

## **ROSS TAYLOR**

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### **BOULDER STRONG: STILL STRONG**

Documentary as an agency for healing in the aftermath of a community trauma.

The alert flashed on the computer screen. CU Boulder's Twitter read: "CU Alert: Boulder Police are responding to an active shooter at the King Soopers at Table Mesa and Broadway in south Boulder. AVOID THE AREA." Admittedly, this had become an all too familiar news headline, so I went back to work, knowing I wouldn't be close to the scene. It was only later that night that the horror began to sink in. "10 dead." A friend of mine texted me. I opened up Twitter, and news began to flood the timeline. A hashtag emerged - #bouldershooting. The terrible news continued - it was the largest mass shooting in the history of Boulder. Ten people were killed at the King Soopers grocery store, including a police officer who was first on the scene.

As the night settled, I knew the historic nature of the moment needed to be documented. The next morning, I arrived outside of the store and begin photographing the aftermath before teaching class. Upon arriving at the scene, the emotional weight of the grief was quickly apparent. People huddled in each other's arms with stunned expressions. Numerous people wailed. It was a profoundly difficult moment to witness, and even harder to document. Later in the afternoon after finishing my teaching duties, I returned to the scene and continued to do so throughout the ensuing week.

But it didn't feel like it was enough. The photographs felt as if they were part of a conversation already told many times before, and while important, they felt as if they only focused on the wounds of the community.

When an event like this happens, there is also strength and resiliency in its wake. Thus began an idea of a large-scale portrait project archive of our community. I partnered with the Museum of Boulder and other key agencies, including Mental Health Partners of Boulder, the Community Foundation and the Boulder Police Department for a portrait series of around 70 people who had some intersection with the shooting.

The portraits are a range of people, including people such as: the police officer who shot the suspect, the store manager who was present at the time, the police and fire chiefs of Boulder, mental health workers working to assist in the healing of Boulder and numerous people who were present at the store at the time. This includes a woman at the store who

wore the same clothing the day of the shooting for her portrait, as a symbol of strength. The result is a solo exhibition called Boulder Strong: Still Strong at the Museum of Boulder.

You brought our community together,” said a tearful Maris Herold, the Boulder Police chief, at the opening. That was exactly the intent and is emblematic of the power of documentary work. The archive is located here: [www.boulderstrongproject.com](http://www.boulderstrongproject.com).

If accepted, I would present about the power of documentary as an agency for healing in the aftermath of a community trauma.