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# After Fatal Subway Shove, Asking: Were There No Heroes?

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The question of the day in New York City on Tuesday — what would you do? — rode on a wave of outrage over a harrowing act the day before. A clearly agitated man pushed a 58-year-old stranger onto the track of an oncoming subway train in Midtown Manhattan.

The man, Ki-Suck Han of Elmhurst, Queens, was struck and killed.

As happens once every few years, riders collectively looked down at the tracks to face a fear peculiar to the subway system. What would you do if you were pushed to the tracks? Or if you were standing beside someone who was pushed?

“I wouldn’t do the wrong thing,” one man said as he waited for a train at the station where Mr. Han was hit, at 49th Street and Seventh Avenue, on Tuesday. That was enough, he said: “I don’t want to talk about it.”

The episode, while not unheard-of in New York City, brought with it something distinctly new: pictures, taken seconds before the victim was struck, by a freelance photographer waiting for the train.

The pictures, which were published in The New York Post, brought wide criticism and were derided as ghoulish and insensitive. But the pictures’ mere existence started another conversation across the city on Tuesday, summarized by the television weatherman Al Roker, who, on NBC’s “Today Show,” said: “Somebody’s taking that picture. Why aren’t they helping this guy up?”

The police took a suspect in the case into custody Tuesday afternoon at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue, just a block from the subway entrance where detectives had spent hours boarding subways, car by car, and asking witnesses to come forward.

Paul J. Browne, the Police Department’s chief spokesman, said Tuesday night that the suspect had implicated himself in the crime. He said that charges were not expected until Wednesday because detectives wanted to conduct a lineup for witnesses to identify the attacker.

One law enforcement official said that the suspect, originally from Africa, was a peddler and was on the street working when he was taken into custody. The official said that detectives were trying to determine a motive.

“I don’t think this is a crazy man throwing people under the train,” the official said, adding, “there is interaction between the two of them.” Part of the exchange was recorded on video; it has led investigators to believe there was some sort of dispute before the attack.

The official said that the suspect had been arrested before, but apparently only for low-level offenses, including peddling. Vendors who said they knew the man, who has not been officially identified, said he ran errands and helped them haul their wares to storage for \$5 a trip, and that he showed up on Tuesday with his head and beard shaved.

“I showed him The Post,” said Liz Willis, who runs a newsstand on the corner. “ ‘This looks like you,’ ” she said she told him. “He said, ‘That’s not me.’ ” She saw a detective lead him away a short while later. Another law enforcement official said the man did odd jobs for street peddlers, making roughly \$40 a day.

The freelance photographer who took the pictures, R. Umar Abbasi, defended his actions in an interview. “I’m being unfairly beaten up in the press,” he said at his apartment in Greenwich Village on Tuesday, before leading a reporter to the 49th Street subway platform to re-enact what had happened.

Mr. Abbasi said he was wearing a 20-odd pound backpack of camera gear for an assignment, and was standing near the 47th Street entrance to the platform when he saw the man fall on the tracks. “Nobody helped,” he said. “People started running away.”

“I saw the lights in the distance,” signaling a subway’s approach, he said, so he started firing off flashes on the camera — 49 times in all, he said — as a means of warning the driver.

“I was not aiming to take a photograph of the man on the track,” he said, later adding that his arm was fully outstretched, the camera far from his face.

“If I had reached him in time, I would have pulled him up,” he said. At one point, the man said to have shoved Mr. Han came toward Mr. Abbasi, he said, so he backed up against a wall, still flashing his camera. He estimated the victim was on the tracks for 10 or 15 seconds before he was struck.

“The driver said he slowed down because he saw my flashes,” he said.

Mr. Abbasi said he brought police officers to The Post’s offices, where they examined the pictures for any images of the perpetrator, and he left the camera’s memory card with editors at The Post. He was not part of the decision to publish the pictures, he said.

“Every time I close my eyes, I see the image of death,” he said. “I don’t care about a photograph.”

Mr. Abbasi’s wife, Joan Sherman, said, “I understand people being heroes, but you also have to be realistic about what you’re capable of and your strength.”

The police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, when asked about the photographer's actions, said: "I don't know. I wasn't there."

"I don't know how fast the train was coming in," he added. News reports emerged saying Mr. Han had been drinking before the exchange, which occurred at about 12:30 p.m., after he argued with his wife. Mr. Han approached the man who pushed him, witnesses said, though it was unclear why. The man had been seen mumbling to himself. The encounter was a new wrinkle.

"He was trying to do good," said Edmilson Xavier, 49, on Tuesday, imagining Mr. Han's motivations, perhaps emboldened by alcohol. " 'Hey, listen, guy, you're scaring people around here.' "

In Mr. Abbasi's photos, several bystanders seemed to be gathered at the far end of the platform, waving at the oncoming train to slow down. "Good for these people," Mr. Xavier said. But he asked, "Wasn't there anybody who was strong enough to pull this guy out?"

He added, "Don't ask me what I would do."

The photographer found a defender in a perhaps unexpected source: a subway hero. Chad Lindsey, an actor, saw a man fall to the tracks at the Penn Station subway stop in 2009, and leapt down to help him up. He cautioned against questioning the photographer's actions on the platform based on the picture.

"That photo makes me think one thing: misleading. It's a still shot," Mr. Lindsey wrote in an e-mail. "Everything about our relationship to that track bed is out of whack. We curse it, we fear it, we daily look at it curiously, ride on it, spit on it. It doesn't look as deep as it is, the platform edge isn't built the way you think it is, the trains are massive and move so quickly along it, and no one knows what his leg muscles will do until they are tested."

*Reporting was contributed by Joseph Goldstein, J. David Goodman, William K. Rashbaum, Wendy Ruderman and Nate Schweber.*