

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRITTANY CASTREJON

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES

This is November ninth, 2017. We are in the Oral History Research Center in the library.

This is Claytee White and...?

This is Barbara Tabach.

And we are with Brittany. Brittany, could you please pronounce and spell your full name for us?

My name is Brittany Castrejon; B-R-I-T-T-A-N-Y, C-A-S-T-R-E-J-O-N.

Thank you. Brittany, we are going to talk about October one. But first, before we get started, can you tell us where you grew up and how long you've been in Las Vegas?

I was born in Las Vegas in 1989 at UMC. I lived in Las Vegas until I was twelve years old and then my parents moved me and my sisters to a small town in Iowa called Jamaica, a town of two hundred and fifty people. I lived there for eight years, went to middle school there, high school and college. I always knew that I wanted to come back to Las Vegas when I graduated college because that small town life was just too small for me. So I graduated college and had a call with a court reporting firm—that's what I went to college for—and they wanted me to come out to Las Vegas as soon as I graduated and begin employment at a court reporting firm here in Las Vegas, and so I've been here for the last seven years.

Where is Jamaica?

It is forty-five minutes west of Des Moines, Iowa.

I'm from Des Moines. I've never heard of Jamaica.

Yes, forty-five minutes west.

Really? I've never heard of it.

Have you heard of Grimes or Granger?

Oh, sure, absolutely.

You go just a little bit farther past those, about twenty more minutes west.

Did you get your court reporting in Iowa?

I did. I did. AIB College of Business.

I grew up around the corner from there.

Oh, that's crazy. I guess this is meant to be, this interview today.

Yes. I have to get that in there because that's very close to home.

I am twenty-eight years old and twenty of my years have been in Las Vegas, and eight of those years have been in Iowa.

Tell me how you found yourself at the venue on October first.

My best friend Marsha and I love country music and we love to go to country concerts and country festivals, and Las Vegas is quite the place to attend a festival or a music concert for country music. There's always one going on. So she's my buddy and we've gone to the Route 91 Harvest Festival since its inception in 2014 and this was our fourth year. Since it's started it's been a three-day festival and we always like to get our picture together with the Route 91 sign, so I actually have a picture frame at home of each of our years together. That's why I was there this year. I can't break the streak; it's a tradition.

Are you going to go next year?

If they have one I would like to go next year. I can't let evil keep me from doing the things that I love, and country music and going to concerts, country music concerts especially, are my life.

Anybody that knows me, my friends, my family, they know that I go to several country music concerts and festivals a year and it's just one of the things that I like to spend extra income when I'm not working; I like to spend it on going to festivals, country music festivals.

Who are your favorite artists?

Luke Bryan and Sam Hunt. They're cuties.

Oh, okay. Did your family and your friends know that you were at the festival when they heard about the incident?

Yes, they did because I always post on Instagram Marsha and my picture and I usually say, year four and what day it is or it's that time of year again. So everybody knows that I love to go to the Route 91 Festival. It's funny that you ask that because a lot of the people, a lot of my friends and family wrote on my Facebook wall that night saying, "You're the first person I thought of when I heard of this shooting. Are you there? Are you safe? Let me know." So I got a lot of messages like that, text messages, Facebook messages.

Tell us what happened. Tell us where you were standing at the concert. What is your area?

Looking at the stage I was on the right-hand side. There is a center catwalk divider that the artists can go down and there's like a bar area, so it's a center divider and there's a left side of the stage and a right side, and I was on the right side closest to Mandalay Bay.

While you're talking about that can you go ahead and describe everything you remember about the setup? No one has done that for us yet. I like that center aisle thing. I haven't heard that before.

Okay, yes, no problem. You go in the main entrance. For non-VIP festival goers, such as myself, would have been—I don't know what the name of the street right there is, but there's an ARCO or an AM/PM right on the street, so right there is an entrance and I think it's Gate 6, is what they called it. There's an entrance for the festival goers. So we would go through there every day and there's photo opportunities along the walls before you get to security. So we would stop and take our pictures and then go through security. On the left-hand side when you enter the venue, there would have been not only vendors but...I don't know how to describe it. It was kind of like a

wheel that you can ride and it just turns people.

Like a carnival ride.

Exactly. It goes really tall and you just fly and you can see the whole city and it was really beautiful at nighttime. Then vendors, like radio stations, merchandise for the venue. And then if you walked to your left when you entered the venue, there was a stage called the Next of Nashville Stage and that's where country music artists that haven't made it to the big time yet, they play that smaller stage and that was in a white tent.

Oh, a completely separate tent.

Yes, all the way at the other end of the venue from the main stage. The main stage was down farther close to Mandalay Bay. So that Next of Nashville Stage would be closer to that gas station. And then heading from that Next of Nashville Stage, you would have porta-potties on the left-hand side, food vendors all along, people that were selling cowboy boots and cowboy belt buckles and then more porta-potties, more photo opportunities, and just bars. There would be bars everywhere.

And then going down the venue, it opens up into where you could see the main stage and then behind the main stage was AstroTurf called the Chair Corral where people could sit up their lawn chairs if they didn't want to stand at the stage; they would be back in the lawn chair area. And there was more bars and food vendors over there. So now at the Chair Corral, the lawn chairs, to the right of that would be another bar and then on top of that bar there was this Stoney's Rockin' Country line dancing area and they would have like silent line dancing where you'd put on these headphones, they'd play music for you, and everyone would be listening to these headphones and line dancing on the stage. That was fun that weekend.

Then from the Chair Corral just looking straightforward, you had a good view of the

main stage and there was two large TV screens on the side of the stage so you could see what was going on, on the stage, which performer was on. If you were sitting all the back in the Chair Corral, they had though helpful TV screens to show you what was going on on stage.

