

“John Tlumacki: Road to Recovery” – Part A

(This case was prepared by University of Georgia journalism student Kelsi Eccles for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, based on secondary sources cited below.)

John Tlumacki is the Boston Globe photojournalist that captured the most prominent pictures from the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. Tlumacki suggested that taking the photos produced a constant struggle between doing his job as a journalist and keeping in mind the “dignity” officers suggested. “I kept thinking of the ‘dignity’ the police officer said, but it was unavoidable to shoot photos that were horrific. I had faith in my new Canon camera, and my new 24mm 1.4 lens. Maybe it was the new technology of the [HD] quality and lens that brought out every detail in the photos compared to earlier years and camera versions, or even film,” he said. “It was odd that nobody told me to leave, or stop shooting, even when I got onto the sidewalk. Time kept ticking in my head like a stopwatch wondering when I would be thrown out.”

Despite the courage to capture grueling pictures Tlumacki admitted to The Image Deconstructed that he was afraid but undeterred. “Behind all that camera gear, you are still [a] person with emotions. That’s what mattered to me most, and that’s what made me make it through April 15, because I believe my emotions and compassion came across in the photos.”

Discussion:

Tlumacki’s display of courage was evident in running toward the bombed scene, but was the officer wrong to suggest that he censor his photography to maintain dignity?

Why is it that Tlumacki was not asked to leave during the aftermath of the bombing, while other journalists have been asked to leave during similar situations?

If Tlumacki came face-to-face with a bystander not receiving help, would it be acceptable in situations like this to provide assistance or to continue to capture pictures?

“John Tlumacki: Road to Recovery” – Part B

Boston Globe staff members bombarded his phone, not to see if he was able to capture great shots, but to make sure that he was ok. Tlumacki was fine, but the victims he snapped pictures of were in critical condition, but Tlumacki was there for one reason and he set out to do that job according to an interview with NLGJA Connect. “You know, I was actually angry when I was shooting because of what I saw; I think that’s what motivated me to stay there and [take] the chances that I did to try and get the photos. [I was] just doing my job as a journalist,” Tlumacki said.

He didn’t ignore the needs of wounded bystanders and runners, yet his camera captured the rapid movement of everyone helping whomever they could, and he captured these moments according to an interview with Poynter. “In the rush of the initial moment... there was so much confusion. When I got to the fence I did not realize how extremely bad it was, but by the time I got close enough, the people who were lying on the sidewalk — there were maybe 20— were already being helped by bystanders,” he said.

Tlumacki also mentioned in the interview that he did have to edit some of the pictures for graphic content and couldn’t look at other pictures after the incident because of the feeling it brought back. “There were images that I captured that I saw only through the camera. Unless I was walking around, I never took my eye away from the viewfinder. Things were happening so fast, and I knew that my time was limited. There are some images that I am so upset by. I cropped some things... because there were bodies, legs dangling and limbs missing. It took me a few minutes to comprehend the carnage and devastation,” he said. “There are photos I shot that will never see the light of day. I see them when I need to see who was where.”

Discussion:

Since Tlumacki’s camera is an HD camera, should he have taken an extra measure to edit the photographs or keep raw footage in an effort to capture the essence of chaos at the time?

Do Tlumacki’s personal views of some of the images stand as enough grounds to not publish the photos or should another person view the pictures to determine if they could be edited for publication?

“John Tlumacki: Road to Recovery” – Part C

Tlumacki had to keep busy after the haunting experience as a coping method with what happened that day. He shared his therapies with *The Image Deconstructed*. One of his biggest therapies was the documentation of the recovery process for a mother and daughter who were injured in the bombing. “The last time, in October, I stood there and visually placed all the victims in their places that I photographed. In April, a week after the marathon, I started building a backyard shed with my wife Debee, something I always wanted to do. It was finished in October, and probably was the third most therapeutic thing I have done; the second is talking about the Marathon; and the first is documenting the recovery of bombing victims Celeste Corcoran and her daughter Sydney. Celeste lost both her legs, and Sydney almost died from a severed artery in her leg,” he said.

Tlumacki could not help them on the day of the event but he searched for victims he photographed in hopes to help them in any way possible during their respective recovery processes. CNN and viewers helped him locate the Cochran family. “I made a commitment with them that I would document their recovery for the rest of the year, which I am still doing, the story to be published before Christmas. They have welcomed me into their family. They have been so open. The most amazing blessing is to hug two people, Celeste and Sydney, each time I see them — two people that I left that day, not knowing if they had lived or died.”

Discussion:

Is a conflict of interest presented because Tlumacki documented the recovery process of victims for his own recovery as well or do journalists have the right to create follow stories for personal strength as well?

Is Tlumacki courageous for going to other news outlets to assist him in finding victims so that he could reconnect with them?

“John Tlumacki: Road to Recovery” - Epilogue

“Our job is act as professionals and to show the world images that they can’t see because they aren’t there. I’m so sick of citizen journalism, which kind of dilutes the real professionals’ work. I am promoting real journalism, because I think that what we do is kind of unappreciated and slips into the background.” Tlumacki’s work on April 15, 2013 was a staple in courageous photojournalism. Tlumacki completed the Cochran family’s documentary and continues to speak on his experiences around the country. He also is still a photojournalist at the Boston Globe.

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