

Rampage left lasting wounds - In July 1999, a white supremacist fired shots toward a group of Orthodox Jews in West Rogers Park, starting a three-day shooting spree that left two dead and nine wounded. Today, survivors continue to cope with the physical and emotional scars.

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There are times when Hillel Goldstein can smell the burning powder of .22-caliber rounds being fired into his body.

Sometimes, in this Appalachian town where he works as a psychotherapist, Goldstein's mind races back to that Friday five years ago in Chicago.

He sees a man pull up in a Ford Taurus and begin shooting as Goldstein--then a bearded and black-garbed Orthodox Jew--walks home from his synagogue.

"Oh, my, this must be an ugly prank," he recalls thinking. "He's shooting blanks at me; he's throwing firecrackers."

Like the other victims of a racist shooting spree that killed two and injured nine July 2-4, 1999, Goldstein didn't at first notice the extent of his five wounds.

But five years after Benjamin Smith's rampage across Illinois and Indiana, Goldstein, 39, and other survivors are still discovering the damage those bullets caused, from continuing physical pain to terrifying flashbacks, upending families and rerouting lives.

Yet the story of the shooting did not end with only chaos and destruction. Victims went on to celebrate their survival, and some have found their faith and relationships deepened. The attacks inspired the creation of a foundation and a scholarship in the names of the two murder victims.

Those who were wounded also discovered untapped reservoirs of strength, transcending this episode in history.

Minorities have always found strategies to deal with hatred and violence, said Dean Bell, an expert in medieval and Reformation anti-Semitism at Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago.

"They aren't just victims," said Bell. "Even in a hostile environment, there's a power that human beings have that allows them to navigate this world."

Bell should know. On July 2, 1999, Smith shot him five times as he walked home from his synagogue in West Rogers Park.

Some of the victims, afraid of retribution, declined to speak to the media at the time of the shooting. In recent interviews with the Tribune, however, many of them described the crime and its legacy in their lives, several for the first time.

Smith, 21, a Wilmette native, was a disciple of a white supremacist named Matthew Hale, the self-styled "pontifex maximus" of the Creativity Movement, which preached "racial holy war."

Over three days Smith attacked Jews, Asians and African-Americans, killing Ricky Byrdson, a former Northwestern University basketball coach, and Won-Joon Yoon,

an Indiana University student. Smith took his own life as law officers closed in on him July 4.

Smith launched his attack on Shabbat, the day of worship when Orthodox Jews don't use phones, cars or other mechanical devices. Apparently he knew the faithful would be heading to and from services around the time of candle-lighting, 8:11 that night.

After services, Bell went a block out of his way to continue walking with Gidon Sapir, an Israeli friend who was then a visiting lecturer at Northwestern University. Sapir's children accompanied them.

At the corner of Lunt and Francisco Avenues, Smith pulled up. Without a word he fired out the passenger window.

Bell felt a zing on his shoulder. A warm spot of blood began expanding on his chest under his white shirt.

"At first I thought it was a BB gun," Bell said recently, "and then you realize the extent of it. I was just screaming, 'God help me.'"

Sapir was shot as he threw himself over his children to protect them, the Israeli said in a phone interview. Bell ran, and the gunman shot him four more times. He rolled under a car to hide. Smith drove on.

The attacks brought Bell an outpouring of support from fellow Orthodox believers and many others. Synagogues celebrated the survival of the six Jews who were shot.

But as Bell recovered, he and his wife, Juli, saw that the wounds ran deep in the family. For a time, his son, Chanan, then 5, was afraid to go to synagogue and insisted on wearing a baseball cap over his skullcap.

A week after Bell got out of the hospital, his daughter, Malkaya, then 7, was playing an imaginary game: She was the wife of a man who had been shot. Taken aback, Bell asked how this hypothetical wife was doing. Malkaya said the wife was fine, but it was hard on the children; they were still scared.

It was scary for their father too. Bell had been shot in his back, left elbow, left calf, right leg and hand, and the pain is constant even now.

Bell declined to have a nerve graft that offered only a slight chance of helping his elbow, and he refuses painkillers.

Sometimes after too many sleepless nights, the pain becomes too much to take.

"Every once in a while, my kids see Dad just sort of dissolve and sit and cry," Bell said. "It's painful for them to watch, I'm sure. I try not to do it too much in front of them."

Bell found that the experience changed his approach as a scholar as well. The shooting heightened Bell's understanding of anti-Semitism and community responses to bigotry.

