

AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA HUTCHINGS

BARBARA TABACH

MARCH 21, 2018

REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

This is Barbara Tabach. Today is March 21, 2018. I am sitting in Congregation Ner Tamid with Jessica Hutchings.

Why don't you explain your position here?

I am the cantor, which is the musical clergy for the congregation, similar to a rabbi. I wear a lot of different hats here between education and spiritual roles and officiating life cycles. The list goes on and on. But I'm a clergy person.

I notice today you're wearing "No Place for Hate," the ADL T-shirt. I have that sign back in my office at UNLV. Is there any special reason you're wearing it today?

We're having the ADL Interfaith Seder this afternoon, so I like to sport my graduation when I'm doing ADL stuff.

Very good. How long have you been here?

It will be four years in July, so a little over three and a half years.

Tell a little bit about your history with the congregation. I think that's always interesting.

I was born in Southern California, but we moved here when I was in fourth grade; I was nine years old right before that started. This is 1993. We kind of popped around to different congregation, first to Temple Beth Am, which is now Temple Sinai, then to Temple Beth Sholom; my mom said it was too conservative for us. Eventually we ended up at Congregation Ner Tamid a couple of years before my bat mitzvah and I became bat mitzvah with Rabbi Akselrad, who is still here thirty years later, but my bat mitzvah was only twenty years ago. This was any congregation that I was very active in through high school until I went to college and moved back to California. When it was time for ordination and placement at a synagogue, this position happened to open just a few months before I was ready to graduate, and it all kind of led me back home. I've been back for almost four years.

You described your role as cantor as the—

Musical clergy.

—musical clergy, which I think is a really good way to describe that. What does that make you responsible for?

I'm responsible for everything that the rabbi at the synagogue is responsible for; the schooling is very similar. Our role is different when it comes to text. My knowledge is steeped in the history of Jewish music and the text through the eyes of music. His history is Talmudic, which is very deep into text study. That's where the difference is between rabbi and cantor. You can serve a congregation without a rabbi as a cantor; however, it's best seen as a partnership. Lots of congregations that are smaller have one or the other, usually the rabbi, and most congregations that are of larger size, from about our size to in the thousands, have multiple clergy, rabbis and cantors.

My role is life-cycle events, so [sigfizits], weddings, funerals, baby namings, bar and bat mitzvah. I teach the kids to get them ready for bar and bat mitzvah. I work with the preschoolers and I sing songs with them a couple of times a week. I have choirs that I run, multiple choirs. There is always programming stuff that I get to do to make sure that we're on our best game as far as what's new in Jewish. I do counseling, pastoral counseling for people that are in need. The list goes on and on.

It really does. It truly does. We're going to segue into October one because that's the purpose of this particular oral history, and we'll get back to your music through this conversation. On October one, it was a Sunday, how are you spending that day?

The day before was Yom Kippur, so holiest day of the year for a cantor or a clergy person, the most exhausting day of the year. It ended with a break the fast and I got on a red-eye flight to

Miami, which normally I would not do, but my husband was working for FEMA after the hurricanes. He had gone from Houston to Miami and I hadn't seen him in five weeks. I decided it was really difficult during High Holidays to see him, so I'm going to go see him, but I have to be back in time for Sukkot, so I'm going for twenty-four hours. I got on a red-eye, saw him for a few hours, saw some family in Florida, got back on an airplane on the first of October, one October. My flight was about an hour and a half delayed and I was in the air. I had fallen asleep and I woke up about eleven o'clock. I was supposed to land, even with the delay, at ten thirty, and I thought, *this is strange. I've flown so many times. Why are we so far off our estimated arrival?* I kind of sat there worried. Then I hear the pilot on the loud speaker say, "Something's happened in Las Vegas. We've been circling the airport. We're running out of fuel. We're going to land in Phoenix until we have more information."

