

# Episode 159-- When Your Grief After a Shooting Is Public

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, simone, grief, allison, gun violence, sandy hook, andy, google, happened, mourning, news, day, sharing, call, families, year, kids, brady, issue, facebook

## SPEAKERS

JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson, Andy Parker, Simone Paradis

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JJ Janflone 00:08

This is the legal disclaimer where I tell you that the views thoughts and opinions shared in this podcast belong solely to our guests and hosts and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please note, this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay we find it disturbing too. Hi everybody, welcome back to another episode of Red Blue and Brady.



Kelly Sampson 00:39

I'm one of your hosts, Kelly.



JJ Janflone 00:41

I'm another one of your hosts, JJ and then there are no more hosts. It's just us.



Kelly Sampson 00:45

Welcome. We're so happy to have you here especially today, as we talk about the hard but sadly so necessary topic of dealing with realities of gun violence in the United States.



JJ Janflone 00:56

Realities like grieving when the story of your loss is on the national news or trending on Twitter.





Kelly Sampson 01:01

Or mourning even as conspiracy theorists descend on your family or town while you're fighting in court,



JJ Janflone 01:07

To talk about grief, how it changes over time and how to mourn even as your life and pain continues to be thrust in the spotlight. We're joined by two amazing guests. The first is team enough executive council member Simone Paradis, who became involved in the gun violence fringe movement after the Sandy Hook tragedy turned her community upside down.



Kelly Sampson 01:25

Yeah, and the second, Andy Parker, author, activist and importantly, father of slain journalist, Alison Parker.



Simone Paradis 01:35

Hello, everyone. I'm Simone Paradis. I'm a current junior at Pitzer College in Southern California. And I also grew up in Sandy Hook Connecticut. So I've been working in the gun violence prevention field since high school, but kind of directly involved since I was 11 years old.



JJ Janflone 01:51

Andy, how about yourself.



Andy Parker 01:52

I'm Andy Parker. And I am the father of Alison Parker, who was the journalist who was murdered on live television in Roanoke, Virginia, little over six years ago. And since that time, I have devoted my life to honoring my daughter with action.



JJ Janflone 02:12

Well, we're very happy to have both of you with us. But unfortunately, you know, again, it's the I wish that, Simone as you entered college, it wasn't with, you know, going, I'm going to work in gun violence prevention. And Andy, obviously, you know, I wish I'd met you like, through meeting Allison at like a theater event or something like that, you know, not, not in this way.



Andy Parker 02:33

Yeah, I've met a lot of really nice people that I wish I had met in different circumstances.



JJ Janflone 02:38

This is definitely a hard topic, I think. But both of you suffered losses that were very public. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what it was like to have to grieve, you know, quote, unquote, like live, you know, when your pain is sort of seen on Facebook and on the news at night?



Simone Paradis 02:56

Yeah, I don't know if I have a great answer to this. Because it's been like, also very impacted by my age, like growing up. And because the shooting happened when I was 11. And my sister, one of the survivors, was in third grade, we definitely didn't understand what it happened at first. All we knew is that like, my sister's school got canceled, and I had to go back to school. And I was kind of mad about it. And there were like, service dogs everywhere. And like news trucks everywhere. And I like also live really close to the school. So like, we couldn't go to the grocery store without like, being followed by a news van for a few minutes. And then I think as I grew up, I started processing more and more of it. But it was difficult. I also remember or like my dad told me a few years ago, that like after the shooting, some people like ran the Boston Marathon to like honor the people that we lost. And then with the bombing, I thought that people were like, specifically targeting like our community in our town. Which I can't imagine how hard that was for my dad to receive that question. The kind of, I don't know you're just always being watched by like news cameras, and like, that's like, a big part of my childhood is like, everybody knew who I was. And like, where I was from, and like, had questions and opinions and feelings on it. And I was just trying to, like, be a kid and go to like soccer practice. So I think like one word I would use this open up is like, very confusing.



JJ Janflone 04:18

Yeah, that sounds so complex to be like, I just want to go eat Brownies. And people are just kind of hitting you with emotion.



