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Tucson, as seen through the eyes of a child

Phyllis Zagano | Jan. 19, 2011 Just Catholic

?Tucson? will remain a code word for too many years to come, as the scars from wanton violence in that sunlit corner of the United States refuse to fade from view. Among the gravely wounded, Gabrielle Giffords, a congresswoman married to an astronaut. The world remains transfixed by her story.

We don?t really know the other names, except perhaps John Roll, 63, chief judge of the U.S. District Court for Arizona. But there in Tucson, dead that day, were Dot Morris, 76, a retired secretary; Phyllis Schneck, 79, a homemaker; Dorwan Stoddard, 76, a retired construction worker.

Thirty-year-old Gabe Zimmerman set up the ?Congress on Your Corner? event, and was soon to marry. He, too, died in front of the food store so ironically named Safeway.

And then there was Christina-Taylor Green, the nine-year old for whom the world held every promise. You know her story. Born on that bright, sunny, awful day, September 11, 2001, Christina was buried from the Tucson church where some days later they celebrated Judge Roll?s life. Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas said her funeral mass. He said Judge Roll?s, too.

When President Obama spoke at the University of Arizona he called us all together to remember and recall the goodness and the generosity of so many people there in Tucson who came together as one to help, to pray, to grieve.

Obama talked about the folks whose bright lives were now forever darkened. He choked a bit on Christina?s story. Someone counted a 51-second gap in his usually measured speech.

The president said Christina ?saw public service as something exciting, something hopeful,? and she watched it ?through the eyes of a child, undimmed by the cynicism or vitriol that we adults all too often just take for granted.?

It?s true. Christina saw the world as a wonderful place full of wonderful things to do and see. Her life was full of newness and of challenge. She was the only girl on the boy?s baseball team, and was elected to her school?s student council. She liked picking blackberries. She did all the things that nine-year-old girls did, and then some. She went off with a neighbor lady to meet her congresswoman down by the Safeway that Saturday morning when the air was clear and the world?s promise rolled out bright and shiny before her.

Judge Roll meant to be there, too. He went to mass at St. Odilia?s, his parish church, went home and then set out again to see the congresswomen who would be meeting with constituents there in the open air that shining day. He strode purposefully toward the congresswoman as what happened, happened, and his voice was silenced and his eyes forever closed.

The town is still in shock, and they?ve several healing services planned. The sloping lawns of University Medical Center are filled with flowers and mementos. Inside the congresswoman and many of the thirteen

others wounded remain, recuperating, but perhaps not recovering from the bullets that barely glinted in the sun before ripping through their bodies, limbs and lives.

And what else is there to say? The congresswoman and the astronaut, we hope and pray, will live happily ever after. But this story can never have a completely satisfactory ending.

Too many lives are maimed, too many beating hearts stilled, too many eyes forever closed.

Yet, sometimes what makes no sense makes sense. Sometimes a glimmer of hope peaks through the shades of darkness.

Young Christina was an organ donor, and so her corneas went to save the dimmed eyes of two children facing certain darkness. Those two children may or may not know they view the world through the eyes of a girl who could hit a baseball over the fence and get herself elected to the student council. They have different hopes and different dreams. But they can see.

And Judge Roll?s prayers without his knowing may have helped those two children for whom transplant teams scrambled.

Remember, if you will, Judge Roll prayed that morning there in Tucson in his parish church of St. Odilia, a patron saint of the blind.

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