

AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROL FREY

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MARCH 30, 2018

REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

This is Claytee White. It is March 30th, 2018. Today I'm with Carol Frey in her beautiful home in Henderson. How are you doing today?

Fine, thank you.

Wonderful. Carol, without you please pronounce and spell your name accurately for me?

Yes. It's Carol Frey; C-A-R-O-L, last name F-R-E-Y.

Thank you. Carol, where are you from? Where did you grow up?

I am from Seattle, Washington.

Tell me about life growing up in Seattle, Washington, your family formation and all of that.

My mother, her ancestors are all from Italy. My father, Norwegian. So that was an interesting combination. I grew up in Seattle and went to high school there. It rained all the time, but I didn't realize it when I was young because that's all I knew.

Did you carry an umbrella?

Oh, of course.

Oh, everybody...Okay.

Oh, of course. [Laughing]

What about kids outside playing, did you play outside in the rain?

We played outside in the rain and we did Halloween door to door in the pouring down rain; it was just the way of life; that's all I knew.

That's interesting. How many brothers and sisters?

I have one brother and he is retired commander in the navy, so he served his country for thirty years.

Does he live here in Las Vegas now as well?

No. All of my family is up in the state of Washington.

How often do you get to see them?

I go up there at least once a year, if not twice a year.

How do they feel about you living in Las Vegas?

That's kind of an interesting question. I think they see it as a town of glitter. They don't see the realistic life of what it's really like to live here.

When October One happened, did they get a feel for the way this city responded? Did people in Seattle know about the blood lines and the...?

They knew about it, yes, yes, but it wasn't nearly as intense as what we experienced down here in Las Vegas.

I just wonder if it changes people's impression about our city, if that helped to change it.

What do you think?

I have a very good friend who lives up there and I think it changed her impression. She is a big-time gambler, so when she comes down—I mean, I don't even know how to gamble. But I think it changed her impression because she was calling me quite often talking about it. It was very interesting. People up there don't really understand what it's like to live here, though.

Tell me what you were doing on that Sunday night, October first.

That Sunday night we had company. When I went to bed that night, I didn't realize that there were texts coming through on my phone; I slept right through it. I became active on the day after, which was October second.

Before I start that, what was your career?

I sold real estate here in the Las Vegas area for twenty-five years. So to go from selling real estate into doing this type of volunteer work was a big change-up for me.

Tell me how that happened.

I was sitting at a tea group that I go to quarterly with a group of ladies and one of the ladies at the table said, "I just started with this wonderful volunteer organization." And I said, "Well, what are you doing?" She said, "I'm a volunteer with the Trauma Intervention Program," which we refer to as TIP. I asked her what they did, and when she told me, I'm like, "I want to do that." I knew right away.

Tell me what TIP does.

What TIP does primarily is we work with various groups of people, primarily first responders in the Las Vegas, Henderson and Boulder City area and North Las Vegas. We work with police departments, we work with the National Park Service, hospitals, McCarran Airport, and they call us to respond to death scenes. Now, not all the scenes are death scenes, but primarily they are; that can be a natural death, a suicide, a homicide, baby deaths or any horrible events that happened, such as One October. We need to have the wheels rolling on our car in about five minutes after the call gets in because we need to get to the scene on a very, very timely basis.

Is there an example that is sort of a powerful example that stands out in your mind that you can use to show what you do?

Well, Claytee, there are several. Let me think. I think the ones that really stick with me that I can't really forget are the baby deaths.

What happens when you arrive at the home?

When you arrive at the home, you might be with the surviving, for example, parents; you might be with neighbors; you might be with relatives. Our main role when we go into a property is to make contact with them, maybe through touching on the shoulder, getting eye contact, asking them to talk about what happened. We are there to give emotional and practical support to the survivors. What we're trying to do is we're trying to eliminate having a second injury. A second

injury is by people coming in, well-meaning neighbors or it could be anyone, saying and doing the wrong things and that will stay on their memory tape in their mind for the rest of their life, so that's why we're there.

Tell me what the right thing is in that situation.

A lot of times it's not to keep talking, it's to learn to be a good listener. If they feel like talking to you, that can be very helpful for them. But if they feel like not talking to you for a while, that's okay, too. But we are there to also be an intermediary between the individuals that we're with and the first responders because many times they don't understand what's going on and they're very upset, and so we normalize the situation and try to explain to them why the people there are doing what they're doing, why the coroner investigator is doing what he or she is doing, why they have to wait, why they can't see their loved one yet, and so those are the types of things that we do on the scene.

