

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTY MCGIRL

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FEBRUARY 21, 2018

REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

Today is February 21st, 2018. This is Barbara Tabach and I am sitting with Christy McGirl in her salon.

Christy, would you say your name and spell it for me?

Christy McGirl; C-H-R-I-S-T-Y, M-C-G-I-R-L.

How long have you lived in Las Vegas?

Thirty-five years.

Pretty much a native.

Yes.

The purpose of this interview is about Remembering 1 October. You're a big country music aficionado, I know.

Correct.

Have you always gone to the Route 91 Festival?

I have not missed a year. There's been three years; I attended all of them.

You were there on October first. How had that weekend been for you?

Fun, what I can remember of one of the nights. I took it easy on the next two nights so I could enjoy the live music. Very crowded. It's gotten more popular as the years pass, so it was a sold-out event this year, in 2017.

It's always been at that same location?

Yes.

If you can describe to me what transpired on October first for you that would be great.

The end of the day? Because all day, you hang out with your friends, you dance, you listen to good music, you venture between the two different stages. They had a main stage and a smaller stage for smaller acts. A couple of our friends had gotten into a little bit of an argument, a

couple, so they had left, and a couple of our other girlfriends wanted to be right up on the stage for Jason Aldean. Me and my boyfriend kind of held back a little bit so we had room to dance while we listened to music. Unfortunately for my friends, we lost them and decided to go home early.

You weren't there when the actual shooting occurred.

I was not. I left about forty minutes before it all happened, during the break between Jake Owen and Jason Aldean.

How did you hear about what was going on or when did you hear about it?

I heard about it because our phones were buzzing while we were sleeping. About twelve, twelve fifteen, my boyfriend told me to check my phone because I had about thirty-five missed calls and text messages, people calling to check on me because they know that I was there. One of my friends text me, "Turn on the news," the one that was at the event. That's when we turned on the news and at that point they had already had announced twenty-two people had died already. But I didn't have a clue until someone woke us up calling our phones because we went home early and went to bed because it was a long weekend.

How did you find out the status of your friends that had been there?

Right before I went to bed my one girlfriend had text me, "We're all good," which I took that as she was home because I had no idea what was going on, and once I turned on the news I figured out that's what she meant because she's the one that sent it. I said, "How was Jason Aldean?" And she sent me a text that said, "Turn on the news." But I didn't get that text until after midnight because I turned my ringer off and rolled over and went to sleep. That's when I figured out what that text message meant. It wasn't she was home and good, because we always check in with each other when we leave somewhere and let each other know we got home okay. That's when I

figured out she was fine. I just turned my ringer off after I text her. The other ones I knew had gone home. I had a couple other friends there, but they had already called me to check on me, so I didn't even have to worry about them because they were already calling me.

Were any of your friends injured?

No. Besides scrapes and bruises from running and falling and jumping fences, no, none of them were hurt physically, but they're struggling mentally and are in counseling, all of them.

How do they share that with you? What do they say?

They don't talk about it. They don't talk about it at all. I know the first day I went over and checked on my friend and she was struggling, but she really hasn't talked about it since. She doesn't really go out much, so I don't see her much. But I know that they all go to some sort of counseling sessions.

That's good. Did you feel like you needed any of that kind of assistance since you weren't there?

No. I have a different viewpoint of the event because I didn't experience what they did. I would have no problem going again because I didn't experience what they did. It's almost like it didn't happen because it didn't happen to me and I feel a little bit bad about that.

That's an interesting observation.

But, yes, I'm glad I wasn't there, but...I don't know how to really...I feel guilty that I don't have the same feelings that my friends do and I have no hesitation to go to any outside venue and this particular event again. I have no reservations about doing it.

Have you gone to concerts or something since October first?

Yes. That week, the following week I went to an outside food event right outside around the pool at Red Rock.

Did you in any way look at your surroundings differently?

No.

It really didn't have an impact like that, okay. That's good. That's honest. That's great.

My boyfriend and I went and we both said that none of our friends would be able to attend this event at this moment because, one, it is outside and it is surrounded by hotel and hotel rooms.

Him and I, we can't even image what their process would be walking around the same event with us. They wouldn't even think about going.

How about attitudes towards gun regulations; did that change because of the event, one way or another?

No. I think people if they're going to want to buy a gun, they'll find a way to do it. I don't think any regulation is going to stop somebody from accomplishing what they set out to accomplish. I don't think it's the hotel's fault for not checking on the room because I always put out the do-not-disturb. I don't like the maid going through my stuff. I don't think it's the hotel's responsibility. There's so many people walking in and out. To point the finger at the hotel not checking his room or not seeing he's walking upstairs with luggage that normal people would normally walk up with, I don't think it's fair.

