

AN INTERVIEW WITH TANYA OLSON

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SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

**This is Claytee White. It is July sixth, 2018. I am with Tanya in my office here in the Oral History Research Center.**

**Tanya, could you please pronounce and spell your full name for me?**

My name is Tanya Olson; T-A-N-Y-A, O-L-S-O-N.

**Thank you so much. We're going to get started. Just tell me a bit about your early life:**

**Where you grew up, brothers and sisters, what your parents did for a living; those kinds of things.**

I grew up in California.

**Where?**

In San Francisco. I lived in the Bay Area in Marin County. A wonderful father, mother. I had a brother; unfortunately, he passed away. It was just a wonderful life. My parents always supported me. I always thought I got my creative side from my mom, but I would say just my ability to accept others really from my father. He's Japanese, born in the United States, but he was one of those that was interned along with his family. So at a very young age I learned that there are differences amongst people and to accept them, and so that was a very healthy childhood for me growing up.

**What kind of stories did your father tell you about the internment camps?**

It's interesting because when he was in camp, he was probably around thirteen years old. This will sound funny, but I asked my dad. I said, "So, Dad, what was it like?" He goes, "I don't remember that much. We had fun." You would think, *wow*. But then as a parent I understand what his parents were going through. I think for many of the parents with their young children they were trying to make it the most normal life as possible for them, go and play softball and go to school. I think my older uncle really understood all that was going on, but I think for the

young children the parents were just trying to make it as normal as possible for them. It was very interesting.

**Wow, that is. You said something about your creative side. Tell me about that creative side of you.**

My mother was a fabulous cook. She never used a cookbook. I never saw a cookbook for her. I would always watch and try to replicate her. It was just little things that she would do and it was always creative in thought. She definitely had a stage presence. I don't. But I see my son, who is now in his twenties, and whenever he gets on stage to play his drums, he's got that stage presence. My husband and I look at each other and go, "Yep, he got it from his grandmother." Just watching her. Look what's before you, but create something beautiful beyond that. I've always done that.

**Wonderful. Tell me about that. Where did you go to college?**

Well, I went to a couple of universities. My first college was at University of California, Santa Barbara, yes, the beach college.

**A beautiful city.**

If you don't mind, I'll back it up. When Star Wars came out in 1977, my life had changed at that point. At that point I had never seen anything like that before, and I'm sure when you saw it. It was mind-boggling, the music and everything. At that point it was like, I want to make movies. So I applied to University of Southern California, UCLA; didn't get in, so I went to UC Santa Barbara.

**Oh, poor thing, you had to go to UC Santa Barbara.**

[Laughing] But it's funny how the unexpected is sometimes the most rewarding thing. If I had not gone to University of California, Santa Barbara, I would have never met my husband. I was

bumped that I didn't get into the elite film school. During that time I had a part-time job. I was working at the Reserve Officer Training Corps, the ROTC, as just a student just to make some extra money. They would always try to recruit me, but I was like, "No, no, I just want to do this." My husband was already in the program. I had not known him. They were doing one of these white water rafting trips as kind of a recruitment and I went on it and that's where I met my husband. I got to know the cadre in the army and I took some history classes with him. I thought, *wow, this is really neat*. I learned so much about myself and leadership. It was like, *you know, I kind of like this*. I had never heard of ROTC before. Like I said, I had met my husband and he was, "I'm going in the Army; I'm going to become an officer and everything." So I decided to join the program. Like I said, it's these unexpected things that happen in life that I think are the most rewarding.

When I finished my degree, I was also commissioned as a second lieutenant. My husband had always been commissioned as a lieutenant. From that point on, mixed with active duty, which is your full-time job, and then I went over to the Reserve, I joined the Army. My film-making aspirations were put on hold for thirty years.

**You're career military?**

Yes.