So in 2018, you would think—it was 2017, but you'd think we had Wi-Fi; I could reach my family; I could find out what was going on. I was on a Frontier Airlines' flight, so not an upgraded flight, no Wi-Fi. My phone had thirty percent left on it. I was trying everything to try to get service in the air to find out, what does that mean that something happened in Las Vegas? Because that's very big. Once we hovered over Phoenix, I was able to get a little service and I reached my sister. She told me that she had been listening to the police scanner, which was not a smart thing to do because she was getting false information, and she told me there was multiple shootings and she doesn't know where it started, but stay in Phoenix until you hear anything else and she's staying with a friend.

So I started calling friends and texting and trying to get the word out that I was okay; I was on an airplane; I was in Phoenix. I was an hour and a half late; but if I wouldn't have been, I would have landed right when it was happening. It's always this question mark.

We landed in Phoenix and by then we had a clearer picture of what had happened. I was delayed a few more hours. It was probably one o'clock in the morning by then. Eventually got back to McCarran at two o'clock in the morning. Walked off an airplane just kind of shocked with everyone else. A lot of people from Miami had come for the week to spend and tour Las Vegas and this was their first taste. The kid next to me was turning twenty-one the next day and that's why he had come to Las Vegas. He was just in shock and I was trying to help him.

Because you had seen the news on television or how was that communicated?

Some people were getting it on their phones finally when we landed in Phoenix and there were some pieces of information already going out. I was getting it from family and trying to get a first account. When I got a hold of my mom, she said, "We just found out it started at the Route 91 Festival." I hung up on her. Then I called Dani McLaughlin, because I knew she was there because I was supposed to go with her and Brian. Before Jeremy took this job for FEMA, we had planned to go together. Then when she asked me if I wanted tickets, I said, "I'm not going to go because Jeremy is away and maybe I'll go see him after Yom Kippur." I was supposed to be there and I knew she was there, so I called her. She was hiding out in her office. I know you've already done her interview.

That's interesting how it ties in here. I didn't realize you might have been with her.

Yes. I was like, "I just want to make sure you're okay." She very calmly said, "I'm okay," and told me what happened, and said, "I have to go. I have to tell the rest of my family." So I think I was one of the first few people that she spoke with. I don't know. I think she was still very much in shock.

Going back to when we landed and what comes next, my sister said, "I think it's okay; I don't think there's going to be an Uber or any way you can get home other than me picking you

up."

By now what time is it?

Two fifteen, two thirty. She came to get me at passenger pick up. I was actually living with her at the time because my house was being built. We went back to her house and we just sat there in front of the TV, like, we have to do something. At three o'clock in the morning, your adrenaline is going. You don't really know who's been affected yet. How do we help? I think that's when the whole blood bank situation started. It hadn't really hit me that I'm going to have to be a clergy person tomorrow or today, however you look at the time. In a few hours, it's more than just my blood, I'm going to be needed in my role. That hadn't hit me yet. I was just a human being. How do we help? How do we jump in?

We ended up deciding the best thing to do was to go to sleep for a couple of hours. I think we slept until six thirty. At seven something in the morning, Rabbi Akselrad called me and said, "We have to figure out what we're going to do. I'm talking to the Interfaith Council. We're trying to figure out something. There's going to be a vigil today." Basically, get up; we have to do something. I said, "Okay, whatever you need me for."

The rest of the day was, how are we going to spiritually support this community collectively with all faiths and help heal a very broken, scared, damaged situation? It was just kind of a reactive mode. Even though I wasn't there, although it scared me to think that I could have been, I felt so much part of it because I was somewhere.

That is interesting that you were flying back that day and, in fact, that affected your travel.

Had you gone to the festival before?

No. But I really wanted to see that particular—I was going to go just for that because the rest of the festival was during Yom Kippur, so I couldn't go. But I thought, *I can go on Sunday and it*

will be nice; that's the big act, so it will be fun to go to that with some friends. That was the original idea. But Jeremy is the one that loves country. So when he wasn't going to be in town, I was like, I don't need to go.

I got you. It makes it a lot more enjoyable.

Yes.

You and rabbi and who else then decide what you're going to do next, your next steps?

