

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIA PALOMA GALVAN

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SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES

**It is October 13th, 2017. This is Claytee White. I'm in the Oral History Research Center today. The person that I'm talking with is Paloma.**

**Could you please pronounce your whole name and spell it for me?**

Maria Paloma Galvan; M-A-R-I-A, P-A-L-O-M-A, G-A-L-V-A-N.

**Do you prefer Paloma?**

Yes.

**Tell me about that name. What does that name mean?**

Dove, pigeon.

**Really? Is pigeon a prized bird in some cultures?**

What happened is my mother had me on the patio as a newborn and a pigeon landed on my forehead. My dad was trying to scare it away and it wouldn't move; it just wanted to stay there. So my father saw it as a good omen and Paloma stayed.

**Yes, good. Oh, wow, that's so interesting. Tell me a little about your background. Where were you born?**

I was born in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

**I see that you've been here since 2001.**

Since 2001.

**What kind of work have you done?**

Right now I've been working with art galleries in the Arts District. I help produce art shows, visual art shows. I work with a body percussion company called Molodi. We have actually performed here at UNLV a couple of times.

**Are you an artist? Do you do any visual art?**

In my free time I do work with Murano glass beads. I do consider that my art as a business of the

arts.

**Okay, I like that. So Murano beads, what do you do with those?**

Jewelry.

**Oh, really? Do you display your work anywhere?**

No. It's just whenever there is inspiration and then whenever there is time, which rarely; there is not much.

**I am moderating a panel of artists on this coming Friday. There are three visual artists and there is some kind of the arts portion of the county and the city. They're having this big conference down at the Fifth Street School.**

Oh, I'm there all the time.

**So Friday afternoon I'm one of the moderators of the one of the panels. Give me this intelligent question that I can ask these three artists.**

Oh, wow. The thing is that when things like that happen, I go into political mode and right now what gets me upset is the city not supporting visual artists. Even further, though, than that why is it that the city is not supporting local performing artists? Because the city, I adore and I am active with the City of Las Vegas Art School Mission. I attend as many meetings as I can and there's all of these great projects for the City of Las Vegas; but, then again, they're bringing artists from other states.

**Thank you so much. One of my questions is, are you supported well enough by the city, the state, the country?**

Local artists are not.

**Thank you because I had not even thought about it in that way; that we bring in people, but we don't support our own local people. And all of these are local artists on this panel.**

**Thank you.**

Yes. It's good, but in a way sad that they're receiving support from Zappos and they're receiving all of this, all of these events coming into town, all of these organizations coming into town, but I don't see the connection, really the connection. I see that the city wants to make a commission, the city, the county. They want to make the city artsy, but they just want for it to look artsy. Because other than the zip boxes that are all around UNLV—and I have a lot of friends that have done those boxes—(Ali Fetalahali), he's an instructor here at UNLV, and his wife—but other than that I don't see the support. We have amazing muralists, amazing—Juan Muniz, the Recycled Propaganda—all of these artists, but they're being supported by independent companies, by private supporters. Where is the connection between this city and their visual artists? And like I said, especially our performing artists because we have all of these amazing performers. And, yes, I love Cirq. All of my friends work in Cirq. But it's not giving them the artistic freedom to produce, to perform, to reinvent. So that's why the most that we have in order to support our performing artists will be public us and Cockroach Theatre and those are the local hidden treasures, but that's all that we have, which is extremely sad.

**Thank you so much. This could not have been more perfect because I didn't know that. It gives me something to talk about, something that I can be passionate about. So thank you so much.**

Then you can just tell everyone, *Paloma told me so*, and they'll be like, *okay, we know who you're talking about*. They will know who you're talking about.

**Thank you so much. Now, tell me about your love of country music.**

I was not at the concert. In order to make extra income, I drive; I do Lyft. I was dropping off a couple at Luxor and that's when the shooting started.

**So you are really right there.**

I heard what we all thought for the first four or five seconds was firecrackers, but being that I was raised in a military household, I figured out what it was. And then being right across the street, Luxor—the venue is right across the street from Luxor, so I could hear people screaming.

**Tell me exactly where your car was.**

I was exiting the valet parking, like exiting. When you walk out of Luxor, the ride share area for all drivers is right to your right. I was right there when everything started.

