

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANE ORGILL

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

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**This is Claytee White. It is March 30th, 2018. This morning I'm here at the Red Cross.**

**Diane, could you please pronounce and spell your name? And tell me what you do here at the Red Cross.**

My name is Diane Orgill, and it's O-R-G-I-L-L.

**And Diane is...?**

D-I-A-N-E.

**Thank you. What do you do here at the Red Cross?**

I am a volunteer. I've been here for about eleven years, so I have a leadership role. The Red Cross is really unique in that they treat staff and volunteers the same, so the responsibilities and the jobs that we take on are the same as any staff member would have. Our disaster program manager is pretty much in charge of all local and area disasters, and I am her volunteer partner. Our region is Utah and Nevada, and I have a couple of roles as a leader in the region, both as a duty officer, which is the person who dispatches people out to home fires or whatever disaster there is, and, also, as a casework and recovery lead for the region [where] we do all the follow-up calls with people who have been involved in any kind of disaster and received our help. There are so many things that the Red Cross does. I learn about new things all the time. Those are my main jobs, but then I also do a Pillowcase project, which is going into schools for third, fourth and fifth graders and teaching them preparedness, and we work with Disney to provide pillowcases to have kids put things and make an emergency pack if they have to evacuate their home.

**What should I have in my emergency packet?**

There is a long list in the packet that we work with and the list tells them what they personally should have in their pillowcase and also what their families should have for a family evacuation.

Of course, you need some food and water. You need a change of clothes, all of your toiletry items, any medications you might have, a flashlight, batteries, a portable radio. There are a lot of things.

**A portable radio? They still make those?**

They do. If the cell towers are gone and your phones don't work, electricity is out, there's really no other way to get messages, so, yes.

**I have never had a preparedness kit. I think I should start thinking about one.**

It's also good for the adults to have copies of really important papers—passports, Social Security card, all those kinds of things—because if they get destroyed or damaged, if you have a copy of them it's a lot easier to replace them than if they're just gone.

**I think I should do better. Okay, good. Let's start the real interview. Tell me where you grew up and what that was like.**

I grew up in a small town near Chicago; it was called Crete, in Illinois. When I lived there, there were only about three thousand people who lived there, so it was a small town and everyone kind of knew everyone. It was an unbelievably amazing place for kids to be because everybody kind of watched out for every kid, but, of course, that was a long time ago when things were much safer. My friends and I could be out until dark or dinnertime. You knew when you had to be at home and then you were at home. Most of my friends' mothers didn't work; they were at home. When we got home from school, there they were with home-baked cookies or whatever. It was just an amazing place to be.

We didn't have a lot of activities. We didn't have a movie theater in that town; we had to go to the next town for that. We didn't have a lot of fast food or anything. But we had a park and there was a creek that ran through the town that we would go down and play in. We would climb

trees and just do all of the things that we don't hear about anymore. Of course, that was before there were all the computer games and everything, so if those things had been present, I probably would have been doing that too, but that wasn't an option. For me I think that was a good thing. I think the benefits of having to learn to entertain yourself and spend outside time being active, riding your bike and that kind of thing, are healthy.

**Did you have brothers and sisters?**

I have one brother and he's about seven and a half years older than I am, so he went away to college when I was in fifth grade. We're pretty close now. He still lives in the Chicago area and his two daughters live in that area. We're pretty close. I get back there a couple of times a year and they come out here every once in a while. At that time when he went away to college, there was such a big difference in our ages that there was a time we weren't really close, but now we have become close.

**That's wonderful. What did your father do for a living?**

My father worked for Commonwealth Edison, which was the electric company. He was a machine operator, so he drove those big trucks that hoisted people up to put in the lines and dug the holes and put the poles in the ground and all of that kind of thing. What I remember most about his job was whenever there was a snowstorm or a sleet storm, which was pretty often, he would get called out in the middle of the night because the branches would break and then the lines would break and they would have to go out and repair those.

