

Trauma-inducing news coverage and the roles of memorials after school and mass shootings

Journalists and survivors connected to five Colorado shootings consider how the news media industry can better cover tragedies and support their front-line reporters

By Lauren Irwin

From the year I was born, 12 mass shootings have occurred in the state of Colorado and six of them have happened less than 20 miles from my childhood home.

Born in 2000, throughout my childhood, the name Columbine was only spoken in hushed voices year-round until April memorials. School shooting drills were part of my first-grade curriculum.

The 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting brought my generation's young eyes to the courtroom for the first time and dominated local media. Six months later, I remember the news of the Arapahoe High School shooting traveling quickly around the middle school halls. I waited anxiously by the phone when my sister told me her school was on lockdown during the nearby 2019 STEM School shooting. I watched the SWAT team run through my back alley during the Boulder King Soopers shooting last March.

Almost everyone in the state of Colorado has been affected, or knows someone affected, by the state's ongoing list of 16 mass shootings since 1999. As a journalism student and Colorado native, I examined a handful of the state's previous shootings to study the ways journalists have induced trauma on victims of shootings and may also become traumatized themselves through their reporting practices. I also researched and explored the growing documentation of the human cost of these shootings, through physical memorials and, more recently, acts of memorial, to prove how changing the narrative for news media will provide solutions to addressing this trauma constructively.

Landmarks of trauma

Jordan Lang was 14 when a student brought a shotgun into her high school. In 80 seconds, he had taken the life of Claire Davis, a 17-year-old student, in the hallway of Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado and then killed himself.

"Nobody teaches you how to heal from a shooting," Lang said. "There's not a textbook on how to heal from that."

Lang remembers media crews parked across the street from the school as they were evacuating the high school, something she wishes didn't happen. After graduating from CU Boulder with a journalism degree in 2021, she has now taken a step back from the journalism industry. After multiple shootings in her life, she felt like the breaking news aspect of the industry was harmful to those involved in tragedies.

“We did not need cameras in our faces as we were running out of the school, absolutely not,” Lang said.

Growing up down the street from Columbine High School—where two students killed 13 people in 1999—Lang deeply feels Colorado's history of gun violence.

“It's just so strange to see, instead of these schools, it's landmarks of trauma,” she said.

As a CU Boulder student who had experience recovering from shootings, many friends turned to Lang after the Boulder King Soopers shooting last March. She was glad she was able to help people, but still felt an emptiness surrounding the incident.

“It was just hard to understand because I was like, ‘Why is this happening everywhere I go?’” she said.

Tom Costello, NBC News correspondent, also an Arapahoe High School alum, got his start working at the local channel, 9News. His experiences as a Colorado native echo Lang's—these shootings seem to follow them.

“I feel like, you know, everywhere I turn, everywhere I've worked or lived, there has been a mass shooting,” he said.

And while the aftermath of tragedies can follow closely behind, many in the Colorado community have used it to their advantage.

Heather Martin (Egeland) was a student at Columbine High School in 1999. Tucked away in the choir office after the teacher had left them behind, she and several other students heard gunshots nearby and tried to call the police on the landline, since it was rare to own a cellphone then.

After the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting, Martin and her friends started a support organization, The Rebels Project—named for the Columbine High School mascot—is an

organization providing a community for those who have been through traumatic experiences. She realized, even 13 years later, the Columbine community was still hurting. Connecting with Aurora victims helped build a community through a shared experience.

“We were just aiming to be like a peer to peer network, peer support group,” she said. “You know, in a way that only people who have been through it, get it.”

The Columbine shooting in 1999 sparked international attention. A school shooting of this size had never happened before, bringing in reporters from every corner of the country.

“It changed everything,” said Kim Christiansen, longtime anchor at 9News who covered the Columbine shooting. “There were satellite trucks for blocks, literally blocks.”

While Columbine ignited an unprecedented amount of news coverage that can now be seen as damaging, some of it was beneficial. There were changes in classroom procedures and police responses not just in Littleton, Colorado, but nationwide. But the news media changed too.

