

AN INTERVIEW WITH AMANDA "ALEX" AIKENS

BARBARA TABACH

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES
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PREFACE

Alex Aikens, a policy analyst/researcher, was born and raised in Las Vegas. She graduated high school from Las Vegas Academy, earned a degree in social work from University Nevada, Reno, and received her Masters at Rutgers. She is currently living in New Jersey doing research.

She was visiting home at the time of 1 October and caught a glimpse of a TV report about a shooting incident on the Strip, but not aware of its significance until the following morning. In this oral history, she shares how she became a community organizer of a free counseling event.

It began with response to Facebook safety check-in's, where she offered to provide rides to the blood bank or to cars. Seeing the overwhelming response and anxiousness it cause to those who wanted to help, she posted that blood banks would need to replenish for days after.

Explains that praying and vigils are helpful for some, but not all. So she then posted an open invitation: If you just need to talk, I'm here. This blossomed into a group effort with others to provide empathetic ears. This quickly grew into a First Friday (October 6) space at the Arts Factory where Marriage Family Therapists (MFT) could listen and offer comfort to a wide range of feelings.

Talks about the helpless feeling—that “People really need to do something.” Reflects on when her best friend was in the Aurora Colorado theater shooting.

Describes what she learned about herself: her genuine fondness for Las Vegas, it's her city and that she is capable of community organizing.

Heartwarming reflection on Las Vegas as a community and the reaction of her friends in New Jersey when she returned there. Her thoughts on gun controls post-mass shooting.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV



Remembering 1 October

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This is December 28th, 2017. This is Barbara Tabach and we're sitting in my office at UNLV Libraries. I'm sitting with Alex.

Alex, give me your full name and spell that for us.

My legally name is Amanda Aikens; A-M-A-N-D-A, A-I-K-E-N-S. And I go by Alex, A-L-E-X.

I asked you before we started, how did you get that name? I think that's a good story.

Believe it or not, when I was a kid I had a book series that I really liked and the main character's name was Alex, so I decided I was going to adopt it and sign all my letters Alex and it took off from there. I've used it ever since, much to my mother's chagrin. It's okay.

I think that's great. I really do. Tell me a little bit about yourself. You grew up in Las Vegas. You were born here?

Born and raised, yes.

Talk a little bit on that topic.

That's funny because growing up my mom's mom, so my grandma, was always very disgruntled by the fact that she was raising us in Las Vegas because it didn't seem like a very family friendly town even though I'm pretty sure Vegas tried to be more family friendly in the nineties and that didn't work out, but I may not be remembering that right. It was actually great. I got to go to the Las Vegas Academy for high school, which I loved. That was a wonderful experience. Then I spent a few semesters at UNLV, a few semesters at College of Southern Nevada, and I got my Bachelor of Social Work at University of Nevada, Reno. So I've been all over the state.

You are a Nevada girl.

That's right.

Now you live where?

I live in New Jersey now. I got my Masters of Social Work at Rutgers University.

That's an amazing school.

It is a great school, yes. I loved getting to go there. I'm still doing research both with Rutgers and with the University of Chicago right now, so that's why I'm still out there.

What kind of research are you doing?

It's policy analysis and it's two separate projects, one looking at the recent policies in Seattle covering worker's rights and schedule changes, particularly for waiters, waitresses, those who usually don't have a lot of predictability in their schedules, so looking at those policies, and then another is looking at some policies in Madison, Wisconsin, where they have had for now a few years universal pre-K and just seeing how that's working within the community and if we should be expanding that to other states.

That's awesome.

I'm glad you think so. Most people sort of start to fall asleep when I talk about it.

Anything doing good for people that's what's really important.

Exactly.

On October first, since this is the project that we're doing this interview for, Remembering 1 October, where were you?