I have to be honest, on no sleep it was a little bit of a blur. I know that there were a lot of talks with the Interfaith Council and building communities, and it was pretty quick that we made a connection with the Catholic Diocese. They said, "Meet at our office at eleven." Between that seven thirty and eleven, we were talking to the Jewish community trying to see, should we have a separate vigil for the Jewish community at large? So we called Rabbi Tecktiel and Rabbi Goodman and Rabbi Cohen and see if we should organize something together. Everyone decided they were going to do their own thing for their communities, so we decided to layer it. We had an idea of what time the vigil would be at the diocese for the entire community and then to have a separate one back here at home for our community, because we were starting to hear from congregants who were affected that they wanted some prayer time. I think going to the Strip was really daunting for a lot of people in that moment and that's where the Catholic Diocese was. It was a huge turnout, but our community wanted something separate here in Henderson.

But you participated with the Catholic Diocese.

Yes, we planned it together. At eleven o'clock, whoever could be there from the interfaith community showed up at the table and we began to put something together. At five o'clock we came back and did the service for about a thousand people.

That was on October second, so you really pulled together quickly. About how many

people showed up for that vigil?

It was around a thousand. They were pretty full in their space.

What was your role in that service?

I sang an opening prayer, an opening hymn, and I joined their musical leaders for a couple of pieces, the exact ones I don't even remember at this time. I just remember how sad and tired I was and something was driving me to keep going. My sister had come to that vigil and she said, "I don't think I've ever heard you sound so terrible." She's heard me so many times throughout my life, but I think between Yom Kippur and all of the—

Oh, you mean vocally.

Yes. But also the heaviness of that holiday, of asking for forgiveness and then you're supposed to feel this weight lifted off of you and all the sudden it comes crashing down, I just don't think that physically I was able to withstand much more, so I was trying to tap into every spiritual part of me I could so that I could be of strength to people because I was losing my own strength. That was a challenge. But these are the moments. I'm glad that my family is here to also support when something like that happens, and, most after all, that I have a clergy partner that we're each other's support so that we can be of service to the community.

I think that's really...I struggle for the right adjectives with this project, but it's very enlightening how there is a human side to every single person who participated in trying to be of service to others. It seems like a natural course. And yet you rise above it and you have the energy to participate in the service. How long was that service?

About an hour.

Then what came next for you?

Next was our vigil here. We did more of a Jewish focused vigil that was a lot like Yizkor, which

is a service that we do four times a year to remember those we've loved and lost. It was outside on our patio. It was a lot of young people. A lot of our teenage community was really shaken by this. I think there was a high school student that was maybe injured that was nearby here, or a teacher. I don't remember exactly who it was. But there were a lot of our kids that I felt were really connected to this. After the vigil, which was Monday, I had my seventh graders on Tuesday that I teach Hebrew school to. We didn't do prayer study. We first just talked about how they were feeling because I just felt this sense that they need to let out how this is making them feel that this has happened.

They're how old?

They're twelve years old, some of them thirteen. I brought them different prayers of comfort and peace and healing to examine, and then I had them go off on their own with just a blank piece of paper and a pen and write their own prayers, which I think was very powerful for them and it ended up becoming a song. We turned it into a song for the Vegas Strong in Song concert, because I didn't expect them to come back with something so heavy. They were really powerful. I still have them. I can send them to you.

That would be great. I'd love to add this to your narrative. That's the second vigil, here at Congregation Ner Tamid, on the third or the second?

No, it was the same day. We left the diocese and came here. I think it was seven thirty that we started that vigil. Now I had been going for forty-eight hours with a couple of naps in between or something like that. It was a whole day of, what do we do next?

About how many people came here that evening?

I would say we had about fifty. I think people were just so shocked that they were looking for something and some people were afraid. There were a few people that talked to us that said they

were afraid because they knew it was going to be outside and they didn't want to be outside with a group of people, which was really interesting. We still have a teen who struggles with that. She wasn't even there, but just the idea that this happened outdoors at a concert where you're supposed to feel safe and have fun, and now this sacred space under the sky, under the heavens is not sacred anymore; it's been taken away from her.

I hope she's getting some sort of help.

She is, yes.

That's daunting. Go ahead.

