

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN FUDENBERG

BARBARA TABACH

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

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This is Barbara Tabach. Today is May 23rd, 2018. I'm sitting in John Fudenberg's office, the Clark County coroner, again today to continue your oral history.

Both of us last time really appreciated your candor and your descriptiveness and allowing us to come back in. We'll continue with the 1 October, and then I definitely don't want to get out of here without getting your personal background, how you got to this position. Somebody doesn't crawl around as a toddler and tell their parents, "Oh, I want to be grow up to be a coroner someday."

That's a good point.

We want that story to go along with this as well. As we were talking, we embraced the name 1 October, and I think you mentioned last time as we were leaving where that phrasing, the naming came about. Can you share that with me?

Sure. It's not a big deal to probably a lot of people, but it's a big deal to people in our office. How it happened, I remember specifically. It was about eleven or eleven-thirty p.m. I had just gotten home from work. There's a report that the FBI needs and it's the next-of-kin information from the decedents. It's not federal legislation, but it's a federal act that says that they're entitled to the next-of-kin information; it's the FBI Office of Victim Services. The reason that they're entitled to that, and I think it's a congressional order, they're entitled to that because they have services that they offer to the victims' families. The reason this federal act is in place is because you'll have agencies that are resistant to give this information; therefore, they can't get the victim services that they're responsible for providing.

I was very fortunate because I had worked with a woman named Staci Beers. I don't know her title, but she's in some sort of leadership position in the FBI Office of Victim Services. I had worked with her over the years on some federal committees specific to mass fatality

planning, believe it or not. I had met her probably eight to ten years ago. Before I even received the subpoena, she said, "You're going to get a subpoena tomorrow morning and this is what we need and this is why we need it." Fortunately, I knew her. It's one of these things, you have so many requests that you don't know who is legitimate and who is not. But I knew her and I knew about this federal or congressional act. I called her. We had just hung up the phone a few hours earlier. She said she was going to be up very late.

I was on the phone with somebody here in the office preparing this report because we knew everything we put out as an office, every report, every press release, every statement we put out, would be scrutinized and very, very important. Just very basic things, like the formatting of the report, I wasn't just going to send out an Excel spreadsheet. We had to format it and make sure we reconciled the spelling of everything. Small things like this report took many, many hours to create with many different people involved in it.

I called her. I think this was Wednesday or Thursday, so just three or four days after, maybe even two days after. I wanted to put a title on the report, so I wanted to name the incident. Nobody had named the incident at that point, at least not officially. We heard the media was calling it The Las Vegas Massacre, and we knew as a community we didn't want this to be known as The Las Vegas Massacre for the next fifty years. I called her because, since she is with the FBI Victim Services, they go from incident to incident, so they were involved in a lot of these types of incidents, or at least similar types. I said, "What have you guys named it? Are you calling this incident something as you put out reports and as you communicate with people?"

She said, "It's funny, I don't know, because I've heard some names that I just don't like. One of which that a lot of people have been calling it—I think there was a report put out by somebody and I don't remember if it was the fire department or Metro—called it The Las Vegas

Shooting."

We had a nice conversation about what other agencies—there's a reason it became 9/11, not because it was on September eleventh, because you could have called it something else. There was probably a reason that it became 9/11. Maybe it was just organic and maybe nobody knows why. Maybe this would have evolved into the 1 October incident without this conversation. We were brainstorming a bit and talking about what other jurisdictions and other countries have used as incident names. I should know this. I would like to maybe even look it up for you before we even stop. She brought up the example of...I think it was the Paris bombing or shooting. Pardon my ignorance. I don't know all about that incident. But she said what they named it and I think it was 11 November or 16 November; it was a date that they just called it that.

Right when she said that, I said, "One October, we're going to call it 1 October." She said, "Okay, that's what we'll call it."

