

this hit HOME

One staff member recalls journey to Mother Emanuel after the tragedy

I'm not a crier. Rarely does a tear escape my eye.

I took this into account as I approached the throng of people snaking towards the tall, white church. The Mother Emanuel AME church stood strong and unwavering as it had for nearly 200 years. The intensity of their despair thickened the already sweltering June heat. The energy exuding from the crowd felt surreal. Other-worldly. But heartbreaking and tangible.

The beautiful white church looked lonely. Lost, because nine of its innocent members were laid down before it.

Yet, I did not cry.

As I walked up to the building, I saw thousands of bouquets lining the ground in front of the church. Handwritten notes with words of encouragement—and love—and faith—covered every inch of the sidewalk.

I read the notes. I took in all the words. My mind tried to process everything, but I felt too lost in my thoughts.

I couldn't cry.

I watched a white woman and a black woman—two strangers—sitting in front of the church next to one another. Suddenly, the white lady grabbed the other woman. They clung to each other in desperation. They held each other and cried and mourned together for the loss of those beautiful souls.

I stood still as the world spun around me. From one direction came the seraphic voices of a gathering of individuals, singing

of togetherness, and support, carrying the weight of despair as one entity. From another direction, the steady voices of news reporters from all over looked the cameras in the eye and spread the word to the world on this tragedy. Those dependable representatives contrasted the wails of everyone else around them. The wails cried out in question, demanding one question: "Why?" It was too much to take.

I moved toward the accumulating pile of wishes and flowers and love, and put in a bouquet. The air thickened yet again. I felt the loss, and the pain, and the gravity of the situation, and the best way I could express my emotions was through tears. I am not one to cry, but in this moment, how could I not to shed tears over lives lost and the whirlwind of emotions that surrounded them and the people around Mother Emanuel? These tragedies have happened all over, but there is nothing like when it happens in your city. My city. Charleston. My home. It hurts deeply to see your city struggle.

My city.

In that moment, standing in front of the church, there wasn't a divide. We were a united force: black, white, and every other color in between. United because this hurt our city. And it was no longer my city, but our city. It really hit home.

I was not embarrassed to cry.

-Sophie Winnick



photographer s. winnick

STRONG CITY, EVEN STRONGER SUPPORT

(above): Teacher **Larsyn Cross** joins her city in appreciation at the Arthur Ravenel Bridge which, that night, was renamed the Unity Bridge. "It was such a tragic situation and showing my support proved that we're all human and we're one... I said a prayer and then tried my best to show support by going to the unity bridge event. We walked all the way up to the top and all the way back. It's hard to find words to describe how I felt. Gratitude; for a city that was united," Cross said.

CHARLESTON UNITED (right four pictures): People from South Carolina and beyond gather around the Mother Emanuel church on June 27 to show support for the nine victims.

UNDYING LIGHT (opposite): June sunlight illuminates Mother Emanuel AME two days after the shooting tragedy.



designer and photographer s. winnick

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TRIM LINE

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