I was trying to think what came after all of it.

Of the fifty people who were here, were there any people who were first responders or at the concert?

The only people that were at the concert that were here—I really encouraged Dani and Brian McLaughlin to come. They're close friends of mine. I said, "I don't know what you're feeling right in this moment, but you should probably try and come." No one else spoke up that they were. People knew people who were there. Pretty much everyone you talk to knew someone that was there. I think first responders were still responding, so it was impossible. But later on there were more vigils that started to come. Actually I was wearing one of the vigil's T-shirts yesterday, from the MGM/Mandalay Bay vigil. I was one of the Jewish representatives for that. That one I want to say was the Monday following—yes, it was because I'm usually off on Mondays and I remember I had to work a bunch of Mondays after.

That would have been October ninth.

I believe so, yes. That was with the COO of Mandalay Bay and the CEO of MGM. Then Rabbi Mendy Harlig and I represented the Jewish community, so they had both spectrums, Chabad and

Reform Judaism. It was very scripted. It was very different than the other vigils. They wrote the service, they being MGM. I don't know if he's called the pastor or priest, from Saint Francis de Assisi in Henderson. He used to work for Mandalay Bay. So they together wrote the service and each person had just a couple of lines, but it was web streamed for all the employees. I heard from people I hadn't talked to since high school that said, "Your words were really comforting." It was really nice to watch that and be part of the vigil because...I was here that day; I was here that day...people telling their stories. I think it was comforting for people to have religious officials standing in front of them showing their support from every faith and every tradition. That was nice.

What was interesting about that night is Rabbi Mendy is a chaplain for Metro. So we decided to go down to the memorial at the sign and then also to the site of where it all happened. A lot of it was still blocked off. He had spent a lot of time down there right after. He was one of the first responders, chaplain-wise. He's like, "You should see this as a clergy person." We talked to some of the police officers that were there and kind of just paid our respects. It kind of racked it up for me not just as the clergy person that's helping, but as a human being to see everything.

Did you go on the site itself?

Not inside, but just on the outside, the perimeters.

I have interviewed Rabbi Mendy as well, so that's good. What did you learn about yourself from all of that?

I'm stronger than I think I am. There's a lot of people in my life that I consider to be my friends that actually view me in a different way than I view them, in the sense that they see me as a source of strength for them and I have to think about that more often; that I can't just be Jessica, I have to be Cantor Jessica even when I'm not looking, if that makes any sense. There were a lot of

people that were so shaken and made appointments in my office. I can go two weeks without seeing somebody for pastoral counseling and then I had a full list of people that wanted to see me that I just never really thought...I teach their kids or I sing with them or whatever, but I would think they would go to the rabbi just because he's been here longer and people see rabbi as that is their person that gives them counseling. But for some reason, I don't know if it was just the story about me being in the air or that I could have been there or I had friends that were there, my age demographic, something put me closer to it that I had a lot more personal visits. It definitely changed us all.

You're young. How old are you?

Thirty-three.

That's very young. In the scheme of life, you don't experience traumas very often. They're few and far and between, hopefully.

They feel like they're happening more often, which I guess is really the scariest thing that you just wonder—I think one of the things I'm going through, wanting to have a family and all this fertility stuff, it makes you pause and say, do you want to bring new life into this world? And then you think about it and say, yes, because they have the potential to change the world for the better. But it's also scary.

Yes, definitely. When you were in your education before becoming clergy, is that part of your training? Is there any preparation for a mass casualty event?

No. Rabbi Akselrad and I talk about that a lot. We've been going back and forth, I wish we had the time, to write a book on how to help other clergy in other places when this happens to them. I hate to say when, but I feel like it's inevitable. We reached out on the day of the vigil to our union and said, "What is there for us?" They sent us a one-pager that just didn't...It's helpful,

thank you, but there's no Siddur, no prayer book that says, "These are the prayers that you have for mass casualties; this is a prayer that you have for people that are victims of gun violence." It doesn't exist. We have to write it. It's not something that was anticipated.