Simone Paradis 04:25

Yeah, very, very strange. Yeah. Andy, what are your thoughts?



Andy Parker 04:32

Well, you know, it's, you're never going to get over this. You have, as I described in the book that I wrote, there's a statue in Switzerland and it shows this figure that's kind of slumped over and and he's got this, you know, it's basically where his torso is. It's just a hole. I mean, it's just in the, you know, and it it's called melancholy, and that's the name of the statue and that's pretty much what you have, you know, just day to day, it never goes away. But then so what do you do? You really have to kind of out of that you have to find a purpose. And, you know, one of my favorite lines in the Shawshank Redemption was when Red said, you know, you either you

either got to get busy living or get busy dying. And Allison would want us to live that the general manager, the assistant GM at WDBJ, the day she was killed when when we, when we saw him, he said, "Listen, you guys have got to live, she would want you to live." So that day, I kind of had an epiphany about what I was going to do with the rest of my life, which would at that point was shattered. And instead of curling up into a fetal position or drinking myself to death, I chose to channel my grief and my anger into honoring Allison through action. So, you know, you try to, you know, you pick, I guess I picked fights with, with some of the biggest adversaries that you could, and that's the NRA and these days, social media. But, you know, and that's the thing when anyone experiences are horrific tragedy like that I like I have you kind of find yourself, you find yourself at a fork in the road. And, and one path looks pretty easy. And it's a little comforting at first glance and you give up curl up into a fetal position and you you know, like I said earlier, you could, you know, kill the pain with alcohol. And the other path looks much harder, but it's really the only path worth taking. And when you go down that road, you fight back. And that afternoon, that Alison was killed something kind of remarkable happened in the middle of my, this tempest that I had of rage and sorrow, I had this epiphany about how I can channel being a son of a bitch, which, you know, I had been known to be, but you channel being a son of a bitch into something for a greater good. And, and that's, that's how I tried to, to go about it, the grief, and the anger is never going to go away. But it's how you channel it that makes your life worthwhile. And, and hopefully make your daughter proud and keep her memory alive.

K

Kelly Sampson 07:38

First of all, I want to thank both of you for sharing about your experiences. And even from hearing the two of you discuss your own lives. It's clear that grief isn't one size fits all. And so I'm wondering, for each of you, how do you define grief and mourning?

A

Andy Parker 07:56

Well, and you're right. There is not a one size fits all. And I can I can use Alison's camera man Adam Ward as a as an example, his family, they were very private people. They just they don't they didn't react the same way we did. Obviously, their loss was No, no less than hours. But but they just weren't. I think Mary you know, Adams mom is doing a little bit now in terms of advocacy. But it took took her a long time. She just didn't want to she didn't want to do what I did. You know, I'm not going to be the one that says well, you know, you need to get out there and do this. Everybody mourns differently. Everybody grieves differently. So it's to your point, there isn't a one size fits all ours, and I'm saying ours meaning Barbara, and me, Allison's Mom, we focused on this fight that we're involved in and with, with social media, with the NRA with, you know, with the gun lobby, as I guess, our therapy, you know, this is this is therapeutic for us to get involved in something where we're not focused every moment of every waking moment of every hour, on our grief. Because, again, otherwise, you're just it's going to eat you up. And to the extent that it has to, to a degree. We didn't want to let it eat us up completely. We wanted to live and so that's how we chose to, to grieve and mourn is to you know, focus on finding that purpose.

S

Simone Paradis 09:38

Yeah, I would echo a lot of the same things. We have a website that has information on how

like each of the kids families would like to like move forward. So for some of them, they're like, we're like not going public at all. We're staying to ourselves and like do not contact us where others have like made foundations and charities and scholarships, and then very similarly to the to that I know a lot of like my friends and my sister's friends, also took very different paths. I mean, I got involved in politics a lot because of what happened, but my sister like, hates politics a lot because of what happened and like, won't touch it with a 10 foot pole, which like both are very, very valid. And kind of similarly, like, among our entire community in school, there are very different like groups of people who decided, like what to do afterwards. And I also think kind of grief and mourning as kids was very different. Because we had like therapists come into our school and like, tell our parents had to tell us. And I don't know a lot of kids like forgot also what happened because your memory is like an elementary schooler isn't that great. But also some kids remember like, too clearly what happened. So I also think like memory plays a really big role in the grief and mourning process.



