

AN INTERVIEW WITH NICK ROBONE

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**This is Claytee White and Barbara Tabach. We are with Nick here in the Oral History Research Center, December 21st, 2017.**

**Nick, could you please pronounce and spell your full name?**

Sure. It's Nick. Last name R-O-B-O-N-E. So N-I-C-K, Robone.

**Thank you. Nick, where did you grow up?**

I was born and raised here in Las Vegas.

**Great. I love those stories because I love this city. When were you born?**

September 21st, 1989.

**Tell me about your schooling here in Las Vegas.**

I went to elementary school at Kahre and then Molasky and then I went to high school at Centennial, graduated from there in 2007. I came to UNLV, graduated here in 2012, and then I proceeded to get my master's from Western Kentucky University, and now I'm here again.

**Why Western Kentucky?**

They had this specific program I wanted. I wanted to do sports marketing, athletic administration-type thing, and they didn't have that here at UNLV at the time, so that was the best option for me financially. A lot of it was done online, too, so that was easier.

**You said we didn't have it at the time. Do we have it now?**

I'm not sure. I don't know. This was three or four years ago. I got my master's in 2014.

**Right now tell me what you're doing here at UNLV.**

I'm one of the hockey coaches here at UNLV. I love my alma mater, so I definitely wanted to stay in touch with it. I played hockey since I was a little kid. I played here at UNLV. Then I also work at Topgolf in the marketing department there. Two full-time jobs basically.

**Explain for the [recording] what Topgolf is and how it operates.**

It's a sports entertainment property with the main attraction being golf. All of our golf balls have little microchips in them, so when you hit it out into the fairway, it will register your shot, score points, play games. There's bars and lounges, live entertainment; things like that. It's a really cool spot.

**They have that big screen around it because?**

The netting is there for protective purposes and then we actually have TVs located on the back of the driving range, too. It's the only Topgolf in the world that has that; it's four huge big screen TVs out there.

**Who is the champion right now, do we know?**

I don't know right now. There's a lot of good players out there that's for sure, though.

**Tell us about your love for country music.**

I actually started listening to country probably in college and it kind of just grew on me. It's changed a little bit; it's become a little more mainstream and things like that, which I don't mind. A lot of people are kind of like, *oh, it's not old country*. I just like the people that are involved with it, too. They've always been very genuine. Whenever you go to country concerts, it's a good time. Yes, I've tried to go to more country concerts each year.

**Give me the names of some of the big ones that you attend.**

I've seen Luke Bryan, Old Dominion, Darius Rucker.

**Any special festivals, any special concerts?**

Route 91 was actually the first actual country festival I've been to. All the other country concerts were just regular concerts where you see a couple of bands or a couple of artists.

**This is the first outdoor?**

Yes, it was for me.

**You had tickets for all three nights.**

Right.

**Give me a little history. Tell me about Friday night and Saturday night and people you met. Just talk about the festival.**

I got tickets from my parents actually as a birthday gift. I was there with two other friends the first and second night, Friday and Saturday night. There were a lot of people I knew there just because of where it was located, obviously, here in town and stuff like that. So I met up with some other friends and things like that and we had a great time. Friday and Saturday night was a lot of fun.

Then Sunday I was just worn out, so I didn't go in the beginning of the day. Then I actually wasn't even going to go Sunday night, but then my brother was like, "Hey, I got an extra ticket; I'm going to go." And I hadn't seen him really that much in the last few weeks, so I was like, "Yeah, we'll go and hang out." So I wound up going Sunday night, too. But the concert itself was a ton of fun Friday and Saturday that's for sure.

**Tell me a little about your brother.**

He's two and a half years younger than me. He grew up playing hockey, too. He played here at UNLV. Then he wound up going the firefighter route, so now he's a firefighter with Henderson Fire Department.

**BARBARA: *What's his name?***

Anthony.

**Did Anthony act as a first responder on Sunday night?**

Yes, definitely.

**Would he sit for an interview with us?**

He might. I can ask him.

**Would you, please? We'd love that.**

Yes.

**Tell me what happened when you discovered, or when your group, you and Anthony and others, discovered that those were not fireworks.**

Actually, the way it kind of happened was we were on the right side of the stage, kind of underneath right next to the VIP booth, basically probably the worst spot, right underneath Mandalay Bay. There were two shots; we didn't know they were shots; it was like, *bam, bam*, two cracks. And we're like, *okay, that was kind of weird*. Jason Aldean was just still playing. Then after that everybody kind of was skeptical and looked around and then all of a sudden you heard, *du-du-du-du-du*, which is more of like a barrage of shots or whatever and then it stopped. We crouched down and everybody was looking at Las Vegas Boulevard, didn't know what it was. Some people are yelling, "It's not gunshots; it's not gunshots." So I turned to face Mandalay Bay, but I'm still crouched down, and then all the sudden we hear it again. Right when we hear it again, that's when I got shot.