**Who would have guessed? Tell me about that.**

Oh my goodness. I retired after thirty years last year. My first seven years I was active duty and my husband was active duty and we went to Korea. What an incredible thirty-year journey was that. I had never expected to join. My goodness, the people I worked with...I joined because I liked the person I was becoming, the leader. Leadership had never—as I call it—as a high school student leadership never crossed your mind, but I learned a lot about myself. You can never be

the best leader. You're always learning. And I always learned. The reason why I stayed in was because of the camaraderie and the people I was surrounded by, the teamwork and the collaboration—I was like, *I love this*—and the accomplishments that I would see, because I started off as a platoon leader with thirty soldiers. Actually, half of them were Korean linguists and the others were American linguists. I just remember we had done an exercise and they did something incredible and I wasn't there. I had given them guidance. I had given them resources. We did the training. I drove back in with one of my platoon sergeants and we saw what had happened. Basically my platoon had identified the main attacking force and that was really a big thing in North Korea. It was like, my goodness, we were part of this effort. At that point I said, "No, I'm staying in."

**You were in—**

For about seven years, 1987. So married and my husband an officer as well. We actually have two boys. I had a son while I was on active duty. Then I got out. He still was active duty. I thought, *no, I'm going to get out and go in the Reserve*. Then we had our second child. But I could never quite get out. I stayed in the Reserve for the remaining twenty-three years. I've just loved it.

**That's wonderful.**

I've deployed to Iraq. The most important thing was the camaraderie and I have been blessed to command units. My last assignment—I was pretty sure I was probably going to be retiring and I thought, *I started out green, literally, and I started out in the Army, but I want to end with all of the services*. We call it *joint* where you have all the services; you have the Navy, you have the Marines, you have Army, you have the Air Force. I thought, *what better way to leave than not just serving with the Army, but to serve with everyone?* I was again blessed. They let me be the

director of a joint assignment. I went from green and we called joint purple.

**I had no idea there was anything called joint. There are Joint Chiefs of Staff, of course.**

But now it makes sense, right?

**Yes.**

Right, right. It was my last assignment. When I retired, it was my last day and we call these drills, these battles where we meet one weekend once a month. They were like, "Maybe we should have a cake for you or do something for you." And I go, "You know what, guys? We're just so busy right now." You've got to put as much training and production as possible in that one tiny weekend. I said, "No, let me go ahead and address everyone." So I showed them some pictures of a very young Lieutenant Olson, now Colonel Olson, and pictures of family. For me it was a really nice way to leave. I could look around the room. We have a mixture of young servicemen and women and older ones—or mature ones, I'll say. But looking at them and working with them, I was like, "We're in good hands because you guys are the future. I can't be here forever. So what's the best thing I can do is to train you and show you what right looks like and instill more values." We're okay, everything that's going on right now. I look at our men and women in uniform and I'm just so proud of them and I just know they will serve us well.

**Wonderful. So in 1987 where was the active duty location?**

Well, you were moved around a lot. But my first real duty station was in South Korea.

**That exercise that your men did that you were so proud of in 1987 that was in Korea?**

Yes, it was probably around 1988 or so. But we supported Korea and their defense.

**That's wonderful. Tell me what your career was in.**

Army.

**I mean your degree.**

My degree was in geography. That was one of them. I love learning.

**Good. Did you take any film classes, anything like that at Santa Barbara?**

The only film class, two, I took was basically film appreciation. It never really went far.

**Where did you get the training to do what you're doing now?**

One, it's a passion. I would have to say it really took off I think—it's not just being a filmmaker, it's being a storyteller. Through my life I've gotten my degrees, master in communications in arts. Then we moved here in 2014.

**Why?**

My husband got a job here. He had finished his Ph.D. in watershed science, and so he was working over at the Desert Research Institute. I just started up a business making video biographies, and I was able to do some for his colleagues in the science field. I guess my background in the military, one thing I do is collect a lot of information and try to make a story out of it. Actually in the Army I was a storyteller. We'd try to get bits and pieces of information and come up with a story of what we think is going to happen, and so I gravitated towards that. We had one scientist. I said, "Give me everything. Give me photos. Give me video clips, sound bites, whatever." I sat down and talked with him a lit bit. I said, "Okay, I'll come back." So I get all this information. For me I would try to find that golden nugget in there. It was like, what is that essence about that person? I started taking little classes on how to edit and stuff like that, so I would make films. Music was a very big part of it. John Williams. I would find the piece, and so I would do that. That was part of my film making experience.