I was trained in CPE, which is clinical pastoral education, but that's sitting at someone's bedside, which is difficult. I'm not saying it's not. But there's training; this is helpful if you do this and this is helpful. There was none of that for any of us, and I don't think there was for any other faith tradition.

It's a very difficult thing to reconcile because we don't have answers and there's definitely going to be unanswered questions with this particular event for a very long time, if ever, of what happened. That's interesting and I like the idea what I'm hearing you talk about and Rabbi mentioned that as well when I talked with him about creating something for others.

In some of the other aspects of this project, different professionals have said that they've reached out to other communities. Unfortunately there were shootings in the few months that's transpired, significant events that have happened. When it happened some of their peers called them that had been in mass casualty episodes in their cities. That's mostly first responders, medical field that I've heard that from. But I'm going to guess that didn't happen.

It did. I'm part of the American Conference of Cantors, which is the professional organization or some people would call it a union; that's what I'm part of. There was a representative who called me from there within twenty-four hours to see how I was doing, if my community was affected, if there was anything they could do. There wasn't a lot they could do, but it was nice to hear from them.

Two days later, I got a call from...I would call her a Jewish music superstar. She's been

pivotal in Jewish music in the last twenty years or so. Her name is Julie Silver and she's in Los Angeles. She called and said, "I want to do something. I don't know what it is. I'm putting the ball in your court. But if you want me to come, if you want my friends to come, we can do something."

I sat in this chair and said, "Okay, what does that mean? What do I do with that?" It occurred to me pretty quickly that music has the power to heal and let's put something together, before any of these benefit concerts came. We were one of the first that was to raise money for the victims. We were really reactive in ours. I didn't want to push it until November or December, like some of these bigger places did; I wanted it to be right away because my fears have come true that it's become an afterthought. So many horrible things have happened since then. The media moves so fast that a couple of weeks later, people weren't talking about it as much anymore and you hardly ever hear about it now. Even at our conference biennial where there's five thousand Reform Jews in one room, they mentioned us in the opening ceremonies in what the Jewish community did to help heal after this happened and then talked about Charlottesville and the places that were hit by hurricanes and all these other things, but what about Las Vegas? That was a big deal.

I needed to figure out what to do and I wanted to do something. It's kind of my DNA is I don't just sit there; I'll figure out something. One thing led to another thing and eventually we had fourteen mostly Jewish music artists that were from both around the country and here locally. We had put together this benefit concert called Vegas Strong in Song. I think we had six hundred in attendance; something like that. It was free, but we pushed people to give some donation for the victims and we raised about eight thousand dollars. We had people selling Vegas Strong jewelry and some other stuff, cookies and things like that to get the donations

higher. It was about monetary help for the victims, but it was also for spiritual support because music does heal. I had friends in places I didn't even know I had friends.

The only person I specifically called was Joe Buchanan who is just now making a name for himself in Jewish music and I've been following him on Instagram. I sought him out because I've been always wanting Jeremy to love Jewish music and he never really meshed with it. But then I saw Joe and it was country music and I thought, *maybe he'll like this. He's got the big beard and a cowboy hat and guitar. Maybe this will be more up his alley.* I've been following him for a while and he's the only Jewish Americana artist I know of. I called him and I said, "Because this happened at a country music festival, I feel like you need to be at this concert." And he came.

Julie Silver was here. Stacy Beyer came from Nashville, also a bit of country. We had Steve Dropkin. Joel Swedlove who used to work in town at Adelson Campus—he is a song leader—he came out from San Antonio. My local colleagues, Heather Klein, D.J. Sinai, Christy Molasky participated. I'm sure I'm forgetting people right now. Jeff Lebo participated. Corrine Hoffman, the opera singer, who was my voice teacher. There was a list of people.

Was there a program for that?

Yes.

Everything, I was unavailable for, so I regret that I wasn't able to come to any of the events because I like being supportive of everything you do and especially for this. If there's a program or any materials that you can—

There is. I actually keep the postcard. There's a dashboard thing in my car and I keep the postcard there with all the people that came to sing and perform, just as a reminder that that's one of the things that we did to help heal the community. When I couldn't be a doctor actually

stitching someone up, which is what I wanted to do in that moment, it was the next best thing, so that's what we did.