**The passengers had already exited your car?**

They had already exited my vehicle. So at that moment what I was doing...My back was bothering me. So while you wait for your next passengers, I got out of my vehicle and I stretched. So I was actually outside of my vehicle, standing up, and that's when I heard the shots.

**After you heard the shots, what did you see?**

It was not so much at that moment what I saw as what I heard, and the screams you could hear. You could hear what (omedios), what we say on social media, sounded like a long time; it was not.

**How long do you think it was now that you've thought about it?**

The screams happened immediately. The shooting from beginning to the end, about twelve minutes.

**That must have seemed like an eternity.**

I still don't know how it is that I got a group out of that area. Because what I did...I heard the people screaming—and some of these things are barely coming back to me; I was blocking all of this—so I exit the parking. To exit from the parking, you drive down to your right, you make a curve, and you exit on Mandalay Bay Road and then you make a left and then you make another

left for Las Vegas Boulevard. I drove on Las Vegas Boulevard and the shots were going on top of my vehicle. This individual—I don't like to say his name, I'm sorry—if he had aimed lower, my kids would be orphans probably right now.

So I pass; I drove in front of the venue and then there is Reno Avenue and right after Reno Avenue there's an open space for the parking from the Tropicana. I remember that I just stopped there and I saw people trying, already getting out, and I opened my doors and I just started screaming, "Jump in; jump in." On my right side on the passenger seat I had two girls, one sitting on top of the other. Behind me I had three other girls. And then I heard two guys saying, "Hold on; hold on." I'm outside of my vehicle. So I opened the trunk and they jump in my trunk, two guys, and I close...And then I just drove.

I hit Tropicana; I reached Tropicana Avenue and I made a right. Nobody still knew what was going on. They didn't know what's going on. All I could say (sic) was them begging me, "Please drive; please drive. They're coming to get us; they're coming to get us. They're still shooting; they're still shooting." So I drove them across the street from Thomas Mack. I made a U-turn on Tropicana and I told them, "You guys are far away. I need to go back."

**Once you made the right turn on to Tropicana...?**

On to Tropicana, I drove all the way...

**Did you get as far as Koval?**

Ooh, I made an illegal U-turn because I dropped them off right across—no, it was on Paradise.

**Okay, so you came down all the way to Paradise.**

All the way to Paradise and then I just drove back on Tropicana.

**You let them out.**

I let them out and I told them, "I need to go back."

**What made you decide to go back?**

I don't know.

**Are you known for your bravery?**

No.

**So what happened?**

I drove back on Tropicana and something told me to go into the parking lot for Hooters, into valet parking, so I'm there. I'm still in the Lyft system and I'm getting requests for rides. And I'm just declining, declining, declining. A passenger called me and he was at Hooters, and at that moment I heard some kind of alarms, because I'm right at the valet parking. I told this guy, "Stay where you are; do not get out; Hooters is going on lockdown." Because the system gives you the location. And I hang up on him. Then I look to my right and there's a group of four.

**Outside?**

They're outside sitting on the floor, but they were not sitting on the floor; they were with a guy, holding his chest. His wife pretty much jump on top of the hood of my vehicle and she was asking for help. She was saying, "My husband's been hit; my husband's been hit." And there was a young couple with them, and at that moment I thought they were a family, but they were not; they were just a couple helping them out because Billy—Billy is his name; William King—he got shot and I saw the blood.

At that moment, at first I did panic, seeing someone wounded, and then I said, "Jump in." My intention was, and I told them, "I'm going to get you to the first ambulance that we find and then I need to go back." There were no ambulances. I am on 9-1-1. I'm calling 9-1-1 and it's fast busy, fast busy; the lines were just saturated.

So at that moment I said a really bad word and I told them, "We're heading to the

hospital." There was a guy from L.A. sitting right next to me on my right. His wife was sitting behind me, and then there were the couple that were helping Billy and his wife. Billy was sitting in the middle. I could see him from my rearview mirror and he was looking—he was starting to look blue. And his wife, she was just pressing, putting pressure, and she was talking to me in Spanish. She was, "Ayudanos por favor." *Help us; please, help us.*

Still 9-1-1...When they finally answer, I told them, "I need medical; I have someone that is wounded in the chest; they were at the concert." I was told, "Give me a second, I'm going to transfer you to medical." And I stayed on hold the whole time. So I just followed two ambulances and I ran every single red light all the way to Sunrise Hospital.

