

AN INTERVIEW WITH KAITY WEBBER

BARBARA TABACH

NOVEMBER 16, 2017

REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

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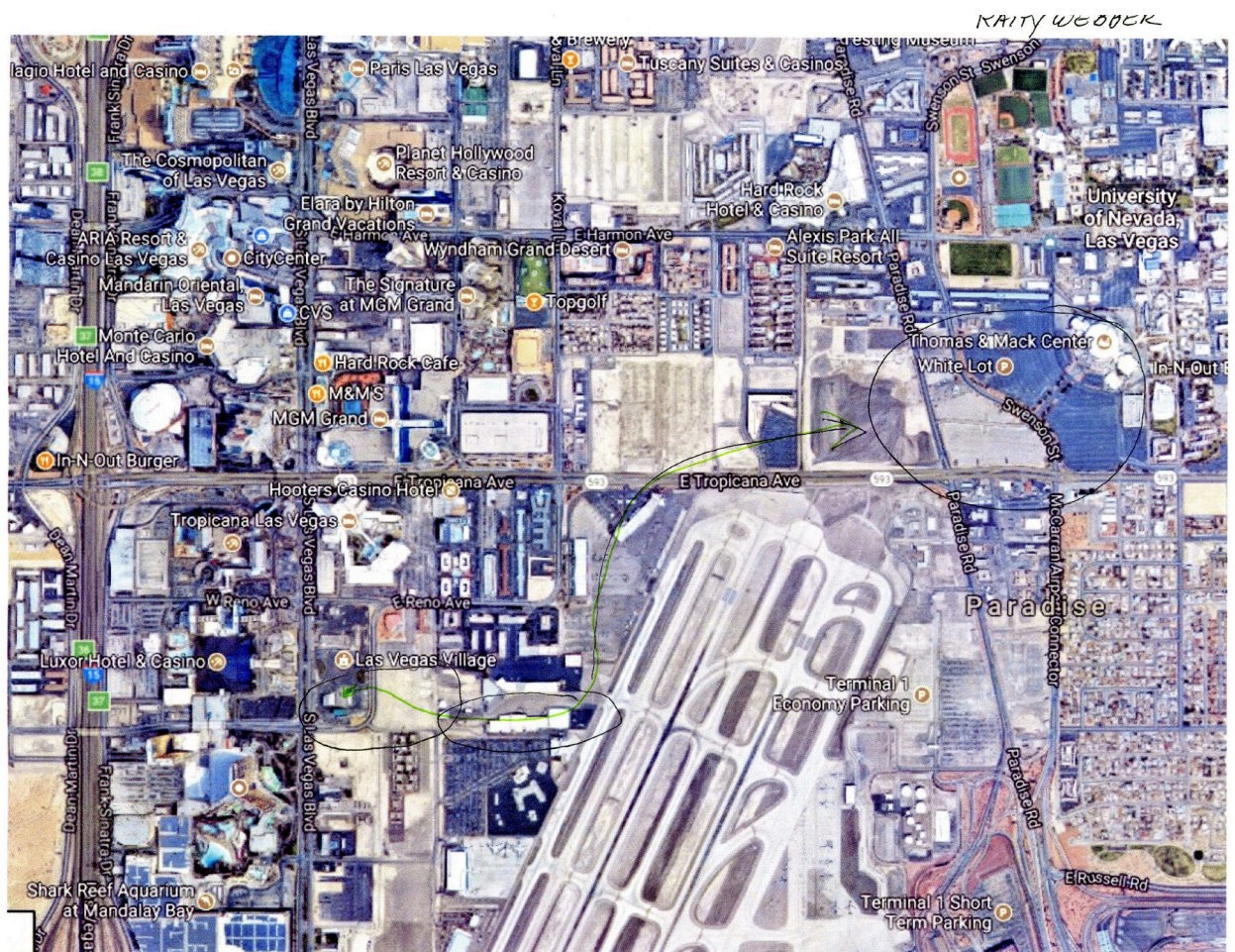
PREFACE

Kaity Webber, 28-year-old marketing manager for a local nanny/tutoring company, is a native Nevadan, a resident of Las Vegas, and a graduate in psychology from UNLV. She is a marketing manager for a local business.

As an avid country music fan, Kaity was excited to be attending her first Route 91 Harvest Festival. She recalls her and a girlfriend's escape from the horror of the shooting site. Both women were standing near the stage pit area, on the east side as the shooting began.

In the chaos that ensued, Kaity eventually found her way to the Thomas and Mack Center on UNLV's campus where she was picked up by friend's parents.

Kaity suffers from post-traumatic stress and talks about her participation in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing) with a volunteer therapist.



Kaity sketches her path from the venue to Thomas and Mack Center.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV



Remembering 1 October

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Today is November 16th, 2017. This is Barbara Tabach and I'm sitting with Kaity Webber.

Kaity, would you spell your name for me, please?

It's a little different. It's K-A-I-T-Y. Last name is Webber with two B's.

Great. We were just chatting a little bit about your background. You were born here, in Nevada.

Yes, I was born in Nevada, but I grew up in Reno because I was born in Reno.

What was it like to grow up in Reno?

It's wonderful. It's a little bit of a smaller community. There's a lot of community sense there, kind of everyone knows everybody. Beautiful, green. You've got Tahoe, all kinds of surrounding lakes all around. So I had a great childhood up there.

What brought you down to Las Vegas?

Just any typical young twenty-year-old's excuse; I felt like I'm a young woman. I moved down here for a relationship and to finish out schooling here as well. I graduated from UNLV with a degree in psychology, but I minored in marketing. My goal was to pursue a career in marketing, but by the time I figured that out, I was too far along in my degree to change it, so I just tacked it on as a minor. So moving to Las Vegas also brought that opportunity for marketing as well.