That was what date?

I'll email you because I don't remember off the top of my head.

Not a problem. What kind of feedback did you get from the people who participated, these singers?

Just wanting to help; that was just the big thing. The same way that I did, they felt helpless and they felt like this was a way that they could help. I was really grateful. Other than getting them rooms at the Green Valley Ranch, they came on their own dime and they showed up on our bema and didn't know what to expect. We had no time to rehearse together. It was pretty incredible. I feel like I owe them a debt almost. I want to bring them all back and do it right and pay them and have them here because it was just so incredibly kind.

The Tuesday before they came, my seventh grade class and I, it was Sukkot and we were in the sukkah and I was doing a lesson and I talked about the Kadesh and what Shiva was and what it meant to be in mourning and what the Jewish traditions were when someone has died. I talked about the stones and the weightiness of them and how we leave them at the graves. I had them paint fifty-one stones and we put them in a jar. Then after the concert I took all the artists to dinner and then we went to the sign where one of the memorials was and we left the fifty-one stones at the one Jewish marker, at the Star of David that was there, of the one victim that was Jewish, and we said Kaddish. I felt like that kind of wrapped up the whole trip for them in such a way for them to give them purpose. It was really hard for people. Some people couldn't do it, it was just too overwhelming.

It's a big concept, it truly is.

Yes, we teach death and dying to our students at that age in a very light way, as light as you can, and they start to learn Holocaust after that. But now it's totally different. How was I not supposed to talk about it? They're looking for ways to grieve and to understand, so why not give them traditions and things they can do they are physical? But it's terrible that I have to do that with a thirteen-year-old or a twelve-year-old.

It's significant and you have to approach it. It can't be the elephant in the room. Did you have to follow up with the Parkland, Florida shooting? Was that part of a follow-up conversation with these kids?

It's really interesting that you said that. I was in Cuba when that happened and I think they discussed it here. The rabbi and I were both in Cuba. We haven't talked about it very much since. The only thing that we did do, at the closest bat mitzvah to that I whispered to him, "We should mention the victims of that shooting and say Kaddish for them." And he said, "Go ahead, you do it." So I added that to the names. One of my students, Ben Schafner, he came up to me after and said, "I'm really glad that you said that because I've been thinking about it all week and that could have just as easily been our school." He's right. Cookie Olshein, who was one of the assistant rabbis here when she was going through school, it was some of her congregants that were affected by this, so it was just as easily them. There's a touchstone to everything.

Explain that connection again to me. Cookie Olshein—

Olshein is how you say it. I know the spelling in my head. Yes, I saw her post the next day that one of her students—

She's from Parkland?

It's not in Parkland, but it's near there. One of her students was one of the victims.

Orlando area or whatever it is. Oh, my.

Now that they're having this confrontation, I'm like, *I really should have reached out to her*. I'm sure she reached out to Rabbi Akselrad. So now I will. It hit her in a different capacity than us, but she's working with teenagers every day there, freaking out, scared to go to school.

Yes, sure. What were your feelings about Las Vegas as a community from this?

I was very proud. I remember that night when I finally got to bed at three thirty or four in the morning, I went to sleep proud seeing what I was seeing on TV; that people were already lining up at the blood banks. I was watching my Facebook feed and just seeing that there was an outpouring of like, what do we do to help? I think most Las Vegas residents agree that it's very hard to make a community in your neighborhood where you live. I always said it was because of the weather, because the weather is either too hot or too cold, so you just drive into your garage and you close the garage door and you go inside your house and you never talk to your neighbors. That's the culture I remember growing up here with. I always attribute it to people just don't care about each other in Las Vegas. I didn't have that in California; people were always outside. I think we just didn't know each other. It definitely was a different perspective. I am proud to be part of this community, and not just the Jewish part, but the whole community.

The whole city, it came together. There's a sense of community and identity with that for sure. Anything else you'd like to share? Any other activities that I should know about?