I had just come into town September 29th or 30th. I was visiting my family because my parents were going out of town and they needed somebody to watch the animals. My parents like to keep the TV on all the time; they're one of those, and so it was on. I had fallen asleep really early because I was still jet lagged, probably like eight o'clock. The TV kind of woke me up every few hours with reports. It wasn't enough for me to really understand what was happening, but I got that there was a shooting. Looking back, it's sad now, but at the time it was just kind of like, *ugh, another one*. I don't think that I was even awake enough to comprehend how close to home it

was or how massive it was. We had three hundred mass shootings in the country last year, so I guess it was just like, *oh, that's sad*, but not enough to wake me up. It wasn't until probably about five o'clock that morning, on the second, where I really woke up and realized what was happening and that was when it kind of all hit me and I was like, *oh, it's going to be a day. I'm getting ready now. It's going to be a crazy day.*

I have a friend who was in social work with me at the University of Nevada, Reno, and she now does mental health intake and triage at local hospitals. She had gotten ahold of me and she said, "We need your help. We need people. We're going to talk to the employees of Mandalay Bay and people who worked at Route 91 and we're just going to do some mental health triage and make sure that people are okay." So I was like, "Yep, absolutely, let's go." Again, you can stop me if this is too much info.

No, this is perfect.

We were originally stationed at the Luxor and the Excalibur. We were just kind of waiting because when the employees came into work at the Mandalay in the morning, whatever shift that was, they had a huge meeting, and so they were all told, "We have these therapists on staff that we're going to have you guys go check in with." But I think some communication wires got crossed. We were kind of in the bowels of the Excalibur, so we didn't have cell service. Nobody could really contact us and we didn't have anybody come to see us for about an hour. At that point Katie's team was like, "We've got to move on." So they packed up and they went to Summerlin Hospital to continue doing intakes and triage specifically for mental health, which I didn't have clearance for because I don't work for her agency.

Who is Katie?

Katie is my friend who helped me out with creating the event, the free counseling event. She was

the one who had gotten ahold of me that morning to say, "Come on down." That was fine. I was like, "Okay, you guys go; you do your thing." Earlier that day, like I said, when I woke up, Facebook has that safety check-in and as part of the safety check-in page you can also let people know that you have resources to share or you can ask for help; things like that related to the event that you're doing the safety check-in for. So I had made a post that said, "Hey, if anybody needs a ride to the blood bank, if you need to get off the Strip because it's still blocked off, if you need to get back to your car, I have a car; that is something I can do; I can give you a ride." I had posted that and I was starting to get messages where people were like, "Yes, I could use your help." So Katie left to go to Summerlin Hospital and I started responding to these messages.

One of the things that I was noticing is a lot of people wanted to go to the blood drives, obviously. The lines were so long. They were so inundated. It was like four or six hours of wait time. So I had told people up front, "I can drop you off. You're going to have to let me know when to come pick you up because I can't stay with you." So people were starting to—I think that they were responding with a little bit of helplessness, like, "Well, I can't afford to be there all day; I have to go to work." But then all the guilt of, *oh, I can't even stay and give blood?* I think there was a lot of guilt that people were feeling because they were saying, "The victims need blood now."

So in hearing that I had been keeping my Facebook updated with the number to the Family Reunification Center, things that the sheriff was saying that people were following. So I was like, *maybe it's a good time to dispel some of these beliefs about blood donation.* A lot of people responded really well to that because I think that a lot of people thought, *I give blood right now and it's going straight to the victim right now*, and that wasn't the case. So I was trying to tell people, "It's okay if you can't go today. We can go next week. It might be even more

valuable next week." Things like that, which I promise is all leading somewhere. There was so much positive response to that post that I just realized people want so badly to do something. I think that people feeling powerless, like when faced with this really long line and now suddenly I can't go and things like that, I think that's just so unacceptable for people. So to have that information where it was like, *it's okay; you don't have to go today; you can go next week; you will still have helped*, was very powerful and very important for people to hear.