Tell me about the business that you're in now. I think that's interesting.

It is, yes. It's called College Nannies and Tutors. It's an in-home childcare provider and a tutoring service. It is corporate, but it's franchised out, so it's been national since 2001, but it's the only location here in Vegas and it's been open for almost four years now. I started out there as just a little intern and eventually turned it into a full-time job of marketing, business development, PR, social media; just kind of all that fun stuff, so that's what I do.

You're using both degrees in a great way.

Kind of, yes. That's basically what I do right now.

The topic that we are meeting here is about the Route 91 shooting. We're calling the project Remembering One October. We think it's really important that the stories of the people that were there are archived and available for folks. Tell me about your interest in country music first.

I've loved country music for a very long time. I'm twenty-seven years old. I started liking country music probably when I was maybe seventeen, eighteen, so I've been a huge fan of it for a long time. I don't know what it is about country. It resonates with me. I love that you can go to country for any kind of feeling you're having, lovey-dovey, if you're heartbroken, if you're having a good time with friends; just that kind of stuff. It just resonates with me and with my group of people is kind of what, I guess, I would refer it to. But I've been a country music fan for a long time. I'm the only person in my whole family that likes country music.

Oh, really?

Yes. Then I got my cousin finally turned onto it about three years ago. I've gone to many, many country music concerts. It's really the only concerts I go to. I have a lot of experience with going to concerts for country and I know a lot of the—not personally—but I've seen a lot of the country artists.

Who are some of your favorites?

My all-time favorite is Eric Church, who performed that weekend on Friday night. He's been my favorite since I was about nineteen. I saw him for the first time in Reno in a little venue that maybe only held like three hundred people and that's crazy now for him because he is just like one of the top artists. So he's my favorite. Then a little bit more of old-time is Alan Jackson. I love Alan Jackson. He's my favorite.

I do, too.

He is old-time.

He is old-time. He's been around a long time.

Yes. If I could see him in concert, I would be okay never going to a concert again because he is my favorite.

That's probably my true confession is he probably—other than there was Chet Atkins, who was a guitarist way, way, way back when I was a little kid, but he was one of the first albums I ever bought was Alan Jackson. There was just something about him that resonated with me. That's interesting.

Yes. He's very passionate.

We are different generations for sure, you and me.

He's my absolute favorite. I first started loving him—probably actually when I was maybe seventeen I was listening to his songs.

The festival on October first or that weekend, was that the first time you had gone to Route 91?

Yes. That's the third year, I guess, that it's been put on. I really wanted to go the first and second year, but I had broken up with a partner. We've been broken up for about two years. He was really my only form of friends here. So when we broke up, I actually didn't have anyone to go with, so I decided not to go for my first and second year, which sucked. But then this year I said, "I'm not going to let that hold me back; I'm going to go and I'll find someone to go with." Of course, throughout those two years I've made a couple of friends. Well, friends who actually like country music; that's the best part. A girlfriend of mine, we became friends earlier in this year. I said, "Okay, you're the only friend that loves country music as much as I do, so we have to go to

Route 91."

I bought my first ticket right when it went on sale in March. I think it was like two hundred and seventy dollars, which is so reasonable for three days of the best country music artists. Then I talked her into it and then she missed her opportunity to buy the ticket and they were sold out. Then she found one. A friend was like, "Oh, I don't want to go anymore; here's my wristband." So he gave it to her

How cool.

Yes. Yes, this was my first year. I was extremely excited. I'm not going to lie, before any of this happened I was actually very nervous about the crowds.

Really?

Yes. I've always been like that. I don't know why. Especially being here in Vegas, I was always like, "I don't want to go down to the Strip; it's just too much for me." Sometimes I hated going down to Fremont because it was so packed. When my family would come in town from Reno, I would always say, "Yes, we can go on the Strip, whatever," because they're cliché tourists. I would always tell them, "I'm just waiting on the day that it happens; I'm waiting for it." That sounds so sad to have that as your reality. I was like, "If anyone ever wanted to do something, there's so many crowds of people here that it would be a fit for them." So it's so weird that I've always felt that way.

Getting ready to go and when we first arrived—we had to take an Uber to the venue and there were just so many people walking in the crosswalks. You can tell they're all festival. I was just like, *oh my God, there's so many people*. Not that it made me nervous, but I remember thinking about that, like, *oh my gosh, there are so many people here, this is crazy. I hope there's a lot of security*.

What was the security like when you walked in?

Which is weird, but there was a lot of security surrounding it. I personally didn't notice any inside the venue. I noticed the typical—officers, I guess; I didn't see any Metro personally. But there was security guards working with event. I don't know if they were officers or what, but I think they were just security people. I don't know. I remember seeing a lot of that. But I never was like, *oh, I don't feel safe here*. I actually never had that thought the whole time.

As far as the security getting in, I felt it was very lenient; it was very loose, because I watch for that. I watched if, one, there were going to be metal detectors; there weren't. They allowed backpacks in, but they looked in them. For me, I just had a little cross-body purse on, very tiny; all you could fit in there was your phone and your keys. But no one was really getting patted down that I saw. Then they would just check in your boot, if you had boots on. They just checked in your boot to see if, I thought, for flasks. That was my first reaction; I was like, *oh, they're checking for flasks*.

Yes, they didn't want people to bring in alcohol.