**What brought you from that to Las Vegas?**

When I was in college, I had studied to be a teacher. I was going to teach Spanish. We had just a job fair kind of thing. The boy that I was dating at that time went in to talk to somebody from Florida and I was sitting there. These guys were sitting at a table and they were from Las Vegas

and they said, "Well, come over and talk to us." I had never been to Las Vegas, never dreamed of coming to Las Vegas. We talked a little bit and they said, "Well, why don't you just fill out the application and see what happens?" So I did and I didn't really think any more about it. Three or four days later under my door in the dorm there was a registered package that was a contract to come out here and teach. I broke the news to my parents. I said, "Okay, I think I'll go," and I did.

**What did they say?**

Well, I think they were a little shocked that it was Las Vegas, but I think they probably didn't really expect me to stay right there in the area. They knew there was a little bit of that adventure that I was wanting.

**That was which year that you decided to come here?**

I graduated from college in 1970 and came out here right after that, so I started teaching here in '70.

**You were in the school system for how long?**

I think it was about twenty-two or twenty-three years.

**Retired at that time?**

Yes. I actually tried to retire a couple of times, but that didn't work very well for me, so I went back.

**What made you take on an almost full-time position volunteering?**

After I got out of teaching full time, I was still doing a little bit here and there. I have always been involved to some degree. When I was teaching I was sponsoring a lot of organizations: The cheerleaders, the Spanish Club, lots of different groups. So I just kind of got used to doing that extra kind of thing and it just seemed like I needed to find something to do. I started working with animal organizations and I did that for quite a while. Then actually I got cancer, so I had to

get out of that business for a bit. When I finished with recovering, I was watching TV and I saw some people wearing Red Cross vests in California after some kind of flood or mudslide or something and those people were helping horses. So I came down here and I said, "I want to do the animal part." They said, "We don't do an animal part." And I said, "Oh."

At that time I was taking some Pilates classes and my instructor is a volunteer at the Red Cross and I was telling her about it. And she said, "Well, just come and do fire responses with me." So I said, "Yes, okay." I started just going out on fire responses.

**Tell me about that. What happens when you do a fire response?**

We get called by the fire department who calls our national dispatch. We go out and assist people that have been displaced because of their residence burning. We give them financial assistance and then we follow up with resources and referrals and make sure that they are recovering. We can offer mental health assistance if they need that, health services if they need to replace medications or things like that. But mostly we're just there so they know they're not by themselves; they have somebody going through that process with them.

**That first night, if your house catches on fire at six o'clock at night, where do you go that night?**

If they don't have a place to stay, the money that we give them is on a debit card or a prepaid credit card and they can use that to go to a hotel. There's a little bit of money on there for food and replacing clothing if they couldn't get anything out.

**Tell me what you were doing on October first.**

I had just gone to bed and I got a phone call. I think it was a little after maybe eleven, eleven thirty; something like that. A lot of the people in our office were out of town. They were not right here at the time. The person who was the program manager at that time gave me a call and

she said, "There's been a shooting. We need you to go down to Command." To the command center.

**Where is that?**

This one was at the fire department right down here on Flamingo. They have a whole room set up with computers for every different organization. Everybody meets there so that we can organize the activities and what's going on and we can all stay informed. I don't know if you're familiar with WebEOC.

**No, I am not.**

WebEOC is a program that we can get on and it has events that are going on and people put in what's happening. For example, when we had the presidential debate here, I could sit there and watch on WebEOC as they were closing and opening roads, which ones, where the car was. We had then set up emergency vehicles and things on both sides of the Strip in case something happened and we wouldn't be able to get across there. It's just a way that all the organizations can put in requests on that so if the police are out and they need something, they can put that request in, if there is a special need somewhere.

**Who is usually at this command center when something happens?**

Usually the city and the county depending on where it is, maybe Henderson, North Las Vegas, but they also have their own. We call it an Emergency Operation Center, an EOC. Usually NVEnergy is there. The highway department is there. There are often people who are representative of emergency preparedness organizations as part of casinos. Really everybody who could have any involvement is there.

**This is a pretty good-size space in wherever the center is located.**

Yes.

**Tell me about what happened on October first. Did you go that night?**

I did. I was there within probably twenty-five minutes. A little difficult getting there because there were so many ambulances. I turned on the TV as soon as I heard about this and there were fluctuating numbers, and when I actually got there, they only knew of two fatalities. As we're sitting there and trying to get a call center set up so people from out of town could call in or family members could call in and say that they had someone there, we sent some Red Cross people, health services and mental health, to Metro, which is where they were asking people to report.