Another thing, a lot of people were giving blood. A lot of people were donating, which are both wonderful things. But as the sheriff said, "We are inundated; we are overwhelmed. We do not have the manpower or the resources to take care of these donations. The blood banks are overwhelmed with all of these things." They had to keep reminding people, *that's it*. But, again, when people are faced with feeling like, *well, then what can I do?* they start getting anxious. So one of the other things that people do is they start praying. They have vigils. This is something that helps them feel like at least they've got that solidarity, the camaraderie, at least maybe they're sending well wishes; they're doing something. I noticed that as it started turning into evening, a lot of vigils were popping up, these events to have the vigils, which, I think, again, is absolutely wonderful, but I also recognize that in the wake of something like this, maybe being in a crowd or being around that much sadness can be really triggering for people. So I just made another—this is all being on Facebook—another status that just said, "Hey, if you couldn't make it to a blood drive, if you couldn't donate something today, if you just need to talk, if a vigil is just not your thing, whatever, let me know. We'll go get dinner and we'll go get a drink and we'll just talk." That was all I said.

Katie came back because she was done with her shift now at the hospitals and she said, "We really should have a get-together. We were in social work. We should find our friends who

have since become therapists who at the very least have an empathetic ear. We should have a get-together." So that's really how it started. I was like, "That is a great idea, yes, a hundred percent." Again, you can stop me. I'm just talking and talking.

No, this is what I want. Don't self-sensor yourself. This is great.

So Katie had responded and she said, "We really should do that." And I said, "That is a wonderful idea." So I made another status to just say, "Hey, all of my MSW friends, all my MST friends"—marriage and family therapists—"anybody who's got counseling experience, if you want to help out, if you've been looking for something, please get ahold of me. We're trying to put something together." It was like lightning after that. Everything went so fast after that. What started as this idea of us just having a get-together where people could talk to each other grew exponentially. We got this whole event together in less than four days.

The first was Sunday, so you're talking about your work really started on Monday, the second.

Right. Yes, the second at night. Then Friday was when we had our event. So it was that fast. At the University of Nevada, Reno, I had been president of the Queer Student Union there and one of the members was still friends with me on Facebook and she saw that call out. She was like, "Hey, I became an MFT at UNLV and I am part of a group that is of MFTs and I would love to put this in the group." Because that page would have been private. And I was like, "Yes, please go, yes." Her name was Shara. She put that up and I just started getting all these messages from people. *I want to help. I want to be there. I want to do something. I am an MFT. I've been a therapist for twenty years.* It was just incredible, just the range of even experience of people. There were some people who were still interns and they were like, "I want to help. I don't know if I'm allowed to help." Because you can't technically say you're a therapist or providing therapy

if you're not licensed yet. But then we had therapists who not only had been licensed therapists for decades, but they also were credentialed to be able to be supervisors of interns. So they were like, "Absolutely bring them along. They can get hours." It was amazing.

One of the therapists in that group was like, "I would love to help out. I can't be there. But I do have a connection at First Friday at the Arts Factory if you guys are looking for a space." Because, of course, we were looking for a space. At first we were like, *oh, we'll just all meet at a bar*, but now it's growing and we need a space. I was like, "Yes, wonderful." I talked to her. Her name is Christine Espicito. She's the director of the Arts Factory? I'm not completely sure. She's a very important figure over there. She was like, "Absolutely, we'll find you a space." So she ended up donating this huge gallery room—two rooms, actually, that are connected to each other. She was like, "You guys can bring your therapists there. That would be wonderful."

Then another therapist in the group, same thing, "I really want to help. I can't be there. But I have a connection at Zappos." So we talked to Zappos. Zappos lent us all the furniture from their marketing department and they brought it over in a truck and all the guys unloaded it. I'm pretty sure Zappos gave the marketing department a half-day off because they were like, *we've got to take all your furniture*, which was awesome.

Another person—I'm forgetting the company, which really makes me sad—but another person's company, they did dividers and curtains and things like that for conventions in town. So they came and they brought some of those dividers so we could cut up the space and have private areas for the therapists to sit, which was wonderful.