Exactly. So I actually thought that getting in security-wise was really easy and I noticed that especially on Sunday because the crowd, I think, was the largest on Sunday, I thought or that I noticed. They were just trying to get people in as fast as they could. The process to get in it and you're right there on the street and all the crosswalks, so they're really just rushing people in. And I was like, *oh my gosh, no one is checking you*. If you had a bag, they just would kind of look in there and you could just walk in. I didn't think anything negatively about it because honestly the people who go to country music concerts are good people; they are. Sorry. They're genuine people and they're friendly and we all have the same passion and the same love for each other. We're all love America. I don't want to call us rednecks because I think that's harsh. But we all

have a pride and we all have the same passion for country music and what it represents. Those kind of people are who I've always felt safest with in a concert.

But anyway, basically, I guess that's how I thought the security I thought was there; I noticed that it was a little loose, but I didn't have a fear about it. I just noticed it.

I get that. I think you paint a good picture that it was a safe crowd.

Yes.

That really bears out from what does happen. Where in the festival venue did you hang out the most? Where were you watching the music?

It's interesting. On Friday and Saturday, during the day we kind of—so during the day there was different acts, a little bit smaller acts, but people I still wanted to see in the Nashville tent, which was to the north of the venue and then the main stage was to the south. So you'd have to go back and forth throughout the day because it was one after the other. You'd kind of have to run back and forth to catch them. I spent a lot of my time in the middle of venue if you're looking at the main stage.

In fact, I have a map. Maybe that helps you. Was this how the stage was set up?

Yes. I've seen this picture a lot. I'm not sure; I think these are different structures from possibly another festival, but these weren't there; these structures weren't there. It looks kind of similar.

These are two sound structures and then I think that was the sound booth as well and then there is a catwalk in the middle right here. So it kind of separated the left from the right, but it was open all around. Then there was kind of called a turf area back here and then a Chair Corral over here. I did a lot of my hanging out during the daytime, on Friday day and evening right around here and then—

To the east side.

Yes, it's like east middle. It was technically to the east of the side, but in the middle. Then Saturday night I was actually a lot closer to the stage—or to that catwalk. Then Sunday night we were supposed to go over to the right side because we actually met up with a group of people that I knew that were going to go and we met up with them on Sunday and they decided just to go on Sunday night. They didn't go during the weekend. We were all going to meet up on Sunday and we all met up and we were walking over to the right side to go get our spot before Jason Aldean.

So you were on the west side of that catwalk.

Yes. We were walking over there to go get our spot over on the right side of the venue, but one of the guys got a call that his friend was on the left side, on the east side. So we actually changed directions and we went over on the left side.

Is that where you were when...?

Yes. There was a group of six of us. We were on the left side when the shots starting going off. This is the same question that everyone asks, did you know it was gunshots? I did not think it was fireworks. I did not think it was a sound malfunction. I went immediately to the thought that they were guns because, like I've told you before, I've always kind of had that...not instinct, but that thought, if someone's going to do anything...So if there's any kind of an emergency situation, I do go to that possibility. I don't know why. I've never had any kind of situation happen like this in my life or even been put in an emergency situation before, but I understand the threat that is out there these days. So I knew immediately that it was. I wouldn't say that I was heavily intoxicated, but I was buzzed, as everyone else was.

It's a festival.

Yes. Once I heard those first shots, it was at the end of the song "Any Old Barstool" by Jason. I

turned around and I looked at a gentleman who is a former military and he looked at me. I didn't even have to say anything and he looked at me and he just said, "Those aren't gunshots." I just kept looking at him. He said, "I would know." Then he started getting really upset because I don't know if maybe he knew deep down it was or he didn't want to come to that reality. I was like, "Are you sure?" He's like, "Yeah, I swear, those aren't gunshots; I would know."

So in that time frame of them ending and then everyone—then people around me were like, "What was that?" Then people were kind of arguing, not in a fighting way, but debating with one another, like, "No, those are fireworks; it's not a gun or anything." Then my best friend that I was with the whole weekend, she was in front of me and she turned around and she just was listening to the conversation that I was having with A.J. who is the former military gentleman.

So in the time frame of during that is when he was preparing to start his next song, "When She Says Baby." So right when that started, you're like, *oh, okay; like, weird*. So then he's like, "All right, let's get this party started." Then the sound starts—or the beginning of that song. Then right when he starts singing, "Sometimes it's tough just getting up and putting on those boots and making that climb"—I'll never forget those lyrics again in my life—but when he started singing the lyrics that was when it just started raining down. He was singing actually for a while the whole time the shooting was happening and then he finally got the sense to run off the stage.

When he ran off the stage, the shots had a break, though, like they stopped. Then the stage went black and then it was very, very dark everywhere and people were very confused and turning around. Mind you, you are shoulder to shoulder with people, not a lot of wiggle room. Then it started again and the lights turned on from the stage. There was like these main, I would

assume, emergency lights that popped on. I can't tell you how long it took me to hit the ground; I can't, but when we did it was just terrifying. I understood what was going on, just like I knew. And the gentleman that was from the military, he had knee surgery that Friday and thought it was a good idea to go to this. I don't know.

This is A.J. that you talk about.

Yes, this is A.J.; that gentleman. I think he finally understood what it was as well, so he got in front of our group as we were laying down and was like shielding us, but he couldn't lay down because of his knee. He couldn't get down right away. So he was shielding us. I felt like I was just lying there forever. You're very curled up and there was a lot of people with their hands on my back pushing me down. I can't tell you if it was strangers or if it was my group; I don't really know.