**Did you know immediately?**

No. Immediately I thought for whatever reason I got shot with a beanbag gun in my side because I just felt like this pain on my side. It was just like excruciating. It kind of burned a little bit. Then all the sudden blood started coming out of my mouth and nose. That's when I'm like, *okay, no, I was shot*. Then I told my brother and my buddy, I was like, "Hey, I've been shot." And they looked back and they're like, *what?*

Then they grabbed me and I started running. We all started running away from where we thought the shots were coming from. My brother and my other friend were with me. Two other

friends grabbed my brother's girlfriend at the time and they took off. My brother is like, "Hey, just take her away." So we went and hid behind a cop car for a second.

**Where was the cop car parked?**

I'm trying to think of the name of the street. I don't know the name of the street, but basically it was the east side of the venue, probably directly—yes, I could show you on the map. Let's see.

**[Showing maps] I don't know which map is better.**

Here is Hooters. So Las Vegas Village is here. It was probably Reno. So we hid behind a cop car for a second. This whole time you're just hearing gunshots and things like that and people are like bleeding everywhere and in disarray and chaos. Then we tried to open the cop car because we were just like, *we'll just take the car, drive to the hospital, if there's keys in it*; there wasn't. So we hid there for a second until we stopped hearing shots. Then we went further back on Reno and then there was a little side street.

**Towards?**

East, we went east, so behind Hooters—or Tropicana. Then that's when we kind of felt like we were out of everything for the most part. Then my brother found a first aid kit and there wasn't really much in the first aid kit.

**Where did he find it?**

He found it in one of the—one of the cops gave it to him or something like that. He put the wrapping over my bullet wound right here on my chest and then he put some bandages on it. So basically I could breathe out, but air couldn't get in because he wasn't sure if I had a sucking chest wound or anything like that. Then he looked at me and I was just like, "Hey, I think I'm going to be okay, whatever, go help other people." Because there were other people shot in the head and neck and stomach and just kind of torn up. So him and my other friend who was an

EMT at one point, they were triaging people and helping them out. We ran into another friend of ours who is a firefighter and he was helping people, too.

Then the first ambulance came and we put three or four people on that and then they left, so I didn't get on the first one. Then the second one came and I got on that one. So once that happened, my brother stayed with my friend Billy and they helped other people. Then I got to the hospital.

**So an ambulance took you to the hospital and you left your group there.**

Yes.

**Which hospital did you go to?**

I went to Sunrise.

**What was it like at Sunrise when you arrived because now several ambulances have probably arrived?**

Yes, it was chaos. There were cops out front making sure only certain people were allowed in. Then there was people that were just trying to barge through the cops. I couldn't get on one of those beds that rolled out of the ambulance because there was another guy who was shot in the stomach and he couldn't really walk, so they rolled him out and then I just got out and walked into the hospital. I found a bed, got on a bed, and then I waited there for probably like twenty minutes because there was just—

**Did anyone check you in? You just got on a bed.**

No, you just walked in the emergency room. They put you on a bed—I found a bed and I just laid down. I was a little nervous at the time because I'm bleeding out of my chest and mouth. I wasn't really sporadically bleeding, so that was a good thing. The blood out of my nose and mouth had kind of stopped for a minute. But then they finally saw me and they wrote something

on my forehead, which is basically triaging me, telling me where I was at. Some people just arrived at the hospital and they were dead already. So when I got there they saw me and they were like, "Okay, let's figure out where you're at." They figured it out and then right away I was pretty much up getting into surgery pretty quickly.

**Did they actually remove the bullet?**

Yes. It hit me right here. It missed my heart, obviously. It missed my lung, grazed it. It didn't hit my artery. It didn't hit a bone. I don't even know how this happened. But then it went and landed and lodged in my back. So they had to go in and cut my sternum, lift my sternum up, and then go find the bullet.

***You were shot from the front and then it went—***

In the chest, yes. The reason I felt it in my side is because that's where it landed, in my back.