So the main stage, if I'm standing looking at the artist, is my back to Las Vegas Boulevard?

Yes.

I think I have a picture. Thank you for that.

You're welcome.

Go ahead and tell me where you were standing and what happens when you realize that it was not fireworks.

Before that, Jake Owen was the country music artist on before Jason Aldean and during his set—and I was on the same side of the stage all weekend and practically every year that I've gone I've been on the right side of the stage closest to Mandalay Bay, side note. So Jake Owen was on and during his set in our right-hand-side crowd, somebody let off a confetti party popper and that went off into the crowd. I looked to my left and I was like, "Who has confetti?" And then another one went off. I was like, "Oh, they're going to get us all in trouble; they better stop." That's just another side note that some party poppers went off in the crowd about an hour before Jason Aldean went on.

So Jake Owen's set ends and in between his set and Jason Aldean's set, there's about forty minutes of downtime where there's a deejay, Dee Jay Silver, playing country music and getting the crowd pumped. During that time me and my group of friends, me, Marsha—I didn't tell you guys that her boyfriend was with us and my fourteen-year-old cousin Danielle was with me; they were new additions this year with us. So when Jake Owen's set ends, we move up a little bit closer because some people have to go to the bathroom, they want to go get another drink, and

we're like, we want to get as close as possible to Jason Aldean. So we're moving up, inching closer towards the stage. We have a really good view of the TV screen right in front of us.

Jason Aldean comes on at nine forty that night. I had not seen his tour yet this season. I've seen him about three times in Las Vegas already.

You are a fan, okay.

I am. Actually he played the first Route 91 in 2014. He was Sunday night, the last act on day three, and he had mentioned that when he came on that, "I've been here before and this is such a great venue to play and thanks for having me back." So he got through about...At the time I thought it was four songs, and now everything that I've heard he got through about seven songs. It's crazy how your mind kind of plays tricks on you in a traumatic situation. But actually during the sixth song that he was singing, at the end of it—it's a song called "Any Old Barstool"—I now know from watching videos that a couple of single shots went off during the end of that song. Me and my group didn't know that at the time, but videos that I have seen, police were evacuating festival goers on the other side already at that time and we were just having a grand old time in our concert crowd, not knowing that that's going on. So Jason Aldean gets done singing "Any Old Barstool" and that's a slower song. So then he's like, "Well, let's get this party started again," or, "Pick it back up," and then he goes into a fast song and that's "When She Says Baby." A couple of lines into that song that's when me and the people around me hear what sounds like fireworks. So that's when it happened for us, not knowing that people had already been frantically leaving the festival from shots already heard.

So we hear what sounds like fireworks and I was like, *somebody is letting off party poppers again, but this time it sounds really loud*, and I don't see confetti. I'm looking to my right towards Mandalay Bay because that's where the noise is coming from. So I'm looking; I don't see

any fireworks. And I can't remember if at that time more—yes, I think more went off, like, *pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop*. And then out of my left peripheral vision, I see Jason Aldean looking in the same direction that I am and then he runs off the stage and then the screen goes black and then the stage lights go off and the flood lights come up. And I thought to myself, *something really bad is happening right now, like, the entertainer doesn't just run off the stage.*

Ben who is Marsha's boyfriend, he's in the military, he told us, "Get down." So me and Marsha and Danielle and Ben all get down. And at that time nobody knew what was going on. So there's people around us that are laughing at us and they say, "What are you guys doing? Get up. It's fireworks. What are you doing down there?" We just really didn't know what was going on. So Ben says, "No, you guys stay down." So we stayed down and then more pops went off. So at that time more people get down.

And then Ben and this other dude that was by us, they were kind of thinking that the shooter was in the venue, so they get up like they're going to go rush the guy, but we pull him back down and say, "No, stay with us; you need to stay with us." So he stays with us.

It just seemed like a lot of pops went off, a lot and for a long time. But now watching videos, I see that there was breaks, like long pauses in between the pops. But during that time, being in the moment, I couldn't even comprehend how long the pauses were. I was just down and trying to...I was scooting in my cousin Danielle closer to me. And I couldn't even get down very far because we were in such a crowd of people, packed like sardines right in the pit crowd. I was actually on my knees hovered over my cousin. There wasn't even enough room for me to lie down.

And then by that time—I don't know how much time has passed—but a lot of people are down now and everyone is just hysterical and ladies are screaming, like, "What's that? What is

it?" I remember a guy to my left was saying that he needed medical attention, "I need medical attention," and he was holding up a woman who was lying down, holding her head up, just saying, "I need medical attention; I need medical attention." And I remember looking at him with compassion, but just thinking, *I don't know what we can do for you; we all need help and we all don't know what's going on.*

Then I looked back and Ben was in front of me and he was on top of Marsha and I was over my cousin Danielle and I asked him, I said, "Ben, what do we do?" I was very calm for the situation, which is really weird because I'm an emotional gal. I said, "Ben, what do we do?" Just looking towards him for that military experience maybe. He says, "Just stay down; stay down."

And then I would say that the pops went off—I know there were breaks, but we were down for about five to seven minutes, just trying to stay as close to the ground as possible and cover our heads with our hands. And then after that five to seven minutes, there was a pause, another pause in the gunfire. Sorry, I'm all over the place. But during that time I was thinking—**You're great.**

—*I don't know what's going on, but this is really bad and I hope the police get whoever this is fast.* And then as more time went on, which minutes seemed like hours in that type of situation, as more minutes passed I thought to myself, *this is really bad and nobody has stopped this yet, so we have to figure out stuff for ourselves.* And I was kind of like just thinking, *the police are going to get them and it's going to stop and we're going to be okay,* but that wasn't happening for us at that point in time.