I had a friend who is a manager at Wal-Mart and she was able to get us this mini succulents so we could make the space look a little more homey, like a therapist's office. Then I sent the succulents home with everybody who had volunteered to help, which was so wonderful

because now you have this growing living thing that is this reminder of this wonderful thing that you did. That was great.

Anyway, all these things over those couple of days all started coming together. Some of the therapists donated tables and canopies so that we could have a check-in area outside, which is really good for privacy and for keeping things calm and quiet upstairs where you actually went to go speak with some of our therapists.

Office Depot donated all of the posters and the fliers and all the little things that we put on the table to designate the section, things like that. They donated all of that. All of that was designed by another friend of mine from high school who now lives in Arizona. She was like, "I want to help. What do I do?" It was like, "You can design these fliers for us," and she did. Within two hours she had these designed. It was wonderful. It was amazing.

I don't think it would have been possible if there weren't this huge thing that had happened that was inspiring people to want to help. If I just tried to put together a counseling event right now, I don't think I could do it in four days. It was amazing. We had this check-in station downstairs.

Was it actually located at the Arts Factory?

At the Arts Factory, yes.

On the second level?

Right, yes, during First Friday, which I don't know if I have to explain what that is for the recording.

No, we're good with that.

Then the check-in was just outside the Arts Factory downstairs. We had obviously lots of signs saying, "Free crisis counseling; this way." So then we had that check-in area downstairs. Then

we would text one of the therapists upstairs to say the first name of who was coming up. Then we would tell the person the first name of the therapists. Then we had somebody at the door upstairs to make sure you got led into the right section. So that was how that got worked out. Also, we kind of knew that not everyone is just ready to talk especially so soon after. Again, the Friday, it's a little less than a week, but it's a couple of days. I guess I could see people being like, *I'm done being sad; I'm going to go out and I'm going to go to First Friday; I'm going to get out there and I'm going to do this*. But then when you get out in the middle of the crowds, all of a sudden you're like, *I don't know want to be here anymore*. That moment, you didn't expect it, but it happened. For those people, obviously they could go to the crisis counseling. But if they also didn't want to talk, we had these boxes set up and people could write what they were thinking or feeling whether just in that moment or what their experience was or something they wanted to say to the first responders or to the victims or the families. Then they would place it in the boxes and that was completely fine. No questions asked. If you wanted to do that instead that was good. So we had that set up as well.

I think we were there from the time that First Friday opened, which was about five, until they closed, which was about two a.m. We had a lot of people from—I mean, not a ton, but people who had a big range of experiences, from people who were actually there to ones that were supposed to be there and weren't to people who just happened to be on the Strip and picked up the people who were fleeing in their cars. There is just so many stories. Obviously, I wasn't privy to the details. I think that it was really hard on the therapists, but also that was their job. They all said that they just felt like they had done something; that they had helped.

So it's all anonymous.

Yes.

The therapist, it's just a first name of the person who is talking to them.

Right. We told them, "You can make up a name if you want to. We won't tell anybody."

Do you know about how many people you helped?

About how many people ended up coming up to speak? Throughout the night I think it was only about seven, so it really wasn't that many.

But you were prepared.

Yes. I think we had like twelve stations up there, so twelve people could be up there at a time.

We had the noise-canceling little machines all over and all this food was donated. People could come up and they were offered food. It was cool. I think probably only about seven people ended up coming up. Some people signed up and then I'm not sure if they got lost because the signs were really clear or if maybe they changed their mind, but I think we had twenty sign up and I think about seven came. Again, no questions asked. It's understandable.

If you reflect on this, you were helping those that needed to do something. It wasn't just about the people who needed to talk, but for the people that made this come together.

Right. That was really the thing. When I was trying to take people to the blood donations places and they were so frustrated, I think it became really clear that I was like, *wow, people really need to do something*. I can empathize with that, A, because that was my very first thought when I woke up, but, also, my best friend had been in the Aurora theater shooting and I lived in Nevada and I just remember being, *there is nothing, there is nothing I can do*. You go through a range of feelings; I'm mad, I'm sad, just all these things. I just image there were plenty of people who were like, I want to do something, but on my own what can I do other than give blood or donate food? The city was inundated already. Yes, that was definitely a hugely important aspect.