JJ Janflone 10:47

Well, I think in both of your cases, too, again, just I think because of that, that national attention, it's got to be hard, because everyone's experience with grief is so different and so individual, but when your grief is getting played out on social media, or at least people think it is, it's a lot easier, I think, than for outsiders to comment.



Simone Paradis 11:06

Yes, every few months, or like, a couple times a year, like Sandy Hook starts chatting again on Twitter. So just be like, checking my feeds, not thinking about like in the morning, and then like, see something out of the blue. And then like some kind of all social media, like avoid social media during the entire month of December? Because like, well, a lot of it is very like, wholehearted, meaningful support. Like, it's very hard to wake up and check your phone and see mentions of horrible things every single day.



Andy Parker 11:33

Yeah, I mean, I had in the, in the early days, after Allison was killed, I had a ton of trolls that just went after I had a YouTube channel, right? And I had just just dumb, dumb, you know, kayak videos that I made, and, you know, Allison's dance recitals and stuff like that, that I just I archived. And I didn't think anybody well, until that point, you know, it was, it was it was public. But nobody was going to track that down until she was killed. And then they did. And the comments were just heinous. I mean, just evil. Like you can't believe I mean, you know, people were saying stuff like, well, you know, "I watched her die. And I'm really glad." I mean, you know, just sick stuff like that. Well, I got rid of all of that I locked all of it down. And honestly, I haven't had a lot of issues since then. I'm, you know, to Simone's point, people have been very supportive. And I don't really get any harassment. Because, you know, and the ones that did early on, I you know, what they were, they'd say something stupid, you know, either Barbara and I would respond and go, Well, how do you know, how is it living in your grandmother's basement, and then you you mock, and then you block. And so we didn't really have to do

much of that. And my issue is more than anything, and that's the reason that that with the help of Georgetown University civil rights law clinic that I filed an FTC complaint Federal Trade Commission complaint against Google and YouTube.



JJ Janflone 13:13

Well, Andy, that's that's actually exactly what I would love to ask you about, because you had to start, basically a legal battle after Allison's death. And I'm wondering if you can tell our listeners a little bit about that. And you know, what it's like to have to grieve while having this fight,



Andy Parker 13:29

Right. Well, you know, first, I wish it was a legal case, unfortunately, because of section 230, which gives these social media platforms Google and Facebook, or meta, or whatever the hell he wants to call it. Now. It gives them complete immunity from any liability, so they can post whatever they want to post. And they have been, and even, you know, dragging them into Congress and having them testify. It really does no good. I mean, basically, Mark Zuckerberg and the folks at Google are giving the middle finger to Congress, to me to everybody that's involved here. And so the the only thing we have two remedies until, until Congress addresses this and amends it. And I don't know that there's, there doesn't seem to be any end in sight or solution in sight. And my biggest issue is the murder. Alison's murder is still living on these platforms. And there is nothing that we can do about it. You know, we flagged it, they don't do anything. So the only other thing that we could do from a legal strategy is what I call the Al Capone prosecution, and that is you go after him. You can't get them for the big stuff. So you go after him for the small stuff, and that's copyright violation. Well, the problem is, I don't own the copyright to the WDBJ 7 video that Adam took. It's owned by gray television and for reasons that we can't fathom Gray, you know, we've asked to, for them to give us just the co-copyright. You know, it's like an arm's length agreement, you know, there's no liability on your part, just give us the co-copyright to this video, so that we can sue Google and Facebook for copyright violation, and they won't do it. They will not do it. I mean, it's, it's just unconscionable it is, I, you know, I, as much as I thought, you know, as bad as, as Google and Facebook are in terms of the the evil that they perpetrate, gray is worse, because they won't give us the one thing that we can do, you know, in a small way to go after these platforms. They've even, you know, not only will they not, but they push back on me, you know, they've, they've called the FBI, we had a, you know, through change.org, and I started a petition with change.org, that's got over, I was closing in on 160,000 signatures, they didn't like that they, you know, it's it's at least getting under their skin, but they refuse to cooperate, and we cannot figure out why other than they may be more afraid of Google and Facebook than they are of me. So that's really kind of, you know, that's, that's where I am right now, we continue to fight, we continue to, we've got some other things that we're going to be doing, and they know that we're not going away. But, you know, until, until Congress acts to fix this stuff where people like me, can address Google and Facebook. And I know that in the Sandy Hook case, you know, I wish I had an Alex Jones that that would that did what he did, so that I could go after him. And I think that's great that you know that there was a settlement there. I don't know that the families should be thinking about spending that money just yet. Because, I, you know, who knows when they're gonna see it, if they see it. But right now, that's the only the only remedy I have is what I'm doing.



