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26/11 US victim recounts heroic efforts of hotel staff

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Chicago: Recounting the deadly Mumbai terror attack during the trial of Pakistani-American LeT terrorist David Coleman Headley, an [American survivor](#) has lauded the heroic efforts of the [Oberoi hotel](#) staff to save her life.



Appearing in a Chicago court, before David Coleman Headley was sentenced to 35 years of imprisonment for his "unquestionable role" in the Mumbai terrorist attack that claimed 166 lives, Linda Ragsdale told the judge how two kitchen employees of the Oberoi hotel defied the bullets of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists to save her and other survivors.

Ragsdale, recounted that at least two of the hotel staffers died in front of her eyes.

"Three of us made it into the kitchen. In a moment of silence, I watched my blood pour out in a pool in front of me. In another breath, the attackers came back with grenades. The bombs shook the walls and floor," she said.

A young man tried to help them out, but her pants were now too heavy for her body to move, she said.

"I told them to go ahead. I knew I was going to live. But this young man did not leave my side. He carefully removed the pants and led us to an exit. He kicked open the door, and we escaped into a beautiful, silent, starlit night," Ragsdale said.

"The next wave of heroes called out to us, taxi drivers who were waiting for survivors. That night our heroes wore the clothes of the everyday person. Each of these young heroes had egress, but they chose to stay and help others. Together, we faced all of this, while you faced a TV screen," Ragsdale told Headley.

"I spent two weeks in the hospital in India and another week at home. It was almost four months before I could stand. For the rest of my life, I will have to work to keep mobile. To this day, the practitioners manipulate the scar and tissue to achieve this. Some days the pain increases to an almost unbearable stage, but it does not hinder me," Ragsdale said.

Ragsdale, who is a children's book author and illustrator, witnessed several people being killed, including the father daughter duo of Alan and Naomi Scher who were travelling with her.

For her family, the horror began with her husband seeing the breaking news on the attack on the hotel.

"His unanswered phone calls made him fear the worst," she said.

Recounting the incidents of that eventful day she said she was dining in the Tiffin Restaurant in the Oberoi Hotel with friends in her meditation group.

"At my table that evening were Naomi (13) and Alan Scherr, father and daughter, and three other friends. I distinctly remember the first two flashes of light that caught my eye. The first bullet's buzz singed past my ear. Naomi tried to dive for her father, and we

hurried to get her under the table," she said.

"In those next moments, I saw bullets hit their first targets. Among them, my friend Michael. The bullet took his shoulder in a red rage. So many bullets blanketed that room that the waves of heat clouded my vision," Ragsdale said.

"I have never been exposed to people who wanted to kill innocent, unarmed people, no concept of the kind of people who would ever hunt survivors. If I had known, I would have laid my body over 13-year-old Naomi," the 26/11 survivor said.

"She was the same age as my own daughter back at home. I would have not hesitated to give my life. I opted to cover my friend Michael, who I assumed was playing dead in the clearing by our table. I had no idea that Michael had sustained three additional bullet wounds," Ragsdale said.

The shooting began again, she said in a court room amid pin-drop silence.

"The attackers were coming table to table to execute any survivors. Alan told us to play dead, but I could not. We lay there waiting for the shooter to arrive. I remembered not feeling a person, not a being coming towards me, but the void of life, the absence of life walking closer. I waited for it to turn the corner," she said.

"My heart broke when I saw it. It was just a boy, a boy who held the same physique as my older son," she said referring to the terrorist.

"I wondered if he had ever been told, told and held by his mother how much he was loved. His fear was palpable in his posture, timid stride, but unexplainable, because he held the fire power against defenseless diners," Ragsdale said.

"I laid my head down before he saw me. There was only one thought in my mind and heart. If I live, I'll be fine. If I die, I'll be fine. There's a rat-a-tat-tat, and the bullet struck me. One, two, three. In actuality, it was one bullet," she said recounting her experience.

"The bullet entered above my heart, travelled along my spinal column, passing through my stomach cavity, nicking my stomach, and finally exiting out the top of my thigh. The length of the scar measures nearly three feet. The impact knocked me out," she recounted.

"While unconscious, the young man emptied his gun into my friends. I awoke to hear Naomi take her last breath. I lifted my head, and I saw the carnage of war in a place where moments before friends and families were enjoying their meals," Ragsdale said as she tried to control her tears.

Ragsdale told Headley in court that she was not revengeful and would not send or train anyone to kill him for the crime he committed four years ago.

"I didn't bring home terrorism. I brought home the power of love, forgiveness, and joy. My work is blessed by this scar. It validates the need for us to actively and universally engage in teaching of peace, forgiveness, and love. It inspires others to release themselves from the anchors of their darkest moments," she told Headley in the court room.

"I don't know you. I know you only from the testimony in this courtroom. In this light and understanding, I would not kill you, nor would I send other people to kill you, nor would I train others, nor would I come back in 30 years and attack an arbitrary location in Pakistan to kill innocent people as retribution for your actions," Ragsdale told the terrorist, who appeared to be emotionless and was looking to the ground.

PTI

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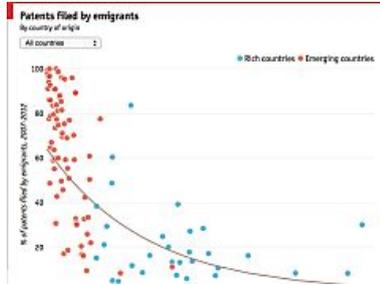
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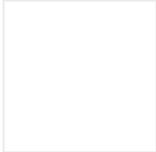
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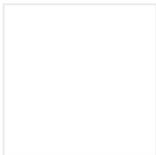
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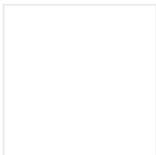
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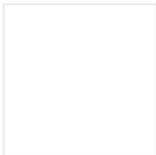
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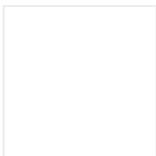
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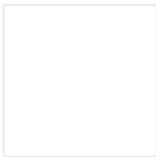


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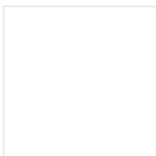
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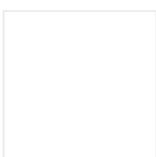


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