Chuck Plunkett, a former reporter at The Denver Post, hadn’t moved to Colorado yet, but remembers Columbine’s ghost lingering in coverage when he arrived in 2003.

“The Post, very much back in those days, would show dramatic images of the killers, it was almost like they romanticized them in a way,” said Plunkett, who is now the director of CU News Corps, a capstone course for senior journalism students. “I doubt that was the intention but no one had ever seen anything like that before. The kids were so dramatic and it was so bizarre, all of that kind of just was such a visual.”

The perpetrators were highly publicized, with news vans parked outside their parents’ houses for weeks. Now, the media has done more to protect the community and exercise sensitivity to survivors by not overly focusing on the shooter or shooters. For example, during the very publicized trial of the Aurora movie theater shooting, many local news outlets barely mentioned the perpetrator’s name, something Christiansen remembers as a change at 9News.

“I think Columbine proved to us why it’s so damaging to report and spend time on the killers because nothing was accomplished by figuring out who they were,” Christiansen said. “And nothing was accomplished by saying these people are horrible and hateful.”

John Ingold, a current reporter for The Colorado Sun, was an intern at The Rocky Mountain News in 1999. He remembers the questionable coverage choices that papers in Denver made surrounding the tragedy. To be a local journalist now, you have to expect you will cover a mass shooting, he said.

“I'd say at the time, people sort of thought that, like, that was going to be it, that you report on something like Columbine, and that's probably the one time that happens in your life. And so, you know, it's kind of interesting to think about whether that informed the coverage decisions,” Ingold said.

“I think, there was a lot of assumption at the time that tragedy creates change, and then sort of a belief in the power of the media to witness and tell people about tragedy in a way that would spur change that would make this tragedy not happen again.”

Ingold remembers asking Columbine students questions about the perpetrators. Fortunately, this type of coverage style—asking grieving teenagers about the tragedy—is no longer used. That idea, though, was premised on the idea that if the community could understand the shooters, people would have a better idea of how to prevent it from happening again, he said. The amount of coverage surrounding Columbine’s perpetrators led to [inaccurate theories about their motives and false narratives](#) surrounding the shooting.

Martin also acknowledges that there have been improvements to coverage in the last two decades, but there is still more work to be done to be inclusive of those affected by these tragedies.

“I’m an English teacher. I know what makes a good story and the elements that fall together and you know, what really touches people's hearts and gets views and things like that,” she said. “But that can be really damaging to people who aren’t deemed ‘worthy enough’ to be covered in the news story.”

Martin knows that community trauma can extend beyond the individuals who were at the scene, injured or actually involved. Reporters can do a better job of including a diverse array of experiences in their reporting, not only the most sensational stories, she said.

In the news

Alex Sullivan was in the Century 16 movie theater watching the midnight showing of “The Dark Knight Rises” to celebrate his birthday where he ultimately lost his life, along with 11 others.

His father, Tom Sullivan, worked as a USPS mail carrier at the time. Waking up at 2:40 a.m. for his 4 o'clock shift, Sullivan turned on the TV to see the news of the shooting. He knew Alex was seeing a movie but didn't know which theater he was at.

Later rushing to Gateway High School, where survivors and families were gathering, the Sullivan family were photographed by a Denver Post reporter crying and clutching each other. The photo went on to be featured in a Pulitzer prize-winning breaking news coverage package.

"I didn't have to tell anybody what had happened because they had all either seen that picture on the news or in their newspapers," Sullivan said.



The Sullivan family embracing at Gateway High School searching for their son Alex, who was killed in the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting. Photo by RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post.

It took Sullivan some time to come to terms with the popularity and significance of the photo. After the trial concluded, he told reporters that they could and should use that photo as an example of what had happened to his family and the 11 other families.

"I told the reporters, you know, I understand that it's an iconic picture that means a lot," he said. "And if you ever feel the need to let people know what terror and people being scared,

and not knowing what's in front of them, and you want to show what the impact is of gun violence, feel free to use that picture, because that's what you can see.”