Billy, one moment he asked, "Where are we going?" And I told him, "Sunrise Hospital." And he said, "I was born there; I might as well die there." And I turned around and I told him, "Dude, shut up or I'm going to smack you behind the head."

We get to Sunrise Hospital and medical finally answers on 9-1-1 and they ask me, "What do you have going on?" And I told them, "I'm already pulling into trauma ER." And they told me, "Just go ahead; just go ahead." So when I arrived there were other people dropping off more victims and everything was out of a movie scene.

A policewoman—I'm trying to search for her so bad—she opened the door and she asked, "What's going on?" And I just said, "He got shot in the chest; he got shot in the chest." And medical staff came in and they pull him out. They put him on a stretcher. They told me, "Go park down the street and come back because we need to check on you."

So I went to park and I came back. This same policewoman, she hugged me and she asked me, "Are you okay?" And I told her, "Yes." Up until this day I feel really guilty that I didn't ask her how was she doing. That's why I'm desperately looking for her.



Then I went inside and I spoke with...not so much with Kimberly, who is Billy's wife. I spoke with the couple—I don't remember right now his name, but the wife's name is Paola. And I asked them, "Where are you guys from?" And they said, "L.A." I thought all four of them were from L.A. His wife was on the phone telling someone what had happened.

**That's Kimberly.**

Yes, that's Kimberly. Billy was already inside. I didn't want to invade their privacy, so I didn't ask them in that moment for their names or for their phone numbers; I didn't, but I gave them mine and I told them, "Right now you're my priority. If you need anything, here is my phone number and call me."

I was broken into pieces. At that moment I broke and I've been broken since then. As I'm walking down towards my car, I started screaming to the top of my lungs. I just started screaming. I remember that a nurse came in and she strapped me to check my pressure and she told me that I needed to relax, so I relaxed a little bit. But that was really fast.

Then I kept on walking and at that moment I remember all of the traffic. And, yes, I do a lot of social media, but I rarely do Facebook Live. So I went on Facebook Live and I was asking everyone, "Get out of the way; stay home; let paramedics do their job; let Metro do what they're supposed to; stay out of the area; stay out of the way; if you see someone driving like a maniac, open the road for them because they're heading to a hospital." Most of my friends now tell me that they saw me on Facebook Live before they saw it on the news.

**That's probably correct because you were there first.**

Yes.

**You were right there across the street when all this happened.**

But at the same moment, even on the video, I'm still saying, "I don't know what's going on."

**So you still did not know?**

No.

**Because you weren't listening to radio stations.**

No.

**You were trying to get in touch with paramedics.**

Yes. A lot of people have told me, people from the Arts District that they saw me and then they turned on the TV, so they heard it from me first.

**When you say that you are broken, tell me what you mean.**

I'm a teacup and I crash on the floor and I'm broken to pieces.

**So have you sought counseling yet?**

I have done a couple of group counseling, but I still—it's not making things any easier. I'm tired of hearing the "it's normal for you to feel that way" or "you need to stop feeling that way." Those are things that I know. Those are things that I know. But the panic attacks that I'm having when I hear ambulances or when I hear helicopters, they're just not going away.

**After you return from the emergency room to your car—**

When I did that I park by the entrance of Sunrise Hospital and I started directing traffic. I was screaming at people, "Get out of the way." I was on Maryland Parkway. Then a friend of mine called me and he said, "I'm on my way to get you." All of a sudden I felt arms around me. The other day I asked—he's actually a fashion designer, a visual artist; his name is Angel Algala—and I asked him, "Were you hugging me?" And he was like, "No, I was holding you down because you were jumping while you were screaming."

And then he told me, "Let's get you home; I'm going to drive you home." And I told him, "No, I'm going to drive myself." And then he said, "You better go home; you have to go home;

I'm going to follow you." And I told him, "No, you go home and I'm going to go home." And he made me swear that I was going to go home and I lied and I tried to get back into the scene, but police were not allowing. At that moment I wasn't thinking. Then I went home.