So as the volleys were going off, then there was like certain breaks. There was like a ten-second break, a twenty-second break, sometimes there was even like a minute-break. So when it would stop, I would look to the west side of me because my head was facing the east side, because that's how I fell was my head was facing the east, so my back was to basically to Mandalay. When I would turn around to look at what people are doing because that's all you have to go off of is other people's reactions—I mean, it's human nature—you could just see people like running towards you and you could see people dropping because sometimes it was just too late for some of them and some of them were dropping out of cover. So when you started seeing that and then when you heard the break in the gunfire was when I just was like, *we've got to get the hell out of here.*

I grabbed only my friend's hand, my best friend Crystal, her hand, and we just got up and started running. I had no thought as to the rest of my group for some reason and we all separated;

every single one of us went our own way. The gentleman A.J. from the military, he actually told us to run. I looked back at him and he was hobbling his way to the gunfire to go help people. So that was tough. I'll never forget that image of him.

A.J. was going towards the Mandalay, towards the shots because his instinct was—

To help. So he ran towards it. At that time I didn't know even if that's where it was coming from because it sounded like it was coming from all around you. As you can imagine, there's quite an echo in the air and you have the chaos of twenty-two thousand people running against you. They were running in all different directions. He just got up and ran that way because he saw some people were running towards him, so he ran against them and went to where he thought there would be people. But not everyone was running always in the same direction. There was people that were running into the gunfire that thought it was coming from behind them.

When I got up to run, I didn't know if I was running into it, if I was going to run into a gunman or what I was running into, so I really had to understand that and prepare myself that if you're running away, you could be shot in the back or you could be shot in the face or in the chest because I didn't know what I was running into. That's really hard to deal with in that moment. Obviously I know now where the location of the gunman was, but in that moment it's terrifying. To have to put your mind in that state of you're going to die tonight and that's okay, like I had to accept it, and I had to understand that if I got shot, what would I do? So I was trying to visualize the pain of a bullet when I was lying on the ground. So to have your mind go somewhere like that, so dark and just truly devastating, it is something that is truly difficult to come back from. Almost everyone that was there can relate to that and I know that they can.

So anyway, I'm still working on my memory a lot with an EMDR treatment specialist. She helps me with PTSD and she helps me with my trauma and how to emotionally deal with it

and process it and get past that.

What's an EMDR?

It's an eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. Basically when you are in REM sleep, your eyes are in rapid eye movement and that is when you're in your deepest sleep and it's actually when your brain processes what happened throughout the day because when your eyes move in a lateral direction, it allows your brain to process what you saw that day, if there's any information you passed up that's valuable or whatnot. So that's actually what happens during REM. So to kind of initiate that reprocessing state, you're conscious, but you hold like a vibration that pulses, so left-right, left-right, in your hand, and what that does is the sensation of lateral sensation across your body actually allows your brain to recognize the sensation from left to right and once you're prompted with the memories and you're talking about it, your brain actually processes it and brings up memories or whatnot so you can understand how to process a situation in a calm and non-emergency state versus when you were. It's very interesting.

How did you become aware of that opportunity?

The convention center. The convention center, I went there probably about a week after the event and the Red Cross was there and actually all kind of counseling agencies locally provided their information and everything is pro bono. They said, "We highly recommend that you seek out this treatment." It was tough to find someone who did it and who would do it, I hate to say, but professionally and pro bono. It was difficult to find that but I did. I did find someone and she's been amazing and I've probably had about four sessions. My next one is tomorrow. That's not my last one, so I have two more. Basically they rate it if you're at a scale of ten to ten on your first session of trauma, then they have you keep coming back in and reliving the difficult memories and they want to chip away at that rate. So when I went in a ten out of ten, the second time it was

a seven. So it just kind of decreases a little bit more and more to when I talk about things that I can be able to logically and rationally talk about it and I don't go back to the emotional state of the trauma. Of course, talking about it, yes, you get emotions, of course, but it's not an emotion that brings you back into that trauma state and that PTSD nature where I'm shaking and all that kind of stuff. So, yes, I've been seeking out that. Sometimes the memories are a little blurred here and there, but I've actually been able to bring out a lot of the memories that I suppressed. So, yes, it's very interesting.

Your girlfriend that was with you, did she do the same posttraumatic...?

No. No one in my group has sought counseling one bit. I've been the only one to seek out counseling. I see two different people. So by the time that all of my counseling sessions are scheduled to get over, I will have been to approximately fifteen counseling sessions for this, which is something that I never thought I would need in my life.

Even though you were in psychology in college.

Yes. I think I knew that it was very important to seek out counseling help because I did study that kind of stuff and I know how fragile the mind is and I knew that when I was having symptoms—I guess you can say symptoms—of loss of self-identity, self-worth, guilt, hearing things, seeing things, I knew it was time that I needed to seek some help. I'm not afraid to admit in that way that I need help. It was very hard to understand that I needed it and that I couldn't just shrug it off, so that was kind of a defeating thing for me to go seek out the help, but I'm glad I did. I knew that my brain was basically like a newborn baby and I had to nurse it back to health. I don't know if maybe my degree paid off in that way. I don't know.

I would guess that it's helped your resiliency.

Yes. I just understand how important that is for everyone to need that. Our brains are not wired

to experience that level of trauma or carnage or just that kind of, I guess, environment among other humans. We're not really wired for that.

That's fascinating. That's a whole interesting story, that survival. But take me back. So you're running, you're holding your friend's hand and you're going towards the east away from Mandalay. Where did you go?