Many of the people killed in the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting were in their late 20s and early 30s. Sullivan recalled that many had moved to Colorado alone, so he stood as a community pillar for the parents who lived out of state.

Sullivan went on to campaign for state representative, winning the seat in 2018. He is a strong advocate for gun control legislation and informing elected officials about the loss he lives with every day.

“I need people to have the courage to have the conversation that has been lacking in our legislature, in politics,” Sullivan said. “We talk every day about, you know, climate change, we talk about mental health, we talked about education, transportation, they're talking abortion rights, on a regular basis, yet the public health crisis, that is gun violence prevention ... we are lacking in the courage to have that conversation on a regular basis.”

Sullivan remembers the clicking of camera shutters as he walked into the courthouse day after day to view the trial of the perpetrator. Ingold, a current Colorado Sun reporter, noted that covering the trial was a bit awkward, as a strict media decorum was placed to protect the families.

After finishing school at CU Boulder, Ingold found his home at The Denver Post. There, he covered the Aurora movie theater court proceedings extensively. He said it was harder than his time covering other tragedies and violence.

“I think getting to know the families just brought a whole different dimension to it because you couldn't comfort yourself with a fantasy of ‘It's over, they're grieving and now they're recovering, they're going to be okay,’ ” Ingold said. “To just see the ongoing trauma that it inflicts on people's lives sort of brings it closer to you and makes it hard as a journalist to stand apart from the story and [have] that detachment you want to have.”

In the almost 10 years since the 2012 Aurora shooting, 67 mass shootings have happened across the country, taking the lives of more than 500 people, a Mother Jones investigation [reported](#). Countless other lives and incidents of gun violence have happened in Colorado and nationwide in the years since. For many in the Colorado community, the spring 2021 shooting in a Boulder King Soopers grocery store was a reminder that this violence hasn't resolved in the 20 years since Columbine.

As they do, local and national reporters flocked to the scene on Table Mesa Drive to find out more information about the shooting. Anna Haynes, a current CU Boulder senior, moved to Aurora from Australia two weeks before the movie theater shooting and witnessed the Boulder King Soopers shooting from a window in her college apartment.

“[Moving here] was definitely an immediate wakeup call that I was in a different environment than when I was growing up,” she said. “One where I had to be more mindful and cautious and one where people had guns.”

Frozen against her window for hours, Haynes watched the scene develop where 10 people lost their lives last spring. She heard gunfire and watched as the perpetrator shot someone in the parking lot and entered the store. She watched as local news outlets rushed to the scene, where they set up right outside her home.

As a journalist, she knew they would need an eyewitness account and she headed down through her backyard to speak with reporters. From there, Haynes went on many local and national news outlets to speak about the ongoing and uncertain situation—many of them asked about the perpetrator, since it was the early hours after the shooting when victims names and additional information were not yet released.

Eventually, audience members connected the dots that Haynes was the current editor-in-chief of the CU Independent, a student newspaper at CU Boulder. On social media and in her community circle, people made accusations that she was trying to further her career through these national interviews.

“A lot of people were accusing me of being a crisis actor because I happen to be a journalist, while also having this like, limelight, 15 minutes of fame,” she said. “A lot of people thought that I was just trying to draw attention to myself as a journalist as opposed to just trying to communicate something that had happened.”

The experiences of Lexi Knutson, a CU Boulder alum, are similar. As a student, Knutson was very involved with the local Best Buddies program, an international nonprofit organization designed to create a community for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Through her time with Best Buddies, Knutson became very close with Teri Leiker, one of the victims killed in the Boulder shooting. Knutson graduated and was living in Florida last March when she received alerts that there was a shooting where her friend worked. Leiker

had been an employee at the Table Mesa King Soopers for over 30 years; she loved working there, Knutson said.

Knutson was in contact with Leiker's mother, Margie, and Teri's boyfriend, while they waited at the CU Boulder Events Center with other family members. As the number of people waiting dwindled, they knew to prepare for the worst.

