

PUBLICATION

The Orlando Attack

November 03, 2016

In the early morning hours of June 12, 2016, this country experienced the single worst killing of LGBTQ people in American history. The attack at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando by gunman Omar Mateen left 49 people dead and 53 wounded.

Prior to the Orlando massacre, the former deadliest LGBTQ attack occurred in 1973 in a New Orleans gay bar, the Upstairs Lounge, when, on June 24, 1973, a lone arsonist poured lighter fluid on the stairs, trapping patrons upstairs and killing 30 people. It was a different time in 1973 for the LGBTQ community. There was widespread anti-gay stigma. There were no public demonstrations of gay pride. There was no public outcry. No one was ever charged in the massacre.

Seven years later, on November 19, 1980, a former transit officer fired an Uzi on the line of patrons waiting to enter the Ramrod gay bar in New York, killing eight people. This tragedy, too, has been largely forgotten.

In many ways our country has come a long way with respect to the LGBTQ community. It has been a year since the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. On the other hand, in this same year, America has seen a proliferation of anti-gay laws and bathroom bills. After the Orlando massacre, there has been focused solidarity and support for the victims and their families and outpourings of grief from all directions.

The fact that Orlando occurred during Gay Pride month and in a place where people go to celebrate is no less ironic than the fact that this community is often a target of hate solely because of who they love.

Baker Donelson and its employees donated \$6,000 to the OneOrlando relief organization after the shooting, and anyone interested in participating can still do so at oneorlando.org. We offer our condolences to the victims and their families and our continued support to the survivors and the community.

This tragedy hit very close to home - the club is a mile from my house (and the Orlando office); my son could very well have been there but for the fortuity of being out of town; my wife was summoned in as part of the city's crisis management team; and I also feel very strongly that this tragedy did more for the general acceptance and understanding of the LGBTQ community than Obergefell. People were not forced to accept an edict from a divided court. Instead, they were confronted with innocent victims who were just out like anyone else in society for a good time at their welcoming and safe place. Empathy and understanding came naturally and I believe that broke down a lot of barriers and bigoted mindsets. That this breakthrough was achieved with the lives of 49 young martyrs is permanently heartbreaking.

-Hal Litchford, Shareholder, Orlando