So there was a pause in the gunfire and Ben says, "Run." So we get up and, mind you, during that whole time we had to wait for the crowd around us. People would run, get down, shots would be fired, people would get down, then more people would run. So we were finally

able to have enough space to even maneuver because we were in that pit crowd. So when Ben said *run*, there was still quite a lot of people in front of us, but we ran towards—in front of us there is a stage barricade that keeps the concert goers from getting to the stage and it's this white fence barricade that's kind of built at a slant.

Made out of what?

I don't know. I would say probably metal. It seemed heavy duty. It's not a chain-link fence because there was nowhere to put my hand through or my foot to hoist myself over; it was just flat. And then there was like stick things coming out at a slant all through it, so I'm assuming if you try to jump over, maybe you would land on one of those. I don't know. The barricade wasn't taller than me by any means, but I just couldn't—there was so many people at it and I didn't have enough room to maneuver, I couldn't even hoist myself over. But I saw that Ben pushed Marsha over. He just pushed her over and she fell. And then he got over.

At this time my cousin Danielle is next to me and she kind of brings me back to focus by saying, "Brittany, I can't get over this fence." And in my head I was like, *I can't get over this, either*. So I tried to push her over, but she's taller and weighs more than me, so that wasn't working. So I thought, *well, I need to figure out a plan B*. So I don't know, it was just really kind of crazy how there's no words spoken; it's kind of all just in-my-head thinking. I wasn't like, Danielle, this is what we're going to do next; no, there was no time for that. So I just grabbed her hand. We turned around and now we're running along the center catwalk; that center catwalk I told you about. We're running along that.

Toward?

Toward the Chair Corral, maybe the Chair Corral direction. As we're running, the shots aren't going off right then. Mind you, this was all in a matter of seconds that he said *run*, we try to get

over that barricade, not getting over, I grab her hand, we run, and I see a lot of debris. Ladies left their purses. People were missing shoes. A lot of beer cans. And then just so much blood. We were on this AstroTurf, fake green grass stuff. So much blood. And that kind of kept me, *this is real, Brittany, you need to keep running*. I had a tunnel vision, too, to where my peripheral was now blurry. I couldn't see out my peripheral; it was just a tunnel vision of that I needed to run straight and whatever was in my line of sight straight that was what I saw. I saw a lot of blood. I saw bodies. I remember specifically seeing a Mexican or Filipino lady down on my right and just thinking, *this is really scary; this is really bad; you need to keep going, Brittany*.

The shots started again, so I pushed Danielle down and I straddled her. My left arm is down and I straddled my right arm over her and my leg because we were still by that AstroTurf still right by Mandalay Bay. We didn't get very far in our run. I think we wasted too much time at that fence. So I get over her and we happen to land by an older lady and an older man, and the man said, "Stay down." So we're staying down. I'm over Danielle and also thinking at that time, *if this hits my head or my back, that's going to really hurt, but I need to protect Danielle*.

So I said something to the effect of, "Lord help us," or, "Keep us safe." Something like that. So the lady that we landed down next to, she grabbed my hand and she said, "Let's pray." And I said, "Yes." I cannot remember the prayer she prayed, but I do remember saying *amen* at the end with her.

After that prayer I felt so much peace, so I reached into—and the shots are still going off—I reached into my cross-body bag that I had on, pulled out my cell phone and I called my mom. She lives in Iowa, so she's two hours ahead, so it would have been midnight, like twelve twenty her time—no, not twelve twenty—twelve fifteen because I called her at ten fifteen. I called my mom and got her voice mail, so I hung up. And then I called Danielle's mom, which is

my Aunt Denise. I called Danielle's mom and she was asleep, too, because she's a CCSD teacher in town, so I knew she was sleeping, but I thought I would give it a try. And she didn't answer, so I hung up.

And then I was like, *I'll call my mom one more time*. So I called my mom and I got her voice mail and this time I left her a voice mail and I told her, "I don't know what's going on right now at Route 91, but people are getting shot, and Danielle and I are safe right now, and I love her and my dad and my sisters and I had to go." So I left her that voice mail at ten fifteen.

After saying that prayer and calling my mom, I just felt that there was no way we were getting out and I had so much peace, a peace that I can't even explain to where I always thought I'd be scared to die, because I think about it and I'm so scared of it, but in that moment I wasn't. I was like, *my family will be okay. This is just how it's going to be. I said my prayer; I called my mom; I'm good to go*. A peace beyond explanation I can't even describe.

But then the shots stopped and the guy says, "Run." So me and Danielle get up and we run, now running past that center—we finally got past that catwalk and the bars that were connected to the catwalk and turned to our right.

Going away from Mandalay Bay.

Yes, going to the right and made it behind...I think it was a bar. On a bottom was a bar and I think on top was the VIP section where people could stand and watch the venue because that's where the VIP people were; there was a bar where they could stand and walk and sit in the VIP section. I think we made it to that because we got down behind a table where the cash register was and whatever. All the tips were all strewn about. We got behind there and we're sitting in beer, a whole bunch of spilled alcohol is what I'm assuming it was. I just sat there for a couple of seconds just to gain my thoughts, like, *what are we going to do next?*

There was to my left three people, a guy and two gals, and one of the girls was injured. Then to my right there was a girl all by herself that looked like she was in so much shock. So I kind of yelled out, "Where is the exit? Where is everybody going?" Because in my head I thought, *if they're trying to target festival people, they're going to come in here for the people that are still alive, so I need to get out.*

So the girl that I said looked like she was in shock, she just pointed to the left of her. That's all she did was just point. So Danielle and I followed where she pointed to, had to get behind...It was like a place where festival goers weren't supposed to go because we had to climb over stuff and under stuff, but we got out of there. Then there was a security guard—not a security guard, just a worker for the festival that had a gate open and he said, "This way, this way." So we got out that way and I think it might have been—ooh, I don't even know—Gate 4 or 5, closest to those airport fuel tanks; that side. I think that street is Giles, so we came out that side.