The other one was I'm always getting cameras. I told my husband one day, "I'd really like to try the digital." He's like, "Oh, great, another expense." He's always gotten me cameras, and it's beat up. About that time my son was starting hockey. I'm not the greatest photographer.

There's people that—I know what settings to put on. It's like, *digital, wow*. Remember when you had to go by that kiosk and drop off at Fotomat?

**Yes.**

I can take zillions of pictures. It's not going to cost me anything. And I know what it looks like right then and there and I don't have to wait a week. I would just taking pictures at his hockey games. It taught me so much because of the conditions. The lighting was poor. The action was fast. I had to anticipate, understand the game. I guess that kind of evolved into street photography. Everything just kind of kept going. That's how I got my background.

Then when we moved here in 2014, I had started my business for about a year and I really wasn't actively working it too much. I wasn't doing the marketing piece. But I thought, *one thing I need to do is I need to get people smarter than me. I can't do this all by myself*. To make the film and being in the military background, I was like, *I need to create teams of filmmakers and oversee that*. Really what I was defining was the role of producer and I hadn't realized it.

I met with the UNLV Film Department. I first said, "I need to connect with people, other filmmakers, and just get a little smarter on how to make a film." I remember meeting this one professor. I was like, "I already have my degree. I don't need to get a degree." He goes, "Yes, just fly right through it." Then I found out in two years I can get a film degree. That's the nice thing about having a degree beforehand, right?

**That's right, yes.**

I was like, *I can knock this out*. So I did. I'm so glad I did because I learned so much. I met incredible people, faculty of the film department. Working with other students, it gave me insight into how this generation is thinking. I don't know about you, but when I grew up in the military world, when we had a fax machine, we were smoking; we were high tech. I mean, you ask today



and people are going, *huh?* Then email, we thought, *wow*. Email was great. It was another form of communication. But what I found here, because I would be emailing and trying to get things scheduled, was I wasn't getting a response back from students. Sitting in the class what do I see? Them not really talking to each other, but pulling out their smart phone and texting a lot faster than me. I'm texting with one thumb. So I'm learning how they're communicating. I'm bringing a wealth of experience within me in communications, but for me it was very important to see how this generation was communicating. I don't know if you've seen that.

**Oh, around this campus, yes.**

It was, *wow*. But the other thing I learned was there are so many creative minds out there, and these stories that they come up with are incredible. They're fresh. They're new. There's so much talent out there. I look at these big movies being made, and by big, major companies. I'm like, why are we telling the same story over and over when there's just this plethora of fresh stories out there and these bright minds? I'm like, *wow*. So that really opened my mind up. That's part of why I wanted to become a producer. In many respects it's like being a commander: You just get a group of talent around, you collaborate, you give them the resources, and say, "Let's go; let's make something new; let's be innovative."

**That was the foundation for this film that you made.**

Yes.

**Tell me about October One. Tell me what you did on that Sunday.**

I don't remember what I did on that Sunday. I do remember this, though, again by the magical applications of your phone and I don't know I had set it up that way, but it did. It gives you automatic news alerts. I remember very late at night I got the beeping sound and I picked up the phone. I'm like, *what?* That's how I first heard about it, about that there was a shooting in Las

Vegas. We all probably live close to the airport anyway, so it was very close. It was like, *my goodness*. I don't have cable TV. I use everything with the Internet now, so I kept following that and that's how I first heard about it.

**Eventually you began to take pictures and do some other things. Tell me how that happened, the evolution of what you did, the beginning, and walk me through that.**

Now it's Two October, the day after. Again, because I'm not having cable news, I'm really relying on the Internet and just reading about what's going on. Just back up a little bit. Street photography, I absolutely love street photography. What I focus in on literally is kindness, joy, brotherhood. I always try to pick out—and I think I have a knack for it—to pick out that person, what is their essence? I always try to make myself better. I'll go to Zumba and I always look at people. It's not the person that has the athletic physique. It's that person, why are they there? I always find some sort of beauty in someone.

**Give me your definition of street photography.**

I'm glad you asked me my definition because everyone has their own definition. For me it's unstaged portrayal of life and life in its environment. That's my definition.

