

AN INTERVIEW WITH SERGEANT DENISE LUTEY

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

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**We decided this was the 27th of February, 2018. This is Barbara Tabach and I am sitting with Sergeant Lutey in my office at the UNLV Library to talk about Remembering 1 October. I really appreciate your time and your service and look forward to hearing what you can remember and offer here. I will preface this by saying I first met you when you did the active shooter presentation about three weeks ago, maybe, the one I was at.**

Yes, right.

**And then you did another one.**

A few weeks ago, right.

**In between, just give a little historic context, the Parkland, Florida shooting occurred where seventeen people were killed there. When I came to just observe part of your second presentation, I noticed that there was twice as many people in attendance.**

Yes, yes.

**We're in a very precious time and thought in remembering what has happened, and so I really appreciate your thoughts. I'd like to start with what you were doing on October first. Where were you and how did you learn about the shooting?**

I'm Sergeant Lynn Denise Lutey. I go by my middle name Denise.

**I told you to spell your name, too. I am whacky this morning.**

That's okay. My first name is Lynn, L-Y-N-N, but nobody knows me by that name. I go by my middle name Denise, D-E-N-I-S-E. My last name is Lutey, L-U-T-E-Y. I normally work as an admin sergeant, but I was covering shift that night for a sergeant who was out. I was working the night shift from seven p.m. to seven a.m. with the night shift officers, Officer James Cisneria, Officer Stephani Loffredo, and Officer Gus Estefan. Then we had an officer covering Shadow Lane, Officer Singletary. I think it was—and I'm probably wrong on the times because I don't

have the report in front of me—maybe around eight thirty, nine thirty, maybe, where I was getting reports of sirens and police cars rushing to the Strip. We're like, "Okay, what's going on?"

**The shooting started shortly after ten, if that helps you.**

Yes. It must have been a little bit after ten then that we're hearing sirens rushing towards the Strip. Then my dispatch called me to say, "Hey, we're getting reports of an active shooter." And around that time an officer was saying, "Hey, there's people that are coming."

We had only three officers and my first response was to make sure that the university campus is safe because we have the students on campus that stay in the residence halls. I had to make a decision as to whether or not to let officers go to the Strip to try to assist or to say, no, we need to stay here. My decision was to say, "Oh, no, we need to stay here and make sure that the campus is safe," because we didn't know how many shooters there were and we're not that far away from the Strip.

**You weren't getting any information yet from anyone else anywhere?**

Right. It wasn't too far along when we found people who had driven and were just looking for a safe place. The first family who came, we sat them in our police station.

**Where is the police station located?**

There is a couple of them.

**Where would they have been coming to?**

The first ones, they had just come straight down Harmon and they saw our police station, which is dispatch. We have a dispatch there twenty-four seven. It's the Public Safety Building. We escorted them into the office and said, "Okay, you're safe; you're safe here; we have you here."

**Just to give some geographic background, they're coming from Paradise or that direction?**

From the Strip, right. Yes, because there is basically a straight shot from Las Vegas Boulevard

down Harmon, east. We started with the one family and then we were getting people coming from all different directions. We were getting reports from the residence halls that people were coming there, and I sent Officer Loffredo because the people were so terrified they didn't want to—we were trying to decide where we were going to put them because we were getting people coming in. I had called our chief to say, "Hey, this is what's going on." Lieutenant Newman who handles events, he immediately got the Thomas and Mack open.

### **Who got the Thomas and Mack open?**

Lieutenant Newman, he immediately got that open, and so we started to transport the people to the Thomas and Mack Center. There was about ten people, I believe, around that number in the residence hall who didn't want to move. They were in their safe spot and they didn't want to move. I told Officer Loffredo, "Stay with them. Just let them know that they're safe and they can stay there. That's fine." The rest of the people were coming into the Thomas and Mack Center. I called Officer Singletary and had them come down to help search for survivors who might be hiding in bushes in addition to looking for in case there is any other active shooters on campus.

When we were letting people into the Thomas and Mack Center, in order to make sure that it stayed safe, we were patting them down. Our student security workers who also work part-time in other places, they stayed over until past midnight. They had classes the next day, but they stayed over to help us pat down the people and make it go faster so that there wasn't a huge long line. They were amazing.

People came in and started dropping off pallets of water from just community members that had heard and had heard that this was the safe place for people. They had heard; it came out on the radio. People came with pallets of water. People came with food.

**That's pretty amazing outpouring.**

The outpouring of generosity and love for the survivors, it just was absolutely amazing.