I put that on the report, 1 October. Then I contacted our county manager the next morning at about seven a.m. and I contacted our emergency manager. I said, "We're going to name this 1 October, and I think we should all use the same name." I said, "One of the things that we've got to think about is in one year, in two years, in ten years when all of the Strip marquees are displaying memorials, we don't want it to say The Las Vegas Shooting. We want to name it and we want to call it something to memorialize the incident without bringing attention to a massacre or a shooting. We figured that 1 October would be that."

Yolanda King is our county manager and she agreed with that. She said, "Let's call Steve Sisolak, who is the chairman of the Clark County Commission, and let's talk to him about that."

I just happened to call him and he was preparing for a press conference. Steve Sisolak is a

very, very busy person, and you don't get a lot of time with him. I imagine you don't get a lot of time with any elected officials, just like a lot of people don't get a lot of time with me. I had to make it very poignant. I said, "Commissioner, I've just talked to Yolanda and we agree that we should name this incident 1 October." I told him about in the future we want the marquees reading 1 October versus something else, and it would sound better if we were all referring to it as the same thing in reports that we produce in the future.

He goes, "Okay, let's do it. That's what it's going to be. It's official. That's what we're going to do." He said, "I'm just walking out to a press conference."

I was sitting in my office and I had a group around this table because, as I said to you the other day, I think, this room, my office, and for those of you listening that aren't seeing it, I have a round table in here and this kind of became our command center for our office where we did a lot of our briefings and planning during the incident. For really the first two or three months we were in this room every day, just preparing and planning for what happens next. We turned on the TV after he said, "I'm going to say something in the press conference."

He walked out. I don't know if you'll be able to hear this on the recording. But he walked out and I literally spoke to him one minute before he walked out into this press conference. It was a very special moment for us because everybody was sitting around here and I had just got done telling them the story I just told you about how we named it; our office named it.

What date is this?

I don't know. It looks like this is the sixth. I said the first three or four days, but this may have been the sixth. I thought it was earlier than that but it was probably the sixth. But if you think about it, we were buried for the first three or four days, so to even have these conversations, it would make sense that we're not having that in the first three or four days, and we probably

didn't have much of an idea. To produce that first report, it probably would have taken four or five days because we didn't even know who the decedents were for the first two or three days. They weren't all identified until October fourth at 9:30 p.m. This makes a lot more sense that since that's when they were identified that this report was being produced the next night, twenty-four hours later, because on the fourth at 9:34 p.m. is when we had notified the last next of kin. The next night at eleven p.m. or so is when I was speaking to the FBI. This is the very next morning or next day or something.

This is what he did, which was very surprising to me. Everybody was sitting around in here and everybody was so happy because they were a part of it. I don't know if you'll be able to hear this.

"Thank you undersheriff. Again, I appreciate you all being here. The past four days we've had numerous names assigned to this event. It's a tragedy. For official purposes and in the future—after consultation with the coroner, our first report is coming out this afternoon—the official name at which this tragedy will be referred to will be the number one October, so the digit one October will be the official name listed in all reports and investigations moving forward on this incident. Thank y'all very much."

That's all he said. He walked out and said that. Again, it's not a big deal and people that weren't involved in it would probably think, *well, what's the big deal here?* I got to thinking after he said that. I thought, *well, what was he going to say in the press conference?* Because I talked to him one minute after he went out there and he went out there and just said that. I was thinking, *well, what I wonder what he was actually going to say because he certainly had something prepared to say?* That's how it was named 1 October.

Staci Beers from the FBI, she told me not to mention her because she didn't want...But I

figure this is for historical purposes, so I'll say it, and she's a friend of mine, so I know she won't actually mind. It's just kind of interesting how those things come about that you would never know. Again, if we hadn't had that conversation, it probably would have still ended up being 1 October. It's not like that's a grandiose, unique idea.

Your thought process was something even we went through as a team as we knew we were going to do this project, when the different museums and everybody got together about how we were going to preserve this tragedy, and that made the most sense because of exactly what you're saying. Your initiating that, it caught a lot of people's ears. I remember my husband said, "I hear people are calling it 1 October." Then we just added *remembering*. That was good. That was perfect.

Yes, I thought it was one of those things that made our staff feel very special that our office was part of that. When they were going through such a difficult time, to have just something to be happy about, it was a big deal.