I don't think so. The concert was the biggest thing as a reaction. I just don't want it to be forgotten, so I'm glad you're doing this because I do feel like it's become part of history now in a way that it's going to be taught and not talked about like it's current and I feel like we're not even that far away from it, like five months.

Yes. It does fade. I think that's what we need to take care of ourselves, too, is to move on, I guess. But, at the same time, it's so massive and so significant. And that's what the gun

enthusiasts hope, I guess, without being too political here. How about your opinions of guns, do you have any? Did they change?

I do. I do. It's been ebb and flow through the years. We go to Missouri every summer to see my husband's family. They have a lake house in Branson. On one of those trips we decided we're going to go to a gun range and we're going to have a class with his aunt and uncle and learn how to do this because Jeremy was bothering me about wanting a gun in our house because he felt like he needed it for protection. I was like, "We can't have one unless I know how to shoot it." We went to this class and I found myself halfway through walking out, upset. "Why do I have to take this class? Why do I have to have a gun? I don't want a gun. Guns scare me." I hear what he's saying; it's not the gun; it's the shooter. I hear him. But why are you helping the shooter by giving him the gun? That was a moment where I was like, I'm going to finish this class. I'm going to shoot off a couple of rounds so I can say I did it. But I don't want this. If Jeremy is insistent, we'll figure that out. So far he hasn't pushed me on it. I just don't see the necessity. So many countries get along just fine without having to bear arms personally. I'm very, very opposed to it. I wasn't always very opposed to it, but I'm definitely very opposed to it. I think the first movie theater shooting was when I was like, why do we even have these things? We don't need them. There are people who are crazy and are using them incorrectly. Who is really hunting still? There's not that many people that are doing it, for that reason.

They certainly aren't hunting with AR-15s or whatever they're called.

Right. That used to be the argument; we want to use it for recreational purposes. But how many people are really going out in the woods and doing that and eating it? No. We go to the grocery store. We're just a different society than we used to be. I get why it was originally something, but now children are dying. The shooting that we had in Florida at the nightclub, it was just unreal.

Why is this happening? I feel like our government has the power to change it and they're not and it's infuriating. I'm proud of these kids that are walking out and standing up and I stand with them. I couldn't physically be with them on that one day that they did it and I can't do it this Saturday because I have a bar mitzvah, but I'm so with them in my mind and whatever else I can do.

I'll take you with me in spirit because I plan on being there. It's on calendar and I moved everything else so I can be there.

If I didn't have this bar mitzvah, I would so be there, but this kid's been planning this bar mitzvah for a long time.

Yes, you can't change that.

I'm sending my family because I'm like, "We can't. Something has to change." I'm not saying take all the guns away because I know that's not realistic, but there has to be something we can do to rein this in.

I think that is what is so frustrating about the shooting that was here is we have no explanation. You can call the guy crazy. Honestly I chose not to remember his name because it was this idea that he was such evil, why should we remember him? We should remember the victims and who they were. You kept watching the news because you kept wanting the answer. You didn't care who he was, but you wanted to know why, and we never got the why. You can call him crazy, but that doesn't help us in any way.

I just learned from another oral history that I did the other day that the shooter's family had difficulty getting someone to handle the disposition of his body, his remains.

Interesting.

I'm not asking your opinion on that, but it gave me pause. When you think about this...

If he was Jewish and someone called me to do the funeral?

Yes.

I've done funerals for people that have been known in life as not great people and it's definitely hard because the family usually has nothing good to say and you still feel like even in that case you need to pay your respects, but that's a hard one.

It is. It's one for philosophical conversation.

For sure.

It can't necessarily be the end opinion. It's just one of those things where you have to ponder.

Like you say, the basic prayers, but nothing personal, just do it because you're supposed to do it.

It's your job situation.

It's your job. Somehow or another you have to.

For me personally, every person that gets married, that has a baby, a family that I do a funeral for, it's all very personal and I put a lot of heart and soul into it, so it would be hard to just... You have to do your job for this person. But that's the way the world works, I guess.

Anything else you'd like to share with me?

I don't think so.

We went deep.

Yes. I actually had a story on this one.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]