I just think it takes such understanding and courage and insight and all of that to do what you're doing, so I really admire it.

Oh, thank you.

Tell me what happened on October second. When you got up that morning, what was that like?

When I got up that morning, I realized what happened, and so I contacted the TIP organization and they said, "We need you to go to a hospital. Will you go right now?" And I said, "Absolutely." So I got dressed and I went to Sunrise Hospital.

On my memory tape I remember pulling off of Maryland Parkway and taking a right into the area where I typically park and I was immediately stopped and cars were being told to turn around and leave. But we wear badges and when the gentleman saw that I was with TIP, he told

me where to park. When I parked my car and I got out and I walked towards the emergency room, it was one of those *oh my gosh* moments because what I saw was police vehicles, a huge police presence, like guarding that area, K-9 dogs, and it kind of took my breath away. I did go into the emergency area and there were more police and there were more security guards. They were securing the hospital. They said, "What are your needs? Why are you here?" So I explained to them and they told me where to go.

I found the area where I was to go and identified myself. At that point they gave me the freedom to walk the halls and to meet the people, and so that's what I did. They were bringing people up from surgery; some had already arrived in their rooms because it happened the night before. I made contact with their loved ones that were there.

So you went to the waiting areas as well where relatives were.

No. I was back in the individual rooms. I would go into the rooms and they might have a mother or a wife, or they might have some loved ones standing in the hallway next to the room. It wasn't the waiting area; it was right back. So I was making contact with all of those people.

What kind of things did you say? What kind of needs did you anticipate?

I will tell you some of the things I said and it was absolutely wonderful. At that moment we found out that there were airlines that were giving—did you know this?—they were giving free tickets to bring family members into town or they would fly people out of town for free. We had airlines stepping up to the plate. It was absolutely...It took your breath away.

We have a resource guide that we hand out with TIP; it's a little red book and it's just filled with information that they could use. However, almost everyone that I met was from out of state or Canada.

I remember one woman. She's standing out in the hallway. Her husband was shot and he

was in a room. They were hoping that he would make it. She said to me, "All I see is myself on TV over and over and over." One of the news stations had zeroed in on her. She said, "I can't get this out of my head. All I see is myself on TV and they keep rerunning this over and over." And I said, "Maybe you should stop watching the TV." That was one example.

There was one lady from Canada and she was awake. Her mother had come in from out of state. She was at the concert with her husband and her husband said, "Run, run, run," and so she ran and she got shot in both of her legs. The lady next to her died of a shot to the head. Now her husband felt awful because he told his wife, "Run, run," and she was the one that got shot and he didn't. But she had a sense of humor. She was very athletic. She said, "Well, I guess there goes my kick boxing and there goes my water skiing." She was a very active woman in about her forties. She found some humor in it and she needed for her husband to be okay with all of this.

Yes, because everybody was running.

Absolutely. That was her family dynamic, because her husband was very upset.

What could you do for the husband?

Actually I didn't do anything for the husband because he wasn't there, but what we did recommend to this woman was that when she gets back home that they seek family counseling. She was very coherent. She said, "We will be doing all of those things when we get back home."

He was on the telephone telling her this?

No. She was just relating the story about what happened the night before. Her husband had not arrived at the hospital yet. He was in Las Vegas. She was in the hospital, her mother by her side. Her husband had not arrived that morning yet. That's pretty much what happened.

I remember there was a younger man and he was sleeping. His mother was by his side and she said, "This is just awful." She said, "He served in Afghanistan and had PTSD. Through

counseling he was just pulling out of it and then this happens." I often think about them because that's really a tough one.

There was also a man standing out in the hallway and his arm was all bandaged. He was just kind of standing there. I remember him saying to me, "I told them you operate on everybody else first because my injuries aren't that bad. You just go take care of everybody else."

The other thing I noticed was these were all strangers, twenty-four hours before; they were bonding. Some of the people were going to another room and they were bonding and hugging people in the hallway. It was interesting to watch the dynamics of the people on the floor.

How long did you stay at the hospital that day?

Oh, gosh. I was probably there, I'm guessing, maybe six hours. I was there for a long time.

When you are doing something like that—this was probably really unusual—

It was.

—how do you stop to eat? Who takes care of you?