I can't imagine what your staff felt like, the burden that they were carrying for the entire community.

Right. Although I've cried each time I've talked to, I haven't been crying a lot, so I'm not an emotional basket case, but these stories we don't talk about. It's more of a special, nice emotional thing than it is bringing up any negative, so that's that. What else?

Tell me about the steps, if you can, that go through in identifying people. I can't imagine.

That's not something you do every day with a large number of folks at the same moment.

That's a good point. We've done a lot of mass fatality preparedness over the years although we haven't done a lot in the last three to five years. But prior to that we received some grant money and we had a contractor help us with that. We redid our plans and we actually did a full-scale

family assistance center exercise in '08 or '09, so that really helped us prepare for this because the family assistance center was something that became a big deal. There were over four or five thousand people that went through the family assistance center and it served a lot of the victims and the decedents' families. That's where a lot of that happened. In a coroner or medical examiner's office, an incident like this becomes really an exercise of identification. Our primary objective becomes identifying the decedents as fast as we can and as accurate as we can because we can't make any mistakes. That's when things go real bad is when an office makes a mistake in identifying people, and it's very easy to make those mistakes. People don't understand the dynamics of how you identify people. When people are in the hospital and they have all of this medical intervention equipment...We've had two people die in a car accident that were delayed deaths. They'll be in a hospital and they're receiving medication, they have all medical intervention equipment on them, they have bandages on their face, and they're swollen up. We've had a family sit bedside by the wrong person for twelve hours before they died. Fortunately when they did that, we caught it. *No, that wasn't your loved one that you were sitting next to for twelve hours thinking it was.* Those types of things, although they seem like they would be automatic, are very, very complicated issues.

Our responsibility for every death, but obviously with this type of incident, is to determine the cause and manner of death. Well, that's the easy part here. The cause of death were gunshot wounds for all fifty-eight of our victims, and the manner of deaths, they were all homicides. That's almost an automatic. Of course, we did the examinations, the postmortem examinations to determine that and all the details, but it's a pretty automatic thing. We had to make sure that somebody didn't die—there were rumors early on that people died of trampling and injuries that were created by being trampled, but that wasn't the case. There were injured

victims, but nobody died as a result of that. All fifty-eight of the decedents died as a result of gunshot wounds. Then, of course, the shooter was a gunshot wound, also, but his was a suicide. It wasn't a homicide because he was the shooter and he shot himself. All fifty-eight victims were homicides. That part is the easy part for us in this type of situation.

The hard part for us is identifying everybody because we have no idea who these people are. There isn't a list of names of who even enters the concert. Their name isn't associated with the ticket, or at least we don't have access to that. Not to mention, there's twenty-two thousand attendees. Even if we did have all of their names, all we know is they are fifty-eight of twenty-two thousand. It becomes a whole process and a lot of that takes place with our coroner investigators and working at the family assistance center, collecting what we call antemortem information from the decedents' families.

They come in and they register with the family assistance center. Then we set up an interview, and these are usually two- or three-hour interviews that one of our investigators will sit down with them and collect a lot of information, very detailed information. These are very, very difficult interviews. That's kind of the standard in our field is to have that interview so then we can take that information and we can compare it with the decedent's information that we get in the morgue while we're doing the examination, and that's how we identify people.

A large percentage of them were identified using fingerprints, but then the rest of them, almost all of them were identified with having the family view their family members, and not directly view the body, but view a photo of them. We'll clean the decedent up, take a good photo, and then we'll even digitally enhance the photo if there's some injury so we can remove the injury so they're not looking at trauma. They're looking at their loved one, saying, yes, that is them.

When I say mistakes can happen, these people are grieving and very emotional. It's not unheard of to have them misidentify a photo when they're looking at it. We were very fortunate we didn't make any mistakes when it came to the identification. Again, I give our staff all the credit in the world for doing that, but there's also a little luck involved too because there's a lot of variables outside of our control that go into that process. That's really the biggest part that we have to complete or the biggest task that we have to complete is identifying the decedents.