JJ Janflone 17:20

The first time anyone has ever said, I wish I had an Alex Jones. Haha



Andy Parker 17:23

Yeah, for the wrong for different reasons. Haha



JJ Janflone 17:27

I, just to reiterate, though, it's, it's awful, that you have to file copyright papers, you know, for a video that you obviously you don't want to see. Right. And I will tell our listeners, you know, normally, you know, this is why we curate the links that we put in descriptions or episodes very carefully, because unfortunately, and this is awful for your family and just for like the wider world, like if you do Google Allison, you can still unfortunately, yeah, get sideswiped by this video. And that's not okay.



Andy Parker 18:00

No, it's not. And it's not just, for me that I'm trying to remove this, it's you know, there are, you know, families with kids that can see this. And I'm not the only one that's been affected, there have been other videos of other, you know, instances like this, and those things are still up, you know, the Christchurch massacre, you know, you can still find a video of that, and, and, you know, we've even flagged the stuff, you know, I've got, thankfully, I've got people that have helped me because I can't see it for obvious reasons, but they, they flagged the stuff and they report it. And even with that, you know, again, it's the middle finger from Google and Facebook.



Kelly Sampson 18:41

Yeah. And I think that's a key thing about you and what you've been doing, when you talked about, you know, you and your wife sort of channeling this into action that you're you're doing this for you, you're also doing it for so many other people who don't have the capacity to do it. And I think that's a really important point. And just love to give Simone a chance to to talk about a little bit about how, you know, your community as well was sort of turned upside down after Sandy Hook. And so I wonder if you could tell listeners a little bit about what happened in that case.



Simone Paradis 19:13

Yeah. So on November 15, my Connecticut Superior Court Judge found Alex Jones liable by default, because he just refused to turn over the documents. So it was not like a true I mean, like he was liable, but only because of like paperwork and bureaucracy stuff, which is, you know, kind of a win, but also kind of not a win. And I know like the I don't speak on behalf of the

families that I know they have different reactions to different things. But they did say in a statement that they like want to continue trying to shed light on how deeply like the conspiracy theories that he's spread has like harmed them and the community that we live in.



JJ Janflone 19:50

Well, and then you all have to mourn when people like him are making money off of claiming that this incredibly awful and traumatic thing didn't happen. So that's got to be incredibly rough.

S

Simone Paradis 20:00

Yeah, it's more just like, ridiculous and like, just so ridiculous that it's almost laughable because you don't know how people have this reaction. And like, Sure, maybe there are people who would rather live in a world where like, kids would pretend to die rather than actually die at elementary school. But also, like, I don't know, one of my sister's friends was like, interviewed, like, shortly afterwards, and you had like grown adults attacking her because she didn't have a Facebook profile at eight years old, continuing to harass her and like, like kids who can't google their own names without finding like, strangers trying to find them, which is kind of terrifying as like a kid being like, Oh, they're like people out there who, like, think that I'm actively trying to like, spread lies, and like, they want to hurt me because of this. And they don't even know who I am. So that's, that's weird. It's also just like, I don't know, every kid from my town, like, eventually goes to college or somewhere else that's not Newtown. And they have to figure out how to introduce themselves. And like, whether you say that you're from Newtown, or you're like, do you lie? Do you say that your town from nearby because you don't want to get into it. But I have had like multiple occasions where I'm like, Oh, I'm Simone. And then like, in an icebreaker, like in school in a classroom. And like I say Newtown and then someone goes like, "Oh, my God, my parents don't think that that happened." Or like, "my grandparents said that that was a hoax that Thanksgiving," and I, and then they like, go into way too much detail about what their grandparents believe in. I'm like, "Cool. Can we talk about the reading that we did this week?" So yeah, it's kind of that thing of like going back to the idea of like, grieving in public where like, every single person has an opinion and like, a perspective that they want to share with you. And, you know, that's nice, but maybe we don't have to talk about how your parents think that like my entire childhood is like made up and trying to get them on, like some weird agenda.

