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CRIME

# Shooting victim at Bass Pro remembers details: very loud shots, blood, fear, disbelief



June 5, 2016 – Westy's following a Saturday evening shooting spree. The vehicle fleeing the shootings then allegedly went to Bass Pro Shops at The Pyramid and shot Chris Dickens. Moments later, the vehicle struck MPD officer Verdell Smith, 46, while he was working Beale Street detail. Smith died at Regional Medical Center. (Nikki Boertman/The Commercial Appeal)

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By *Daniel Connolly* of *The Commercial Appeal*

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One of the things Chris Dickens remembers about being shot a few nights ago is the gun sounding very, very loud. He says perhaps it was because it was a large-caliber gun — or maybe because the gun was so close.

Dickens, 21, attends Northwest Mississippi Community College and sells archery equipment at Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid. On Saturday night, he was one of the staffers sent into the megastore's parking lot to collect shopping carts. He found himself in the middle of a downtown crime spree.

"I'd been out there for about 10 minutes, and I'd gotten all the carts all together, about 14 of them, and a silver Camaro pulls up," Dickens said.

"My first instinct was he was going to ask a question, because he was rolling his window down. So it was really before I could take a step or two, and I could see the barrel of, you know, the gun."

"And he fired about five or six shots at me."

Police said the suspect in the shooting, Justin Welch, shot and wounded two people moments earlier at Westy's restaurant. A short time after Dickens was wounded, the suspect would drive into Memphis Police Officer Verdell Smith, fatally injuring him.

Dickens said at that point, he had no idea who the shooter was. "Now I know what he looks like — never seen that guy in my whole entire life. I think it was just a random act of violence, really."

Dickens recalled what happened when the shooting started: "And I put my arm up and it hit me in the arm. And I jumped behind shopping carts for safety."

"I really honestly didn't think it was real, like when it happened. 'Cause it was kind of — when I was sitting behind the shopping cart, after I jumped behind there, was just kind of really thinking, Did I really just get shot, you know? ... I was thinking I could have died right now."

He said later that he was in shock. He didn't know how many times he had been shot, or how seriously he was hurt.

"There was just blood all over my pants and blood leaking from my arm and everything. And so I waited for a second and I just took off to the front of The Pyramid on the south side, and screamed for someone to call 911."

One bullet hit his left arm near the wrist. "They had to cut the bullet out ... I think it was only half of it left. It was pretty big." He should know — in addition to selling archery equipment, he sometimes sells firearms. "If I had to guess I would say it was like a .40 caliber, but I could be wrong."

He said another bullet grazed his left leg, and a third bullet deflected off an iPhone in his right pocket.

Reached by phone — another phone — he was recovering at home in Olive Branch.

"Today is actually the first day that I've felt a lot better than before," he said Monday afternoon. "My arm is still kind of numb and everything."

He said he doesn't know if he'll have nerve damage.

"It's really — man — it's just like some things you don't think could ever really happen to you. That's just one of the things I thought. I never really pictured myself ever getting shot, you know. Really just be thankful for what you have, or what you have right now. I could have just lost my life and that could happen at any time."

He said people have been saying the shooter was mentally ill, or as Dickens put it. "This guy was just a little — basically crazy, I guess."

"It makes me feel a lot better that they have the guy," Dickens said.



**About Daniel Connolly**

Daniel Connolly is a Memphis native who graduated from White Station High School and Kenyon College in Ohio. He joined The Commercial Appeal in 2006 and now covers Collierville. He's a member of the professional association Investigative Reporters and Editors and the

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