Then statutorily our next responsibility is notifying their next of kin. Once we identify them, we still have to notify their next of kin, and a lot of that information is gathered through our call center that we had set up and the family assistance center. Those that were identified right away with fingerprints, we still have to track down who their next of kin is and notify them that they're dead because a lot of people thought maybe they were still alive in the hospital. I don't know how many people went to the hospital. I know there were five or six hundred injured, so it's safe to say there were least five or six hundred in the hospital. They don't know necessarily unless they died in their arms at the concert, which happened with several of them, and they had to run away from them and leave them there, which you can imagine how difficult that was.

Once we identified them, we notified almost everybody at the family assistance center. I don't think I talked about that prior to this. I may have. But that was probably one of the more difficult things for our staff was that. We notify next of kin every day. That's what we do every day, but you're usually doing one a day. I personally do one a year. I don't go out and notify people. I'm at scenes periodically and I'll end up just naturally being the one that notifies people, so I know how to do it and I'm comfortable with it, but I don't do it that often. In this situation I notified about ten or eleven families within about three or four hours. You can imagine these are big groups of family members, very emotional. That's stressful for people. That was one of the

biggest stressors that our staff experienced. It was certainly one of the biggest stressors I experienced was those ten or eleven notifications because, again, I don't do it every day. I'm not used to it. Although I know it, I'm around it all day long, I don't do it myself. So to do ten or eleven in three or four hours, it drains you. I was emotionally exhausted after that.

The timing of notifying the families, for some of them it was within a few hours that you were able to. Was that everybody? And did you do this in person or on the phone?

The goal is to always do it in person. I feel like every one of these were done in person, in large part because of the family assistance center. The families knew where to go and we were there. Occasionally on other types of cases we have to notify people via telephone and that's only because we have no choice. We may go to their residence and they may call in. We can't say, "Well, hey, this is the coroner's office. Don't worry about it. I'll be over in an hour." We can't do that to them. If we get them on the phone, we have to tell them. We prep them for that prior to the notification. But the majority of our notifications are done face to face, and I think all of them were done face to face in this circumstance.

A lot of the people were from out of state, too.

Right. But a lot of them came into town right away. Again, this didn't happen the first twenty-four hours. We were doing it within the first twenty-four hours, notifying some of them right away. But most of the families flew in right away and we met with them on the second, third and fourth. Again, the last notification was done—I'm looking at the piece of paper because I don't remember exactly—but on the fourth at 9:34 p.m., and I remember writing that down that night because that's a big landmark for us. That's when that part of it is done and we move on to other things. Although that may seem like a long time, and it's certainly a long time for families to wait, that's miraculous that we did it that fast, and there was a lot of reasons for that, most of

which was how amazing our staff is. They did a great job and we got a lot of support from the fire department, the police department, social services and different people. We couldn't have done without everybody, but they did a very good job doing it.

I think the public doesn't really understand how much goes into the identification and what can cause a delay, and then you want to be accurate. You need to be accurate.

We have to. We can't just assume. We can't just pull a wallet out of somebody's pocket and go look at their driver's license and say they're identified. We can't do that. That's what people think we do, but we can't do that. Let's take an incident like this. There's plenty of people in there with fake IDs that may be nineteen years old that are walking around with an ID that's not even them, but it's their picture on it, because they couldn't get in if they weren't. There's a lot of people that have fake IDs and we can't afford to make a mistake based on somebody using a fake ID whether it's for immigration purposes or to get into an event that you have to be twenty-one. There's a lot of different reasons people have fake IDs, so that's not the answer; you can't use that as a standard.

What do you think were the major topics or strategies that you learned from this experience that you can take forward into the future for your whole profession? What are the major takeaways?