It's the second of October and I'm just following what's going on, but I'm seeing things about these long lines of people donating blood and this town is...I mean, we're stunned. We're shocked. But you're seeing people reaching out and helping. In the back of my mind, I'm like, I need to go out there and I need to go donate blood. I was thinking about this in the back of my mind. I kept thinking, *I'm seeing a lot of kindness here. I'm seeing ordinary citizens doing extraordinary things*. It's kind of one of my mottos. It's an old cliché. I'm seeing photos. *I really should go out there and capture some of this in imagery*. I was kind of looking around, seeing what was out there. I saw the long lines of people donating blood and stuff like that. I had not

heard of the fifty-eight crosses. I had not heard of the Healing Garden.

I told you I do Zumba. One of the people in Zumba I friended, she posted about—well, I'll go to that later. On the third of October I thought, *you know what?* Again, pulling back in street photography. *I'm going to go walk down and see, what is life like out there on the streets of Las Vegas right now?* I had taken pictures before and I have pictures that I could bring you that are just haunting. When you think of Las Vegas, you think of the city and you think of nothing but traffic.

This is exactly what I saw out there. I'll show you one picture real quick. I took my camera out and I thought, *well, I'm going to go out there and take pictures.* It was a little weird because I was like, *can I take pictures? I don't know.* South of Tropicana Street on the junction of Tropicana and Las Vegas Boulevard there was no traffic; it was all blocked off. I don't know if you had seen it. It was like, *my goodness.* I just decided to walk one side of the street all the way up to the last hotel and then turn right back.

**You parked your car where?**

I parked it in one of the casino's areas.

**You walked south on Las Vegas Boulevard?**

On Las Vegas Boulevard, yes. Then I walked basically all the way up to Mandalay Bay. I didn't know if I could go in the casino or not, but I did. I walked all the way there. I crossed the street and walked all the way back down to the Bellagio, I believe, and then kind of circled back. It was a pretty long walk, but I just thought, *I want to walk.*

When I first got out and I started crossing one of the—right near Tropicana I saw people actually standing on the crosswalk taking pictures. I'm looking and I'm like, *oh my goodness.* I'm going to show you this picture. This was one of them. This is not any special effects. This is on a

crosswalk, the pedestrian bridges, as you're looking out, so you saw the Statue of Liberty off to your right. The reflections, isn't that something?

**That is amazing.**

I'm like, *I can't even do any special effects like that.* So I crossed that and I walked around.

**Is this one of the photographs you've donated to Special Collections?**

It's not in the film, but I am going to donate it.

**Please. Wonderful.**

I don't do a lot of posting, but this is one of the photographs that I posted. My husband said, "You need to get this out."

**Yes. This is a photograph on the third of October at the corner where Mandalay Bay—no, no, no.**

I think it's Tropicana and—well, it's where the Statue of Liberty is, so Tropicana and Las Vegas Boulevard.

**I can't even describe it. It's New York New York, the Tropicana Hotel itself, the crosswalk there, with a reflection in the back. Oh, this is amazing.**

I took a lot of different pictures. It was interesting. My family was like, "We like the palm trees because that really shows Las Vegas right there." I'm like, "That's a really good point."

**It does.**

Let me just show you two others. Then I walked a little bit more. I am really now getting into framing. I found this little cove, walking across this bridge again. I can't remember which casino it was. It was kind of tucked away. I turned around and I looked and I went, "Oh my goodness." I figured out how to set the filter on my camera to blue and red. This, again, was on the third of October.

**Setting it on blue and red means that you got that red car with the U.S. flag.**

Yes.

**Oh my, that is beautiful. You're probably near the Excalibur.**

Yes, I believe so, absolutely. It was interesting because they did a blackout later on, but this was before they did the blackout. It was interesting. When I saw that blackout picture, I noticed they had the same angle I did. But I'm like, *I got mine there first.*

**And the MGM already has, "Our prayers for the victims, our gratitude for the brave first responders," already on their marquee.**

Yes, and that was the third of October. I just got that picture and I'm like, *oh my goodness.* It just really set the tone. In the film you'll see that I have another picture looking straight down Las Vegas Boulevard that is south of Tropicana. It's bare; there is no traffic on there. I don't know whenever that happened, but it was haunting. I ended up using that picture in the film. When you put on your editor hat...I wanted to put these pictures in, but they just didn't fit in the film and I thought, *well, maybe sometime later.* But I'll hold on to these pictures.