The difficulty was that because of the way this situation evolved people were going to different hospitals and different places in so many different vehicles, private vehicles, that we really didn't know where people were until we could get the hospitals to let us know who they had. We had people down at Metro and people at the EOC. Well, I was the only one there at that time. Then we had people on alert for whatever we needed.

By that morning when we actually had more figures, the national Red Cross had been called, so within twenty-four to forty-eight hours, people started arriving. When I left the EOC at about ten or eleven the next morning and I came here, we already had some people who had flown in from Utah, some of our region people, and then people were coming from everywhere. They set up the Family Assistance Center at the convention center. By the time they got that opened, we had about three hundred people here.

**Wow, you had three hundred volunteers.**

There were a few people in the management office that were paid, but most everybody was a volunteer. When we have any kind of large emergency, they go en masse and we go to everything. The people that they had here who were kind of the leaders and managers of the part



had also been at the Pulse Nightclub shooting, so they've had experience; some of them were in San Bernardino, so people who knew how to operate a Family Assistance Center and all the things that we needed to have there. Once they got here then they just took off, took off running.

It's kind of important to know that a lot of times the Red Cross is used to being put in charge of these things because they've had experience, but in this case the county retained control. Chief Steinbeck was amazing. I don't think he ever slept, but he really kept his finger on things. He knew what was going on. He really kept things going.

**Who is Steinbeck?**

Chief Steinbeck is the county chief for this area.

**Chief of?**

The fire department. He's the one who, of course, was in charge at the Emergency Operation Center, also. He was in charge of the whole thing and he worked with the Red Cross very closely. He had things that he wanted and he took their advice because they've done this before. They really know what we need.

We started calling in other organizations to help. We had other organizations in town. VOAD is Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster. We have a lot of nonprofits in Las Vegas. If it's a big apartment fire or something, they can provide a lot of things. They can provide clothing. They can provide food. They can help provide housing. They can just provide assistance when we have a lot of people who are displaced. Because of this, it wasn't that kind of thing; these people didn't need clothing or shoes or diapers or things like that; they needed mental health; they needed care; they just needed support and health services, of course.

Some of them came in and helped with all of the things that were donated down at the convention center. I can't even image how many pallets of water we had. People donated. Some

of them donated clothing and baby supplies and things like that. Then we had all of the businesses and civil things that helped with people, with whatever their needs might be. We had Uber drivers and we had airlines and we had Airbnb we had Social Services and we had the Red Cross and we had the FBI and Victims of Crime; they were just lined up around the room so that these people had a one-stop shop. Our health services was at one end of the room and we had mental health workers and spiritual care workers and they would talk to the people and determine if they needed financial assistance for certain reasons. They would mark the things; it was all very efficient. Then they would come to us at that point, and I was doing the casework and recovery. We would fill out the forms and do everything on the computer and activate cards for them.

### **Cards?**

They get a prepaid credit card or a debit card; it can be used either way.

### **Do you have a limit?**

There's a set amount. In this case, what we were providing was health services or mental health services. The Red Cross provides immediate emergency assistance, so we're not going to be able to pay somebody's hospital bill forever. We're not an insurance company. But what we want to do is make sure that those first few days when those people are so confused and just still in shock—they can't make a decision; you can't ask them a question and expect them to answer it logically because they are not thinking that way yet—we want to make sure that if they need a co-pay quickly—maybe they were just a little bit injured, maybe they were trampled and they didn't go to the hospital—so a little bit of money for co-pay until they could get reimbursed from Victims of Crime. Mental health would talk to them then, but if they felt that they needed more mental health...And mental health isn't just to pay for treatment. Sometimes mental health might

*be, oh my gosh, I'm going to be out of work for two months; how am I going to pay my rent?*

Maybe the money that we give them pays a bill; maybe it pays for food; maybe it pays for their childcare. That's kind of mental health, too, because it takes some of that stress off of them.