Later the next day, Knutson posted a tribute to her friend on Instagram. It was then used in multiple publications and she felt that the message was misconstrued. In articles, reporters made it seem like they had spoken directly with Knutson, she said.

lexi.knutson Teri Leiker, 51, was killed yesterday working at King Soopers in Boulder, Colorado. Working at a grocery store. She had worked for the store for 30+ years and it was her favorite thing to do.

Teri was the most selfless, innocent, amazing person I have had the honor of meeting. Our paths crossed in 2017 during a CU Boulder Best Buddies meeting. Her shy friendship towards me turned into a sort of sisterhood. Teri and I were the dynamic duo of Best Buddies and in Boulder. We frequently took Boulder by storm: the Sink, Pearl Street, CU sporting events, etc. Teri was a CU Boulder super fan. Additionally, Teri and I spoke almost every week (especially at 6am, Teri's preferred call time of choice). She always ended the calls with "love your buddy Teri".

Teri leaves behind her family, her boyfriend Clint, and many close friends that truly cared about her.

To think Teri was murdered while simply doing her job angers me. The fact that a man decided to take away so much from so many in a matter of seconds angers me. If you think we don't need any sort of gun reform, you're wrong. We can't go to movie theaters without fear. We can't go to school without fear. We can't go to music events without fear. Now add going to the grocery store to that list.

There were 10 deceased and nobody injured. What does that say for the power of that weapon? That it shouldn't be available or accessible to any civilian.

Knutson's Instagram tribute to her friend Terri Leiker, who was killed in the 2021 Boulder King Soopers shooting.

Hours after a press conference confirmed the list of victims, Knutson and Margie were bombarded with questions about Teri. She had posted multiple photos with her in the past, there was no stopping what was coming, she told Margie.

Following the family's requests to decline interviews about Teri, Knutson turned down many national outlets. People Magazine used her Instagram caption as if they had interviewed her and it just began to spread, she said.

"I did put all my stuff on private because I was like, 'This feels like an invasion of privacy.' I became really numb to it all," Knutson said. "I'm like, 'You know what? It's out there. Whatever happens happens.'"

When Knutson finally did speak out about her experience and about Teri, she wanted to make sure the narrative surrounding her intellectual disability wasn't misinterpreted. Teri lived on her own; she was capable of living a normal life, Knutson said.

"I want to humanize her, I want her to not be another name on a list," she said.

As the grocery store location reopened on Feb. 9, 2022, and mid-March marked one year since the shooting, Knutson recognizes the difficulties she may face again with reporters.

"Internally, I'm like, 'Do I want to post a tribute for my friend, or is that going to get taken again?'" she said.

While family and friends shooting victims have a range of responses to media inquiries following the death of their loved one, John and Maria Castillo have been vocal about their son's death following the 2019 STEM School shooting in Highlands Ranch, Colorado.

Kendrick Castillo was three days away from finishing his senior year of high school and one week away from graduation when he stepped in front of and tackled a perpetrator with a gun at his school in May of 2019. Since then, his parents have spoken with local and national media about their son's death and Colorado's history with gun violence.

"I think the decision to speak out for my wife and I, from the beginning, is we just didn't want our son's death to be in vain," said John Castillo. "We just felt that we needed to share that with the community that they really needed to know, first of all, what was taken and lost and two, what a contribution that he could have been, had this tragedy not happened. The whole purpose for it is to memorialize Kendrick."

People in the community want shootings like the STEM School shooting to be closed chapters in their lives, but they think continued conversation about domestic violence can be reduced through meaningful dialogue, Castillo said.

"He was, you know, he is our only child," Castillo said. "And you know, it really is a tragic loss."

While Colorado's long and tragic history of gun violence, unfortunately is most likely not over, there have been many improvements around gun reform, mental health checks and purchasing laws.

“There are people who are working toward [gun reform] who are making a difference and who have gotten different laws passed,” Martin said.

And in terms of news coverage, Christiansen provided examples of reform that was spurred by 9News’ coverage of the Aurora movie theater. That night, there weren’t enough ambulances to transport the number of people who were hurt to the hospital. Police transported victims in the backs of their cars.

But as a result of a lack of medical training for police officers, some people lost their lives on the ride over. If police had some level of medical training like EMT’s, they could have saved a few lives that night, Christiansen recalls.

