ONLY LIGHT CAN DRIVE OUT DARKNESS

A year after the Jewish Community Center shootings, victim Mindy Corporon counteracts hate with love and a Seven Days of Kindness commemoration April 7-13.

words Kathy Boos photos Jeremy Theron Kirby

Mindy Corporon grabbed the headlines of local and national media one year ago when she was interviewed shortly after the deaths of her father William Lewis Corporon, 69, and her son Reat Griffin Underwood, 14, following a shooting outside the Jewish Community Center (JCC) last spring. On the same day, Terri LaManno, 53, wife of Jim LaManno, was killed at the Village Shalom assisted living facility in Overland Park. The man accused of the murders is a self-proclaimed white supremacist and anti-Semite Frazier Glenn Cross, 74. He will be arraigned March 27 and will face charges of capital murder. All three of his victims were Christian.

One year later, Mindy Corporon clearly recalls the events of the day.

Corporon arrived at the parking lot of the Jewish Community Center campus on April 13, shortly after 1 p.m., approximately three minutes after the fatal shootings of her father, a retired physician, and his grandson, Corporon’s son Underwood — a fun-loving teenager, Eagle Scout and aspiring singer. The two were at the JCC to attend the KC SuperStar singing competition for high school students. Underwood planned to audition that day.

Underwood practiced his song for his mother before he left his home for the performance. That song: “You’re Going to Miss Me When I’m Gone.”
The first thing Corporon noticed as she pulled into the parking lot of the JCC was her father’s truck. She knew it was odd that the doors were open. As she got closer, she noticed bullet holes in the side of the truck. The awareness that something had gone terribly wrong crept into her conscience and she immediately felt her body fill with cortisol. Though shock had taken over her consciousness, she recalls being able to make her way to the entrance of the White Theatre, where she managed to park her car and turn it off. Everything felt like slow motion. As she got out of her car, her father’s motionless body came into view. She knew immediately he was gone. “I don’t know how to explain it,” says Corporon. “I just knew.”

Though she was standing all alone, frozen, she heard a voice in her head, loud and clear, as though someone were standing right next to her. The voice said, “Your father is in heaven now. Go find Reat.”

Corporan moved in a direction where she thought she might find Reat. Someone attempted to stop her saying, “You can’t go there.” She pushed forward screaming, “These are my family!” She continued approaching and quickly saw the first responders working on her son. They were preparing to transport him to Overland Park Regional Medical Center, where he would later die.

Something came over Corporon that afternoon in the moments of chaos and in the haze of the senseless tragedy. “The best way I can describe it was there was a strong sense of peace. And, the only way I can explain this is God,” says Corporon.

That sense of peace was projected on the television screens of viewers the day of the tragedy as they watched the composed woman, who had just lost two of the most important people in her life, deliver an eloquent message.

Corporon explains her remarkable composure. “I lost a close friend when I was in high school. I was 15, the same age as many of Reat’s friends and classmates. The memory of that day came rushing back to me and I knew I needed to say something comforting to them.”

“I also know that kindness and faith are the only way we can overcome hate and evil. The only way to drive out darkness is through light. I knew I wanted to keep it positive.”

On the anniversary of the shootings, Corporon also knew she wanted to host a peace walk to mark the events with a positive spin. On Monday, April 13 at 5:45 p.m., the walk (open to the public and members of diverse faiths) will start with a commemorative ceremony at the Jewish Community Center and end at the Church of the Resurrection. The walk is approximately 3.4 miles and will serve to provide an
Inspirations

On the anniversary of the shootings, Corporon also knew she wanted to host a peace walk to mark the events with a positive spin... the walk will start with a commemorative ceremony at the Jewish Community Center and end at the Church of the Resurrection.

opportunity to shift the focus to a sense of connectedness and love.

Along with family and friends, Corporon has founded the Reat Griffin Underwood Memorial Foundation/Faith Always Wins initiative. The organization has come together with the LaManno Family and the newly formed Racial and Religious Acceptance and Cultural Equality Foundation (RRACE Foundation) to form the umbrella event titled “SevenDays: Make a Ripple, Change the World.” SevenDays is a week-long event featuring events with a focus of positive, community-centric acts.

Significantly, details of the SevenDays events were announced to the public on the day the preliminary hearing was set to begin for the man charged with the senseless killings. In her announcement Corporon stated, “We knew there would be a lot of negative news surrounding this, and we can’t help but think negatively when something like this happens in our world. We want the public to know that there is more good in our world. We want to redirect that negative energy in a positive direction,” she said. “We want people to know that faith always wins,”

SevenDays of Kindness begins April 7 and ends April 13. It includes a songwriting competition for kids 14 to 21 years old, with a $5,000 first-place scholarship, and the peace walk April 13. A Facebook page has been created and a website features details of the focus of each of the seven days.

“We were enveloped in love and kindness,” Corporon says of the community support that day, “and so we want to give back to our community and say thank you for that.”

For more information about SevenDays visit giveseventdays.org or ‘like’ them on Facebook. For more information on the Reat Griffin Underwood Memorial Foundation and Faith Always Wins initiative visit gkehfonlinedonations.org/give/unde01.asp and faithalwayswins.org.

The Giving Spirit

No stranger to giving, Mindy Corporon was recognized for her generous support of community in 435 Magazine, December 2010. She has served on the board of the Community Foundation of Johnson County, volunteers on the frontlines for Operation Breakthrough, has served the homeless through her church and supports the Women’s Employment Network, among other charitable endeavors.