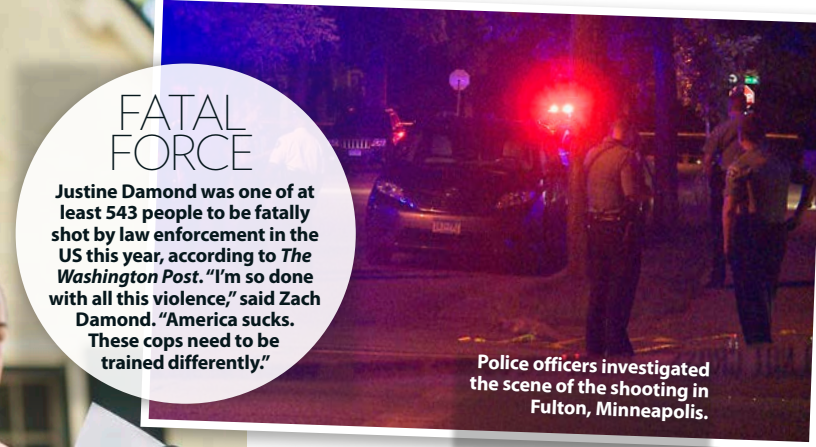


Justine Damond (in a social-media portrait) "touched so many people with her loving and generous heart," said fiancé Don Damond.



Damond (with fiancé Don and "stepson" Zach) was "such a kind woman," friend Hannah told Minneapolis's *Star Tribune*.

"Our hearts are broken and we are utterly devastated by the loss of Justine," said Don (with Zach on July 17).



FATAL FORCE

Justine Damond was one of at least 543 people to be fatally shot by law enforcement in the US this year, according to *The Washington Post*. "I'm so done with all this violence," said Zach Damond. "America sucks. These cops need to be trained differently."

Police officers investigated the scene of the shooting in Fulton, Minneapolis.

US police shooting victim

A FAMILY'S AGONY

The shocking killing of Australian bride-to-be Justine Damond leaves a family heartbroken—and angry

ate into the warm summer's evening of July 15, Justine Damond did what many would do when she heard a woman's scream shatter the silence near her home. Believing there was a sexual assault taking place in the laneway behind the house she shared with her American fiancé in Fulton, a leafy, upper-middle-class neighbourhood in south-west Minneapolis, the Australian called emergency services. In audio uploaded to US website policeclips.com, the 911 dispatcher who took Damond's call informs patrolling police of a "possible assault." Minutes later, police radioed back: "We've got one down." In what one local called an "absolute head scratch," the "one down" was Damond, allegedly shot dead in her pyjamas by police officer Mohamed Noor. The 40-year-old, also known as Justine Ruszczyk, was due to be married next month (she had already taken her fiancé's name). No weapon was found at the scene and at press time it had not been revealed what brought about the shooting, which has sparked outrage in Australia and in Minnesota, where five people have been killed by police this year. "Our hearts are broken and we are utterly devastated by the loss of Justine," said her fiancé, Don Damond, who was away on business at the time of the shooting. "She was so kind and so darn funny. She made us all laugh with her great wit and humour." Her loss has left her Australian family "utterly devastated," said her father, John Ruszczyk. "Justine was a beacon to all of us, we only ask that the light of justice shine down on the circumstances of her death." The former Manly High School student and vet had moved to the US after meeting Don in Australia five years ago and worked as a meditation teacher and yoga instructor for the Lake Harriet Spiritual Community in Minnesota. "This is a very difficult time for

our family," the Ruszczyk family said in a statement in Sydney. "We are trying to come to terms with this tragedy and to understand why this has happened." What is known is that Damond called 911 to report "what she believed was an active sexual assault occurring nearby," said Don, vice-president and general manager of Little Six Casino in Minnesota. In the audio of the emergency-dispatch response, the 911 operator is heard directing patrolling officers to the area just before 11.28 PM. The operator informs the police there is a "female screaming behind the building." Two officers arrived at the scene: Noor, 31, who joined the force in 2015 and had just completed his field training, and his partner, named in local reports as Matthew Harrity, 25, who was in the driver's seat. The pyjama-clad Damond approached the driver's window of the car and, according to local reports, was talking with Harrity before Noor opened fire from the passenger seat, shooting multiple times across his partner and through the door. After requesting emergency para-medics, an officer tells the dispatcher they have "started CPR." The bride-to-be, however, couldn't be saved, dying from a "gunshot wound to her abdomen" and leaving her devastated family and locals desperate to know how the tragedy could have occurred. "My mom is dead because a police

"My mom is dead ... for reasons I don't know"

—Zach Damond

officer shot her for reasons I don't know," says Don's son, Zach, 22. "I demand answers." At press time, those answers hadn't been forthcoming. While Minnesota police have body cameras, they were not turned on in this instance. There is also no dashcam footage. A mobile phone was found near Damond's body, leading to speculation it was mistaken for a gun. Meanwhile, local TV station KSTP reported that Noor had three complaints on file. One has been dismissed while two remain open. Harrity also has a complaint against him. Both officers are now on paid administrative leave. Noor "extends his condolences to the family," read a statement issued by his lawyer, Tom Plunkett, who said there were "several investigations" ongoing. "We would like to say more, and will in the future."

For Damond's grieving loved ones, the dearth of information only adds to their agony. "Our lives were forever changed from having known her," said Don. "It's difficult to fathom how to go forward in my own life without her here. Piecing together Justine's last moments, before the homicide, would be a small comfort as we grieve this tragedy." ■ *By Michael Crooks*



Alleged shooter Officer Mohamed Noor.

'A caring person'

Officer Mohamed Noor, who has been with the Minneapolis Police Department since 2015, said through his lawyer, Tom Plunkett, that he takes Justine Damond's family's loss "seriously and keeps them in his daily thoughts and prayers." Noor, who has a degree in economics and business administration, moved from Somalia to the US at a "young age," said Plunkett: "He joined the police force to serve the community and to protect the people he serves. Officer Noor is a caring person with a family he loves and he empathises with the loss others are experiencing." Due to the ongoing investigations, Noor could not say anything more about the shooting, Plunkett added.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT: LINKEDIN; FACEBOOK; AAP IMAGE; TWITTER; FACEBOOK