**What part of the city do you live?**

I am in Green Valley.

**When you were directing traffic, you walked out to Maryland Parkway or you drove out there?**

I park pretty much by the street and I got out and I was on Maryland Parkway.

**And you are trying to help the ambulances or people with victims in their cars get into—**

People with victims. The image that cannot leave my mind was a white pickup truck; I think it was an F-150. I think I've seen the videos of a female; she is the owner of that vehicle. I could see legs hanging out from the trunk; it looked like mannequins in the back of a truck. There are so many images that will not leave my mind. I saw people barely being able to walk into Sunrise Hospital. I saw people being carried into Sunrise Hospital.

**After your friend left you and you were supposed to go home, what did you really do? You drove how far back?**

I went back on Tropicana and they were directing traffic down to Koval and I wasn't able to get in. So at that moment I went back—all the way down—I don't know why—I drove all the way down to Flamingo and then I hit Paradise and I drove home. I went again on Facebook Live and I asked people again to stay out of the way. I still didn't know exactly what was going on, not until I got home and my daughter was waiting for me and she gave me more details and we turned on the TV. And then all of the guilt started.

**With your actions, I see you as a first responder. Why is there guilt?**

I am mad at myself because I was not able to do more. Right away I told my daughter, "We have universal blood type; that's what they're saying that they need." But we had just gotten tattoos. So I felt guilty about that. I felt guilty about my kids being worried about me. I felt guilty about not being able to get more people out of there. I was like, "Nine people; it's not enough." I felt guilty about being at that spot at that time because, like I said, if that person would have aimed any lower, a whole bunch of vehicles would have caught on fire. Up until this moment all of the fears and all of the guilt, they're not stopping.

**So what can I say to you to make you stop this?**

Nothing.

**Because I have a lot to say because, see, to me, you are so brave.**

I don't see it because it was not my intention "I am going to go and save the world."

**It doesn't make any difference.**

I don't see it. Yes, people are telling me, "Oh, you saved his life." No. I just help him not die that fast. The doctor saved his life. God saved his life. I just drove him there.

**But God had you in the right place. God put you there.**

So, you see, it was not me; it was God, so I didn't save him.

**I go to a church that teaches that we are all made out of the stuff that God is. God is love; God is wholeness; God is perfect health; God is all of this stuff and created us out of that stuff that it is, so we are all that God is and we are God's hands and feet. So God had you right there because we are His hands and feet.**

I just see myself as a grain of salt, nothing more and nothing less.

**And I see you as this beautiful magnificent being made out of all this God stuff. I have given your daughter a list of places that you might want to just read over and look at and**

**maybe there is someplace else there that you might want to go just to talk to a professional because I just want to tell you that you are God in expression.**

I just helped a little bit for it not to be from fifty-eight to fifty-nine. I wish it would have been less than fifty-eight and I feel guilty because maybe if I would have driven faster, it would have been fifty-seven. That's all.

**What did your daughter say to you when you got home?**

I think she asked me if I was nuts. And I think in many ways she took the role as the mother, which is not there, which is another guilt that I have on my shoulders.

**You've raised her well.**

Well, I didn't drop her that many times, so that's good for her.

**I love that even the way you're feeling you have a sense of humor.**

Oh, we run a comedy show at home. They're my shrimps. We live in a democracy in which I am the queen. Everyone is grounded. I ground them ahead of time. They ask me, "What am I grounded for?" And I tell them, "I'm going to figure it out later; I'm just paying forward; you're grounded. And you're not allowed to get married and you're not allowed to have kids because I'm too young to be a grandma." We do run a comedy show.

But at this moment I am Miss America; I'm just smiling and waving and that's the best thing that I can do. But on the inside I feel an elephant's foot on my chest. I feel an elephant's foot.

I've also been extremely upset about the way that the media has responded to this.

**In what way? The print media has done a decent job, so are you talking—**

But some of them are going—they like the ratings.

**Okay, yes.**

To the point that I guess a certain TV station, a national TV station did some digging on me and they found out that I'm Muslim. I was invited to do a live interview on TV and I was told, "May we suggest you wear your hijab." And I hang up the phone immediately. Because, you see, Billy is Christian.