What happened to your friend from Aurora? Were they injured in that event?

She's okay. She's still dealing with the PTSD, but she wasn't shot. She was trampled, which was actually pretty terrible.

That would be terrifying.

Yes. Can you imagine?

Yes. Each incident is dreadful in and of itself and, as you say, that heightened it for you knowing someone.

Yes, absolutely. I definitely felt like, *I remember that feeling; I remember how helpless I felt.*

What did you learn about yourself from all of this?

Two things. I always wanted to get out of Las Vegas. I didn't want to have to be here. I didn't like it very much. I loved my high school. I loved LVA, but other than that all I wanted to do was get out. I think I felt that Las Vegas is such a transient city that there is no community here. I was just completely, A, blown away—that's something I learned about the city—blown away by how tight-knit it is, how much people stepped up and were like, *no, this is our city; we're stepping up to support it.* I would have bet money before that none of that kind of response would have happened and it did and that surprised me. I think from that surprise I was surprised by my own fondness and defensiveness of the city afterwards. Some people were flying to Vegas and they were making a comment this last trip when I was coming down for Christmas and they had said something offhand about how, oh, thank goodness there was that huge shooting because their hotel room was cheaper because of it. It was just this moment where I was like, *I can't believe you.* I feel like the old me maybe not let it roll, but wouldn't have been so immediately like, *people died. It was a horrible event. Don't trivialize it.* That feeling of wanting to jump to Las Vegas' defense is very new for me that I wouldn't have felt before. That was something I learned about myself.

Then also I think it was really good for me to know that for me as well being able to do something where it was like, I'm not a licensed therapist, so I couldn't have provided any of the therapy. I guess it was really good for me to be able to be like, but you know what? I can community organize.

Obviously you're successful at that.

That's what I can do. I can do that. I did something and I helped. That was a good moment. It was good to know, okay, in a crisis event at least I can community organize.

Had you ever done anything like that before? What did you draw upon?

I'm very lucky because I got my master in social work. I have always had more of an interest in sort of the macro policy level of things and part of learning that is, how do you get people rallied behind a cause, and so I think a lot of those lessons really helped me out. I think having my degree in social work was hugely beneficial. I did my internship with the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada when I was in my undergrad and they did tons of community organizing. When I was the president of the Queer Student Union, we had so many events. I was lucky that at that point I had done a couple of things to help me understand what is going to be needed to put this together and I was just so lucky that so many people were like, "Oh, I have that thing that you need," or, "I can do that thing." It was like, "Great, come on down; come help us out."

And you're how old?

Twenty-nine.

You're part of that millennial group.

Like I said, all this was thanks to Facebook. I just put this stuff up and having everybody just being connected on Facebook, it worked out.

And because of the social media aspect of this.

Yes.

Are you still in touch with that group?

Yes.

How does that perpetuate or does it sustain itself?

A couple of the therapists have reached out to me and they were like, "That was so great. I can't believe we did that. That was wonderful. I would really like to keep doing it. Can we have more free counseling events now?" You can just tell that they're very excited. We stay in contact because I don't live in Vegas and I'm trying to pass the ball on to other people to keep going. The Arts Factory is still interested in doing that. Just having these separate entities, these different parties that I was reaching out to make sure this would happen, now I'm connecting them to each other so they can keep making it happen. Does that make sense?

Yes.

I think social media was great for that because I was like, *oh, I don't really have any other contact information for them, but here they are on Facebook; friend them.* So that's been awesome and it's great to see these people who I had never met before, now I'm friends with on Facebook, and see their lives and what they're doing. There were some of the therapists who took their kids down to the memorial and it was kind of like, *oh, I wouldn't have seen that; I wouldn't have known that; that somebody in the community was doing that.* Other than just vaguely assuming somebody was doing, now I'm seeing them doing it. So it's been cool.

I'm curious. Is your grandmother still alive?

No.