We learn when we're with tip on a typical call—this was not typical—that we would leave a snack in the car. But this was different at the hospital. Actually I didn't eat that day. But on a typical call, we would say, "I'm going to step away for a few minutes; I'm going to my car, but I will be back in about ten minutes." They don't know that you're going to grab something to eat or drink. That's how we take care of ourselves on a long call, but that day I didn't have anything.

Now, would they have wanted you to step away at some point; would TIP have advised you?

We know through our training when to step back. Sometimes if people are not receptive to you, we will stand back and we will be very quiet, but we learn to know when to go back in and to be

with them again. It's the art of hanging around. That's what we call it, the art of hanging around and not being intrusive.

I just love what you're saying. How long have you been doing work for TIP?

I've got some longevity here. I've been doing it—it was nine years in January, so a little bit over nine years.

In Las Vegas this was the first time we've had anything this massive and this tragic.

Yes.

What did you learn about yourself even though you had nine years under your belt?

It's kind of interesting. When you find out your trigger points, which is your aha moments, I learned that about myself, like when I went into the hospital, it kind of took my breath away. It took my breath away how United Health Services honored us.

Tell me about that.

We have a meeting once a month, which is mandatory; it's a continuing education [class]. And many times we travel around the city; they tell us where to be on the meeting night. The month after it happened, this was our first meeting. We were told to report to UnitedHealthcare out in the northwest section of town. Our meetings start about six thirty, so about six twenty-eight I hit the front door with another volunteer and we open the door. Claytee, I couldn't believe what I saw. I don't know how they did this, but they kept all these United Healthcare employees late at work. This is six thirty. They have families. When we open up the door, they had signs, all these wonderful signs saying *thank you*, and they started cheering as we walked through the door. It was...

Wow.

There were, I'm guessing, a hundred and fifty people at least. There were employees everywhere.

This woman, she must have been about ninety, ninety-two, and she was like five feet tall with this little pink suit, she came up to me for me to take her arm.

She was your escort.

Yes, she escorted me down this long hall. Then as we turned to go down this other hall, there were more employees cheering us. It took your breath away. So the community really was very supportive for first responders and it was their way of saying thank you.

Yes. Tell me who United Health Plan is.

UnitedHealthcare.

And why you were there for one of your meetings.

Because it turns out we were there because a former TIP volunteer from many years ago—and she was great—she marched into the CEO's office and said, "Hi, I'm with the Trauma Intervention Program and I think you should know about us." And he said, "What?" She told him about us. She got him onboard. He is very supportive of our organization and that's why he did what he did that night.

Wow. That's amazing.

The cool thing about it that I didn't know is my son, Cory, he sells healthcare packages to companies and corporations and that day he was out in the field and there was a woman who said to him, "We're doing a big deal tonight. We're honoring TIP." And Cory said, "My mom's with TIP." And she said, "It's a really big deal tonight."

He goes, "Mom, was it a big deal?" I said, "It was wonderful." So it was very nice. Then the CEO spoke to us.

Oh, I love that. You even found that you could be shocked and surprised.

Yes. You never know what you're going to run into when you go out into the field.

Good. You have probably seen more gunshot wounds than most of us. In these nine years and with October One, has your attitude about guns changed pro or con in that time period?

My attitude has not changed.

Are you comfortable sharing your attitude?

We do not have guns in our home. We didn't give our children toy guns to play with growing up, nor do we give those types of things to our grandchildren. That's just how we've lived our life.

I appreciate that. We've talked about how outsiders might see Las Vegas. Did your attitude about our city change with all the happenings around October One?

No, because I think we have a great city. I have met the most wonderful, caring and sharing, wonderful people here. No, my attitude didn't change. It's a great city.

I feel the same way. Is there anything else about the October One experience that you would like to share thinking that this is something that a person going through this nine months from here in another city someplace would read and get some comfort from?

Yes. When we went to our second TIP meeting after One October—and this also took my breath away—we had received a package in the mail, handwritten thank-you letters from students in Sandy Hook. Now, these students were now in high school; some of them were in the elementary school or their brothers and sisters were in elementary school, and it was their way of reaching out and saying thanks. When we got those letters, ooh, it was very emotional.

Oh, it had to be.

Yes. It was really very cool.

I will mention one other thing that we did. There were many things that we did during this time, but one other thing that I did was on October third in the morning was to do the

debriefings at hospitals.

Tell me what that is.