**Yes, you should. That was for two days.**

That was the third, yes.

**Did you continue to shoot pictures?**

Yes. Now we'll bring it up to the sixth. The sixth of October was a Friday and that's where I take Zumba and one of my friends posted about the fifty-eight crosses and the Healing Garden. She just posted these news clips. I was looking for something to show the human kindness. I was actually all set to go and donate some blood. I thought, *eh, let me just look at this.* I read about this and I read about this guy named Greg Zanis who lives in Chicago. He drove almost two thousand miles in his pickup truck with a friend with fifty-eight crosses and came down here.

They were by the Las Vegas sign. I was like, *wow*. Then I read about the Healing Garden, how in downtown Las Vegas they set aside this little piece of land and they were making this Healing Garden to comfort the victims and the families. I was like, *huh, that's really interesting*. I thought kind of one of those, *I think I'm going to change my plans right now*. I grabbed my camera and I said, "I'm going; I'm going for it."

I went to the crosses. At that point the crosses had only been up, I think, since Wednesday. They were adorned with flowers and whatnot. It was just incredible. You saw all the news vans out there and everything. But it was like, *no, this is the right move; I need to take pictures*. Yes, it's a public forum and you can take pictures of anyone you want. But at the same time I'm like, *these people are hurting, too*. People were bringing their children out there. It was an incredible sight. It's not your usual "stand in front of the Las Vegas sign and let's take a picture," no. I don't know if you were there at that time, but it was adorned with flowers, unbelievable. Then I went and I saw this kind of serpentine trail of the fifty-eight crosses and it had names of everyone. They had the Star of David for one of the victims. People were just going through that by themselves, with families. It was an incredible sight.

And so I stood off to the side and I'm looking around and I'm seeing these people. I wanted to give them their privacy, especially the ones that were grieving. But I saw this one young lady and she was just heartbroken. This cross had caught my attention before; it had a cowboy hat on it and it was Brennan's. She was kneeled by it and she had her hand—because they had a picture of every victim and she had her hand on it. You could just tell she was grieving. I didn't know at that time she was actually crying. I had to make a decision, do I take a picture of her or not? Normally I would not. I would just give people their privacy. But this had hurt so many people and I thought, *I need to be able to demonstrate how hurtful this was, but*

*also how much kindness had come about that to help those grieving.* So I stood back and I thought, *all right, how do I capture this moment? But I don't want to invade her privacy. I don't even want to know who she is. I just want to show the emotion.* So I stood back.

Like I said, I've become really focused in on framing. That picture is in the film and if you look real closely, you can see that she is actually crying in that one. As a street photographer I am so wrapped up into just catching pictures, and a lot of times I don't even know how they're going to come out until I look at them a couple of times when I go back home. But I'm so busy with that I don't have time to get so emotionally wrapped up, and I think that's actually a good thing because it kind of keeps me objective. When I got home and I'm looking through the pictures that one caught my attention and I go, *oh my goodness.* I just sat and looked at it for a while.

Then I took my pictures. I took one of mother and daughter. She brought her little daughter. There was a huge sign there that you could write something on it, so I captured that.

I went back Saturday and by then—my goodness, I thought there was a lot of things adorned then—it was just overflowing. That was that Saturday. I remember that Saturday. I saw a guy walking up with these roses. I was going to say something to him and then I thought, *no, no, just let them do his thing.* I thought he was coming for a very special person, and he may have. But as I was watching him later, I realized he had brought red and white roses. He had placed a rose beside every single site. I saw another lady; she had a rosary, every single site. She's in that, too.

There's stories behind that you don't know in the film, but I was watching this. I'm like, *my goodness.* These were just glimpses of kindness that people were bringing. It was unbelievable.

**I think so, too. Tell me about your experience at the Healing Garden. Did you go to the Healing Garden on Friday?**

On Friday as well.