In one story he found from the early 17th Century, the burghers of the German city of Worms decreed that the Jews should be expelled, Bell said. A rabble gathered to launch a pogrom. But then a famous rabbi and mystic appeared, pronouncing divine names. A cohort of warriors in armor appeared to protect the Jews.

Bell concluded that such stories empowered believers. The message was that people could protect themselves by calling on God. Just as Bell himself did.

"I just thank God that I'm alive," Bell said. "There are people that weren't that lucky."

At 2 a.m. July 5, 1999, a ringing phone awoke Shinho Yoon and his wife, Kang-Soon Lee. South Korea is 14 hours ahead of Bloomington, where their son, Won-Joon Yoon, 26, was about to begin his doctoral studies in economics at Indiana University.

"We were very, very surprised," said Shinho Yoon, now 73, in a recent phone interview. "Why such a phone call so early in the morning? So we thought it was some very bad thing."

The caller, pastor of a Korean-American church in Bloomington, was phoning from a hospital to say, "I'm sorry for calling you so early, but unfortunately Won-Joon got injured very seriously," Shinho Yoon recalled.

The young man had been leaving church July 4 when Smith fired into a crowd of worshipers. The pastor didn't yet tell the parents that their son had died. It seems the cleric was preparing them, Shinho Yoon said.

Ten minutes later the pastor called again. God had called their son home, he said. Stunned, the couple sat down.

"We thought we had a bad dream," Shinho Yoon said. "It was absolutely unbelievable, incredible, unthinkable, that such a young boy, a good fine boy, our son, suddenly was gone. We didn't even cry. No weeping. Just like we thought we had a bad dream, and it would be wrong--our imagination. It was so shocking, so sudden."

The death of a son was especially painful in a culture that values male heirs. Won-Joon Yoon had three older sisters, but as the only son in the family, he had been exempted from the draft, his father said. Nevertheless, when he was a young man he volunteered to serve in an army artillery unit.

The young man's parents came to the United States to attend his funeral service. Perhaps a father would have every right to be angry.

But Shinho Yoon, an elder in his church in Korea, says his faith kept him from bitterness.

He is touched that 2,000 people, including U.S. Atty. Gen. Janet Reno, attended the funeral, and that Indiana University created a scholarship in the name of his son.

While leading a trade mission visit to Korea later that year, Indiana Gov. Joe Kernan--then lieutenant governor--visited the family to express his condolences. The slaying had been widely covered and discussed in the country. He was impressed, though, by the couple's faith in the face of such a terrible loss.

"I didn't sense any bitterness toward America and Indiana," Kernan said in a phone interview. "Just a great loss."

Won-Joon Yoon's family joined victims Goldstein, Steven Kuo, the Rev. Stephen Anderson and the Byrdsong estate in a 2000 lawsuit against the manufacturers of the guns used in the shootings and the man who illegally sold the weapons to Smith. Shinho Yoon just wants to hold gun sellers accountable to the law, he said.

Four years later, one gunman has been dropped from the suit, and the other two defendants have declared bankruptcy, said Elizabeth S. Haile, an attorney with the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, which represented the plaintiffs. The suit has bogged down in bankruptcy courts in two states, she said.

Someday Shinho Yoon would like to meet Smith's parents to let them know he does not blame them.

He has even forgiven the killer, he said.

"We don't try to figure it out," said Shinho Yoon. "Our Lord has taken him away. No more do we have to be sorrowful, because he has gone to be with Christ in heaven."

For Goldstein, a former Israeli soldier who had served in Lebanon in 1983-84, the shooting revealed his vulnerability. He had come under fire and had not been able to shoot back. Like many other Smith victims, he developed post-traumatic stress disorder and was haunted by flashbacks and nightmares.

Goldstein wanted to try in Chicago what Orthodox synagogues had done in New York and elsewhere: creating unarmed patrols of volunteers with cell phones who call the police at any sign of trouble.

Others argued that such patrols wouldn't have stopped Smith. Goldstein disagreed, because Smith could have been caught as he sat in his car surveying the neighborhood.

"They felt that I was overreacting," he said. "This phrase was mentioned over and over, and it's mentioned in secular communities after a crime. I think a lot of crime victims would relate to it. You're told, 'Let go. Move on. Get over it.'"

Rabbi Reuven Gross of Sha'arei Tzedek synagogue, which Goldstein attended, said his heart goes out to his former member. But the Orthodox community felt that the shootings were an anomaly that was unlikely to recur, he said.

"The community felt secure with the way the Chicago Police Department was dealing with it," Gross said.

Goldstein saw that reaction as a lack of support from his community. This added to the ongoing frustrations he felt about living within Orthodoxy's strict network of social conduct.

