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That Day in Tucson

By

GUILLERMO REYES

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That Day in Tucson premiered at Borderlands Theater in Tucson, Ariz., in September 2014, and was directed by Barclay Goldsmith.

CAST:

ACTOR 1 Luke Salcido
ACTOR 2 Maria Gawne
ACTOR 3 Susan Arnold
ACTOR 4 Roberto Garcia
ACTOR 5 Esther Almazan
ACTOR 6 C.J. Moore
ACTOR 7 Hal Melfi

That Day in Tucson

CHARACTERS

ACTOR 1 (m): Daniel Hernandez Jr.

ACTOR 2 (w): Ensemble, Jared's Ex-girlfriend, Kelly Paisley, Kid 1, Cathy Monroe, Erin Hertzog, Doctor, Volunteer 1, Mrs. Loughner, Soldier.

ACTOR 3 (w): Ensemble, Newscaster 1, Kid 2, Hillary Clinton, Gabby Giffords, Vietnam Veteran.

ACTOR 4 (m): Ensemble, Ron Barber, Deputy, Online Man 2, Father, Wayne La Pierre, Gun Guy, Walmart Clerk, Mr. Loughner, WWII Veteran.

ACTOR 5 (w): Ensemble, Newscaster 2, Police Officer, Online Woman, Mother, Pima College Official, Assistant, Citizen. This actor must speak both English and Spanish.

ACTOR 6 (m): Ensemble, Mark Kelly, Scott Kelly, Jared Lee Loughner, Online Man, Kid 3, BIP Opponent, David Martinez, Volunteer 2.

CASTING NOTE: In its original production at Borderlands, the director chose to break up the characters in different ways. A seventh ensemble member played Mark Kelly and Actor 3 ended up playing Mrs. Loughner as well as Gabby Giffords. The author leaves this decision to the director, but the play was originally written for six actors for an intense ensemble experience. If practical considerations necessitate changes like that, the author is fine with casting more actors and then mixing and matching the roles as the director sees fit.

That Day in Tucson

(All ACTORS gather onstage as an ensemble or a chorus. ACTOR 1 [DANIEL] leads the way into creating a center of attention. The play can start and it takes off nonstop.)

ACTOR 2. Gun!

DANIEL. Somebody yelled.

ACTOR 3. January 8, 2011.

ACTOR 4. Tucson, Arizona.

ACTOR 2. Gun!

ACTOR 6. It's 10:10 a.m. on a Saturday morning.

DANIEL. When I heard shots that day, the first thing I thought of was the safety of everyone there ... But where was Gabby?

ACTOR 6. Gabby?

ALL. Gabby!

NEWSCASTER 1. “We have reports coming out of Tucson, from various sources, including NPR and a local Tucson TV station, that Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords has been shot—”

ACTOR 4. Shot?

ACTOR 2. When did this hap—?

NEWSCASTER 1. “Earlier this morning—while trying to conduct a meet-your-congresswoman function outside a local Safeway at Ina and Oracle roads in northwest Tucson ... ”

ACTOR 5. Turn up the news ...

ACTOR 2. You hear about—?

ACTOR 3. Why? What hap—?

ACTOR 6. Just turn it up!

ALL (*except DANIEL*). Up! Up! Up!

DANIEL. I was thirty to forty feet away from the congress-
woman.

NEWSCASTER 1. “We don’t know the condition of
Congresswoman Giffords—”

DANIEL. I heard the shots and ran toward the sound.

NEWSCASTER 1. “We have reports of various people shot,
unknown number of injured, unknown fatalities. As soon as
we have further details, we will bring them to you.”

DANIEL. I was a twenty-year-old intern and a U of A student
who simply wanted to be involved and make a difference—

NEWSCASTER 1. “This is all we know. We’ll bring you
updates as they come in.”

DANIEL. There was blood everywhere.

ACTOR 2. Bodies on the ground.

ACTOR 4. It was just meant to be a “meet-your-
congresswoman” gathering.

ACTOR 6. But instead of dialogue—

ACTOR 3. Screams!

ACTOR 4. Gun shots!

ACTOR 5. Chaos.

ACTOR 2. Blood everywhere!