By the time Danielle and I got out, I believe it was about—oh, I'm sorry, I forgot to tell you that we got separated from Marsha and Ben at that fence. They made it over and they got behind big black speakers. I remember just—okay, I was kind of jealous because I was like, *they're behind something; they're going to be safe, but me and Danielle are still out here in the open.* But I was like, *they'll be okay.* That's when I took her hand. I'm sorry.

Then we got out on Giles and by the time we got out it was ten twenty-one. We missed all the trampling of people. We missed the stampede because when we got out there wasn't that many—nobody came out the exit with us. I saw cops lined down Giles and people just seated on the curbs, people crying, people still running. So I decided to get over on the sidewalk and run down Giles. I never even knew that there was a church on—

The Catholic Church?

Yes. We ran by that church and I thought, *I can't go seek shelter in there because I know whoever is shooting is shooting up high and I don't know if it's in there, so I'm going to keep going.* I also thought, *I don't know if they're targeting police officers, so I'm not going to stand next to the police.* So even when we got out, I'm running with—somehow we're with two other gals now, running. I'm like, "Where are they telling you guys to go? Where are we supposed to go?" Nobody knows anything. Nobody's talking. People are just crying, screaming.

So I keep running down Giles and across the street I see an open door at the Tropicana; it's like a back delivery entrance, and I see some festival people going in there. So I decided to take me and Danielle down there, go through that door. We got in and it kind of seemed like an entrance that we shouldn't have gone through, so I was like, *if there's a shooter in here, he's probably going to try to escape out this way, so I need to get away from this area.* There was a lot of festival people inside there sitting along the walls, hugging, crying, and definitely people in panic, still not knowing where to go. Those of us that got out from the gunfire, we all still didn't feel safe because we didn't know what was going on. We didn't know if it was a terrorist attack or what. We just knew there was gunfire, it was really bad, and, *what's going on?* So all of the festival people, you can imagine, were just in panic not knowing what to do, where to go. We just wanted to hide and basically seek shelter. I'm like, *I can't be by windows.* There was a pool in the area that I went to as well. I'm like, *I can't be outside; I can't be by windows; I don't want to be in a crowd of festival people—because I still thought they were targeting festival people—and I need to get away from this exit.*

So I heard a lady say, "We're taking people up to our room." And it was another festival lady, "We're taking festival people up to our room if y'all want to come with us." So I was like,

"Well, what floor are you guys on?" Because I didn't know if there would be explosions or what. I'm thinking that eleven...She's like, "Twelfth floor." I was like, *ooh, that's kind of high, but I have no other options, so I'll go.* The elevator was a glass elevator overlooking the Strip. I was like, *oh*, the longest elevator ride of my life.

But we got out and stayed on the twelfth floor in the Tropicana and got in the room. Me and Danielle were in the room with two married couples and then another gal that got separated from her group. We all went in the room in panic and people got behind the bed, behind chairs, and Danielle and I squeezed ourselves behind a dresser together, and then we turned off the lights. Basically we told everybody, "Be quiet; we can't talk loud in case they start rushing rooms." So basically if I wanted to call my mom, I had to just text her because we weren't allowed to talk loud. And then we turned on the news, quiet, we turned on the news quiet so we could finally figure out what was given on and at that time people didn't know much.

Another side note, my mouth was the most dry that I had ever felt it in my life. I don't know if that's like a fight or flight thing, but mine and Danielle's mouths were so dry—even all the other people in the room with us—that we started drinking out of the faucet in the bathroom.

So then all the casinos go on lockdown and we were on lockdown in the Tropicana.

So how did you know? How did they tell you?

I think a friend might have messaged me saying, "You can't—" Because I was trying to get away. I wanted to get off the Strip, but I had to go to this room until I figured out my next plan. And so my cousin texted me and said, "The roads are closed," so he wasn't going to be able to come pick us up. And then I think that's when somebody texted me and said, "The casinos are lockdown and Tropicana is on lockdown where you are, so just stay there." Then all the other people in the room with us had people feeding them information, too. So we just all knew that

we had to stay where we were.

We heard helicopters and sirens. Then there was a couple of loud noises when we were in the Tropicana that scared us. It scared the girls in the room so bad that we all crawled to the bathroom and sat by the bathtub. Then we didn't come out until one of the guys was like, "It's okay, ladies, come on back out."

We were all in there...two, four...until five a.m. and that's when somebody had texted one of the people in the room that said we're allowed to leave the casino, but we're not allowed to get back in, so we had to have a plan of where we needed to go.

Before we left the whole room fell asleep; everybody in the room fell asleep. My cousin fell asleep and I stayed awake. That's when I finally wasn't calm anymore. I broke down and I just started to cry because I told myself that that night was my last night and here I am with my cousin sleeping next to me and we escaped with just cuts and bruises and dirty legs and here she is sleeping and we're going to be okay because...

By then were you aware of the fatalities and what was going on through the news feeds that you were getting?