**What a story, yes.**

So it would have been a Muslim saving a Christian. I'm not willing to play that game. For a moment of going to a live interview right there at the corner of Tropicana and Reno, leaving my house to go do an interview for a Spanish-speaking TV station, I call it off. Out of everyone that has been dialing my phone number, the only people that I spoke to was KNPR and that's because that's our people; they support the arts. I guess they're writing something. I don't know. Desert Companion, the magazine, is doing something. But other than that I turned everyone down because I'm not going to be a puppet.

**Good, good. You've described your feelings. How did you feel about this city prior to this incident?**

Las Vegas has always been a safe place. I mean, let's face it, since 9/11, we were all expecting this to happen since ISIS, since Al-Qaeda released those videos. We knew that something was going to happen. We just didn't know that it was going to be done by pretty much one of us. At the beginning I didn't want to call it a terrorist attack until my daughter actually said, "Yeah, Mom, it is a terrorist attack. Just because it didn't come from the Middle East, it is a terrorist attack."

Does my love for Las Vegas change? No. The community has been beautiful to the point that people wanted to come and cook for me and do this and do that. I'm like, "There is other people that need more than I do." The hugs are amazing; the hugs are beautiful and the attention

of everyone. I do go on social media. I'm going through a roller coaster. It's just easier saying, "Please send light; I'm not having such a good day." And they come by the hundreds.

Las Vegas will always be Las Vegas. Do we need to be a little bit more prepared? Yes, we do. Is there anyone to blame? No. Because companies, hotels, we can only do so much. Let's face it, there's always going to be evil in this world and there's always going to be someone that finds a way to sneak something in to do. It's no one's fault.

**What did this experience teach you about yourself?**

At this point it's really difficult to tell because I'm going through so much right now. I need to figure it out. I need to get out of all of this confusion in order to be able to figure that out. But, in reality, it was not just me; it was a whole community doing this.

A friend of mine Dustin, he started driving people out of Thomas Mack and he is doing care packages for families. He got in contact with me, Dustin Hoots, a visual artist, and he was like, "Give me the contact number from your guy"—now they call Billy "my guy"—“so we can hook him up." He called me the other day and we were able to help him out with a couple of his bills that he was behind and we have some coloring books and care packages for his kids. He was able to get his wife a haircut and color, just little...It's just beautiful that tiny things can make such a huge difference.

The community has—and I don't like it when people say, "Oh, the city of Las Vegas, the community of Las Vegas, they have become one." No, we have always been one. We have always been one. Now it's just out in the open. Now people are actually paying attention. City of Las Vegas is not just the glamor and the lights that you see on the Strip. I go grocery shopping at two in the morning. I can go right here on Tropicana and Maryland Parkway and since I'm driving I can go and get my tires balanced and the air to be checked then. The guys right there

know me and they see the stickers on my vehicle and they know that I'm trying to make a living for my kids and they don't charge me a dime. I have tried to tip them and they get mad at me. So Las Vegas has always been—we have always been one. We have always been strong. People are just paying more attention right now. That's all.

**I love this city and I could not have said that any better. How has this changed your attitude, pro or con, about guns?**

There has to be more guidelines. There has to be more restrictions. At the same time, the more restrictions there are, the black market is going to open up because—you know what?—there is always a Peter Perez or a Poncho Fernandez or Muhammed, an Archie, everyone selling twenty-tvos out of their trunks.

I have always said that the way that we are starts from home. We just found out that this individual—it's not even worth going into details, but it's coming out in the open, everything that his family has done. So it is all in the upbringing. People are not paying attention. Everyone is their own mind, their own soul, their own decisions, but everything starts at home.

And, yes, we do need more regulations. There is no ifs or buts about it. Hopefully something will be done soon. It's not just cases like this, what we just went through. How many people have guns at their houses, in their closets, and they're not with that safety feature or they're not inside those safety boxes? And how many kids have we seen committing suicide or shooting someone by accident?

**You have been very gracious and very kind to do this at this point in your recovery.**

**Describe Paloma to me one year from today.**

I am never going to be who I was the night before October first. I'm never going to be.