A

Andy Parker 21:50

Well, it's, you know, if this last year, or the last four have taught us anything, it's that none of this should be a surprise, because, people, it's astounding, how many people believe that stuff, and believe that the election was stolen, I mean, it is there is now you know, with the rise of Q and all of this, you have a cult of millions of people that they believe just the most outlandish, crazy stuff. So it's, it's no wonder and it just kind of, it's really tough to, to get your arms around and unpack it, that that's where we are in, in the country right now. And it's, you know, we better do something. And I think, again, social media, Facebook, and Google and YouTube, have, you know, they're accomplices, and they're complicit in all this stuff. Because they help, you know, this, this crazy, these crazy notions, spread and circulate.



K

Kelly Sampson 23:04

And I think it's really important what you were saying to about just the culture of what people believe, and what you all are pointing out, I think as well as when it comes to gun violence in particular, for whatever reason, whether it's because people just don't want to believe that these things happen, because it makes them feel safe, or they bought into some lie about what it is, I think what both of you are doing is also showing that, you know, sometimes the news media will cover something, and then move on. But there's all this collateral damage and pain that just goes on for years. And that's a really important part of understanding what's actually happening. So I really appreciate both of you for, for sharing that and bringing that to the floor so that people don't forget, it's not, you know, yes, you may be able to just bring up Sandy Hook to you when you're doing an icebreaker. Because that's something that you can just have a distance from, but there are real people who are experiencing these things. And it's important to remember that.

A

Andy Parker 24:07

I feel like I'm lucky in that. Well, let me rephrase that. I'm only lucky in the sense that, as you were saying that the news media will, you know, they'll run stories and then the cycle will go away, and then they won't say anything about it or we won't, you know, it won't come up. My situation is different because Alison was a journalist. And I can't tell you the number of times that journalists have you know, they, they will continue to say constantly say to me, I remember the day that that happened. I was you know, and they want to keep the story alive because she was one of the fraternity she was one of them. And I I must say they've done a really good job, you know, it's not in the news every single day. But they, they keep it on the front burner. And I challenged them, you know, early on, like, don't let this issue slide in, you know, three days, and then you move on to something else, you got to stay the course with us and, and see this through. And they for the most part, they really have. I mean, they've done a good job. I, I've made friends with journalists, again, that I wish I had had another occasion to meet them, but, but they've been true to their word, and they remember Allison and they want to do everything they can to try and help us keep this keep this issue alive and keep it in the forefront. And, you know, one day we will prevail, it's going to take a lot of hard work, and effort. And I think it's going to take a younger generation to finally get us over the hump. But as long as we can keep going, and we can keep keep this, you know, the gun issue out there, the social media media issue out there, then ultimately we will prevail.

S

Simone Paradis 26:07

And I also feel like believing that it's not real allows them to like, be more like harsh or blunt in terms of like what they say online, or like what they do online. I know for like a couple months after, I mean, obviously the school shut down. But there were just like people who would just drive there for fun. And like the sign of the school was stolen a bunch of times and like had to be replaced. Because like people could like treating it as like a media news event. And I also think like Andy, for what you were saying earlier that that's also kind of where like, people differ and like grief and mourning, but also people differ like, like I personally am like tired of seeing things about Sandy Hook on the news. And like, I don't really enjoy seeing these vans everywhere, especially like in December they like it always comes back goes back on the news.

