

# The Dallas Morning News

## *A grieving man's cry for support 'draws people from all over to mourn El Paso massacre victim*

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EL PASO — For 22 years they were together. She was all he had. Then she became one of the 22 slain in the race-driven massacre at Walmart, the worst in the city's history.

On Friday, Antonio Basco, 61, prepared to put his wife to rest, attending the visitation for 63-year-old Margie Reckard. Fearful he'd be alone, he'd invited the entire city to join him. His story took off like wildfire, inspiring people from all over to come and share his sorrow.

In the evening, surrounded by more than 1,000 flower arrangements contributed by people in the region and from all over the world, a seemingly endless stream of mourners passed through to grieve with him and the two cities rattled by the Aug. 3 massacre — El Paso on this side of the border and Ciudad Juarez on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande.

For Olivia Jimenez, 59, coming to this wake was important “to put closure on a sad, sad two weeks. We grieve with Mr. Basco, for his wife and city.”

Elizabeth Cordova, assistant funeral director at Perches Funeral Home, one of dozens of funeral homes offering free services for the victims, said they expected thousands to pass through. Perches had to scramble at the last minute to hold services at a La Paz Faith Memorial & Spiritual Center, a bigger location with a sanctuary that can seat 500 people.

Coordinators were on hand to help people express their condolences and then gently be ushered out to make room for the next groups. A GoFundMe account has been set up for Basco. As of Friday night, more than \$27,000 had been raised.

People have called from Australia, England, Dallas, Minneapolis, Toronto and Mexico.

“The response has been phenomenal,” said Cordova. “This is a time when our region has come together in a very beautiful, generous way. But it's not just El Paso, but all over Texas and the world. We consider Mr. Basco a member of El Paso's family.”

If you're down on your luck, El Paso is not a bad place to end up.

At a makeshift memorial in back of the Walmart set up by El Pasoans and Juarenses, the crowds have thinned, but white crosses bearing the names of the victims are inundated with rosaries, photos and flags, including a friendship flag of the U.S. and Mexico to also pay tribute to eight Mexican citizens who were among the dead.

Lucy Flores, 72, touched a teddy bear amid the many flower arrangements where a white cross with Reckard's name carved on it stands. Then she headed home to make burritos for Basco and others who attended the wake.

“They're green and red burritos. It's not much,” she said. “But it'll be done with much love. I hope he likes them.”

Maria Velasquez, 62, added: “Imagine losing everyone. We are all he has.”

Many of the visitors Friday were from out of town. Many were moved by Basco's story. They came from throughout Texas, New Mexico, Washington state, California, Ohio and Colorado.

Leon Duran, 32, a life coach, flew in from Denver on Friday morning. He was scheduled to leave Fri-

day evening but planned to be at the visitation.

“I just want to hug him and tell him he’s not alone,” he said. “Show my humanity.”

Walter Castilleja, 52, drove from Washington state. He was visiting relatives in Tucson when he was overcome with the urge to explain that he had to go to El Paso to pay tribute to the victims.

“I told them, ‘I want to go to El Paso and see the memorial. It’s a mission. Seeing it on TV is one thing. Seeing it here is very emotional,’” he said.

He said he was disappointed not to see Basco at the Walmart memorial, where he’d been showing up almost every day since the shootings.

For many, Basco remains an enigma and a symbol of the city’s pain.

Harrison Johnson, the funeral director at Perches, has had almost daily contact with Basco, making arrangements and finding tidbits about his life. But he admits, “We don’t know much about him.”

Basco and Margie Kay Reckard, born Aug. 21, 1955 in Baltimore, met at a bar in Omaha, Neb., where he worked in a rodeo and traveled a lot all over the country, mostly on trains, from Nebraska to Louisiana and finally settling in El Paso at least two years ago, Johnson said.

Basco makes a living running a mobile car wash business, wearing a trademark blue Ford Motor cap. He was at work when his wife went on a routine grocery shopping trip to Walmart.

After he heard about the massacre, he went looking for her at hospitals. About 24 hours later, he learned he’d lost her.

Since then, he’s been a fixture at the makeshift memorial, crying on his knees, staring at the cross, mumbling things to his wife. When he was approached days after the killings, he simply choked up and smiled politely.

His story spread across the country in news accounts and social media when he asked funeral directors to let people know he didn’t want to be alone during the wake.

Perches shared an image of Basco at the memorial site on Facebook. The post urged people to attend Reckard’s funeral because Basco has no other family.

“Mr. Antonio Basco was married for 22 years to his wife Margie Reckard, he had no other family. He welcomes anyone to attend his wife’s services. Let’s show him and his wife some El Paso Love,” said the post, shared thousands of times.

As the evening grew dark outside, people formed a long line around the church — at one point about 1,500, with hundreds more inside and hours to go before the viewing — were pressing up against one another as “Wind Beneath My Wings” played. Orlando Antonio Jimenez sang. “Amor Eterno” would come later, courtesy of Mariachi Esencia de Mexico.

The coffin was closed, a funeral home official said, because of “circumstances behind her death.”

Before walking in for the wake, Basco took off his cap. He stepped into the sanctuary and the mourn-

ers stood up and gave him a standing ovation. Many were teary-eyed.

Instead of taking a seat, Basco first touched his wife's coffin and then walked into the crowd, overcome by emotion. "I may not get to all of you, but you all get a hug," he said.

"I never thought I'd see so much love," he added.

Strangers walked to him and embraced him. Some prayed. Many women and children gave him roses. Many spoke only Spanish. Language wasn't a barrier. They disarmed one another with just a smile.

"My heart hurts for you," Susie Ruacho Reyna, from Anthony, N.M., told him. "And you thought you were alone."

Another said: "You're not a stranger. You're family."

Basco grinned between sobs and replied: "Now I know. Now I know. "

Reckard was buried Saturday, the last of the 22 shooting victims laid to rest. Reckard's three children from Nebraska joined her, as did Basco, his pockets stuffed with rosaries.