**Let me go back just a little bit. The first family that came, do you remember was it a husband and wife with kids, or how would you describe them?**

I would describe them as a husband and wife with an adult child and just basically saying, "Oh my God, I can't believe."

**Did they describe to you what had transpired?**

They described that they were in the area and had seen shots going on. They were basically terrified, trying to get away.

**Were they attendees at the festival?**

Yes, yes. Of the people that came, there were some that had some minor bruises, minor injuries. When we first started there was maybe thirty, forty people. When I got to one, she had an injury to her knee. There was a small gash, but it wasn't bleeding still. But I said, "Let's get some medical attention to it." For a while they would stay, but they would say, "I want to go where all the people are." So it was like, "Okay, you can go; that's fine; you can get up there." I kind of regretted that because by the time that the ambulance came—ambulances were very busy—so by the time they came, there was several hundred already there, and we're searching for this person who had an injury. The good thing was that the people saw medical there. "Anyone slightly injured, come see medical."

Our PIO officer, public information officer, responded, Detective Velez, who is now Sergeant Velez. Our chief came in and our assistant chief came in, so Chief Elique and Chief Green. They came and responded to help make sure that everything was going good. I got several calls from officers who were supposed to come in the next day. It was like two in the morning. "Do you need me? Do you need me?" It's like, "No, no, no, we'll need you to come in

to relieve us." Just the outpouring of support from—

**But your first call was to Chief Elique?**

Right.

**To let him know what was going on?**

Yes, yes. And Chief Green.

**Did you find people hiding on campus?**

The officers did find some people just kind of wandering, searching for a safe spot, so, yes.

**The Thomas and Mack got open and that's an amazing picture to imagine. What about your training prepared you all to use Thomas and Mack? Was that part of the protocol that was already established?**

Yes. They do have the Thomas and Mack set up as a response area through crisis intervention.

That's been the idea all along. It's one of those things where we do talk about, hey, in the event of a major thing that needs to be taken care of. Yes, the second I called the chief, he had already gotten that into motion; it went through Lieutenant Newman.

**What kind of preparation do campus police or police in general go through in preparation for a mass casualty event or anything of a similar nature to what they experienced on October first?**

We do training, active shooter training; we do that type of training annually, but I know as a campus police officers, the ones especially that are working night shift, if it's quiet, then you just get together with your squad and just practice going through the buildings because each building is different. It has different issues or awareness issues to be looking out for. It's something that's ongoing that we do as part of—the sergeants make sure that happens. Officially, annually, we do active shooter training annually and we do active shooter trainers on campus. We also have

trained in the past with Metro SWAT officers.

Another good thing is that here on campus, at least, we know that the response is going to be huge when that happens because a couple of years ago we had the accidental discharge of the system. The good thing about that was it showed; we had officers from around the valley responding to try and help us. The system is designed to have the correct—what building it's at, where it's at. Unfortunately at that time, because it was a false alarm, it just said, "Active shooter on campus." *Okay, where do we go? Where?*

### **Where on campus, right?**

Right. The officers were just kind of like, *oh, no*. There was a panic alarm that went off at the preschool, and so everybody responded to the preschool. But the problem was that, of course, with such general information, everybody was calling dispatch to find out, *okay, where? Where? What do we do? Where do we go?* Dispatch was deluged with so many calls—it was eight hundred calls, I believe, in the first hour—that when the panic came in, they couldn't call to verify whether it was real or not, and it wasn't real. It kind of brought it home that no matter how much information we put out, it's going to be everyone's natural response to want to call and say, "What do I do?"

Part of this active shooter training, we've been stepping it up trying to get everybody to go to it and understand, hey, there is only those three—run, hide, fight—that we're going to tell you to do. Whatever information we put out, it's great for at that time, but things change. It's according to what you observe and what you can see as to, hey, do you hear shooting? Do you hear anything in any kind of shooting that's happening nearby? If you don't hear it, then most likely get the heck out and go somewhere; get away from the campus if you hear that.

Since I've been doing these active shooter trainings and I've talked with people about that

thing that happened, there is only one person that actually left the university when they got that response, who left the area. Now, I believe that it said, "Shelter in place." Now, I'm not blaming the people who didn't leave. But it's just a reminder to pay attention to your observations and not just what's in the instructions because the instructions aren't real time necessarily. There as real time as they can make them, but you're the one who's there. If you do not hear shots going off, but there is a threat that there is an active shooter in the area, most likely the best thing you can do is get away, run.