As you would imagine, I have been asked to speak on this issue; I think we all have—the police, the fire, the health department. All the people involved have been asked by other communities to speak on it, so I've put a lot of thought into that. It really depends on who you're talking to what they can learn from it. But people in our field, what I have been preaching over and over again is you've got to have a good solid family assistance center plan, and thank God that we did. I think we did because we've heard throughout the years how important that was. All of the coroner and

medical examiner's offices, we do postmortem examinations. We do autopsies every day. We recover decedents from scenes every day. We speak to the families every day. But what we don't do every day and we probably have never done, 99 percent of us have never done, is set up a family assistance center. Because we did that exercise—again, it was by the grace of God that we did that exercise—because we did that exercise, we knew what we had to do. That doesn't mean everything went perfectly and that doesn't mean it wasn't a huge challenge, but that's one of the things. It's really more than the coroner or medical examiner's office, it's the whole community needs to come together; meaning, the police, the fire, the health department, social services; everybody needs to be involved in that. We were very fortunate that everybody was involved in it. Because we had the basics of what we needed to do, we kind of directed it.

The fire department was a huge resource because they have a lot of people. They have eight- or nine hundred firemen, so they can send over twenty or thirty people and they don't miss a beat about it because after the initial response, the fire department doesn't have a lot to do after that. I don't mean that they don't have a lot to do, but a lot to do as it relates to the incident and the emergent issues. They were able to send a significant amount of resources over to the family assistance center to help us set it all up and just handle the logistics so we could meet with the families and do those interviews. That's the biggest thing that we learned is how critical that was.

Frankly, although a lot of people were amazing and did amazing things from the first responders at the scene to the hospitals accepting all of the patients, I think one of the things in addition to those that I just mentioned that really saved our entire community was that family assistance center. It was so valuable to us because not only did we get done what we needed to do there, but it also gave the families—perception is a bad word because that means it's just a perception—but it gave the families confidence that we were organized and we knew what to do.

They had somewhere to go and they knew where to call and they knew where to go and they could talk to people.

Somebody told me early on that when we did our exercise ten years ago that one of the mistakes that coroners and chief medical examiners—the difference of the two is chief medical examiner is a doctor and a coroner isn't always a doctor, but they're both department heads in a coroner or medical examiner system—is that the chief medical examiner, some of them in the past have spent the following days in the autopsy suite doing the examinations versus out there talking to the families, and that's been a grave mistake and that didn't go well. I had been trained to be at the family assistance center and communicate with the families and brief the families multiple days, so that's what I did, not because I knew what I'm doing, but just because somebody that knew what they were doing told me what to do. I stood up in front of the crowd of five hundred people each day about four times a day and briefed them. Really I didn't give them much information because we didn't have much for the first forty-eight hours, but at least they had somebody that was communicating with them. Then I would stand off to the side and take their individual questions. I've been told and I believe that that helped the families really feel like they had a say and they had somebody to ask questions. If they're sitting there with no information and they can't ask any questions, you can imagine that's not going to go well. Those were some of the things that I think really helped us and things that our office learned over the years that was beneficial to us.

What is the source of the training? That original training that you said was a number of years ago, who organized that? Who led that?

We had a grant initiative through Homeland Security. We applied for what's called a Mass Fatality Preparedness Grant through Homeland Security, and we received it. We hired a

contractor; they have expertise and people that are experts that have been through this before that came in and helped us facilitate the exercise. It was planning, training and exercise. First they created our plans and then they trained us on our plans and then we ultimately did the full-scale family assistance center. Like I said, I think that was '08 or '09.

About a year after that, I think it was 2010 or maybe 2011, the Reno air race crash happened where eleven people died. We sent eight people up from our office and we helped them set up a family assistance center because we just did the exercise, so we knew what to do, and that went very well up there. They had three or four people from the Washoe County area that worked directly with our staff. When we had to set up our family assistance center, those same three or four people came down and helped us set up our family assistance center. It kind of organically turned into a statewide family assistance center team. They're not even called that, but that's what it ended up being. They also participated in our exercises. We invited them to our exercise because we knew that if something happened in the state, we are going to be involved. We have all the resources. If something happens in any of the seventeen counties in our state, we're going to be involved. We're not going to be managing it necessarily, but we're going to be there to help them. People don't have a lot of resources, certainly not to plan a full-scale family assistance center exercise. There's about forty-five different agencies involved in it and three hundred and fifty participants, so it was a big one.