The shooting also contributed to marital stresses that eventually led to his divorce, he said. After finishing his psychology coursework he looked for work elsewhere in the country, seeking to get away from Chicago.

And all those factors led to his decision to leave the strict observance of Orthodox practice.

Goldstein ended up working as a psychotherapist at a hospital in Hazard, a town of 4,806 in Kentucky's Appalachian Mountains, where the forested hills and hollows are draped in kudzu. He feels the pain of his old wounds sometimes, but it is not constant like Bell's.

Goldstein says he is the only Jewish person in town, but he feels safer here than in Chicago, where passersby sometimes shout slurs at Jews.

His past as a shooting victim has deepened his respect for his patients. They are tough mountain people--often loggers or coal miners injured by a tree fall or the collapse of a mine wall--who have been buried by depression and addiction to prescription painkillers or other drugs.

"My patients suffer far more than I do," he said.

These days Goldstein is prepared to protect himself. At home he keeps a .357 Magnum and a 12-gauge shotgun. He doesn't intend to become a victim of someone such as Benjamin Smith again.

"Somewhere in hell, I believe that guy is looking on to see what happened to the people he killed or tried to kill," Goldstein said. "I'm not going to give in to that animal."

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Three-day rampage (area map)

Shooting incidents

FRIDAY JULY 2, 1999

1. West Rogers Park,

8:20-8:35 p.m.

Shooting spree begins with shots fired at several people, wounding six.

2. Skokie, about 8:52 p.m.

Fatal shooting of former Northwestern basketball coach Ricky Byrdsong.

3. Northbrook, 9:20 p.m.

Shots are fired at an Asian-American couple, but they are not injured.

SATURDAY JULY 3, 1999

4. Springfield, 1:15-1:33 p.m.

One man is shot and injured while crossing East Matheny Street.

Two black men are fired upon but not injured on East Division Street.

5. Decatur, 2:50 p.m.

Rev. Stephen Anderson is shot four times and wounded.

6. Urbana, 11:47 p.m.

Steven Kuo is shot in the right leg while walking home.

7. Bloomington, Ind. 11:20 a.m.

Won-Joon Yoon, a student from South Korea, is killed outside a Korean church.

SUNDAY JULY 4, 1999

8. Downstate Salem, Ill.

Benjamin Smith's violent spree ends when he shoots himself as police close in on the van he had carjacked.

The victims

KILLED

Ricky Byrdsong, 43

Former Northwestern University basketball coach

Killed July 2, 1999 as he walked with his children in Skokie

Won-Joon Yoon, 26

Student at Indiana University

Killed July 4 outside the Korean United Methodist Church in

Bloomington, Ind.

WOUNDED

JULY 2, 1999

Dean Bell, 31.

Now a dean at Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago

Shot five times

Hillel Goldstein, 34

Former high school therapist, he now works at a psychiatric center in rural Kentucky.

Shot five times

Ian Hupert, 31

Now works for a health services management company

Shot in the forearm and right side

Gidon Sapir, 34

Former Israeli army captain, he is now a law professor in Israel.

Shot as he threw himself over his children to protect them

Ephraim Wolfe, 15

Recently returned from studying in Israel

Shot in the leg while walking to synagogue

Eric Yates, 31

Shot in the leg

JULY 3, 1999

Lewis Jordan, 31

Shot in the buttocks in Springfield while crossing the street

Stephen Anderson, 37

Former Decatur, Ill., church pastor, he now lives out of state.

Shot four times

Steven Kuo, 22

Former University of Illinois student

Shot in the right leg while walking home

Source: Tribune reports

Chicago Tribune

Caption: PHOTOS 7 GRAPHIC

PHOTO (color): Haunted by rampage Hillel Goldstein, below, and other survivors bear scars of racist's 1999 shooting spree. (Chicago Final edition, News section, Page 1.) PHOTO: Hillel Goldstein, a victim of Benjamin Smith's 1999 rampage, divorced and moved to Hazard, Ky., where he is a psychotherapist. Tribune photo by Heather Stone. PHOTO: Shinho Yoon, with his wife, Kang-Soon Lee, says his faith kept him from bitterness after the slaying of their only son, Won-Joon Yoon. AP photo by Lee Jin-man. PHOTO: Ephraim Wolfe was 15 years old when he was shot while walking to a synagogue. Tribune photo by Phil Velasquez. (Chicago Early Edition, News section, Page 10.) PHOTO: The effects of Benjamin Smith's racist shooting spree are still being felt. PHOTO: Ricky Byrdsong, 43. PHOTO: Won-Joon Yoon, 26.

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