**So tell me about that better person that you're going to be.**



Like I said, right now I'm a teacup broken into pieces. I'm gluing my pieces together. Will I ever be the same teacup? No, I'm modified. I'm discovering a lot of things about myself. I'm paying more attention. Like I said, we run a comedy show at home, but my kids are like, "Why are you kissing us? Why are you hugging us?" Because we don't know what's going to happen. We don't know when a First of October is going to happen again. Hopefully it won't, but right now we cannot say that it's not going to happen again. There's always going to be someone. There is always going to be that bad apple. As much as we try to be Miss America and pretend that everything is right, there's always going to be someone.

**You are Miss America at home. I want you to become Miss Universe.**

Gosh, that's a really big title to carry.

**Yes. But as much fun as you have with Miss America at home with your kids, one year from now I see Miss Universe, as light as a feather.**

I really wish I could see that right now.

**Let us see it for you.**

But right now I'm not even taking one day at a time. I'm taking like three hours at a time because I'm going through the most incredible and the most horrible roller coaster that I have ever been.

**So let us see that vision for you. Let us keep you in your prayers.**

Please do.

**Let us see all this good for you. Let us be the strong one for a minute.**

It's just difficult. It's just really difficult. But right now what is keeping me more at peace is knowing that—and it's barely catching up to me—that there is five people that I don't remember their faces and that they're somewhere safe and that Billy—William, Billy—was able to celebrate his thirty-ninth birthday two weeks ago and he has a loving and adoring wife and they

have four kids—six, seven, eight and nine years old.

**When Billy gets ready to talk about this, please let him know that we want to talk to him, but not until he's ready.**

I think he's ready. We did an interview all together at KNPR.

**Good. Please just let him know that we would love to have a longer interview to let him just tell the story in a way that might be able to help somebody unfortunately when this happens again.**

That's why I agreed to do this, if it's to help someone. I used to produce my own open microphone shows. I don't mind taking the microphone if this is going to be for something productive, for something that is actually going to teach and to help and to support. That's why I have this idea just to speak.

**Tell me about your open mics. Have you actually produced some open mics here in the city?**

Yes. I used to have an open microphone called Provoking Fusion. I started running that out of a little coffee shop that is now closed down of business. It was the Coffee House down on Water Street in Henderson. And then I move Provoking Fusion down to the Bar and Bistro at the Arts Factory in the Arts District, but then there was a change in ownership.

**And it went out of business. I liked that little restaurant.**

Right now it's called the Urban Lounge and then right next to it has a place called Tacos and Huevos.

**I've been to the Urban Lounge. I have not been to the other one. What is it called?**

Tacos and Huevos; something like that.

**So I haven't been to that one, but I love frequenting downtown, the new restaurants. I love**

**it, so thank you for that.**

Actually the owner of Urban Lounge, he's a senator.

**Yes, right.**

Kelvin?

**Kelvin Atkinson.**

Yes.

**I want you to stay in touch with me. I know I've given you one card. I want you to give one to Billy.**

I will.

**When you get ready to do your open mics again, I want to know. I have a couple people here on this campus that need those kind of venues, need to be involved, need to be given their poetry, so I want to stay in touch. Thank you so much.**

No, thank you because all of this is part of my therapy. Like I told you on the phone and I was really honest, I did my homework right away. It's hard to trust. It's hard to trust. What's her name, Melissa?

**Melissa, yes.**

I met her actually at a birthday celebration at a bowling alley and it was all of Molodi; our company worked together and she was invited. Some of the members of Molodi were asking me, "How are you doing?" She was like, "I'm sorry, but would you mind? It's for UNLV." I was like, "My daughter goes to UNLV. Of course." Then I wanted to *juu-juu-juu-juu*. It was like, okay, green light. Then I text my daughter. I was like, "Can you search on this?" Then I text Jason Dagher. What is it that Jason does?

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: *What doesn't he do? I don't know. He's the director of civic***

*engagement.*

**Oh, yes, okay.**

So I was sort of like, "Can you give me the four-one-one; should I do this?" So, yes.

**We've done some good stuff, but this is the best thing we've ever done.**

I'm a grain of salt.

**You're an angel.**

I don't know about that. I just did what I was supposed to do. That's all.

**Exactly. The hands and feet of God. I want to thank you not just for this, but I want to thank you for that night.**

**[End of recorded interview]**