***Wow. May I ask about the sense of mortality, when this is happening so quickly for you and you didn't go on the first transport to the hospital, did you have any fears, concerns?***

Even when I got shot and I knew I was shot and I was bleeding out of my mouth...the only thing I just kept telling myself is, "Don't freak out." I was like, "If you freak out, you're going to make it worse and you're going to start bleeding; your heart is going to start pumping." So I was like, "You're going to give yourself a better chance of survival if you just breathe and stay focused; don't freak out." Stay calm in a situation because that's when you're most reasonably thinking is when you're calm, so that's just what I was just trying to tell myself to do. For the most part, I felt like I did it. Then you're getting there and the first ambulance comes and you don't get it on it, you're just like, *I don't really know how serious this wound is, but it was in the chest and there's a lot going on and I'm bleeding out of my mouth.* But I was like, *there's other people that need it; you're not shot in the neck; you're not shot in the head.*



*Did your athleticism, especially as a hockey player, kick in for you in some way here?*

They did say—I was very big on the gym, still am, but they said that played a pretty big role in the bullet not doing more damage is the fact that I have been in pretty good shape. I think that was probably more or less a benefit for me, was just making sure I was in good shape and I had solid muscle mass around this area, so that helped me out.

**Tell me about your feelings since that time. It's been a couple of months now. When you go back over it in your mind, talk about your feelings about all of this.**

There's been a lot of feelings that have come through me, obviously one being anger, two being very grateful; that's probably the top of the list. I'm very, very grateful. I'm blessed. I think that I was more fortunate than fifty-eight other people. I can wake up every day and be glad that I'm here. Obviously, you get a little mad about the situation and there's frustrating things that go along with recovery and not being able to do the things you did before and how long it takes to get back to normal life.

My story was pretty unique, too, I guess. It got a lot of coverage and things like that between news outlets like ESPN and NBC and things like that. I wanted that to get out. My brother and I talked about it and it was like we wanted there to be some sort of light in such a time of darkness. So hopefully people can see our story and have a sense of, wow, there are good things that happened out of this and brave people and things like that. Anybody I've talked to that are there, I always tell them, "Tell your story because people want to hear it."

There are certain news outlets we didn't talk to, but, at the same time, all that good stuff definitely played a toll, just very taxing. It takes a lot out of you and it's kind of annoying sometimes because you're trying to just relax and recover. Like I said, I was very fortunate to have the backing and the support system that I had, but, at the same time, there wasn't a time

when there was nobody at the hospital for me. I'm grateful for that in many more ways, but, like I said, at the same time, it's like you wanted to have your time to relax, too, and I haven't had a lot of me time until maybe the last month.

**When you said there are a few outlets that you did not talk to, why not?**

Just because I didn't really feel like it was a very credible one, one where people would take serious, and maybe one where in the past you've seen them kind of spin stories and stuff like that, and I didn't want that. I wanted it to be my words.

**What did you learn about yourself through all of this?**

I'd say I've learned how important family is and good friendships are. The family and friends that really helped me out and were there for me; that was really important. Then as far as maybe learning about myself, I guess that I learned how I would react in a very dangerous situation, and I guess I can say I'm pretty proud of that because some people might have freaked out and things like that and for whatever reason I just didn't. Then even moving forward from this, mentally I've been pretty good, really good, probably better than a lot of people. I think it just shows that if I'm able to go through something like this and still be okay, it makes me think I can go through pretty much anything in life and probably be okay. So I think that noticing that has been more of a positive for me. Then I guess overall, it's just been an eye-opener.

**There have been a lot of activities among people who were attendees. They're now getting together. They're having dinners and celebrations. Have you attended any of those?**

I went to the—it was probably right after I left the hospital. So end of October, there was something for the first responders and survivors and things like that at the Orleans; they had a concert there, so I did go to that. That was really cool. I actually just went to Maui last week. I booked this trip back in July, me and a couple of my friends. They were at the concert. Then the

other few that were at the concert, they booked a trip right after it and they were like, "Hey, we're going to come." So all five of us went to Hawaii together. That was pretty cool. That was something special that we all got to do. When I got shot, I didn't know if I was going to be able to go to Hawaii. That was my recovery goal was like, *okay, let's get back to doing physical therapy and all that stuff and then you'll be good for Hawaii*. So I did that.

It was actually pretty interesting. I got a phone call from this guy Matt, Matt Mika. He was actually one of the people shot at that congressional baseball practice in June. He called UNLV and then UNLV told me, they're like, "Hey, Matt reached out to you if you want to call him." So I called Matt and we talked for a long time about everything. So that was cool, how he dealt with everything and I got a lot from that. Then he put me in touch with another girl Kristin who was shot at the Virginia Tech shooting back in 2007, so she talked to me. It was cool.