**Which is First Friday also.**

Yes. What I also read was that they were going to have the grand opening that night, which I did go to. After the fifty-eight crosses, I get in my car and go back over there. I went there and I was like, *oh my goodness*. It was this outpouring of the community...school buses. There were children out there. There were mothers carrying little babies, and I put those in the film. There were people that were from, I think, nurseries and companies. Just everyone was out there and they knew they had a goal. It's like, *we're going to get this done*. I was just amazed at what I saw.

That night I took my son and we went to the opening. Mayor Goodman spoke and it was very, very nice what she said. But for me the most touching part was seeing that community and knowing we're going to get this done. I don't know if you knew this, but they didn't start working on the garden until Wednesday.

**Right. Seventy-two hours.**

They were go, go, go, go, go, go, go. Then I went back in December and that's where I met Brother Dre. By then they had put the red tile along the planter for the Tree of Hope and he was polishing it. He greeted me. So that's how the pictures came about.

**Wonderful. Did you learn anything new about yourself from this experience, from this filming?**

It was that I could do this. Sometimes I shy away from photos because I don't want to invade privacy. I really try to be very careful about that. But this was one of the ones, it's like, *you have a belief in human kindness*. I do. I just thought, *nope, you went for it*. You've got to make those



decisions sometimes last moment. It reassured me that, yes, I can do this; this is a new chapter in my life and this is a voice I have.

**Wonderful. Tell me how the film came about.**

I wasn't initially going to make a film. I just took pictures because I wanted to capture what was going on. About a month prior to October, they had a get-together for UNLV film students and composers. I thought, *I'll go to it*. I was just volunteer. I met some of these composers. We all introduced ourselves and Jamez Dahl stood up. The thing that caught my attention was he said something about he really writes to bring out the character in everything. I think before that I had talked about the way I want to work with composers is I want to create the film, but I really want to bring the essence out of that character in the story. My roots go back to John Williams. So I heard him speak and I was like, *wow, we're on the same wavelength*. I gave him my business card and a couple of weeks later he wrote back to me that he would like to meet with me. I didn't realize who he was at first. Then I started understanding, *oh, wait a minute, you are the one I gave the card to*, because I was really impressed by what he said.

So we sat down. This was right after One October. I showed him my pictures. I said, "I think it would be really good for us just to learn how to work together, to see if this work and how we can work. Here I took some pictures." I showed him some pictures from the fifty-eight crosses and the Healing Garden. I was just thinking, *maybe I'll put a couple of pictures together and I'll give them to him next week. It will be a simple project, but let's just take this for a test run and just see how it goes*.

As I was trying to pick out the pictures later on—so he had only seen a couple—I was like, *no, this isn't doing them justice. There is a story here and I need to tell it*. What turned out to be a week, turned out to be a couple of months because I really sat down.

Meanwhile, what I didn't know—I thought Jamez was waiting on me to finish this piece—he saw enough of it and we talked about where we wanted to go with this music, and so he already started composing.

**That's amazing. He's the composer. You have all the photographs. Who else worked with you?**

That's it. Well, I went and I interviewed Brother Dre and I interviewed Jay, who designed the garden. But for the most part, it was really Jamez and me. It was interesting because remember I told you I did a lot of biographies. A lot of times what I'll do is I'll find the music first and I was able to put the music to it. Kind of like a writer's block, as I was putting the film together, I was just kind of stuck on some of these things. Then Jamez sent me his piece. He goes, "Here's what I have so far." It was enough to motivate me to figure out, okay, this would be beautiful here.

Then I realized I needed a little more music, and so I wrote back to Jamez and said, "Here is now the finished part, but can you fill in these gaps here?" Within a day or two he came back and goes, "How's this?" I'm like, "Wow, you are gifted." We put this together. I only wanted to make it about five minutes and that's how it came about. I think we fed off of each other; his music and my pictures fed off of each other.