**We chatted before we started the recording that that was where I first saw you was at the active shooter training, which occurred about three weeks ago, so it was post-October first.**

**How many of those trainings do you do around campus?**

They farm them out to different people. I'm not the one who gives them. Chief Seta is back from his medical leave, so he's going to be doing them again, too. He's wonderful. If you are able to attend one of his trainings, I think he's better than me.

**I thought you were pretty wonderful, but everybody has to have that standard to go for.**

His full presence, he is a bit intimidating.

**What is his name again?**

Chief Seta, Sandy Seta. He'll say things like, [speaking loudly] "You're talking to me?" Just, *wow*. He just gives you that real...Any time that they offer the active shooter, I always say the more times you can attend it, the better off that you are. You can ask for detailed questions and it helps get you prepared. The more preparation that you have, again, not detail, just ideas of where you can go and what you can do, any time you go anywhere outside of your home that's your mind set is just preparation, looking around and being observant. It's not being paranoid, just being observant.



**Your mind must never be off duty.**

Right.

**As I've talked to your fellow officers, I hear that power of observation. Heavens, I was with a Metro police officer and this was way before October first. My recorder I was using wasn't plugged in; I was using batteries. He was telling me my batteries were going dead before I even paid any attention. The power of observation down to those minute details, I really respect that. I wish I could see that well.**

There are things you can do to help better your observational skills. I always recommend three books.

**You recommended three books to me. I wrote them down. Let me make sure I got them right.**

*The Gift of Fear. Fight Like a Girl...and Win.* This third book is *The New Superpower for Women* by Steve Kardian. That one has specific things you can do to help heighten your powers of observation because we all can do that; we can increase our observational skills. It has little things that you can do. When you go out and you're going through the parking lot, just count how many cars are actually occupied; that kind of helps train you to start being more observant. We can all do it. No matter how old we are, we can learn.

**Yes, the power of observation, I think that's great. At the Thomas and Mack that night, you're transitioning. You're the person. Let me just make sure I understand this. The picture I see is you're on duty. It's a normal, quiet night, not much going on.**

Right. It's Sunday night. You're just expecting just going around and checking buildings and making sure nobody is sleeping in them.

**The only thing irregular is the sound of the sirens shortly after ten o'clock.**

Right.

**You make your call and everybody starts coming in and falling into their jobs that...they're trained to do when they get here?**

Yes, absolutely. Therapists from the Student Rec and Wellness Center show up, just show up, to try to help. "Hey, we're here to help you, to make sure that you're safe." They're there at the Thomas and Mack talking to people, just helping them.

**Was that probably within the first hour or so?**

It was probably around midnight or so. People are sitting in the seats or laying on the hallways. People came and dropped off blankets, pallets of blankets for the people.

**And no request was sent out for any of that.**

No. They just came and did it. It was amazing.

**The people that were coming here seeking shelter and safety, how were you interacting with them, or were you? Describe that for me.**

I would just tell them, "Hey, you're safe here. We're here to help you." Because they wanted to go to a safe spot. They were just not able to go back to their hotel rooms and that made it very difficult. "I just want to go someplace where I can sleep." The Thomas and Mack is not really set up with beds. It was just like, "Okay, this is a safe space for you and as soon as we can get you to the next space, we will." Working with that, I know that the morning shift, they came at seven. We actually extended until nine, an extra two hours to make sure everything was safe. When they came on, one of the officers, Officer Torrey was describing to me how people just came and hugged her, just trying to be safe. "Thank you for keeping us safe." People coming and crying into her.

**Were people sharing stories with you or describing what they had left behind?**

A little bit, yes. They were running and people kept telling them, "Run this way; run that way." Nobody knew really where to go. Trying to keep them running. Some of the injuries happened where they're jumping over the fences and trying to get away, just somewhere away.

In the morning, trying to get all the buses there, I think we had almost all the buses that were coming to transport the people. It was by eight or nine that they were able to get to their places. People were still dropping off—

**Buses were organized, the RTC, they were organized to come and pick up people at Thomas and Mack?**

I know that they did come. I don't remember how exactly that happened, but I'm thinking Lieutenant Newman might have information about that.