NEWSCASTER 1. “Happening now in ... ”

ALL (*except DANIEL*). Tucson, Arizona!

DANIEL. I rushed toward the sidewalk in front of the market.
I passed the gunman. I saw him shooting with a pistol. In
that split second, I figured it was more useful to go to the
front, where people had been injured ... It was probably not
the best idea to run toward the gunshots, but—

ACTOR 4. People need help.

ACTOR 2. Over here!

DANIEL. I had limited medical training in high school and knew that people could bleed out in seconds from gunshot wounds.

ACTOR 6. Over here—it's Mr. Zimmerman.

ACTOR 2. He's wounded!

DANIEL. No. Gabe Zimmerman, outreach director, was already dead.

ACTOR 3. District Manager Ron Barber—he's—

ACTOR 6. He's bleeding!

RON BARBER. I'll be OK—just make sure you stay with Gabby, go help Gabby!

DANIEL. Then I saw her.

ACTOR 6. She's lying on the sidewalk bleeding from a head wound.

DANIEL. I apply pressure to the entry wound on her forehead with my bare hand. "Gabby," I say. "Gabby, if you understand that the ambulance is coming, squeeze my hand ... That's it, yes, that's it ... " She squeezes my hand! "We're going to take you to the hospital ... "

ACTOR 4. She's got gunshot wounds—

ACTOR 3. Through her brain!

ACTOR 5. The shooter tries to reload.

ACTOR 3. But two men, Roger Salzgeber and Bill Badger, wrestle the gunman to the ground and hold him before he gets a chance.

ACTOR 2. A woman, Patricia Maisch, grabs the clip and takes it from him.

DANIEL. The shooting lasts only nineteen seconds.

ACTOR 2. Nineteen long seconds—of living and dying!

ACTOR 3. Only a small stretch of time really—

ACTOR 5. But the moment won't end.

DANIEL. Then, suddenly, there's silence.

ACTOR 4. And death.

ACTOR 6. Time regains its rhythm!

ACTOR 4. Who's shot? Who's injured?

ACTOR 5. We need help! Over here!

ACTOR 6. An ambulance arrives.

DANIEL. "Please!" I tell them. "The congresswoman needs to be out in the first ambulance."

ACTOR 3. Who are you?

ACTOR 4. Make way please!

ACTOR 5. We need help.

ACTOR 4. Make way.

DANIEL. Gabby's still alert and responding to commands. And I'm going with her.

ACTOR 3. We can only take family.

DANIEL. I'm going with her! ... Yes, I push my way into the ambulance.

ACTOR 3. Who are you?

DANIEL. Get her to safety! ... I don't have numbers for Gabby's husband Mark Kelly or her family. Instead, I call my parents: "I am all right! Just all right. That's all I can say." I couldn't say much more. When we reach University Medical Center, the ambulance doors open. The medical staff rushes Gabby into the hospital.

ACTOR 3. I don't know who he is, somebody deal with him.

ACTOR 2. We'll need your cellphone.

DANIEL. My cellphone?

ACTOR 2. It's evidence.

DANIEL. But I need—

ACTOR 2. You can't use it and you can't interact with anybody until the sheriff's deputies question you.

DANIEL. Well, how long will that be?

ACTOR 2. And you can't change those clothes just yet.

DANIEL. My clothes? (**They're drenched in blood.**)

*(*No need to say it if the actor reveals suddenly the blood-soaked costume. It's a powerful visual if achieved.*)*

ACTOR 2. It's evidence. You stay here until we tell you to.

DANIEL. An initial broadcast interrupts:

NEWSCASTER 2. "CNN can now report that Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot and killed in Tucson today."

ACTOR 6. What? No!

DANIEL. It can't be! I was just with her!

ACTOR 2. She can't—

ACTOR 2 & 3. Be dead.

ACTOR 6. We need to get through to Mark Kelly and see what he's heard.

DANIEL. Tell him I just saw her! She isn't dead!

ACTOR 4. You're in denial, son.

DANIEL. I'm not in denial, really!

NEWSCASTER 2. "We have other confirmed fatalities in this tragic event—"

DANIEL. People were shot—but the chaos of not knowing all the facts—

ACTOR 2. Do we have more names?