Yes, we started to get up and we started to run. We didn't go to an exit. We just ran to a corner, basically. We went through—which is a new memory that has come up—it's called the Malibu Bar or something like that. It was just like a little pop-up little bar thing for the VIP people. We actually ran to that and there was no really exit on the other side, but people had made an exit because they're just pop-up walls. So people just busted down the wall and a lot of people were going through that little bar thing. There was chairs and people were throwing chairs and tables to get out of the way. Holding on to her hand was extremely difficult because people are pulling at your shirt or they're pulling at you or they're trying to get in front of you and that's nothing. I don't hold any of that against them. It's the desperation of life and you cannot blame them. That was just very hard, to get out. When we managed to get on the other side of the bar, there was no exit. But I remember running alongside the fence still inside the festival grounds, running inside the fence and I believe I was running north, but I still don't know how I got out. I still don't know how I got out.

I don't remember casually running out of an exit that was there, but I remember there is the road, Mandalay Bay Road, and then it goes behind the venue, this one, Giles Street. I had to have crossed that street. I do not remember running across that street. You'd think I would remember that because cars were still actively driving. From videos, which I've watched—don't ask me why—but from videos that I've watched, there was thousands of people running across

that street and cars were in the middle of the street. I don't remember any of that. I don't even know if I got out of an exit or if I went over a fence that had been broken down. I do remember having to step over many fences, but that comes later in the story because I had to cross over so many fences. After apparently I crossed the street, there was still fences lining this whole dirt lot and people were trying to bust that fence down, getting people together to bust it down, crawling over it. But once you crawled over that fence, there was another fence and another fence.

So you're still going eastward across that dirt lot.

Yes, so I did run east, absolutely. But I felt like everywhere we went we kept hitting dead ends and corners within fences. So I'm still very confused of actually where my tracks were.

Are you hearing the gunshots the whole time that you're running?

Yes, yes, yes. The gunshots were going on for a very long time and I know it's only reported as—I don't know; what?—eleven minutes or twelve minutes or something like that.

That has to be an eternity, anyway.

It just felt like it went on forever, yes. So when I got out and eventually whatever I did over here, if you continued down this street, that was where the field tanks are. So it looks like—

Oh, towards the airport?

Yes.

The fuel tanks that he supposedly shot at—or they reported that he shot at, not supposedly, that he reportedly shot at, which is...

You might be able to see them on that one.

You're going towards the airport.

Here is the festival ground right here. Oh, there they are. They're right there. Yes, those two little ones. So if you take that road straight back right in here, I don't know if you've heard any stories,

but there was hundreds, hundreds of people that were continuing to run straight and it led to a dead end essentially that went on to airport property, but there was hangars there. Like I said, I don't know my time line of where I was when the shots are still happening. I can tell you locations of where I was at, but I can't tell you when I was by the airport hangar were shots still going off. I actually don't remember that.

Eventually I made it over to an airport hangar and there was just hundreds of people running that way trying to break into any of the doors. They managed to break into—I almost want to say this little blue square—that airport hangar. They broke down the doors. There was a massive jet inside, which was kind of cool. But there was nowhere to go, so they were all trapped. Then there was one exit that was leading out to the airport tarmac to be on airport property. I knew that it was not safe to cross airport property. You can be shot, right? I think. So I was like, *no, we're not going on to a highly secured thing if they don't know what's going on*. All these people are rushing the airport. That's not safe. Logically I had that in my mind.

So my friend and I turned around when we saw that there were too many people crowded over there because the last thing you want to do is be around masses of people because if there are shooters, which we thought there were, on foot, you don't know what's lying around. You don't know where they can see you. Being around large groups of people was not a good idea, so we turned around.

At some point we were running along this road back here. I don't know what that road's called. But there's very deep ditches back there. So there was hundreds of people just running in the ditches. There was gunfire going off when I was in ditches, so maybe I ran into ditches before I went to the airport hangar; I don't know. But there was a lot of shots being fired while I was going through ditches. It was very hard to run in them, so we were tripping and falling a lot.

There's people running in the ditches with no shoes on and their feet were just very beat up, as you can imagine.

Did you see people who were injured by shots?

This is what is interesting is—if I could say right now, do you remember seeing any injured people blood-wise? No. What scares me is, how did I not? Because a lot of injured people were over in that area. It probably doesn't do good to talk to other survivors who were in that area that I went to, what they saw, because apparently there were a lot of shot people in that dirt lot that we were in and there was a few of the deceased that were on the pavement over there. Is that something I blocked out of my brain? Possibly. I don't know if it's important to actually recollect that; I'm not sure, because I feel like it would do more damage. But knowing that I had to have maybe seen that it's scary.

I didn't see any deceased until I got on to...What road is that? I don't even know. By map it's hard to see, but if I was there I could tell you what it was.

But it was south of the venue and west of the airport.

Yes. Oh, no, it was Tropicana. So I made it to Tropicana after being turned around so many times by fences or broken down fences. We ran past the fuel tanks, so I did run along this weird dirt road, which is not even a road. This is a church right here and a lot of people were there. I still can't tell you how I got to Reno Avenue because when I went and revisited the sites, I was like, *I don't remember any of this*. I had to have run over here to get to Reno, but I don't remember any of that.

But I eventually made it to Koval and that was a suppressed memory that came to me. But I eventually made it to Koval because we were running around. Koval kind of turns and it turns into...I think Koval turns into—I don't even know. I always feel like these roads are kind of

weird over here.

There's a lot of construction going on there, too, and maybe these maps are a little old.

But a road turns into Koval and we ended up getting on that street and there was a lot of ambulances and police and they were trying to get us to stay behind their car, but we had a mission to get to UNLV. My friend Crystal called her mom I think when the shots were subsided and we were in a ditch. She calmly called her mom and told her to meet us at Thomas and Mack because her mom knew where it was, we knew where it was—well, Crystal knew where it was. I thought one of these buildings was Hard Rock; that's how I got out of it I was. That was our mission was to get to UNLV. It's a pretty long walk especially in that state of mind, but that didn't matter.