Yes. And we were watching every police press conference, too, so that's how we got a lot of our information. But in the early hours we were getting text messages from our friends that were listening to police scanners that was saying, "There's a shooter in the Tropicana; there's a shooter in New York; there's a shooter at Bellagio; people are stealing cars and putting bombs in them." So we had no idea what was going on outside of our hotel. Even though—I said this before, I think—even though we were safe from the gunfire, we were now experiencing a different kind of hell because we were safe from that, but we still didn't feel safe because we didn't know what in the world was going on, on the Strip and we all just wanted out. The people that I was in the

room with were from California. I feel so bad for them, tourists not knowing where to go or what to do. Even me living in Las Vegas for twenty years of my life, I had no idea where to go or what to do.

When I got out at ten twenty-one, Marsha called me and I don't remember this phone call, but Marsha called me.

Is that how you knew when it was ten twenty-one is by the phone call?

Yes, by the phone call logs is how I know these times. I've put together my own time line. A side note for the time line thing is it's really helped Marsha and I have to have a time line because we feel like we've lost so much of that night and we just want to know everything that happened to us and at what time. I don't know if that's for healing or closure. I don't know.

So she called me, and I don't remember this phone call, but she said, "Meet us at MGM." They had escaped over to the MGM. And I was like, "I'll be there." I remember saying *I'll be there*, but was like, *I have no idea how to even get to the MGM*, when it was so close to me at the Tropicana. But my mind was so in disarray that I was like, "Okay, I'll be there," and I wasn't going to go because I didn't know where it was. I had no idea of my surroundings.

Have you thought about how brave you are since that time?

So the first couple of days, honestly I was just numb and just crying because it was just a lot to handle. Now looking back at it, I feel like—I don't know if I want to say brave or just calm enough to get me and cousin out of that situation. But even being the most calm, there was no rhyme or reason to who got shot and who didn't because we were all in that area, fair game, with flood lights shining down on us and no shelter. So wherever you moved or you ran or even if you were down on the ground, there was a possibility you would get shot. So I thank God that all of the moves I made that night and the people that He put in my path helped me escape, from Ben

saying *get down and run*; from us landing down by the other couple, praying; and then getting behind that lounge and the lady pointing us to the exit; and then the lady taking us up to their room. I feel like He placed all of those people in my path for me to escape. It just wasn't on time that night and that's been—

Exactly. That's right.

Sorry. I don't know if you have questions about side effects and I'm getting too far.

No, no, no, I want you to continue. We're going to stop right here to just ask some questions. When you realized that the police had already started helping people on the other side, before people in your area even knew what was going on, what have you and Marsha talked about?

We've talked about this.

Tell me the conversation about that part.

When we saw the video of people running out and the police opening up the exit and telling them to *go this way; go this way*, a whole flood of emotions; sad that we didn't know that that was going on, kind of feeling naïve because here we are still singing and dancing when that's going on, and then also anger because if somebody could have—I don't know—over a PA system or something...Maybe there would have been more trampling and more stampeding.

What happened to those police officers once you started running, once your crowd knew?

What happened to them?

I have no idea because—okay, so when I told my parents my story the day after, on October second, I told them, "I didn't see security; I didn't see police officers; the people that I thought were going to protect us weren't there, so I had to figure out how to keep me and my cousin safe." But then watching videos, I see that there was security by the fences that we tried to get

over. But I just don't know if they were there at the time we were trying to get over because Danielle and I were in the gunfire the whole ten, eleven, twelve minutes, whatever their final say is, the FBI's final say is on that time line. But we were out in it the whole time on the right side of the stage by Mandalay Bay that I don't know if the security after a couple of minutes were like, *we're getting out of here*, or what, because I just don't remember seeing security on that side of the fence and I know that they weren't helping people over. Then police officers I see in videos, they were kind of by that side where I was, telling people to stay down, but I never saw police officers and I don't know if that's just because that's my tunnel vision or if I was too far into the pit crowd to even hear or see police officers. But it just seemed like it was every man for themselves, and I think that's kind of just how it was that night with the people in the crowd helping people get to hospitals or making tourniquets out of their shirts or getting them on fences for stretchers. It was like we all came together to help out the police and first responders because that's kind of just what we do as a country family. So I don't even know how long it would have taken or if more people would have died if everybody didn't step up and help each other.

Do you feel safe now?

That's a hard question to answer.

Talk about what you were talking about before we even started the recording, when you were in church.

I think this goes along the same lines as your question about feeling safe now. I feel safer than the first couple of days and weeks after October first. The day after I went to go pick up my parents from the airport with my brother-in-law, and they came in at ten p.m. the next night or October second. And I heard noises above me that sounded like gunshots and I got down and covered my head and started to cry, and then my brother-in-law had to bring me back to focus

and tell me that I was okay. That's one of the first times I remember in this whole...however many days it is after this incident of not having control of myself, and I'm a person that has so much control over my myself and I never thought I would be the one to have...I don't even know if you want to call it posttraumatic stress, but I never thought that that stuff happens to people like me. That happens to people that come from Vietnam or fighting in Afghanistan or something, right? It doesn't happen when you come back from a country concert. So that was a time when I didn't feel safe.

I wouldn't like standing next to windows especially at nighttime, and I think that comes from when we were in the hotel room we were trying to stay low down behind the dresser. I remember even thinking when we were in that moment that if somebody comes in this room right now, what am I going to use to protect me and my cousin? So I think about those things. I don't like the windows; don't like being next to the windows. Also bright lights on me, and I'm assuming that's from the flood lights glaring in on us. When a bright light shines in my window or just bright lights are on in general, that brings me back. And then going places, to the grocery store, I am always looking for an exit, like a way out. What am I going to do if somebody comes through here and starts shooting people? What am I going to do? So that's happened to me at grocery stores and restaurants.