There are a lot of organizations now that are providing free mental health; the Resiliency Center is providing that. There are ways that they're getting co-pays paid. That's really what we wanted to do is get them started, get them feeling comfortable when they left that area so that they knew at least they had a day or two to calm down and try to think about things.

**Once you left the command center, where did you go?**

I came here to the office, to the Red Cross office, because the Family Assistance Center was not open yet. We were just trying to get organized; we were calling in volunteers, setting schedules for that; packing boxes of things that we knew we were going to need at the Family Assistance Center, computers; that kind of thing; and just getting everything ready to go until we knew where it was, and then we transported everything over there.

**Because you knew that they would have to have a center some place.**

Oh, yes.

**Your training that you had had prior to October, you told me that you started off as fire.**

Yes. We have a Disaster Action Team; that's the team that goes out to respond to fires or, like, if a car runs into a house, or when we have floods and that kind of thing. We also open shelters when we've had some large apartment fires or floods, like the fire up on Mount Charleston a few years ago. Then Red Cross people deploy a lot to other disasters, and I don't do that a lot because I do teach most of the time; that's a minimum of a two-week commitment, so it's hard depending on the time of year.

**You probably had team in Texas and Florida.**

We had a lot of people in Texas and Florida and Louisiana, yes, all over; that's actually where some of them were when this happened, and they were in Puerto Rico; they were everywhere.

**Because of the training did your training just kick in automatically?**

Part of it does. Red Cross is a little different than a lot of organizations that you can go and volunteer. You can't just go and make sandwiches for an hour and call it done. You have to make a commitment and there is a lot of training that comes first. There are on-line trainings. There are classes that you have to attend here. You have to get—it's not certified, but it shows that you've taken these trainings, so the basics are there. But no matter how many of these things you respond to, they're different. This one, of course, was really different because the needs of these people were so different and it was not just the Red Cross. If we open a shelter, it's just the Red Cross providing the food, getting the clothes, taking care of all of these people's needs. But here we had help; the county was there; we had hotels that were helping; we had so many people bringing things, so it was an entirely different situation. But the basics, we knew that we were going to have health services people talk to them; mental health services people talk to them. And then as far as entering the information on the computer and activating those cards, that's the same.

**Did you then go to the LVCVA, the command center?**

Yes, the Family Assistance Center.

**Tell me what that was like when you first walked in.**

First of all, because less than half of the people were from Las Vegas, a lot of the victims or people who were lucky enough not to have been hurt had already left; they were gone; they just got out of here and went home. We really couldn't track them; we didn't know where they were. We got a lot of calls later, and Red Cross chapters in other areas could assist them the same way

we did.

When we walked in, they had it set up very well. There would be people at the front door, and as the victims walked in, they were asked some questions just to verify. Many of them had left everything there. For a little while we did have a lot of people coming in because they were curious, some people who were homeless and thought they could get some help there. It became so overwhelming that we had to try to figure out that these people really were there. Some of them still had their wristbands. Some of them could tell us where they got their tickets. Some of them had pictures on their phones or whatever. They would ask a series of questions just to be sure that they really were attending that event.

They had a form and it had a list of the things that they might need, and they would check off what things that these people felt that they needed. Each person or each family was assigned a person to be with them, which really was smart.

**Where did that person come from? Who was that?**

They were Red Cross volunteers. They were spiritual care workers. Some of them were mental health workers. But they were people who knew the process there; they knew what services were in there and they knew to take these people to the tables, because if you just open the door and let a thousand or so people come in, they're going to be jumping around and they're going to miss something that they really need. These people sat down and talked with them; said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do." They went from place to place to place and marked off as they went so that we know that they talked to the people they needed to talk to.

There was an organization that the Red Cross has an MOU with this organization that sets up...basically it's childcare. They have a room with amazing toys and activities and people who are trained child caregivers so families could feel comfortable leaving the kids there; while

they walked around and did all this, it made it a lot easier. There was a table with snacks and drinks and things that were needed. If they had babies, there were bottles and diapers, whatever kinds of things they needed.

Some people just wanted to sit and talk. Other people were very nervous just to be in a crowd again. We were in the convention center, so every once in a while there would be a loud bang when they were setting something up above us or beside us and people hit the ground; they were scared. Some people react so differently than others. Others just say, "Wow, I made it out alive; I'm lucky," and they move forward. There are people that I have talked to, certainly a lot of people who are still getting therapy, and they still have a really difficult time.

