truth be told, I probably started to retire then. There's a *before*

Matthew was killed and an *after Matthew was killed*. And for me, it's never been the same. I overheard somebody saying something about how, "I lost my edge." I was a negotiator. I went to work for the Teamsters and loved the workers, but I didn't have the wherewithal. I just couldn't. I wanted to hang out with my grandbabies.

Every day, I'd like to talk to Matthew about something. I miss hearing Steven and Matthew argue with each other. Steven has two kids. Matthew would have been such a fun uncle.

I try to celebrate him.'

I'm not much of a drinker, but immediately after, I drank a lot. Numbing was the only thing that was truly helpful. Outside is helpful now. I have a little garden. I feel him there when I'm digging in the dirt and remember playing with him. I try to celebrate him, not mourn him. We've tried to do the things that he liked.

[After Matthew's death,] I spent a year volunteering with crisis response intervention where people text if they're suicidal. I would find myself up in the middle of the night. I've always been sort of nocturnal, generally. Matthew was always up, and we used to talk in the middle of the night. I figured if I was going to be up anyway, especially because they needed people at those busiest times. I found it healing to be helpful like that.

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