I haven't gone to a movie theater because I know that there's been movie theater shootings. And then at church, I have known that there have been shootings at churches before. So now when I go and sit in church, I think, *I'm stuck in here and whoever comes is going to come from behind me; we can't see who comes through the church doors*. Ironically, just this past Sunday when the shooting went on at that church in Texas at that Baptist Church, I was sitting in my church, because I have just have these thoughts now, *what am I going to do if*

somebody comes in here and starts shooting? And I thought, I'm going to get under this pew right here and the exit is right to my right; it's close by. So I had my plan. It's just crazy to think that as I'm thinking these things, a shooting is going on at a church, another Baptist Church in Texas.

So I know these things are real and it's kind of sad that I have to think about those things now. I like to say that it took away my innocence because I love country music concerts and festivals. I haven't been to a country concert yet since October first. I've hardly listened to country music, which is my favorite type of music. I haven't done too much. I haven't seen very many friends. I don't go out as much. I used to like to go to our country bar Stoney's every weekend and line dance; I haven't done that. I'm kind of just laying low and being a homebody because I'm just scared of going somewhere and being a part of another shooting.

How is Danielle?

She's doing okay. She seems to do a lot better when I'm with her. We were with each other that whole night and then after the Tropicana we had to—the roads were still blocked, so we told her dad who was going to pick us up that we were going to meet across the way over the 15 by the In-N-Out. There's an In-N-Out over there on Tropicana Road and there's a Chevron right across from that In-N-Out, so we were going to meet him there. So we met him there. He took us back to Danielle's mom's house, because her parents are divorced. So he took us to the mom's house and Danielle and I just were inseparable for the week after that, spending the night at each other's house, holding hands. We went to counseling together. Basically from what I've seen, she just seems like she does better when I'm with her because she has somebody to relate to. But since I work and she goes to school, I haven't been able to be around her that much. But I do know that she's in counseling.

She's had a couple of times where she's had to be picked up early from school because she just is having a rough day or a kid says something insensitive. She's been getting into a lot more fights with her little brother because he likes to seek out attention and if he doesn't get his way about something minute, he likes to say, "That's not fair; that's not fair." Then she'll text me and be like, "My brother's saying that's not fair again, but does he know that so many people died that Sunday night and they didn't even get to say goodbye to their families and tell them that they love them? That's not fair. And he thinks these little things are not fair." So she kind of vents to me in that way. I have to tell her, "Your little brother doesn't really understand what happened to you right now."

It's awful that her and Marsha and Ben and I went through that together, but then I'm kind of glad we all went through that together because we're all feeling the same emotions and we all talk about it together. *What are you feeling today?* Or I texted Marsha about two weeks after the incident and I said, "You know what? I'm angry today. I drove by Mandalay Bay and I'm mad. I'm mad at Mandalay Bay. I'm mad at the shooter." Before I hadn't had those feelings; I was just sad. She was like, "I'm feeling the same way." So it's been good for all of us to talk.

When you didn't show up at the MGM, how did you explain to Marsha where you were or what happened; that you couldn't find the MGM?

I think she texted me and was like, "We're at—" They actually made it to MGM and they just sat behind a bush for like an hour, because that's just how scared everybody was. Ben was kind of saying, "I don't want to go into the crowd of people inside the casino." Because they still didn't know what was going on, and especially if you didn't go to a hotel room, like me, you didn't have the news.

That's correct. When they left the venue, they went toward the MGM then.

Yes. So they had to crawl underneath the stage and there was a lot of people hiding in there, they told me. There was a lot of people hiding under there. They had to get out and climb another fence. Marsha is diabetic, type one, and she dropped her pump and her phone and she had to get those. They saw a lady that was shot die right in front of them. I know they went through a traumatic night, too. They made it to MGM, sat behind that bush for like an hour, and then Ben was like, "We just need to keep walking; we need to get away from the Strip." So they kept walking. And a stagehand that was actually working the show on the stage crossed paths with him and he was by himself and he was like, "Can I walk with you guys to wherever you're going?" So they let him walk with them and he was saying how he dipped out on the show after those first shots were fired and then he didn't know what was going on at all, so he was scared, too. Marsha's boyfriend's brother picked them up and dropped that guy off at his house, too. Everyone kind of bonded together that night even if you didn't know people. Even people that were in the hotel room with me, we're friends now on Facebook because we're all bonded from that night.

How about Route 91 as an event, did they reach out to the ticket holders? Did they have a way of communicating with you?

This is really funny—well, not funny at the time. But when I got to Tropicana and got in that hotel room behind that dresser, I got notification because I have a Route 91 app on my phone and that's the app we went into all weekend to find out about the schedule and you can see the venue map on there, so I had notifications that would come from that app. So I looked down at my phone and the app is from Route 91 and it says, "Get home safe." And I thought to myself, *what? Get home safe after what just happened?* I felt it was kind of insensitive.

Do you think that was a notification though that would have been the timing of the end of

the concert?

Like a preprogrammed?

Yes, like a preprogram, yes.

It actually might have been because I think the show was actually supposed to end at eleven or something. That might have been.

I'm going to give them the benefit of the doubt.

So let's go after that that night.

Then after that they took—so on the app now when you go on to it, you can't go and see what artists were playing and the times anymore. It has changed to very somber. It has the Route 91 poker chip symbol and then an orange ribbon around it and then it says, "We're sorry about the events of October first and thank the first responders," and stuff like that, then it's just kind of saying, "We're a country family." So it says that now and it says that on their website to where there was pictures and stuff of prior festivals and now you can't see any of that stuff; it's just the ribbon and whatever they said.