There was a couple of girls that I went to visit. We also have what we call Integrated Care and Condolence Team, so we have a mental health worker, a health worker and a caseworker who can go visit either in the hospital or at their homes or whatever is needed to get these services to these people. One of the girls, I went with a nurse out to visit her and her friend. They had both been injured and they were both kind of dealing with this and it was not easy for them. I got a call from her a couple of weeks ago because the cards that we give expire after sixty days and she had not read that, so she didn't realize it expired. This has happened to a whole lot of people. But she called me personally just because she knew me from my visit to her home. She hadn't spent the money, which you think, *gosh, if they need the money, it's six months later now; why haven't they spent this money?* But you know what? Some of them were just saving it for when they thought they needed it and she was now starting to get some doctor bills, medical bills coming to her.

I reissued the card, but I also sent her to the Resiliency Center because those would be paid by Victims of Crime or whatever. They have more resources down there. I'm hoping that

she got that.

But it was still our point to have people who can go in small groups of people to visit them in their hospital, in their home, in their rehabilitation center, wherever they might need assistance because for some people it was almost impossible to leave and to get out of their homes at that time and it does provide them a closer feeling because they really know you. You sit there and talk to them for a little bit.

**Good. This is amazing. Thank you for that look inside of that center because we didn't know how it operated.**

I'm sure there must be pictures somewhere. I know Chief Steinbeck did a little webinar kind of thing a couple of weeks ago and there were people from everywhere. There have been groups who have come into town from national organizations who are looking at best practices and all those things, so they've interviewed a lot of people. I'm sure there are pictures of that.

We just pretty much had the tables set up in a U. The childcare center was in another place. Then there were tables in the middle along serving area with all kinds of food and drinks so people could just come in and sit down and whatever they needed to do.

There was a large area that was blocked off with curtain kind of things and that was the area that the FBI was bringing in belongings that were found there. They brought them in and they separated them according to the area in the parking lot where they were found so that someone could say, "Well, here's where I was," and they describe it and they would go back and find it. I was amazed that they actually were able to find those things. They didn't want people to be milling around looking at things that might not be pleasant to look at, so that was pretty amazing.

The FBI brought their dogs and some other groups brought therapy dogs. For me that was

wonderful because I'm a dog lover. The dogs were walking around and they would stop and visit with people.

Then the other thing that we had that was really good was because it was in the convention center, we had a separate space, of course, for all of the volunteers and staff to go and eat and rest for a little bit. Then there were other small individual rooms. They had moved the whole command center, so that was down there. But these small individual rooms...There were people who really couldn't deal with being this that group, so their guide could take them in one of those rooms and say, "Diane, come and talk with this person and do whatever you need to do." I could go in a little room and just talk with them and get the information because when they were out in the large area, there were people waiting. Sometimes you're just going, "Okay, and this and this," giving the information and you're typing it in. It was so nice to be able to be one on one in a room—well, it wasn't one on one, but two or three on one—and actually be able to talk to people. If they needed to sit there and cry for a while, they could do that without feeling uncomfortable or inhibited in any way. There were a lot of things that were really well done I think.

**That's great. You transition out of there to a resiliency center that's going to be there for some time.**

At least three years.

**Does the Red Cross have a presence in the Resiliency Center?**

We don't have a presence there. We don't sit there every day. I attend a meeting every other week so that I am kept up on what's going on. Whenever they have anyone that if their card expired or if they're having some problems that they think we can help them with, they let me know. We're still connected, but it really isn't a big presence anymore. When we're talking on the conference



calls or in those meetings, if there are things that I can help with or if I think there is something that we might be able to do that they can't do, at least I know they need it and I can try to supply that.

**You, as an individual, with all of this volunteer time behind you, did you learn anything new about yourself during this?**

I don't know. I think I learned from the beginning when I started responding to the fires and individuals and sitting here in the office and dealing with these people's recovery; I learned that there are some things that I never thought I would be able to do that I can do, and dealing with people that are in crisis is one of those things. I don't come apart, pretty much; I can pull things together. I do think that I have a knack maybe for making people feel comfortable; I think they trust me; they know that I'm trying to help them, so I think that's a strong point for this kind of job.