**Chief Elique may have mentioned that, too. I'm curious for yourself on a personal level, how did that evening change you? What did you learn about yourself?**

We all knew that it was going to happen here because Vegas is the destination and we knew that something was going to happen. I think it just kind of brought it home to be much more vigilant around campus because with all the school shootings that are happening and the fact that this is an open campus and so we can't just say, you're not a student, you're not staff, you can't be here—

**It's a public university.**

Yes, it's a public university. People have the right to be here. It just depends upon the person's behavior as to whether or not they can stay here. It just reaffirms the fact that the active shooter training is so necessary. I think it opened our whole community's eyes as to rather than think I can live to be a hundred and everything is fine, I need to start looking and being observant and helping. That whole "see something, say something" is huge. Who do we say something to? Us,

the police. Let us help. Let us figure it out.

**Had you ever experienced anything even half as traumatic as that episode?**

No, actually. Working here, I would say it's the best-kept secret for any kind of law enforcement.

To work at a campus is the best thing because you get the best parts; you get to do community service; you get to talk to the students and the staff and that's your main thing is helping them, helping people. Yes, there is the occasional things that happen. We have had shots fired. We have had—recently—an abduction on campus, and that makes us so angry because we want our students to feel safe; we want our staff to feel safe. But, no, we haven't had that in our community.

**Well, I'm glad you hadn't, but now you have this experience. Do you have people come up to you and ask you about what's going on on campus or anything like that?**

Students are feeling frightened and concerned. We just reassure them, "Hey, we are here. We can be seconds away." Because we're always patrolling, walking the buildings, trying to let them know, "We are right here; feel safe in calling us because we will help you." It's hard because there are times when the media tend to portray police as...There is a lot when the shootings are going on. Trusting us can be hard for students. We try to share, "Hey, this is what we look at and the reasons why we do the things that we do." Our training is showing, okay, what is the person's behavior? It doesn't matter what their gender is, what their race is, what their sexual orientation is. What we're looking at is their behavior. We do our best to respond to make sure that everybody goes home safe.

**You do a good job. You mentioned earlier the student workers' involvement.**

Yes, yes, yes.

**Describe to me what those positions are and how they were involved during that.**

We have student security. I think that they normally are off by ten p.m., I believe. I'm not sure on their hours. They stayed until past midnight that day. They help with student escorts. They go out and help check buildings, too, to keep students safe. I know some of them work for the Thomas and Mack, too, for ushering and helping things. But their role that night was intrinsic to helping. They helped pat down those people to make sure that everybody was safe, and nobody had problems with that; everybody was completely understanding.

**At that moment you want to be safe.**

Yes, yes. They stayed until past midnight. It's like, okay, we need to get you guys home. But they were amazing.

**You mentioned counselors came within a few hours. What was done beyond that for the police officers? I'm curious about the student workers, if something special was done for them, because that was a young person in an extraordinary circumstance. Maturity helps us a little bit, or a lot sometimes; it depends. What about the mental healthcare of the different people that were involved?**

The university came out and offered all these wonderful counseling services afterwards and did a remembrance ceremony and continued to offer sessions. *Hey, come in and just talk.* The response of the university community was tremendous.

I know our president came under criticism because he kept the classes open. His whole thing was, we want students to feel that they have a place to go. It was just like, don't worry so much about teaching, but processing. *Hey, this is a safe spot; we're here to talk.* That was really the whole reason that he did that and I think it was a good decision.

**Yes, I agree. People do need to talk in that opportunity. I think we were talking about that, again, before we started the recording that discourse is helpful for the individual as well as**

**anybody.**

Exactly.

**How did you come to this career path? How did we get so lucky to have you?**

I began working for UNLV Human Resources back in '89 because my brother who works here said, "Hey, come work for us."

**He's works for the police, too?**

No. He works for UNLV. He worked for Human Resources. He said, "There's opening; go for it." So I did. I loved helping people. That's what I was doing with health insurance, helping people. It got to the point where I had seven stacks of paperwork almost as big as me and I was working a lot of extra hours, but not getting paid for it because state workers, you don't get overtime unless you're police. I was on the phone almost my entire time that I was working, helping people with their health insurance. They knew, *call Denise; call Denise*. Trying to get through all the stacks of paperwork, I was getting very burned out.

I was looking for any other job, just anything. The police officer position, they had openings all the time and they kept advertising and advertising. I was like, *I don't know*, because I don't like telling people what to do. I was like, *I don't think I could be a police officer*. I was just conversing with the lady who worked in Employment Services at the time, Trish Kalard, and she's like, "Well, you tell people what to do all the time. Health insurance has certain rules and laws and regulations and you tell them what they need to do." It's like, *oh, I guess I do*. She encouraged me and I put in my application and I passed the background, passed everything, and went through the academy. I did a really good job. I was valedictorian.