I was wondering what her reflection would be looking at what you were doing.

It would just be like, "All right. All right, Becky." That's my mother. "I suppose that this worked

out."

Vegas is a community.

Right, exactly.

What happened to the boxes where people wrote?

Oh, God. Sorry. We had a connection to a mini publisher and we were going to have them all put into a book for first responders in the hospitals because Katie had that connection to the hospitals. My dad, not knowing what they were, threw them all away. I was like, "Oh, God." It literally made me sick when he told me and I had to really take time and step back and think about it and just realize that that was such a loss, but at the same time at the very least it did serve its purpose of letting people do something. They wrote out their feelings; they were able to do that. So even if they're gone now, they still served the biggest part of their purpose, I guess.

Did you read them?

I didn't. We made them in a way that the person who was filling it out would see that they were meant to be quite private even though they were told up front, "These may go into a book." It's not like they weren't meant to be read. But we wanted to make sure they didn't think we would be sitting there all night just pulling them out and looking at them. Also, there was another individual that was a few nights after our event that we were going to take the boxes to, and so we kind of kept it all together. I never did get a chance to go in and read them.

How far after that event of that First Friday did you return to New Jersey?

Maybe a week, about a week later. I was there for that week getting everything together and I was there about another week and then I went home.

How did your friends back at Rutgers, or however your world is arranged now, how did they react when you came back?

How do I word this? I think it was a little bit of surprise or something. There was something sort of impactful there where it was like, *oh, this was closer to me than I thought*. Because they're in New Jersey; that's across the country. But then they're like, *oh, I know somebody who was there*. I think they were a bit surprised at how close something like that could be. Even though it's about a community, it has such far reaches. I think that was probably the most common thing was like, "Wait a minute, you're from Nevada? Wait. You were there?" I had friends that had tickets that night and they didn't go and they had written on Facebook just hours beforehand how upset they were because their friends bailed so they couldn't go.

Katie, in her triaging that she was doing, one of the people she talked to was the woman who checked in the shooter at the Mandalay. Her thing was like, he had these be bizarre requests. He wanted to be able to see the festival at all times. But it didn't strike her as weird because he was a high roller and you kind of get bizarre requests from the high rollers. But it's like after the fact, now she's blaming herself. *How come I didn't have these red flags?*

To go back to what you were saying is that I'm already surprised that I was as close to it as I was for not being there. Here are these stories that are so close to me that are close to it and I think that that kept carrying on to my friends in New Jersey. The degrees of separation were so much fewer than I think they thought it could have been.

I found myself—it's interesting. I don't usually interject my own experiences.

No, please.

But on this same thing—and I don't want to forget this—is that I traveled a few days after October first—I'd have to look at calendar—because my mother passed away.

I'm sorry.

So I was en route. It was okay. That part was a blessing, really. But I was in the Midwest

and people knew I was from somewhere else. I found myself after the first time of saying I was from Las Vegas, I would just say Nevada, but it didn't matter. Just saying Nevada, their tone of sympathy and empathy and wanting to reach out and make you feel better was amazing.

Yes. That's very true. That you say that, that is so true with how people reacted to me. The amount of sympathy almost felt like I wanted to be like, *oh, I wasn't there*. Like, *don't worry; it's okay*. But, again, it goes back to *I just want to do something* and I think there was a feeling of just such sadness and I wanted to be able to express the sadness at least to somebody who is vaguely connected to it. It kind of became sort of that...I think caretaking is too strong a word, but letting them have that moment of being, *this was awful*. You're right; it was. You can talk to me about it.

It was a shared experience. We do all lose some part of ourselves—

Yes, very much.

—when we think about each one of these events like this, which leads me to one of the questions that we do ask everyone just out of curiosity more than anything. If you had an opinion about guns and gun control that prior to this event that changed or didn't change? Or your love of country music?