We eventually got to Tropicana and that is when I saw a lot of the injured was over there and that was very tough. So I saw a lot of injured, but it wasn't due to gunshot wounds, when I was escaping by the fences. I saw a lot of people who were very injured from climbing fences because a lot of fences had barbed wire on it. So there was a lot of people who were very hurt from the barbed wire and trying to untangle their clothes, their legs and arms and stuff, so that was very disturbing. So I saw other injuries that I don't think were gunshot related. But when I got over to Tropicana, I saw many, many people who had been shot and quite a few bodies who had been passed away and had sheets over them.

For me I couldn't even comprehend. I've never been exposed in my life in seeing anyone who has been passed away out of...like a normal death, I guess you would say, illness or something. Yes, I've been to funerals, but I've never witnessed any kind of a tragedy like that. So I've never witnessed people being injured in that sense and I've never seen dead bodies like that. So it stopped me in my tracks, I guess, to the point where I stopped and I just was staring at them. I was like, "What is going on?" It is just still so surreal. The friend I'm with, she's a nurse,

so she kept me calm. I kept telling her, "Look." I just kept saying, "Crystal, look, look at those people. Look at those bodies. Those are bodies." And she said, "I know, I know. Just look at me. Look at the back of my head. We have to keep running." And I'm like, "Okay." So it was very weird when I think back on that, how fixated I was when I did see people who were injured or who had been trying to crawl under fences and they couldn't hit and they were getting smashed. I just stared at them. I don't know why I didn't have a different reaction. I think I was just in such a state of shock. Like I said, I've never been exposed to people who were in an emergency situation and injured like that, so I was just extremely fixated on it. I just could not comprehend what was going on.

After that was over, we got picked up—I don't know where—but we got picked up in a truck.

A stranger?

Yes, I think just a stranger. I'm pretty sure it was a black truck, a truck bed. It was a white male. I don't know why, but I feel like I remember him saying he was an ex or an off-duty officer. He was ex-military. He was something. My friend Crystal said, "Hey." Because people were starting to jump in the back of his truck. She said, "Where are you going? Where are you going?" I don't remember what he said. But she said, "Can you please take us to UNLV?" He said, "Yeah, I'm taking a couple of other people there, too." So we jumped in the back of his truck. It was just the weirdest truck ride ever. There was probably about fifteen people in the back of this truck bed, completely silent, but people were crying. I held a blond girl next to me and she just was weeping. I didn't cry the entire time, by the way, that this happened. She was just weeping in my chest and I was just holding her. She had blood on her, but I don't think it was her blood because I didn't see any injuries on her, but I could tell that she had blood all over her legs and stuff.

When we got to UNLV, they just dropped us off right in front of Thomas and Mack and we thanked the guy and Crystal's parents were waiting for us just right in the parking lot. At that time it was already organized, something in Thomas and Mack, as a safe space. It was like a compound and there was already officers out there trying to get us to come in. "Hey, we've got water; we have blankets; we have food." They were trying to get us to go in. But when I said, "My mom is here; we have a ride," they let us go. But basically—yes.

So they were running some sort of interference for people who were in shock and alone.

Yes. They kind of turned it into a compound, which we didn't even know. We didn't go to UNLV thinking, *oh, okay, it's safe there*. We went there because it was a known place to her mom.

It's a landmark.

Kind of meet us at Tropicana and this. We just said UNLV. It was the closest thing Crystal could think of. If it wasn't for Crystal, I don't know what the hell I would have done.

So that worked out well. You guys were good for each other.

She was more good for me. She was more good for me. During the gunshots I remember I would just stop running. On the outside of the festival grounds, I would just stop running and I would just start screaming like, "Why hasn't it been stopped? What is going on?" She was trying to keep me going. I said, "Crystal, you don't understand. Every one of those bullets..." It's thousands of rounds—not rounds, bullets. It's a fully automatic. So the amount of bullets you knew that were being sprayed was just devastating. I looked at her and I said, "Every one of those bullets means someone is getting shot. People are dying." I was just hysterical. I wasn't crying, but I was just losing my mind. There were points when I wanted to run back in there. There were points—she's a nurse—she wanted to run back and I had to stop her. So, yes, it was a lot of chaos.

I made a call to my boyfriend at the time; while the shots were still going off, I called

him. The only thing I remember saying is, "There's gunshots." And he said, "Well, what kind of gunshots?" Then I said, "It's just a war zone." Then he heard all the shots going off and I don't know what I said after that. I haven't asked him. It doesn't really matter, I guess. But that was one call that I made. Then I made a call to my mom, but it went to voice mail, so I had to leave that voice mail, so that was very tough. Then after the shots had stopped, I called my dad and just told him what was going on. Sometimes I'm like, why did you even call your parents when you're in that kind of a panic? What are they going to do? They live in Reno. You don't know where your life is going.

I think it's instinctive to call.

You don't know where your life's going and you don't know what's around the corner. I thought it was for sure a terrorist attack and I said, "There has to be more of a plan to this; there has to be more of a distinguished plan if this is a terrorist attack; there can't only be one; there has to be multiple and we're running with all these back in the back here." *Are there bombs? Are there active shooters hiding when we're all escaping?* So it was just very scary.

Did people have conversations about what was going on or were you all in various stages of emotional...?