For example, then-Governor John Hickenlooper [expanded](#) the state’s mental health funding, limited magazines to 15 rounds and instated a universal background check when purchasing a gun.

“This is why I’m still doing this job. In the midst of the terrible things, there are some really powerful, not only inspirational things,” Christiansen said.

Christiansen is a CU graduate and Colorado native, working at 9News since 1984. She has unfortunately been here to cover every tragedy the Front Range has seen.

“You know, it’s horrible to say you remember every single moment of your life based on these tragic events,” she said. “But you do.”

Bubble baths and burnout

Journalism is a public necessity and a form of democratic service. Reporters are trained to act as watchdogs to the government, gather information and news on events in communities, and disperse it in a timely manner.

The industry is an ever-changing and growing community of truth seekers and storytellers. In the last three decades, American societies have seen a decline in print newspapers tossed onto front lawns, with an increase in digital-based articles, primarily due to increased technological usage and the cost of producing a physical paper. The industry has been faced with a bout of economic uncertainty, as reporters are working for barely-liveable wages in cities with rising costs of living.

Reporters are oftentimes front-line workers, first to a breaking news scene and witnessing strings of tragic events. But the mental health and preparation that is often given to first responders is not given to reporters who witness the same things.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been discourse around the difficulties of being a reporter and the lack of resources they are given from their publication and the industry.

Elizabeth Hernandez is a reporter at The Denver Post. In the summer of 2021, she hosted a panel, “A frank conversation about burnout,” for reporters, editors, and others to speak about the deep exhaustion of the never-ending grind of being a journalist and to find tangible solutions to this issue.

As the pandemic sparked work-life balance conversations across many industries, journalists continued to follow the political divide, social uprisings and wide-spread sickness and death, without a moment to consider the ramifications of their own profession.

“At the end of the day, you know, taking a bubble bath is not going to erase the fact of all the crazy things they did all week, working too much for too little,” Hernandez said.

And though top-down support hasn’t generated within newsrooms yet, Hernandez said coworkers rely on each other. Everyone commiserates after a hard day but there’s not much you can do besides going to therapy, she said.

Moe Clark, a freelance journalist who got her start at smaller papers in the metro area, took a step back from the daily role of reporting because it became too much, with too little support.

“These things just compound and compound until my brain felt like it was moving through molasses,” she said. “And I’d only been reporting for two years, and it was like, ‘damn, am I already done?’”

Clark isn’t done reporting, but she agrees with other journalists that more needs to happen in terms of mental health support from the leaders of the industry and individual publications for the job to be sustainable.

“Mental health is way more of a conversation in newsrooms now, but it hasn’t been coupled with how that stress impacts productivity,” Clark said. “It’s more like, ‘Yeah, we hear you, but your story is due by five.’”

This “old school” mentality of toughing it up to get the story out isn’t conducive in an environment where pandemic-related strains have caused mental illnesses to spike and Millennials are demanding better from their superiors. Reporters are told that they don’t matter as a person with feelings, homelives and daily stressors, but what they produce is more important, Clark said.

“That goes back to journalism being a public service,” she said. “I do love the work and I agree it’s a public service, but we don’t have to drag our reporters through the mud to make the news happen.”

Ross Taylor, an assistant journalism professor at CU Boulder agrees. In his photography classes, he prepares students for their assignments on what they may witness in the field, something he said he never received in his education.

Mental health and being a journalist shouldn’t be mutually exclusive, he said. “Yes you can sign up [for the job] and we can be healthy and support each other,” Taylor said.

Taylor was a war photographer, assigned to document trauma hospitals in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thinking back to his training, he never received preparation or aftercare for what he witnessed abroad.

“In retrospect, I don’t know how we sent people out into the community, in sometimes very dangerous and difficult situations, and then just expect them to come back and start working as if nothing happened,” he said.

Mosaics, memorials and memories

Like Clark, Taylor took a step away from the daily role of being a journalist. At the university, Taylor has used his skills to provide a new way of looking at documenting tragic events.