ACTOR 3. Can't we get confirmation about the names other than Gabby's?

DANIEL. Hey, she's not ... !

NEWSCASTER 2. "CNN is reporting Congresswoman Gabby Giffords is dead, victim of a fatal shooting in Tucson."

(The ENSEMBLE registers shock and reactions.)

DANIEL. No! People, listen! It can't be!

ACTOR 2. So says the man with Gabby's blood on his clothes.

DANIEL. Listen! Somebody listen to me please! I saw her, I applied pressure to the wound, I helped put her on the stretcher, I held her hand. I refuse to believe that she—I saw it with my own eyes, but could she have died when I let go of her hand? No, it can't be. Maybe I am in denial. About this—I have to be! Maybe I've lost track of what's real and what's not. She may be ... She may be ... dead!

NEWSCASTER 2. "Our condolences to the family."

DEPUTY. Sir, I'm deputy here. We need to put you in isolation.

DANIEL. Why isolation?

DEPUTY. I'm sorry, regulations!

DANIEL *(to audience)*. I am cut off from all communications.

DEPUTY. You can't talk to anyone except the police.

DANIEL. For the next seven hours, I am on my own thinking that Gabby was dead and that my attempts to save her life amounted to nothing. My name badge and my clothes were covered in her blood ... I failed her, I am a failure.

ACTOR 3. We're here from forensics!

DANIEL. Excuse me?

ACTOR 2. We'll need take pictures—your hands, you can't wash them until we tell you to.

DEPUTY. We'll need to sit down, son, and have you answer some questions.

ACTOR 2. Yeah ... who exactly are you?

DANIEL. What? Just tell me about Gabby!

ACTOR 3. We can't confirm her condition.

DANIEL. She can't be dead.

ACTOR 3. We don't know really.

ACTOR 2. Don't know at all.

ACTOR 3. This is about you actually.

DEPUTY. We need to know who you are, son.

ACTOR 3. Did you get a glimpse of the assailant?

DANIEL. No. I was trying to help Gabby. But if she's dead, I should have tried to help Ron instead.

DEPUTY. How exactly do you know these people?

DANIEL. I—

ACTOR 3. We need to know your exact relationship.

ACTOR 2. You insisted on coming with the congresswoman.

ACTOR 3. You pushed yourself into the ambulance!

DEPUTY. Does that mean you're family?

DANIEL. I'm just ... an intern.

DEPUTY. An intern?

ACTOR 3. Are you a trained emergency provider?

DANIEL. I took a class in high school.

ACTOR 2. In high school?

DANIEL. Emergency procedures, I volunteered.

DEPUTY. So you're not family, and you're not a campaign manager—

ACTOR 2. And you're not a professional medical assistant—

DANIEL. I told you, I am just an intern.

ACTOR 3. And you tried to help her because—

DANIEL. Gabby's not just a politician, she's a friend.

ACTOR 2. I see.

DEPUTY. So an intern?

ACTOR 2. Only an intern. Is that all?

DANIEL. That is all.

DEPUTY. You put yourself on the line for ... ?

DANIEL. Yes, a friend.

DEPUTY. I see. Well ...

ACTOR 2. Well ...

ACTOR 3. Well ... we'll need to get you out of those clothes.

DEPUTY. We'll take you home and have you change immediately, but no talking to family or roommates.

ACTOR 2. We'll tell you when it's safe to talk.

DANIEL. The FBI confiscates my clothes. To this day, they keep them somewhere in Quantico, Virginia, as evidence. I finally get to wash my hands and get them as clean as possible. Not until I get back to the hospital do I see Mark Kelly.

NEWSCASTER 2. "Astronaut Mark Kelly and husband to Gabby Giffords has just landed in Tucson from Houston, Texas ... "

ACTOR 4. Mr. Kelly, do you have anything to—?

MARK KELLY. No comment please.

ACTOR 3. Any reactions, sir!

ACTOR 2. Sir! Any comments?

DANIEL. Mark, please—

MARK KELLY. Daniel ... I heard ... thank you for being there for her.

DANIEL. They told me she died.

MARK KELLY. What? No, don't listen to that.