I have always liked country music. It's interesting. Again, my degrees are in social work, so I think that we kind of all in that field have this shared feeling of, *my gosh, we need to disarm this country; it's out of hand*. When you're trying to prove that you can be a very rational person to the other side, you try to give these olive branches or something. I would be like, "Well, I don't think I'm as anti-gun as most liberals." That was my thing to kind of do the olive branch. Now it's kind of like, "No." I think I'm a little bit more willing to be honest about my feelings now

when I'm talking especially even with conservatives because I do that a lot. I'm always talking to the other side. Being able to be like, "I think, though, that we can agree that automatic weapons, it's unnecessary." Whereas before I probably wouldn't have been so honest about that. So that's definitely a big one.

I have noticed a change in some of my more conservative friends because I think that they really feel like it really touched their community. Country music is—I can't say for a fact, but I assume is probably more widely consumed in conservative areas. I really noticed a change with some of my friends who are like, "Okay, maybe we need a few regulations. Maybe we can draw a line with automatic weapons." I thought that was really interesting to see that social opinion start to turn. I don't know if that's going to lead anywhere.

None of us know that, do we?

I know. But it is interesting. It did sort of feel very much like that line in a history textbook where it was like, *the nation was harshly divided and then this event happened, this terrible thing, and that was when the tide started to turn*. It kind of felt like that moment. Whether or not that's true, that's how it felt.

For sure. Your family that lives here, how did they react to everything that was going on?

My parents were out of town and they didn't have cell service. I had been trying to tell them we're all okay, but, of course, they got the news before they heard from us because they didn't have cell service. They actually didn't come back until after the First Friday event, after the free crisis counseling event. I think they felt a bit of whiplash or something that this huge thing had happened and they kind of walked into the dust settling. I don't know that I've got a good descriptor word for whatever that feeling was and obviously I'm not them, so I can't speak for them. But I did notice that it was kind of like, *oh, oh, this all just happened; I wasn't even here*.

For one of my sisters, she's got a family. She didn't even know that anything had happened. She was so busy chasing after the kids all day. So she was like, "Why are you calling me insistently?" I was like, "Are you okay?" She was like, "Why would I not be okay?"

That's interesting, too. It might not sound very tactful to say. But it's a reminder that, wow, life just keeps going, doesn't it? My parents came back from their vacation; they went to work. My sister was just chasing her kids around all day, hours after this horrible thing had happened. They didn't know the difference; they're toddlers. I was like, *wow, that's crazy; we all just keep going.*

That's the way grief is.

I know. Yes, it's true.

It really is. Any other stories or anecdotes you'd like to share with me about this terrible event and your experiences? You mentioned some really interesting people. If you find that any of them would be interested in participating in this project, I'll give you some of my cards to share.

Yes, please do. I would really like it if Katie would talk to you. I asked her to come today and she said she wasn't going to be able to make it. I think that she heard so many things that maybe she is in a place right now where she's like, *I don't want to go back to it*, if that makes sense.

Absolutely. This project will continue for quite some time. I would think sometimes—and you probably know this—that you have that immediate reaction and then you have that time when you become more philosophical or it settles and you get other lessons learned from tragic events as time goes on. We can see people even coming back and saying, "I'd like to add to my interview."

Yes, or amend a statement or something that I've learned since or thought about.

I think it's interesting, too, the connection to other events, like you mentioned Aurora. Somebody I talked to recently was in the Denver area when Columbine happened. The repetitiveness of these episodes gives us pause if they're closer to us or if we're closer to them.

Like I said, when I was in and out of sleep when I was first hearing about it, my reaction was kind of like, *oh, here we go again; oh, another one*. Which is weird. It's like, wow, maybe we're all a bit desensitized at this point. But it's interesting how much that feeling, that sentiment changed as soon as I was aware, *oh my gosh, this happened here*. That shouldn't be what makes you care more, but I think that my feelings definitely changed to where it was like, *oh, this is a big deal and I need to do something now*, very much.

It seems pretty normal, human.

I suppose. Unfortunately, we're all human.

Anything else?

I think that's it. I feel like I've talked a lot.

I thank you very much. I appreciate this tremendously.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]