There was just a ton of chaos. In the midst of everyone screaming, there's people screaming that they need a medic, there's people screaming that we need help breaking this fence down, trying to get guys to help them. There was people who were so drunk they couldn't run; they needed to be carried, not because they were incapable. I think just with the alcohol and their body going into this emergency mode that it was just too much for their body to handle and a lot of people were not able to run. So a lot of people needed help carrying people. There was a lot of people saying, "There's active shooters out." Where I was people were telling us to get down because

there was people coming around the corner. So, yes, we absolutely thought that there was people in the back there. Then I heard that there was shooters at Tropicana. Then there was people saying that there was a bomb at Luxor. So it was just chaos.

Even in all that chaos, there's rumors getting passed along.

There's rumors going around. I didn't find out what it was until I got into the car with Crystal's parents and probably about ten minutes into—probably when we got on to 215 right there by Las Vegas Boulevard through the airport.

The airport connector.

Yes. That's when we found out there was a gunman at Mandalay Bay. I had no idea that whole time.

Do you know what time it was that you finally rendezvoused with her parents? How much time had lapsed?

I had made my call, which I still am very confused on with the time line given my officials. But when I ended my phone call with my boyfriend at the time, it was 10:16. They said shots started at 10:05. So that means I had to have gone out of the venue somewhat fast because I was on the back roads when I called him. But I made the call at 10:16 and he said that he could still hear the shots, which I guess kind of lines up, but it's weird. I know we hung out there for a while and it took us forever to get to Koval and then to get to Tropicana. I don't know. Maybe 11:30 we met up with her parents, I would assume.

So over an hour has transpired and all of this, you're just constantly in motion.

Yes, we're running or we're hiding. Yes, we're running or hiding or there is just a lot of people, like chaos. Most of it was hiding. There was a point where we said, "Okay, we've got to figure out where are we." We were in these back roads and we had no idea where we were. I'm like, "I

have no idea. I've never been back here in my life. That's the airport. Where are we?" We hunkered down in this huge bush and pulled up our maps and we're zooming in. We're like, *okay, Tropicana is that way; let's just try to run that way*. But that was after we heard that there were these shots going off in Tropicana and I said, "No, we're not running on Tropicana." And she said, "Well, what other option do we have? We can't run that way back towards the Strip. Where do we go?" Then she got frustrated and she said, "What do you want to do, Kaity?" I said, "I don't know; I don't know." Because, yes, at that time we thought that there were shooters at Tropicana. So we just said, "Let's just run over that way and see how it goes." As crazy as that sounds. But we knew we had to get to UNLV.

It's funny, sometimes I'm even uncomfortable coming on UNLV campus. It's a reminder. That will go away. I just feel like everything in this city is a constant reminder.

That prompts a question that we do ask people. Would you go to the festival again next year?

I don't know. I want to go because that's what I love. I don't want to be scared for the rest of my life; I don't. Even though the two days leading up to Sunday don't even matter to me anymore, those fun memories don't even really matter, but I know that at one point I was extremely happy. And I want to do that again. I had so much fun and I don't want it to hold me back again. But am I going to be able to step foot on those festival grounds knowing what happened? Knowing where people died? I don't know. It's a little disturbing and it's pretty hard. I almost feel like it's insulting going and putting on another festival there. People lost their life there. People were left alone dying there. I feel extremely weird going back there and standing where I was standing. It's just weird.

I think that's understandable.

If they were to hold it at a different location, 100 percent I would go, which I hope they do. I hope they hold it at the speedway where EDC is. There's no buildings anywhere, so that's great. I don't know. Personally I wish that they would tear that festival ground down and kind of do like a—I don't know—turn it into parking or do a memorial kind of thing, a memorial site, kind of like Nine-Eleven, they just kind of did that thing. Should it be that drastic? I don't know. But I feel like there shouldn't be any more concerts held there because in the future you can never prevent this from happening again. We can take precautions and we can up the security and have snipers on roofs, but it's not going to stop it. It might just help how we respond. But this can never be prevented again, personally. What are you going to do?

Talk to me a little bit. Did you have an opinion about guns, gun controls and how maybe you felt before and after, the change? What's your thoughts on that?

I was pro-gun. I agree that if a responsible mentally healthy individual wants to buy a gun for the sake of a hobby, shooting or target shooting, hunting or for safety and they take the precautionary classes and they have the concealed weapons permit, all that kind of stuff, yes, I don't have a problem with that. I actually used to like it if I would see an individual come in and you could tell he had a concealed weapon or whatever. I actually didn't mind that. I kind of felt comfortable. I thought, *well, if shit goes down, this guy, he'll handle it.*

I've never held a gun in my life or shot a gun in my life until probably about May, this May. I shot with the friend that I was there, her and her family. They like guns and they like to go shooting for fun and go to the gun range and stuff and they own multiple guns. My friend Crystal who I was with that night actually owns an AK. I was like, *why do you need something like that big?* But whatever. Personally I don't ever want to own one. I do for the sake of my safety, but it's intimidating. When I did shoot my first gun, I hated the feeling of it. The

adrenaline rush was not a good adrenaline rush for me and it just felt way too powerful. The power behind a gun and the different kinds is unbelievable and it's scary. It's incredibly intimidating. I didn't feel safe having the gun in my hand and holding it. I was like, *okay, I'm done; take it out of my hands; I don't want to move it.*

Yes, I've been pro-gun. Would I say my views have changed? In a sense, I guess. How are you going to stop—I understand background checks and whatever, but I just feel like there's always ways around it and there has been. Will it ever be resolved? I don't think so. Do I wish that people could just not purchase AKs and rifles and all this—I don't even know all the types of guns there are.

And that bump stock or whatever that is that he put on.