DANIEL. You sure?

MARK KELLY. She's in surgery right now, Daniel.

DANIEL. She's alive then!

MARK KELLY. Of course she's alive.

DANIEL. Will she be all right?

MARK KELLY. We don't know. But I heard you were there for her. That means a lot to me, really. I—

NEWSCASTER 2. "CNN would like to retract the previous statement—Gabby Giffords is currently in surgery. She has apparently survived her gunshot wounds to the head."

DANIEL. Ah, there!

MARK KELLY. Well ... they messed that up, didn't they?

DANIEL. Big time!

NEWSCASTER 2. "We regret any inconvenience."

MARK KELLY. Daniel, I thank you for everything you did for her—but we'll have to catch up later—

DANIEL. Thank you, thank you for letting me know!

MARK KELLY. Gotta go, please understand.

DANIEL. Yes. Well, I found out that nineteen people—

NEWSCASTER 1. "Nineteen people have been shot, six reportedly killed. A young man has been arrested at the scene of the shootings ... "

JARED. I am Jared Lee Loughner. I'm twenty-two years old.

NEWSCASTER 1. "A former student at Pima Community College. He's said to be under police custody at this time."

POLICE OFFICER. Do you need anything, son?

JARED. I'd like to sign something.

POLICE OFFICER. What's that?

JARED. I'd like to sign something, a paper.

POLICE OFFICER. What sort of paper?

JARED (*getting a bit agitated*). You know ... Forms? Don't I have to sign anything? You supposed to, right?

POLICE OFFICER. No.

JARED. Oh, OK. Can I go to the bathroom?

POLICE OFFICER. Again?

JARED. Otherwise, I should sign something, right? You all starin' at me funny.

(ACTOR 2 enters.)

JARED'S EX-GIRLFRIEND. Six years ago, we dated in school. Jared was a quiet young man, but altogether a great guy ... I never saw anything that was unusual, to tell you the truth, at least at the time ... Later, that's different. There was no good news. He was becoming more isolated, some involvement with drugs and alcohol. I couldn't believe it, it was very emotional, the person that I used to know had turned 'to something else ... I heard he interrupted his classes at Pima Community College, teachers were a fraud, school was all a "scam," he said ... I don't know that person. I heard his friend Tyler got a text message before the shooting and it said—

JARED. Peace out!

JARED'S EX-GIRLFRIEND. What did that even mean?

JARED. Wassup? I'm Jared.

POLICE OFFICER. Stop pacing around, Jared.

JARED. Dear Friends: Please don't be mad at me. The literacy rate is below five percent. I haven't talked to one person who is literate. Just me, I'm in the five percent, I'm literate! Ignorance, ignorance is everywhere.

JARED'S EX-GIRLFRIEND. I'm sorry, there's nothing I can say, I just don't know that person! He's not the boy I knew once.

POLICE OFFICER (*to audience*). Jared paced around his cell hundreds of times for fifty hours straight. He got open sores on his feet, which became infected.

NEWSCASTER 1. “We will keep you up to date with more information about the assailant as soon as it comes in.”

ACTOR 4. But just who is this Daniel guy? Somebody, get me something about him. We need another angle, we need a hero.

DANIEL. *The Arizona Republic* requests an interview, which I give them rather calmly and composed.

ACTOR 2. The story went out at midnight.

ACTOR 3. It goes viral.

DANIEL. Meanwhile, my parents take me home. After a day like that, I need to drift away. I need to get my mind off things. It’s 2:30 in the morning when I finally begin to ...

(He begins to sleep. A phone rings.)

DANIEL. Come on, it’s 4:30 a.m.!

KELLY PAISLEY. Daniel, Kelly Paisley here, sorry to call you so early—

DANIEL. Huh ...

KELLY. An ABC show called *This Week* wants an interview.

DANIEL. I’m still ...

KELLY. I’ll need to be your press secretary for this week.

DANIEL. This week? She ends up doing that for months.

KELLY. Christiane Amanpour will do the first interview for ABC at 5:05.

DANIEL. First interview?

KELLY. Then George Stephanopoulos from *Good Morning America* expects one as well—he’ll be landing in Tucson any minute.