“Boulder Strong: Still Strong,” is an installation currently at the Boulder Museum that features artifacts such as poster boards, flower bouquets and stuffed animals that were left along the chain link fence outside the King Soopers in the days following the shooting. When people gathered at this memorial wall, Taylor photographed the initial community response.

But he felt like there was more to be done for the community than the early reporting done by local and national outlets. Embarking on a year-long journey to capture the recovery and resiliency of the community following the tragedy, Taylor's portrait project is featured in the museum exhibit as well. From grocery store employees, to CU Boulder students, to the officer who shot the perpetrator, Taylor's collection amassed over 70 portraits.

This approach, memorial journalism, has been done before, but hasn't caught on in newsrooms. For example, the New York Times profiled each person who died in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, titling their year's long effort "Portraits of Grief." Working at the university has allowed Taylor to view documentary work in a new light, for the benefit and healing of the community, he said.

As journalists, "we're trained to be responsive to the events at hand or events that are about to happen a lot of times," Taylor said. "We're less focused on looking back. And I think if anything, this project shows the community can oftentimes really rally behind an idea of a memorial or an archive approach to an event."

Physical memorials for tragedy are a human instinct of remembrance, including war memorials. Memorials have been erected at locations near both Columbine High School and the Century 16 movie theater to honor the lives of the murdered. Gravesites can also be seen as memorials for the dead. The Castillo's moved their home across town to be closer to Kendrick's cemetery, where they visit every day.

Tom Sullivan said he never understood who physical memorials were for. His son Alex's childhood bedroom has remained largely untouched, the sidewalk outside is where he watched him walk to school. The memories are the memorials for the Sullivans. The physical memorials are for everyone else, he said.

*insert photo of Aurora memorial

"The memorials that they erect for many different things are for others to remember that time, that moment, that person, and I've come to believe that when others go to those memorials, and they spend that moment, seeing the that person's picture or reading that person's name, those of us who have been impacted, we can feel that," Sullivan said. "And we feel that someone else at that particular moment has recognized what we've been through."

Since the Boulder King Soopers shooting happened less than a year ago, there hasn't been a permanent physical memorial created yet. But the artifacts recovered from the temporary

memorial wall have been collected and preserved at the local museum to serve the purpose of a physical memorial in the meantime.

Anna Haynes was one subject featured in Taylor's project and she noted the importance of this type of creative work.

"It was ... important for the community to not forget that there are so many people that were affected by this and are still affected by it," she said.

With the grocery store reopening, many journalists felt that it was a "public service" duty to cover the reopening despite the traumatic history behind the location. Henry Larson, a CU Boulder senior and writer for the CU Independent, covered the store reopening last month after continued coverage of the shooting in the last year, something which was really difficult for him.

Larson notes that things aren't going to get better unless younger journalists consistently ask themselves difficult questions about the industry, mental health and covering tragedies, but also ask those same questions to the people in authority.

"The last year has been enough for me to know that I'm still looking for the thing that's keeping me here, I'm still here for some reason and I don't know why—it's definitely not because of these 'big stories,'" Larson said. "I don't know how much more the community can take and I don't know how much more I can take."

This sentiment is reiterated at the professional level too.

"I think a lot of people, from what I've heard, at a certain point are just like, 'I can't do this anymore' and quit," Elizabeth Hernandez said. "And I don't know if or when that point will come for me."

So is journalism a dead-end job where reporters harm themselves and the community by covering tragedies? Not necessarily. Many expressed sentiments of public service, public good and a care for the community through their reporting.

But something has to change institutionally for this career to continue serving democracy in a healthy way.

While the state of Colorado and the country have made major strides in reforming access to guns and access to mental health support in the more than 20 years since Columbine, still there are structural issues that allow deadly shootings to keep happening.

In terms of the journalism industry, there also have been changes regarding the ways in which shootings are covered. But like the issue of gun control, there is still room for improvement.

As noted above, the journalism industry has a lot of ways in which it can improve for the sake of the reporters, the content they produce and the community that content affects.