In your job as a manicurist you meet a lot of different people. Do you have some third-hand stories of people who were attendees at the festival?

Just the friends that were there. I've talked to some people that have given me stories and they've given me a perspective that you don't think about, like the fireman. Even though he wasn't there, his guys were there. He wasn't on duty that day, but his guys were. The most interesting story you don't think about is his guys telling him the eeriest thing was in the field where they were organizing, the field of people who were injured and who were killed, all the cell phones sitting

on the ground going off knowing it was their loved ones checking on them.

That would be so eerie. I can't imagine.

Some of these guys now have an issue with just having their phone on and making the ringing noise; that they turn it on vibrate so they don't have to hear it because it triggers, I guess, a memory, he said, that brings all that back of the eeriness of the field and those phones ringing, knowing what those calls were about.

Let's talk a little bit about social media. How did social media play into the people who were attending the festival and dealing with the massacre and aftermath?

They do have something set in place on Facebook where you can actually go and check in at an event to let everybody know if you're okay or not. I was seeing a lot of people who I didn't even know were at the event that I was friends with on Facebook checking in, saying they were okay, and so that eases people's minds so they don't have to keep calling. They did the same thing when there was a hurricane in Florida. That's a nice feature to have so people can check on their loved ones no matter where they're at when maybe phone lines are busy. That's a good power of social media that was implemented for many different events.

I didn't see a lot. It's a forum for people to, again, keep people posted on what had happened, their experience. I have an old client, a friend whose daughter was shot while there. I didn't speak to her directly, but I got to follow her story on social media and see her journey from being brought to the hospital and her progress to rehab and all that. A lot of bashing.

Bashing of what?

That's where people say it's the hotel's fault. Everybody has their opinion on the response time, positive and negative. It's just a forum for people to vent. I try not to read too much of the venting stories, more of the progress stories of people who have been hurt and were in recovery.

There's a lot of groups that have been formed on social media. My main platform is Facebook. A lot of Route 91 survivor groups have been formed and they put on events. They have quite a large following and they get together and do support groups and time capsules. People have just bonded over this experience and have come together. All this is possible through social media.

I'm not part of any of the groups because I don't feel I can actually call myself a survivor because I wasn't there. I've been to one function with my girlfriend that was there, but I don't feel I experienced the same thing as them, so I didn't really participate in anything they were doing.

Do you get the sense that the Route 91 Festival will happen again this coming year?

I heard it was. I just don't know where they're going to hold it. But I did hear through the grapevine that they were going to do it again. We'll see. Usually it's announced in April.

That's around the corner.

I hope it does. I don't want something like this to ruin it. It's a fun event.

You have a daughter, so as a parent how did you handle this event? Did you talk to her about it?

When I was watching the news, she must not understand the severity of it because she kind of laughed it off. Until she actually went to school the next day and people were crying and talking about it—I don't know if any of her friends' parents were there; I didn't hear of any of them being at the event—but after hearing people being sad about, she's like, "Oh my God, my mom was there; she could have been involved in this." Then she went to her church group and when she realized how many people had died, that's when it affected her. She came home and she's like, "Mom, that was sad." I'm like, "Yes, it was very sad. It's more serious than what you were making it out to be chuckling at the news." Being in a room with—I think there were three thousand people that went to the church that she went to—and saw the masses and heard people

talking, that's when it hit her. She's like, "Mom, you could have been there." I'm like, "I understand." So she is thankful I wasn't.

I'm curious. A week ago the shooting that occurred in Broward County at the high school that killed seventeen teenagers and teachers, has she talked about that? The fact is our kids are being exposed to so much of this.

I know. She did not talk about it. She said she heard about it and it was sad. I got an email from the school talking about different drills they'll be implementing in the school and preparing for an event like this. But she has not talked about it. Again, this is the things they talk about in church. She goes every Wednesday. Who knows what they'll talk about this week? That's when it seems to kind of hit her is when she gets in a group with her youth group and they talk about it.

When she's sitting with her peers, they have an opportunity to think about it in a different context.

Right.

Anything else that we should talk about?

I wish I had more, but I just wasn't there.

You had plenty. The fact that you escaped before it happened has its own baggage, as you're describing it.

There's a little bit of guilt, but then I'm happy that I won't have to live with that.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]