We laid out the footprint of the 1 October Family Assistance Center at the convention center, the same exact footprint that we used in the exercise, and it was big. Had we not done that exercise, we would have had no idea that we needed that much space, but we used every bit of it. That's how that came about, just really experts that have done it before and studied it helped us learn it. Again, not that that made us experts, but at least it gave us an idea of what we had to do.

It helped a lot.

We hear about that center from you and others. That was incredibly important throughout the community and for all the folks.

I want to shift a little bit here and talk about your background. Where are you from? Where did you call home when you were growing up?

I grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Like everybody from Minnesota, I walked barefoot to school up hill in the snow every day. No, I'm joking.

I'm from Iowa. I know.

I was in Minnesota, failing out of the University of Minnesota, and twenty-one years old. I had two friends of mine that wanted to move to Las Vegas, and I actually wanted to move to San Diego, at the time. I decided to go with them. There's a little more to the story, of course. But I decided to go with them, so the three of us moved out here when I was twenty-one years old. A couple of weeks before I moved out here—there was no Internet then. You talk about history, right? Nobody now can believe there was no Internet.

What year is this?

That was 1990. The Internet existed, but there were no cell phones. We didn't have cell phones, and certainly I didn't have a computer that I could go on the Internet. There was a bookstore that used to sell two-week-old Sunday papers. Back then, which is funny because when you think about it that is now history, but back then if you were looking for a job, you looked in the Sunday paper. You didn't go on the Internet.

The want ads.

Yes, the want ads, the classifieds. I looked. I got an old Review-Journal that was a couple of weeks old because they don't ship them; you're not getting them on Sunday, and you can't look it

up on the Internet, so it was a couple of weeks old. I was looking through the classified and I saw a job for a corrections officer with the City of Las Vegas. I had been working part time in a work-release jail for Anoka County, Minnesota, so I was a work-release officer. We weren't officially police officers, but we were officers. It was a part-time job that I had that paid a decent wage while I was going to college, so I had a little experience. I thought that I would apply for that job, so I sent in my application. I actually wrote it out and mailed it in. I didn't hear a thing, so that kind of went away.

I moved out here. I know this is going to sound exaggerated. Everybody has these stories. This one is actually true. I had fifteen hundred dollars in my pocket, and I know that because that's how much I sold my car for and I didn't have a car. The two people that I moved out here with did have cars, so it wasn't like I walked everywhere I went. I actually had a way to get around.

I worked at Palace Station for two days. On the way home one day I stopped at Canyon Gate Country Club. It was brand-new and I liked to golf. I went in there. They had a job opening for a maintenance person, so I applied for the job. The guy hired me. He and I hit it off because his air force flying partner was from Minnesota. I was twenty-one and I didn't know anything about Las Vegas. I warned him that I wasn't very handy. He said, "Well, that's okay because the clubhouse was just built and everything is under warranty, so really all you have to do is clean the place." I was basically hired as a janitor. I worked there thinking I would be able to golf a lot.

I worked there for maybe two or three months, and then I ended up working at Angel Park golf course, which also just opened maybe a year or two prior. I think it opened in the late eighties. The head pro there, he became kind of a mentor of mine and he was going to put me in what they called the PGA program, not to be a golf pro playing golf, but to be a golf pro that

works in a golf shop. A lot of people do that as a profession.

In the meantime, I had then been contacted by the City of Las Vegas and took the written test and then took the physical agility test, but went on my way. It's still probably the same, but that was a nine-month process before you get hired in a law enforcement job because you have to go through the psych evaluation and all these written and physical tests and everything.

In April of '91, the City of Las Vegas called me and offered me a job as a corrections officer. I was attending UNLV at the time and working at Angel Park. I had a car by then and I thought I had the world in the palm of my hands. I was so happy. I loved my job. I played golf all the time. I thought I was going to be in the golf business. But when I broke it down, I realized that there's no retirement and the pay is lousy in the golf business. I told them I'd call them back and I thought about it and I did take the job. I started working for the City of Las Vegas in April of '91.