Besides that, working with people who have come from really all over the place to help in a situation like this, sometimes it's kind of difficult to be put in a position where there are people here who really know what they're doing and they want to just jump in and take over and you have to find a way to rein them in and make sure they're doing it the way that it needs to be done. Because it does have to all follow the same thing because, like I said, we have chapters throughout the United States. We had visitors here from England, we had Canadians, and the Red Cross was working with all of these people, so everything really had to be done the same. We don't want anyone getting more or less than anyone else.

**Do you think the way people around the country see Las Vegas changed at all after our response to this?**

I don't think so. I think certainly the Mandalay Bay has had some fallout from it. But my niece

and her husband were here last weekend, and I'll tell you there wasn't enough room to put one foot in front of the other on the Strip; it was so crowded. I think that this has become kind of widespread—and I hate to say that—that it's become kind of a new normal. Where are you safe? Where can you go that you're sure nothing's going to happen? This isn't the first time this kind of thing has happened and unfortunately it won't be the last. I think people probably are a little more watchful, a little more alert for a while. I know the next time after this happened and I went to—I go to all the UNLV basketball games—I went into the stadium and I just started looking around and I thought, *where would I go; what would I do?* I had never thought of that before.

**Do you think that the world was surprised by our humanity?**

Maybe, yes, the amount of money that was raised and the people that came forward to help.

**Just water and...**

Yes, yes, everything. When people think of Las Vegas, I think that what they think of is certainly the casinos and the Strip and the activities and now it's becoming more sporting, but they didn't really think about the people who live here and love living here. I don't think that they think that the people who live here are the kind of people who care about other people. I think they think everything is about money and that is sometimes what we project.

**Maybe some of those ads will change a little now. Who knows?**

Yes, yes.

**One of the last questions: With the kind of volunteering that you've done, when you think about guns, has your attitude changed, pro or con, after your work that you do?**

I don't think it's changed. I've never been a fan of guns. I grew up in the Midwest, so a lot of people would go hunting and that supplied some of the food for the winter. Because I am such an animal lover, that was not an easy thing for me to deal with. But my dad would hunt. His parents

lived on a farm and they would go out and they would hunt rabbit and pheasants and things. I didn't want to see them when they brought their home and I wasn't especially crazy about eating them. I've never been interested in owning a gun or shooting a gun or having a gun in my house, so that hasn't really changed I don't think.

Personally I do think that it's too easy for people to get guns. I don't think that any regulation we could ever come up with is going to stop someone who is determined to do this from being able to get a gun; I mean, this guy obviously had a long-term laid-out plan of how he was going to get that many guns, and I don't even know how he thought he could shoot that many guns. That was just overkill to me. That was just...But you can't explain that because nobody is in his head and I don't think we'll ever know why he did that. Like I said, you could put a ban on guns. There's still going to be people who get guns, and the people who get them are going to be the people who are going to use them for bad.

**Any other thoughts or experiences that you'd like to share hoping that these kinds of interviews that we're collecting will help other places that will go through this?**

I think a lot of places—now, since it's happened so many times, the support that we received, like from Florida, we had calls telling what they did; what worked; what didn't work. And then we've passed that along; in school shootings since then, we've sent messages. I think now that it has become something that is...I don't want to say expected, but it's really not expected, either. We have to be prepared. I think that there are more people looking at this and looking at those practices and what we can do. Certainly they're looking at preparedness and trying to make sure things like this don't happen, but we know, what we just said, that people who are determined to do it or going to do it. As prepared as we are, they're learning new methods and different things that they use to do these destructive things. We can be proactive, but most of it is going to be

reactive because it depends on what they do, how they do it, how many people are involved, and what the venue is. I think sharing is good, but it's not the only answer because every situation is going to be different.

**Diane, this is wonderful. I know you have other things that you have to do today. I really appreciate the time that you've spent.**

Sure.

**Just the information about the recovery center and all the other things that were set up, that's wonderful information. I appreciate it so much.**

You're welcome.

**Thank you.**

**[End of recorded interview]**