And it's like you can never really get a break. But I know some people from Sandy Hook also like, do you think it's important to like, bring it back up every single year. So I think that's another situation where like, people's opinions on that very much are different.

A

Andy Parker 27:04

I've never figured out how people that you think are, you know, you you meet him in the grocery store or see them someplace and then you think well, this is a nice person, and then, you know, come to find that they believe all this crazy Q stuff that the election was stolen, that Sandy Hook didn't happen. And you're it's just stunning. Because it's, you know, how how do they go down that rabbit hole? I don't know.

S

Simone Paradis 27:32

I think a part of it is treating like the news as entertainment. Especially when something tragic happens. Like people don't see it as like people are hurting. Sometimes they see it as like, Oh, here's like an interesting topic of conversation. Be like, oh, did you see what happened today? And then going from there. And I think also from what I've seen and read about it's like, seems like if it wasn't a dream, right? Like, it might be a weird, very strange version of like, investigative fun, where they're like, trying to solve a mystery. And that's for them, like forgetting or maybe just purposely ignoring that, like these people are actual people that like can see what you're posting online and like are actively trying to process this grief. And it's not like a board game or a video game.

K

Kelly Sampson 28:16

So what advice do you have for outsiders or people who aren't experiencing a particular event, personally, for how we can be helpful and not jerks?

A

Andy Parker 28:30

The easiest thing is that, or the simplest thing is you gotta vote. And we saw what happened in Virginia when not enough- we had we sure had a lot of people that voted on our team, but not enough did to carry the day. And it's going to be the same thing in the elections coming up next year in the midterms. If we don't get people who are going to champion our issues, gun violence, and social media, we're going to still be stuck down in this rabbit hole with all the rest of them. Well, we're not down there, but but we're going to be have to be dealing with these people. And the only way to, to win is, you know, unless that's another that's a whole other issue is, you know, assuming that they're not going to steal the elections this this next go around. We got to vote, we got to vote for people that are champions for our issues. And I think that's the only way that we're gonna solve this is encourage people that, you know, and I'm asked this all the time, what can I do, you know, how can I help? Well, you know, it's your duty, it really is your duty to help us get people in Congress, it you know, even at the local level, that support what we're doing, because that's really the only way we're gonna fix it.

S

Simone Paradis 30:04

Yeah, I also think, I don't know, when talking about online conspiracy theories, I think it's important to like, as interesting as they can be usually kind of delve into what other people are thinking to kind of avoid getting sucked into like debating of the existence of an eight year old by like, trying to uncover her real identity and everything like that. And instead of giving them those views, kind of just, I don't know, call them out for the ridiculous and outrageous and unreal ideas that they are, without giving them a platform and being louder than those people and your support of the victims and survivors. I've kind of just shifting from like news as entertainment to like, the acknowledgement that people like on the news are people and treating everyone with empathy and respect.



JJ Janflone 30:48

Both of those are just really fantastic pieces of advice to keep in mind. So thank you both so so much for coming on, and for being so open with us about what you've experienced and what you continue to go through. So I love every time I talk to Simone and Andy. And this is why I liked them so much. You know, they shared so much wisdom with us today in the little time we had with them.

K

Kelly Sampson 31:12

Yeah. And I really personally appreciated that while as we talked about grieving looks different for everyone. Simone and Andy both turn their particular grief into action, which in a way also helps others who may be in a grieving process of their own.



JJ Janflone 31:27

And after speaking with Simone and Andy, I know that I'm committed to confronting misinformation out there, especially about mass shootings and gun violence, including what I see online. Like I'm not saying I'm going to get into a comment battle on Facebook or entertain trolls. But I do think setting a goal of sharing at least five facts to get some truth out there. You know, that can do some good.

K

Kelly Sampson 31:46

Yeah, and I mean, I'm not really meeting that many people these days due to the pandemic, but I think one takeaway for me, especially as someone who works in gun violence and sometimes wants to be able to talk to people and sort of bond on that is to let survivors take the lead and sharing how they want to engage or not engage, and not being weird about it either way.



JJ Janflone 32:06

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thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever! Kelly and I are standing by.



**Kelly Sampson 32:06**

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