I became a supervisor in the jail and then I left. I stayed with the same department, but I became a marshal, a City of Las Vegas deputy marshal. The corrections academy is abbreviated, so I went back to the full police academy in '98 and became a marshal. Then I was a sergeant in the marshals, and for the last six months I was an acting lieutenant. I was our department's public information officer for the last three years.

Mike Murphy was our deputy chief at the City of Las Vegas. Everybody thinks that I was a friend of his and I worked with him a lot and that's why he hired me here at the coroner's office, but I wasn't and I didn't work with him a lot. I actually knew his wife a lot better because she worked there when I started—not when I started, but I worked with her for a long time. She's the one that told me about the job. When Mike became the coroner in 2002, she contacted me and said he was going to be hiring an assistant coroner, an assistant department head.

I did a ride along with the coroner's office. I thought I had a good idea what they did. I ended up applying for the job and took the job and started in July of 2003. I left the city, went to the county, to Clark County, and started in July of 2003. Mike told me he was going to be the coroner for six to nine years and the idea was that I would take over for him; that was his plan for succession planning. He ended up staying twelve years, and then I got his job when he left in April of 2015. I worked as the assistant coroner for twelve years, and then the county manager appointed me as the coroner in 2015. I've only been the coroner for three years. What's funny about that is Ron Flood was the coroner before Mike, and Ron said to Mike, "Thank God, I didn't have a mass fatality incident on my watch." Then Mike said to me. Sure enough, I end up with one right away, which is our worst nightmares. But it happened and we got through it. That's my career basically.

Does Mike Murphy still live here?

He does, yes. He moved to Washington, D.C. after he retired and took a job with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. He worked there about a year and a half, but his wife stayed here because she worked for the City of Las Vegas. He ended up moving back.

Washington, D.C. and commuting back and forth I would imagine is not easy, not to mention who would want to live in Washington, D.C.? It's so hectic and the commute to work is probably...Here we get to drive fifteen minutes and park in front of our building. There you drive for an hour and walk for five blocks or take the subway. He moved back probably a year and a half ago now and he's still living here in town and he's just doing some consulting work now.

Did he touch base with you after 1 October?

Oh, yes. I talk to him frequently.

I know he and I crossed paths in an airport once. I'm struggling to remember if it was

Kansas City or Omaha that we were stuck in a car rental line.

He was born and raised in Kansas City, so it was probably Kansas City.

Thank you. I've been trying to remember. My husband and I were both trying to remember why we were in line and we struck up a conversation.

You've seen a lot of changes in the city since 1990.

Indeed.

Did you graduate from UNLV, then?

No, I didn't. No, I didn't graduate. In Clark County, fortunately you don't have to have a degree to be the coroner, and I don't. I ended up getting an online degree that I think is somewhere in between not credible and a full degree from UNLV, but it wasn't required. It's similar like a University of Phoenix degree that I'm certainly not proud of, but I got it.

It's an accomplishment no matter what.

To be the coroner in Clark County, by county ordinance you have to be either a medical doctor or a law enforcement officer within Clark County with a minimum of five years of management in law enforcement. The past three coroners—Ron Flood, Mike, and I—have all come from the law enforcement side of it. Otto Ravenholt was our first coroner in Clark County. He was prior to Ron Flood. He was a medical doctor. He was the chief health officer here for the health district, and at the time the health officer was also the coroner. They were the ex-officio coroner. Because he was a medical doctor—and he wrote the statute back then in the sixties—he determined that we, as a county, should not hire medical doctors to manage the office; that we should hire medical doctors to practice medicine and we should have administrators with some law enforcement experience manage the office. That's what they did. Ron Flood was a former police officer, Mike was, and so was I. That's how we all came to be the coroners.

[Announcement: Meditation will be starting in ten minutes.]

That's appropriate, isn't it?

