

Las Vegas was a Party -- then a Horror

By Tha Khanittha Kraithong

Last August, I went on a trip with a few friends to Las Vegas, met some more friends from Los Angeles there and we all stayed at the Mandalay Bay Resort for two nights. Some of us stayed on the 22nd floor, and others stayed on the 32nd floor. Both rooms were huge and luxurious and had great views overlooking the swimming pool, and the amazing night scene of the Las Vegas Strip. I could not stop looking out of the windows in my room and my friend's room 10 floors above us.

I was able to see the mountains surrounding the desert where the City of Las Vegas was built. Moving in closer with my eyes, I kept staring at the crystal blue waters in the swimming pools and the palm trees of the resort. There was a huge wave pool, a lazy river and three or four other smaller pools with artificial beaches built around them with lounges, cabanas and cocktail areas. I felt like I just arrived in paradise.

For three days, we had so much fun! The interior of the Mandalay resort is highly decorated and architecturally beautiful. It has everything: pools, spa, a fitness center, a huge casino, restaurants with delicious meals, bars with great cocktails. We took a lot of photographs and enjoyed ourselves, going for walks in the late afternoon, swimming, going to the rooftop bar, listening to some music and having a few cocktails.

On one day, we all went out to the Strip to walk the streets of Las Vegas and to visit other casinos. We had lunch at Caesar's Palace and one night, I wanted everyone to come with me and join a pool party at the Mandalay.

"Let's go guys, let's have some fun!" I told my friends.

During our stay, I could never have possibly guessed that the place where we had so much fun would turn into a nightmare for other people two months later.

It was October 1, a Sunday evening, when I was about to go to sleep in my apartment in San Francisco. I checked my cell phone as usual for the latest news and Facebook posts. As I was browsing through the feeds, suddenly, headlines of a Las Vegas mass shooting started popping up on the screen.

I couldn't believe it! The shooting had happened at the Mandalay Bay! The killer had been shooting from the same floor where my friends had stayed during our Las Vegas trip in August.

He had brought more than 20 rifles to his room during the last few days of his stay there and decided to open fire on the nearby country music concert audience, just across the street from the hotel. I remember us walking on that side of the Las Vegas Boulevard once on our way back to the hotel.

He fired shots with his almost fully automated rifles during 11 minutes of horror. Later that night, some videos of the shooting started to appear on the social media. They showed the people at concert who were shot and then the terrible images of men and women trying to run away and find cover. But it was really difficult for them to escape since the shooter had chosen an elevated position, a strategic place for shooting. He killed 58 people and wounded another 500 and then committed suicide shortly afterward. What a horrible tragedy! So many innocent lives were lost and so many injured in the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

Only two months before, I had been so happy there with my friends. I could never have imagined such a massacre could take place right where we were – or anywhere else in the U.S. My thoughts and prayers have been with the victims, the injured and their families. I can't imagine the suffering of the people who had lost their loved ones in such a senseless act of violence. I believe some legislative changes should be made to prevent tragedies like this from happening in the future.