They also were refunding people their money for the festival tickets for that whole weekend. I don't even think it's Route 91's fault at all that they should even have to refund people their money, but that's what they've been doing. But I won my tickets, so...

How did you win the tickets?

About March I was at Stoney's and I had went there specifically that night because they were going to be giving away Route 91 passes and I wanted to win mine this year because they're quite pricey for the whole weekend and I knew I was going to have to buy Danielle's ticket, too. I had looked it up; I had them in my cart beforehand and it was about five hundred dollars. I was like, *ugh, I really want to just win these tickets.* So I went to Stoney's that night because they

were going to give them away. So the guy comes out on stage and says, "We're giving away Route 91 passes." He only gave away two passes that night, well, one ticket to redeem two wristbands. So I went up to the stage and I was just like, "Please, can I have those?" And then he saw me and I guess I was the only one that was saying *please*, so he gave them to me. Everybody else was just like, "Give me, give me," but I said, "Please," so that's how I got them.

Good.

I kind of like those E-mails that I had because you had to e-mail somebody and give them the confirmation on the ticket that I won. I had to give them a confirmation and then I had to go pick up my wristbands at will-call that day of the festival. But those E-mails now—kind of just everything about Route 91 this year, I want to print it and put it into a scrapbook. I think Danielle still has her wrist band on from the festival and I had mine on for about a week afterwards. It kind of just felt like that was something tangible that made us feel like we were a part of it and it was real. But I took mine off because I didn't want somebody to see it if I was at work and then ask me about it, so I took mine off. Danielle still has hers on. I told her maybe we can make them into a bracelet or put them into a shadow box.

Another side note is we had lawn chairs there at the Chair Corral and we don't want them back, so we let those go. The only thing that I want back from that is I had the festival map and the artists and times, like the pamphlet; I had that in my cup holder. That's the only thing that I want back so I could put it in a shadow box or something.

What did you learn about yourself from that night?

That I can be calm in a tragic situation. I'm so glad that I was because Ben told me, he says, "You were so calm." I just think, *thank goodness I was because I kept my wits about me so I could have a clear mind to know what I needed to do to keep my cousin safe.* He told me that

there was ladies around us just hysterically crying and screaming and didn't know what to do, even guys. He said that there was a guy that he was actually keeping down on the ground, protecting him because this guy was going hysterical. So it was like here I am, I'm so calm, and here's a bad situation.

What did you learn about other people?

I have said this; that it was a really bad night and something so evil happened, but people are still good and they stopped to help people, or the lady that prayed with me, the lady that pointed me to the exit even though she was in shock—and this is just in my situation—and the Route 91 worker that stayed by an open gate to let us out, he didn't have to stay; he could've left, but I thank God he was there and pointing me in the right direction of where to run. And then seeing all the stories of people putting injured people in their own vehicles and driving them to the hospital or people staying with people as they were dying to let them know that we weren't alone even though gunfire is going off and you want to protect yourself, people really stepped out and showed how good people can be in a tragic time and they didn't have to be.

Because you wanted to move back to Las Vegas from Iowa, we kind of already know how you feel about Las Vegas, but did any feelings change? When you saw people acting like that, Las Vegans acting like that, did your feelings of this city, of this area change in any way?

After the event I felt way more connected to this city than I had before. People were being nice to each other and coming out in droves to donate blood and food and water. It just seemed like the whole community came together to support not only the people that were at the festival but the whole city because we're all grieving from what happened in our town. So I just have felt super, super connected to Las Vegas, even more so after the event.

Then a side note, I was born here in Las Vegas at UMC and I know that night they were taking people to Sunrise and UMC and it's kind of just eye-opening, like, I was born here and I could've been taken injured or worse to where I was born—I don't know—if I died or something. All of these thoughts run through my head.

Another thing, I knew it was bad and I knew a lot of people were down and it was awful, but at that time you're not thinking this is going to be one of the biggest mass shootings. I just wasn't thinking things like that. I was just thinking, *where are the police? When are they going to help us?* Not knowing that they were out already doing what they had to do. But not thinking, *this is huge.*

Also, we're in an awful situation, but we're knowing about this happening first because it's happening to us; it's not even on the news yet. Then when those first reports came out of only two had passed away and not that many injured, my friend texted me that and they're like, "Okay, Brittany, it's just two and not that many injured." And I wrote back to her and I was like, "No, girl, that number is going to go way higher. Just from what I saw alone with my own eyes, I know it's way worse than that." Sorry, I'm rambling.

You are not rambling. You have given us so much valuable information. We're planning, like we said, to use this to try to help other people. And with your detailed account and with how you thought about the time and you were able to describe this venue, you just have no idea how grateful we are to have you share this with us.

Oh, I'm grateful to be here. It's kind of a weird thing after you tell yourself that it's your time to go, but you don't and you have to continue living. And I have to continue living for those fifty-eight people that I now feel are my guardian angels, part of my family. They aren't getting the chance to live because people took them too soon. So once I'm done with my grieving and I

heal, I need to live my life to the fullest.

When you think about guns, pro or con, did your opinions change?