Yes. It's like, why are we selling it? I just don't understand it. So I wish honestly that guns could just not even be sold anymore to be honest. I don't feel safe around a gun anymore at all. So, yes, I would say my view has changed a little bit on that and I don't really like that because I've always been pretty confident about my beliefs and where I stand on things, but now it's kind of turned around and I understand that I'm against a lot of the majority. It's a constant battle between people. If I see someone in a room now, I'm very hyper vigilant. If I see someone even a police officer, I hate looking at a gun on their holster. I hate it because I know what it can do. I've seen what it can do. I know how powerful it is. I'm just not okay with it being around me.

How do you feel about Las Vegas since then? What kind of impact did it have on our image, on our tourism, just in general? If you were conversing with friends from Reno or wherever, what would you say about it?

It's weird. When I moved to Vegas, I left all my family and I hated that Vegas didn't have a community feel back then. I would always say that, "There's no community here; no one cares

about anyone else really; it's all about the Strip; the city just cares about the Strip and the revenue and the tourism." I just felt like people here weren't as friendly from where I came from and I hated that. I always tell my mom, "There's no sense of community here." So when this happened that kind of slapped me in the face with the sense of community that was brought out. But I think in any big city—and I'm not trying to sound ignorant about it—but I think with any big city that a big tragedy happens in, especially a city that has money, people do come together, but it will fade away. I think that the resilience of this city is very strong, but I do think that that community sense will fade out for a little bit and I don't know why. I don't know why I immediately go to pessimism over optimism because that's not also like me at all.

But during that time that happened, I was extremely proud to be a resident in Las Vegas; I was. I had people who were strangers that helped me. Local and counseling agencies helped me any way they could, no charge, and support groups were formed everywhere. They did the beautiful remembrance wall in two days, I think. They held the memorial site up for a long time. I'm not upset that it had to be taken down. Everything's got to come to an end. You know what I mean? We've got to all go back to normality at some point. I get that. The billboards will come down.

Actually, to be honest, I don't even like the billboards; I don't like the Vegas Strong. For me it doesn't mean what I went through. Vegas Strong has an identity that the city is resilient and will come together, but it doesn't mean the same thing for me. I don't see it like that I guess. To me it's just a constant reminder of what I had to go through and that I'm one of those victims that everyone kind of has pity over with that hash tag. So I see it a little bit differently and I wish all that stuff would just come down already, which is weird.

I don't know that that's weird. I think that parallels any grieving process.

There's a lot of individuals, which is great, but they're very proud; even attendees are very, very proud to wear the Vegas Strong and to really just have it part of their identity. I don't. I don't like it. I don't want to get a tattoo. I don't want to put the sticker on my car. I don't want to get a sweatshirt or a mug that has a ribbon on it. I just don't want to do any of that because I don't want it to be tied to me. I don't want it to identify who I am, but it has and that's where it's a battle.

With the city, tourism, I don't think it will ever stop. I think it will always be good. How I've seen the city deal with tourism is they've used Vegas Strong as a ploy for commercials. Maybe just I interpret that offensively because of my experience and my direct impact with that. But I'm not like seeing commercials to visit Las Vegas and then they put Vegas Strong at the end of the commercial. That's not what it's about. So I get a little bothered by that. I've kind of seen how just MGM in general is treating the whole situation and I'm very disappointed in that as well. I don't know.

Kaity, is there anything else that we haven't covered that you think we should talk about?

I don't know. I think one thing that's important is that people remain compassionate and somewhat empathetic for the individuals that were there. There's no time line on when we're supposed to be over this. There's no deadline on when I'm supposed to stop with the grief or stop with the guilt or whatever. Will I become stronger and think about it less and less? In a sense, yes. But this event has changed people's lives. People's lives changed forever that night and a lot of people have taken their lives because of it. I've not known them directly, but there have been some people who couldn't deal with it and they've taken their lives. So it's very hard and it not normal to have to go through this. It's not normal. I just want people to just be patient and sensitive about it. If you don't want to go to a concert again, I want those individuals to feel okay with that. It is a personal choice on how you do want to move forward; I understand that.

Sometimes people maybe aren't equipped with that though. They don't have that support. So I think reaching out and being there for people whether it's a survivor to a survivor or a stranger just wanting to hear you out, it's extremely important.

I reach out to people, absolute strangers that I don't even know, and I know that they were having a very hard time because someone said, "Oh, I have a friend who attended and she's very alone. She lives in Vegas. She has nobody and she's having a very tough time." I got her number, reached her and met her for coffee the next morning and just talked to her. It's extremely important. It's really important that we build each other up and move forward because, like I said, it's a family. It's a country family. It's not just a festival of random artists. Like Life is Beautiful, say, there's a whole bunch of different genres. You get a mix of everybody. But when you go to a country concert, they're your people and that's what I call them; I call them my people. So I have love for all of them and I would do anything for anyone if they needed it.

That's very cool. You've actually connected with people, strangers outside of this—

Yes, I have.

—with that moment. Wow, that's great. I wasn't aware, do we know that people have taken their lives?

They're not locals here. There's a support group on Facebook that is private. It's for survivors only. It's heavily regulated. You can't just join. You have to be approved and go through a process. Their friend or whatever has spoken out on their behalf and they've went to their funerals. Yes, they took their life. The stress was just too much.

That's tragedy upon tragedy.

Yes, it's very sad.

Yes. I can't thank you enough. This is a very important contribution that you're making to

this project.

Thank you. I knew it was important.

We'd appreciate anyone that you might suggest to do this. This would be great. Thank you so much.

Absolutely. I think it's important.

[End of recorded interview]