

When one hears of mass killings, one's heart aches for the victims and one's brain reacts vigorously to yet another horror. We never do forget, but after a while, we become somewhat desensitized to the pain and shock that real lives were destroyed in our country. When I heard of the murders in a Squirrel Hill synagogue, I felt initially the usual disbelief, horror, and pain, but this was different because I had lived in Squirrel Hill. And when I realized that I knew and cared deeply about two of the victims, I was overwhelmed in a new and awful way.

Rose Mallinger, the 97 year old murdered victim, and her 62 year old daughter, Andrea, had been caring and loving friends of mine. We lived in Pittsburgh from 1970 through 1973, and the Mallingers had been neighbors of ours. The family lived in a two-family house and Sylvia Moidel, Rose's sister, lived in the other half with her family. Both families had teenaged daughters who baby-sat for my three daughters, ages 4, 2 and an infant. We had been living for a year in Miami near my parents and my extended family, and moved to Pittsburgh where the weather was freezing, the skies were gray, we knew no one, and everything seemed smoky and dark. I was in my twenties and my husband, who had a new job, was working hard, 7 days a week, early morning to evening. The children missed my parents and so did I. It was a hard time for me.

Rose and her sister and their daughters reached out to us with kindness and affection, and they were the first hint to us that Pittsburgh and Squirrel Hill were great places to live. Rose had a birthday party for one of my girls and when our baby-sitters were with the children, they would often take them across the street to visit with their families, making them and us a part of their lives. I never saw Rose without a smile on her face. We cared so much about them.

After Pittsburgh, we moved to four cities in the next 7 years, and we lost touch with our dear friends in Squirrel Hill. When I met Toby Schaeffer in New Orleans, we made the Pittsburgh connection: Toby was niece of Rose and Sylvia. Through Toby, we restored contact briefly but then, life moved on. Toby would update us periodically; not surprisingly, she loved and admired these wonderful people. She explained that Rose was vigorous and aware of everything, hard to believe that at 97. Now she reports that Andrea, Rose's daughter who was also shot on Saturday, was hospitalized and needs another surgery but should recover. I wonder if the grief from losing her mother will retard her recovery--I hope not.

I mourn with everyone the desecration and destruction that this anti-Semite brought to Tree of Life synagogue and its people, and I share the anxiety of us all about the apparent rise of anti-Semitism in our country. I again deplore this violence--here, in South Carolina, and everywhere-- and I grieve with everyone about the apparent corrosion of our country. Still, the incident is more than all of those because I and my family lost a friend. May her memory be a blessing to us all.