Yes. All of my life I tend to lean more conservative, but on the gun issue I've always just been indifferent about it. I was like, if you want guns, you can have them; if you don't, don't get one. But with all of these mass shootings and stuff going on, even if there's the slightest...anything that could have prevented it, I would hope that those measures would be taken whether it's casino security, casino cameras or not letting people that are your casino big-time bigwigs—keeping an eye on those people, too, just like you would the general public, or not selling the bump stock. I don't think people's guns should be taken away completely because I know people like to hunt and it's people's hobbies, just like country music is my hobby. But I don't know. I don't even know if there's a way to prevent something like that because even if you say, *no, nobody can have guns*, there's always going to be those evil people that have their way around it. Just like us in the festival, I'm sure there was a lot of people that generally do carry guns, but since you can't do that in a festival setting, we weren't the problem. All of us inside there, we were okay. It came from an outside source that we had no control over. So it's like basically we were doing what we were supposed to, but somebody else just wanting and deciding to do evil had to ruin it for all of us. I don't know if there was any way to it to have been prevented. I would say yes because now I'm super scared of guns and before, I was like, *eh*. Guns just weren't on my radar and now they are big time with all of this. It just seems like a lot.

Yes, yes, all at one time.

I think maybe it was because I was a part of one and I would have never in a million years—like that happens to other people. I watch that on the news and I feel bad for those people, but that just doesn't happen to...I guess I was naive, like that doesn't happen to me; that just happens on

the news; that happens to other people. But now that it happened to me, my family, like Danielle, my best friend, my country music family and my city, I just have a lot of feelings.

But I would like to say that all of—so country music fans, we are pretty much family before this even happened. You go to a country music concert and you're making friends. You're in that pit crowd, you're making friends with the people around you to where I even have people that I see at different concerts and when you're at other concerts, "Hey, are you going to this one tonight?" "Yes, we're going to be there." You just make friends with those people and you just stick together. So now even more so I feel like we're even more of...Before we were probably more of a community and now we're more of a family. We like to say country strong. We're literally country strong now. We even have Facebook survivor groups that we're all a part of and we cheer each other on. *What are you going through today?* This was people at the event. *What are you going through today?* There's so many of us, twenty-two thousand or whatever. *What are you going through today? I had a hard day today. Oh, look at the tattoo I got to remember that night. Or, does anybody have counseling recommendations? Or, anybody going to this country concert and we can go together so it won't be as stressful?* So we've really come together as a community of country music fans.

This past Sunday, the day of that Texas church shooting, we had about eighty-one people at Brio at Town Square having a Route 91 Survivors Brunch. We all planned this and got together at Brio, rented their room, and we all had, as survivors, a brunch together. I felt like that was somewhat of a little bit of healing because we all got to sit and hug, tell each other our stories, like, "How did you get out that night? Where were you standing?"

About how many people came to that?

It was about eighty-one people. So we all feel like family.

Brittany, if there's anyone among that group of eighty-one who would like to tell their story to us, we're going to give you some cards and we would love to have them share those stories with us.

I'm sure they would. I think it would be good to get different perspectives because I was on that side of the stage and maybe somebody in the Chair Corral or on the left-hand side of the stage would have... We all experienced the same tragic event, but we all have a different story to tell.

Right. If Marsha and Ben would like to talk about how they got out, hiding behind a bush, if they want to talk about that we would love to talk to them.

Yes, I'll let them know. I also want to say one more thing.

Please, I want you to, as much as you want to say.

I have never been—I go through life and I consider myself a really strong person. I am the person that my family leans on in hard times because I'm just the rock. I always keep a straight mind about myself and I feel like I'm such a problem solver that if my family comes to me with a problem, or my friends, I just take it on myself, I feel it, have compassion for them, and then I try to help them navigate out of that problem. So I've always been that person that my friends and family come to for strength.

Exactly four Sundays before October first my cousin Serena had about a two-month battle with a failing liver and kidneys. Me and her family were at the hospital day in and day out; a whole week I slept at the hospital just supporting her because we knew her time to leave this earth was close. Four Sundays before Route 91, October first, I was in the room with her as she passed away. She knew it was time. She wanted to go. She wanted to be taken off her breathing machine. We all knew that it was going to go fast. So I told her mom and her sister, "I feel like this is a private family moment. But if y'all need me in here for you guys, I'll be in here for you

guys." So they wanted me to stay. So she passed away at nine fifty-three on September third.

To date that was the most tragic thing in my life because I've been pretty lucky. I haven't gone through anything really bad in my life. I've been always just blessed. That was one of the tragic things that I had in my life. Then to think that four Sundays later at almost the exact time—she passed away at 9:53 p.m.—at 10:05 p.m. I think is what they're saying—I had the most, most tragic night of my life.

I feel like she was one of the reasons why I got out of there. She had so much protection over me. I'd just like to add that to my story because I can't explain how Danielle and I got out that night. I really can't. Because seeing pictures...Knowing where all the carnage was, most of it, we were in that area and we were in it for that whole time until, by the grace of God, the shooter killed himself. She is one of the reasons I can explain why I got out because I can't humanly explain how I got out. I just wanted to add that.

Thank you for that. Brittany, you're a special young woman.

Oh, thank you.

So special.

It's been a rough road of recovery after this, a lot of emotions and feelings.

If there is any agency on that list that you think could help, please get in touch with them.

Don't hesitate, just do it.

Oh, no. I am down for anything. I've had chiropractic adjustments. I have a massage scheduled.

Church has been helpful. Counseling has been helpful.

Wonderful.

It's important.

Yes, it is.

Barbara, I saw you jotting down some things. Did you have another question?

No, she actually dealt with it. Being a person who has PTSD from totally less traumatic experiences, yes, do take care of yourself. It will pop up when you're least expecting it.

What I've learned is I think it's made me just a little bit more—I've always been a compassionate person, but now I have more so for people that have gone through tragic events. It's not like your tragic event is less significant than mine or mine is more because there's always people that have more. What you feel is more. But then somebody could be looking at you and saying, "Well, yours is more than mine." But it's all pretty much kind of the same with the after effects that we deal with, right?

Right. Thank you very much.

Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]