My goal after that was like, okay, it's unfortunate, these mass shootings, but now that I've been through it, I think it could be a good thing for me to call some people and see how they're doing. So I tried to reach out to a few people from that Texas shooting, but obviously that one was kind of a little different; those people are from a really small town and maybe they're not open to talking to strangers. And it might not be right now, immediately after; it might be six months from now I reach out to some of those people again to see how they're doing with everything or even people from here in Vegas. PTSD is a real thing, so I know there's a lot of people that are still struggling with that.

**Exactly. With that experience of talking with those two people, what would you suggest for this project that we are doing where we're trying to talk to all kinds of people? We're trying to talk to first responders, doctors, coroner's office. Any hints for us about how this project can help other people? Because, unfortunately, we know that there will be others.**

Yes. I think the biggest thing is when you're speaking with these people and things like that is finding out the best ways that they're dealing with the situation; that way when you do present this project to other people or something like that who are struggling, they can use those tactics for themselves. This is going to be a long, long process for a lot of people, a really long process, and so what might not work for one person, might work really well for another and vice versa. So I think that that's a big thing is finding out how people are coping with it and better ways to deal with it. Because the shooting is done, but the aftermath is just, like I said, going to play those images that run through your mind and maybe you lost a loved one or something like that and that's obviously really tough.

**We're sharing a list of services that we give to everybody we interview, some free services for psychological care and all of that. Do you already have that list?**

I don't have that list, but I have...even though I felt like I was okay after the shooting. Obviously, the first week I was a little shaken, I guess, but I never really showed it to anybody. At night I'd be like, *oh, man*. I spent one day Googling everything and finding out information on the shooter and trying to figure out why, and then I was like, *you know what? You have way better things to do with your life. Whatever the reasoning was, you may never know; you probably will never know. So just go live your life. Don't worry about it. Let's focus on helping other people.* That was just what I was thinking.

I did go see—sorry, that's where I was going—afterwards I decided, yes, I'm still going to go see a psychologist. I've been seeing one probably once every other week or once a week. We actually don't even talk about the shooting. We just talk about other stuff. We've talked about it for a little bit, but she, I think, feels like I'm okay with it. So now we're just talking about other things in life, in my life, and goals and things like that, too. I still see her.

**Great. So you don't need my list. Any other coping skills that you would share with somebody else going through this?**

Yes. Whatever they love to do, just continue to do it and just really, really put your heart and soul in that. Whatever you're passionate about, go with it. I've realized that. I'm really passionate about coaching hockey, so I was very fortunate to be able to jump back into that right away and that has been big for me getting into that. It kind of makes me think, okay, maybe I want to pursue coaching even more; maybe I want to do it at a higher level, so why not do it now? Don't wait. You never know.

***When we've got the Golden Knights, right?***

Yes. Obviously, it's been really cool with them here, too. Pursue your passions; that's what I would say is the biggest thing.

***I'm curious, cultural background. Are you Italian?***

I'm Italian.

***I feel like I'm looking at a cousin here. Do you have any feelings about what you drew upon that culturally being Italian, how that might have been...?***

I'm sure you're familiar with Italians. It's very, very family oriented. Right when I got shot, my dad's whole family was there and they're from Vegas and a lot of them live here. My mom's whole family flew back from New York, not just one, all of them. So they came.

***Yes. (Indiscernible) they're going to be there.***

Yes. My mom's brother and sister and cousins and things like that, they all flew out. Yes, you're always surrounded by family when you're Italian that's for sure.

**Some of the people are doing things; they're paying it forward. When you said something about helping others, are you part of that paying-it-forward initiative?**

I wanted to do it in my own way. The hockey community has been very, very good to me, really good. I've been involved with it now since I was a kid, and now coaching at UNLV it's even that much bigger. So I wanted to do something where I could utilize them a little bit—not utilize them, but have them be involved while also giving back. I've actually set up a public skate for February third. What it will do—the rink has done an awesome job with donating the ice time. It's just going to be ten dollars a person. It's a free skate for two and a half hours. The UNLV team will be out there, so they'll be there greeting people and hanging out.

All the proceeds—I want it to go to PTSD Victims of Southern Nevada. Now, I haven't decided whether I maybe want to try and just reach out to a couple of families and just do one or two families—maybe you guys can even help me out with this—or if I want to do it to an organization. But we're going to do a raffle, as well, too. So all the money raised from this is going to go towards somebody that's affected by this event. I just need to figure out how I'm going to do this.

**As we continue to do interviews, if we come up with something that we think could be a good idea for you, we'll definitely stay in touch.**

Okay.