Many reporters noted the toll that shooting “anniversaries” have on them and their sources. Continually reaching out during a time that marks tragedy isn’t beneficial for anyone involved.

Kim Christiansen noted that for the 20th anniversary of Columbine, their team met with victims and survivors the October before. The group was willing to speak so freely about their experiences because they knew that national outlets would be knocking at their doors in April, when they were grieving and didn’t want to speak with the media, she said.

Small changes in coverage styles have proved to be beneficial for the community and those affected. For example, after the Aurora shooting, 9News hosted a gathering for families, victims and survivors. There, they learned the harm in using the word anniversaries when the date of tragedies come around every year.

“A lot of them said ‘Please don’t use the word anniversary,’” Christiansen said. “Anniversaries are meant to be celebrated.”

Tom Costello noted how memorialization of the lives lost in tragedies has become easier with increased technology. Everyone has a camera in their pocket, something that may be perceived as a double-edged sword in crisis situations.

“People didn’t carry a camera around with them everywhere they went but today they do,” Costello said. “And as a result, you capture all of those moments of people’s lives that paint the portrait, if you will, the mosaic of somebody’s life in a much more complete fashion.”

There’s still a long way to go in terms of prolonged tragedy through news coverage. Lexi Knutson said the recent Marshall fires outside of Boulder, prompted a news alert including the word “Boulder” and it brought back feelings of the King Soopers shooting.

“The way the media surrounded [the shooting], I can tell, is kind of affecting the way I see day-to-day news or even breaking news,” she said. “I’m taken back to those moments.”

As a reporter, Anna Haynes knows the value behind breaking news. But she also notes the significance of community rebuilding and resiliency after tragedies.

“Seeing specifically how people learn to be okay again after something like that happens, and how they connect with their community and heal is really inspiring,” Haynes said. “And I think it’s equally newsworthy, if not more newsworthy, than the events of what actually happened.”

As someone who has been around to cover each of the shootings discussed above, Kim Christiansen has seen the changes the state—and the journalism industry—has made for the better. Despite the tragedies, the state of Colorado has rallied together to support one another.

“I just think, you know, when I look back at all of these, I mean, it’s awful and it’s so heartbreaking. I think of all the pain that it’s caused so many of the people in our communities and how they live with it every single day,” she said. “But I also still see the value of journalists in this, in changing things and trying to give a voice to what needs to change and how we can stop this.”

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While the ways in which these tragedies have affected the communities spiderwebs from person to person, I wanted to acknowledge the list of people who lost their lives due to Colorado’s continued issue with gun violence.

Columbine High School 1999:

Rachel Scott, 17 years old

Daniel Rohrbough, 15 years old

William David Sanders, 47 years old

Kyle Velasquez, 16 years old

Steven Curnow, 14 years old

Cassie Bernall, 17 years old

Isaiah Shoels, 18 years old

Matthew Kechter, 16 years old

Lauren Townsend, 18 years old

John Tomlin, 16 years old
Kelly Fleming, 16 years old
Daniel Mauser, 15 years old
Corey DePooter, 17 years old

Aurora Movie Theater, 2012:
Jonathan Blunk, 26 years old
Alexander J. Boik, 18 years old
Jesse Childress, 29 years old
Gordon Cowden, 51 years old
Jessica Ghawi (Redfield), 24 years old
John Larimer, 27 years old
Matt McQuinn, 27 years old
Micayla Medek, 23 years old
Veronica Moser-Sullivan, 6 years old
Alex Sullivan, 27 years old
Alexander C. Teves, 24 years old
Rebecca Wingo, 32 years old

Arapahoe High School, 2012:
Claire Davis, 17 years old

STEM School, 2019:
Kendrick Castillo, 18 years old

Boulder King Soopers, 2021:
Tralona Bartkowiak, 49 years old
Suzanne Fountain, 59 years old
Teri Leiker, 51 years old
Kevin Mahoney, 61 years old
Lynn Murray, 62 years old
Rikki Olds, 25 years old
Neven Stanistic, 23 years old
Denny Stong, 20 years old
Eric Talley, 51 years old
Jody Waters, 65 years old