

## **‘I don’t think my son died in vain’**

**By John Darling For the Tidings**

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Amid hopeful music, heartfelt speeches and calls for a loving response to acts of hatred, hundreds of friends and family gathered in Lithia Park Wednesday to celebrate the life of Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche, killed May 26 while coming to the aid of two teenage girls under a verbal racist attack on a Portland MAX train.

“I don’t think my son died in vain,” said his mother, Asha Deliverance. “I promise you he did not. ... He left with a mission. ... and that mission I don’t really know exactly on the other side, but on this side I can see very clearly. This planet needs to be cracked open.”

Meche and two others had intervened when a man began hurling racial insults at two girls, one of whom was wearing a Muslim head covering, on the light rail. Ricky Best, 53, of Happy Valley, also died in the attack; Micah Fletcher, 21, of Portland was seriously injured. Court records show Jeremy Christian, 35, of Portland pleaded not guilty Wednesday in a Portland courtroom to a 15-count indictment charging him with aggravated murder, attempted murder and other crimes.

But in Ashland Wednesday, thoughts were with Myrddin. Deliverance, sitting in the front row at the Butler Bandshell, was given long hugs by scores of well-wishers, and when the time came to dance to the music, she did.

Taliesin’s sister Ati Nasiah told the crowd, “My little brother stood up for justice and love and did what any human being would do. He was shaped and molded by every one of you, who challenged ... and loved him.”

Citing the “tide of hatred in our cities,” she said Americans need to “stop making people feel they don’t belong. We need to fill our country with love. Let us give a voice to the marginalized. My brother was not a hero for acting like a decent human being. I hope each of us can stand and act heroic at a time like that.”

Nasiah said her brother's last words — that he loved everyone on the train — also included the man who stabbed him.

"I am so humbled by the love all over the world" following the tragedy, she said. "We have the platform now to share love and take on the burden of creating change. With the lives lost from hate and Islamophobia, let us pray for grace, humanity and kindness. We have a lot to do. Be strong and share in the brilliance he brought to the world."

Taliesin's godfather, Cedar Miller, the emcee of the evening, recalled his years with Taliesin as a life lived with smiles and laughter.

"He was a bright star," Miller said. "So many people loved him. I wanted to see what he was going to do in this life. He set a fire in me to be kind, humble and more compassionate."

Miller recalled 30-hour stretches playing Dungeons and Dragons with Taliesin and his pals — and a time on a "medicine journey" in the wilds of the Applegate, where Taliesin sang a long rap, much of which Miller recited, including the line, "My country instigates the fight cuz we want everything in sight."

Taliesin was honored by Ashland Culture of Peace, whose executive director, David Wick, said, "He did not hesitate to act with love. We honor you for courage, compassion and your love that you brought to this time."

Mayor John Stromberg lauded the "deep community" of Ashland, which acted in the wake of the stabbing without having to be told what to do, much as it did in the Unpacking Racism conference and the Women's March.

"What is the point of life if you don't step up?" Stromberg said. "These three men stepped up and paid a tremendous personal price — and we wrap Taliesin in our love."

Rabbi David Zaslow sang songs and commented, "I've never seen an Ashland tragedy like this. It was unimaginable. A senseless loss ... We live in such a bubble here in Ashland. Count and appreciate every day. These men gave their lives so that we could live."

Of her son, Deliverance said, "He would stand up for anyone, especially if they were having a hard time." When she attended a large memorial in Portland for Meche and Ricky Best, 53, who was also killed in the attack, she said she discovered her son's considerable network, adding, "This country was founded on people who honored diversity, loved all people and it is a message that is now echoing around the world."

The memorial was preceded by picnicking on the grass. A light rain began falling as sharing from the stage began. Afterward, many in the group headed on to Jackson Wellsprings for dinner, music and a slide show of Myrddin's life.

*Reach Ashland freelance writer John Darling at [jdarling@jeffnet.org](mailto:jdarling@jeffnet.org).*



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