**That's great, a free skate. Where do we play hockey?**

There's three rinks in town. Two rinks have been here for a really long time; one's at the Santa Fe in North Las Vegas, and one is the Las Vegas Ice Center on Flamingo and 215. Now the newest rink is where UNLV practices. It's where the Golden Knights practice. It's where we play our home games, too. It's called City National Arena and it's right across the street from Red Rock.

***Is that where your public skate will be?***

Yes, that's where our public skate will be, too.

**I think that I have covered everything on our sheet that we wanted to cover. Anything else that you think could help someone else? I think that your interview is really thoughtful, so I would love to see if you have any other ideas.**

I would say that the biggest thing is talking about it. For me, like I said, and my brother, our story got a lot of coverage. So I was talking about the incident from the time I woke up in that hospital bed after surgery and telling people about it and going and going and going, and I think that has helped me a lot with it. I didn't keep anything in. I literally have no problem telling anybody about it without getting emotional or anything like that. I think that the repetitiveness of it and bringing it up and reliving it and things like that, it just makes us say, *okay, this actually happened. I made it through it.* I think that some people just hold it in too much and they don't want to talk about it. They don't even want to think about it. They don't even want to see anything on it. But it was an event that actually happened and you have to sometimes relive it to make sure that—it's one of things where you cannot learn from it, but realize that you went through it, you survived, and now what are you doing to help yourself and helping others? That's what I've come out with, how can we help each other?

**I really appreciate this so much.**

**Anything else, Barbara?**

*No. That was really good.*

**I think this is wonderful. I really appreciate you coming.**

No problem. Anything else you need from me, just let me know.

**If your brother would like to talk about his experiences...I have not talked to a first responder yet.**

**Did you?**

*No.*

**We would love to talk to a first responder, especially someone who was right there who was an attendee and a first responder. That would be amazing.**

Okay. Let me talk to him today. I'll shoot him a text and see if he can do that.

**Fantastic.**

*It has been interesting. I have a relative who has dealt for decades with PTSD with veterans.*

*The phenomena of people talking and how much more healing that is that we're aware of and this episode seems to be bringing that to the forefront.*

Right. The thing about PTSD with these people is it makes it even more difficult; I think they'll have a harder time with it because veterans and soldiers and things like that, they sign up for it.

They know that they're going to probably see some things. These people, you never expect to see anything like that in your life.

**Have you been to another outdoor event since?**

Not per se, but I've been to a bunch of Golden Knights' games. When you're entering the Golden Knights' thing, you're surrounded by New York New York, the Monte Carlo and all that stuff there. The first game I went to, you're looking up, because everybody is just crowded into this plaza right there. But then after that, just like I said, I'm not going to let it stop me from living my life. The odds of it happening again to me is very, very, very slim, but even so.

***One thing we didn't ask was about guns. Did your attitude about guns change because of this episode?***

Yes and no. I'd say yes in the fact that he used what was called a bump stock and I thought those should for sure be illegal. The fact that you can change a semiautomatic weapon to basically an automatic weapon is just ridiculous. So that was one thing. I'm a little indifferent about it



because I think guns are...I support the Second Amendment, but, at the same time, like I said, I think there should be restrictions on it. Nobody needs to be able to shoot thirty rounds out of an AR or anything like that or have a bump stock or anything like that. There should definitely be restrictions on it especially for—what are the purposes of using guns? It's either self-defense or hunting or just whatever may be as far as sporting goes, but I don't think any of those three things need to have a magazine that can house thirty rounds.

**Thank you for that.**

*The other thing that's interesting is as recently as today I heard a little report on the radio saying that they don't even think they'll come out with a report until maybe the anniversary of...*

Yes, that's another thing that's really frustrating—

**It was on the front page today.**

*I didn't see the paper. I just heard it on the radio.*

That's another thing that's really frustrating for me. I'm not as frustrated as I was, but it's been really hush-hush. You haven't really heard much since.

**This was the FBI that said that, not our local police.**

Yes, yes. And the FBI is...Whatever they're doing, I hope they're getting to the bottom of it. Like I said, I don't think I'll ever really know, so when you stop caring about that and you just go on and live your life, it is what it is.

**Nick, thank you so much.**

No problem. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

**I might even go to a hockey game now.**

Yes, definitely, come to one of our games.

*I love hockey.*

We have a great team this year.

*I grew up in Iowa.*

Oh, nice. We actually went and played Iowa State this year.

*Yes. My nephews played hockey and one of them played for Iowa State.*

Oh, really?

*Yes. It's been a number of years ago, but, yes.*

They've had a team for a really long time. Any time you want to go, just let me know.

**Okay, great.**

*Thanks so much.*

**[End of recorded interview]**