**You were valedictorian?**

Yes.

**You kind of let that slur through there. That's cool.**

I found out that I actually can do this. My focus is more on the helping people part. But if I need to step it up and put people in jail, that actually does help them because it can change your path. It can be a wake-up call. That's how I was able to transition.

**It shows here you arrived in Las Vegas or Nevada in 1976.**

Right.

**This was your home since you were about ten years old.**

Yes, since I was ten, yes.

**You've seen lots of changes. You've experienced personal changes.**

Yes, yes.

**As a campus police officer and all of that, what do you feel about Las Vegas and how we came through October one?**

Oh, excellent question. I love that question. I am so in awe of the generosity of the response from everyone. The lines for Red Cross for people to donate blood...I would have been in the line, but I was in Germany in '85; I've been mad gasses there; they won't let me donate anymore—but the lines were...Just the tremendous outpouring of response how the community came together to help without even being asked, it brings tears to my eyes. I love Las Vegas. I love the community. I love the university community. I think it shows that we're not just a city of transients who don't care about each other. When it matters we do care.

**It's part of the human story. What high school did you go to?**

Vegas High back when it was originally near Main Street. What's really cool is that my daughter went to the Performing Arts Center.

**To LVA.**

So it was the old Vegas. When I was taking her to school, I was like, "Oh my gosh."

**I love that school. My daughter graduated from there, from LVA. I think it's a great place and piece of history as well as the future.**

Yes, yes.

**You said you were in Germany?**

Yes. I was in the Army for four years from '85 to '89. My first duty station was in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

**Oh, wow. You were ex-military, so you had a foundation.**

The only reason why I joined was because of my brother; I followed him. He went into the Army and he's like, "Ah, this is cake," because he did admin stuff. I was like, *okay, what do I want to do? I'll be wire systems operator.* Well, that wasn't quite...He just had one formation a month where you get your paycheck and then he would just go to his job from seven to five or eight to five or whatever. Me, with my profession I chose, we went to the field every month where we would have to go and pack up our tents and put up tents. We had formations five times a day. I'm thinking, *this is very different.*

**You're interesting. Because this is an audio recording, visually you're a petite person. You have a very girlish voice. But when you did the active shooting training, you projected.**

**Now, is that something that came naturally to you? What about Denise allows you to transform yourself?**

I think it's all the training. Originally when I went into the Army, if I would have had to actually be in a war, I don't know how good I would have done because I was like, *I love this; money for college.* You get the training, but I don't know if it really sunk in here. It was here, but it wasn't here.



But then when I went to the police academy, that was very different. It was much harder for me. In the Army, they teach you how to follow orders. They do pull people out to be the squad leaders or whatever, but I was never chosen because that wasn't my thing. I said, "Okay, I can do it; I can follow orders." The police academy, they make everybody be a leader and they force that and so you have to make decisions and you have to do it. What I learned in the Army from here, I had to take it down here.

**When you say "here," you're talking about your head and then your heart.**

In my head and I had to bring it to my heart. It was very hard, but I was able to do it. It's one of those things that really works in careers. It doesn't work in relationships, but it does work in careers.

**We won't go there.**

No, we won't go there. [Laughing]

**That's great. Any other stories, any observations you had about others that you want to make sure we have down for this record?**

I was really impressed with my officers, the way that they just went out of their way to look for and find people and take care of their group of people. Officer Loffredo stayed with those people. When it got to be about two in the morning, I was like, "They can come here if they need to or they can stay there, but I'm going to ask you to start going back and patrolling because we want to make sure..." She was making sure that they felt safe. I was really impressed with all of their performances, and the officers who called in. I was just impressed with everybody who responded.

**It sounds like, if I read between the lines, that you feel like you came together as a team even tighter than ever before.**

Absolutely, absolutely.

**Not that you were dysfunctional before.**

No. And the command staff were immediately there and calling me. Before I could even call Chief Elique, Lieutenant Barry called me. I don't think I mentioned him. He was like, "Okay, I'll be right there." To let me know, hey, I'm supported; right there.

**You feel more prepared in the—**

Oh, yes.

**—unfortunate likelihood that something else will happen?**

Yes. It helps to know that, oh, yes, we have everybody and we will be there.

**Thank you very much.**

Thank you.

**Anything else that you want to share before I turn this off?**

I think that's it.

**I appreciate your time so much and everything you've done.**

Thank you very much.

**[End of recorded interview]**