That's appropriate, it is, yes. I think I told you that earlier, since about the ninth or tenth day, we've been having trauma meditation in our office. We're still doing it three times a day. That's what that announcement was. People are getting a lot out of it. They really are. I did it this morning at seven a.m. I'm not able to do it every day. I've never done meditation before this, and it really helps me. It just gives you a chance to go in there and focus and relax for a minute and do some deep breathing. Like I said, I was one of those that had never done it before and never really thought much of it and never probably would have done it. Early on I went in there to get some sleep, not necessarily the intent. Meditation now nobody lies down, but then I would lie down and I would do some deep breathing. They walk you through some deep breathing exercises. Within five minutes I was snoring. That was probably the thirty minutes of sleep I would get in that day. Nobody was getting much sleep then. A lot of our staff have gravitated towards the meditation and have really gotten a lot out of it.

I'm sure it recharges your batteries, your human batteries, at least I feel that it does.

It does, yes.

Minimal stress.

I'm a believer now. I probably never would have done it, but I am now.

Are there any other stories about yourself or the experience that you want to share? I can't remember if we talked about your views on weapons or not. We usually ask people that question, if your opinion has changed.

I don't think we did. I'm not real opinionated. My opinion hasn't changed as a result of this. I don't think that's the answer. I'm one of those that doesn't really take a strong political stance

either way. I definitely think it's absolutely ridiculous that people can have assault rifles legally. You don't need assault rifles. I don't get into the debate about whether or not people should be allowed to own guns. I don't think there's anything wrong with owning guns. I think there should be background checks and I think you shouldn't be able to go up to a counter and buy any kind of gun. You should have to go through a background check and you should not be a convicted felon and you shouldn't be mental ill. There's no reason any human being should own an assault rifle. Assault rifles, there's one good purpose for that and that's killing a lot of people. Other than that you don't need them. We don't need people having them. Whether or not that's good or bad on the political side that people are on, I don't really care. I just think it's absolutely ridiculous that we can legally own assault rifles. It's just not necessary. I think the police should have them because the police should have more fire power than the bad guys. But instead, the bad guys have more fire power than the police, which is not a good situation. Whether that's politically correct or not, that's my view on it.

Do you worry that another episode will happen in Vegas?

I think everybody does. I would be lying if I say I didn't because I think that might push us over the edge in many, many ways. I can't imagine us handling another one. If it happens I hope it doesn't happen for a long time, and obviously I hope it never happens.

We did have just last week—you said today is May twenty-third. I got a text message and I don't know what time it was and it was last week, but it was in the p.m., probably six or seven p.m. that said there's an active shooter at Boulevard Mall. A guy was walking through shooting with a mask and a gun at Boulevard Mall. All of that turned out to be—he wasn't shooting. I think there was somebody in there with a gun and a mask, but he didn't end up shooting anybody. I don't know if they ever caught him. Everybody responded. The police and fire

responded and we ramped up. I'll tell you that really brought out a lot of—we've talked about that as an office since then because it flared up a lot of emotions in people. Just the potential that we were going to have another one was very, very difficult on people.

Yesterday I was in a group called the First Responder Recovery Group; it's a group of us from the police department, fire department, health department and some different agencies that are responsible for providing wellness to the first responders. We meet every Tuesday and we try to do things for the first responders to provide them services. We had that meeting yesterday. One of the firemen brought that up that a lot of their—it was a fire chief, not the chief, but one of the deputy chiefs—brought up how difficult that response to what turned out to be a false call or it didn't materialize into people dying, how difficult that was on a lot of their firemen because they thought they were going to be going into the same type of scenario, and that same thing happened in our office. It was very difficult for people to deal with that potential of having to deal with that all over again.

I'm not one that thinks about it a lot; meaning, I don't worry about it. But if I think about it, I'll worry about it because it would really be very difficult on our staff to go through that same thing.

I thought about that with the most recent shooting, the death of eight children and two teachers in Texas, and the Houston police chief coming out and saying...Hit bottom. This is just unacceptable. Something's got to change with our world that we live in.

I thank you very much.

You're welcome.

This was great to fill in these little pieces.

[End of recorded interview]