I was asked if I would do a debriefing. It was a moderate-size hospital, not the smallest, not the largest. I said, "Of course." I reported to the hospital something like eight o'clock in the morning. I went to HR. The CEO was in the meeting. In the meeting were the staff of nurses that worked through the night who were pulling people from flatbed trucks, getting them in the hospital. There was a lot of blood all over. We had some paramedics that were there.

We did what we call a debriefing. What we do at that point is try to have them feel like they are in a safe and secure environment. We tell them that we are not counselors, we are regular citizens, but we're here to be with them, and if they feel like sharing their experiences, this is a very safe place to do it. So we broke into small groups. Of course, at the very beginning they were afraid to say anything. It's like, *oh, gosh*. But really when they say something, other people in that small group are feeling exactly the same thing. The group started out kind of quiet. I had some nurses who had been on duty the other night and it became very emotional for them, but they were able to sit and really talk about it in a safe environment. It was really helpful, I believe, for them to have that experience.

Did TIP have debriefings at all of the hospitals?

We had it at many hospitals. We would have a debriefing in the morning and then we would have one in the evening so different shifts could come. After I left that debriefing, the nurses that were in my group, I could tell that they thought it very helpful because they started out quiet, but a couple of them became very emotional. But it's good to talk about it sometimes and get that support from the rest of your peers. So that's another thing that TIP did that I thought was very helpful.

TIP is amazing. How long has this organization been in Las Vegas?

I think maybe twenty years, but I can't quite remember.

Right. Because on this card it's 1994.

Okay, right.

Amazing.

Thank you.

I take it that you have lots and lots of volunteers for a city of over two million people.

Right now I think we have about seventy volunteers. They come and go all the time because people get started and maybe it's just not a good fit for them, or, *wow, it's not exactly what I thought*. Sometimes we get down to sixty or fifty-eight. We are a very busy organization. We service all of Clark County, so there's travel involved. I think last year we had over fifteen hundred calls. I'm not exactly sure of the number.

For that many calls how often are you called upon?

I can be called upon most days because they will send out a text to everyone. *We need somebody. Can somebody who's not on call go out right now?* But as a requirement to be with TIP, you are required to put in for three shifts a month and each shift is twelve hours.

That means being on call for that twelve-hour period.

Absolutely. Ready to go, ready to get out the door.

You're at your home while you're on call?

When you're on call you can be shopping in Target, but you just need to drop everything and leave.

How does that impact families of TIP volunteers? You are sort of an empty nester. But a lot of people...Do you hear about the impact, what this does?

Yes. If you don't have a significant other or a spouse or whatever onboard with you, maybe TIP is not a good fit for you. It's very important to have your support at home.

Wonderful. I am just amazed by TIP. I am surprised that there was enough thought—and this must be in other cities as well—that we think enough about these things to have this kind of a group. I'm just so impressed.

Oh, well, thank you.

I'm just so in awe of this.

Thank you.

Do you ever have any direct contact with the coroner's office?

Oh, absolutely.

How does that work?

John Fudenberg is our coroner and he's on our board of directors for TIP. He is a huge supporter of TIP. He will come to some of our meetings. He will talk to us. He will come out and greet us. If it's high profile and he's on scene, he comes over to TIP. He thinks that we're wonderful, yes.

Fantastic. With an organization like TIP, do you find that you have needs? Let's say that there are certain communities that are not well represented that maybe you need more volunteers from that segment of the population. Do you have enough people that are Latinos, enough people who are black, enough people who are Asians as part of TIP?

I can tell you that we really need more Spanish-speaking volunteers. When we get a Spanish-speaking volunteer, we're thrilled. But as I mentioned before, we have a high turnover. People's job changes. Their life experience change. But across the board, the ethnicity, we have a pretty good...

Balance.

Yes, we do have a pretty good balance and people from all different walks of life—blue collar, white collar, retired—a wonderful group of people.

This is amazing. Is there anything that you'd like to add? I think I have exhausted all of our regular questions. Your interview is completely different from all the others that we've had because your organization is doing something that we didn't even expect to find at the beginning of this project.

Really? I'm so glad you found us.

Oh, me too. This is amazing. What you do is just wonderful.

Thank you.

I thank you so much.

Thank you.

And I thank you for the referrals that you've given me because right now, as you know, I'm going to talk to a person that you referred to us.

Yes. Thank you.

I appreciate what you're doing for us, as well as for all of us.

Thank you.

Thank you so much, Carol.

[End of recorded interview]