**That's amazing. Do you think the image of Las Vegas changed at all among people around the world, around the country, around the world?**

I think so. I really do. When I moved here in 2014, I've got to be honest, I'll I kept thinking was casinos. My husband said, "I got a job offer in Las Vegas." I'm like, *Las Vegas?* The first thing that popped in my mind is the casinos, but there's more to that as I found out when I moved here and I met people in my exercise class and went to UNLV. It's like, no, there's much more. So, yes, I would say it did. But sometimes sadly, for a splitting image—and let me explain—I think

the people that were here and saw what happened and saw the community coming together that will stay with them forever. But unfortunately, not everyone saw that and you will probably still have the stigma of Las Vegas and what Las Vegas was originally. But I think as it's growing now, like what you're doing is phenomenal, and showing images and sharing stories about what had happened during this period, I think making that part of Las Vegas and educating people in that and making it available, I think that will continue and people will see Las Vegas in a different light. I think if we don't do that you're always going to have that stigma of the Rat Pack back then, the casinos, the shows, but you don't see this other side of it. So, yes.

**Tell me why you are leaving the city.**

I'm so excited about this. Nineteen seventy-seven, Star Wars came out—and I've tried like heck to go back to film school. I was finally accepted into the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. It really is the perfect fit for me. I am so excited. I'm going to start this August. I'm going into the producing program.

**That's wonderful.**

So I'm excited. Yes.

**That is wonderful. Are you leaving your family here or are you all going to Los Angeles?**

It's funny how you mentioned that. My boys are grown up. Our families are very close. My husband actually moved to Monterey because he picked up a professorship and he's now teaching at what used to be the old Fort Ord where we were stationed at in Monterey. He is now a professor over there. He's at the California State University of Monterey Bay. John and I grew up in the military together, so to speak. We have a very special relationship, married thirty-one years. But we also understood the military. John understood that I love making films. He knows I would go stir crazy if I didn't have something to do afterwards. He is supporting me going to film

school. It's only a five-hour drive, so I can drive and we can visit each other. My boys are grown; one is in college, the other one is growing up, too. We are a very close family and my family is in northern California.

**Oh, that's right. So he's near family.**

Yes, yes. So it's okay.

**That's wonderful. How long will you be in film school?**

It's a two year program.

**Two years, that's nothing.**

Which is good for me, especially when you're on your second chapter in life. It's great. This is good.

**I love it. I love how all of this is coming together.**

Thank you.

**Anything else that you want to say about your experiences, being on the street, the Healing Garden?**

Yes. I brought something here. When I made this film, it was not for profit. I just wanted to get the word out and show people that there are some wonderful human kindness going on; that was my whole thing. That was the first time I posted something like this on YouTube. I got under five hundred hits, which is great. I showed it to some of my film faculty. One of them, Bret, is great, and she said, "You should put it out in some of these competitions. It's good for you." The Las Vegas Women's Film Festival selected it. Bret was great. I love her. She was a real advocate for me. She was telling me, "Nothing like this has been done for Las Vegas when it happened." So they showed it at the film festival. What was really neat is because a lot of people did not know about the fifty-eight crosses or the Healing Garden, even people visiting. That's why I said

keeping these things, these stories and this imagery and artifacts and showing the public really, really gives us insight into the kindness that was bestowed upon us and the community. They showed that and I brought Brother Dre with me. He was just wonderful.

But that same day—I'm going to show you another picture—my son had told me about this and I hadn't even heard about this. This was happening nationally.

**Your son is where?**

He's here with me in Las Vegas. By the way, this is Brother Dre. I think you're going to be interviewing him soon. We're at the Las Vegas Film Festival. My son had told me about this. It was funny, the night before March twenty-fourth he's making his T-shirt and he's making a sign. I'm just so doggone proud of him. It was March for Our Lives. It was nationally. It was a peaceful demonstration and it was really about our problem with gun control and the violence.

**Is this the one that was at the Smith Center?**

Yes. He knew about it. So the night before he's making his sign. I just want to show you this. I was just so proud of my son that he was standing up for something he very much believed in. This happened in Las Vegas. Coincidentally, it happened the same day they were premiering my film. I mean you couldn't...

**Oh, that's wonderful.**

I just wanted to show you this because *To Kill a Mockingbird* is my favorite novel.

**"Courage is not a man with a gun in his hand," Atticus Finch.**

I was like, "I'm very proud of you."

**Yes. That's great.**

That was going on during the same time, and I wanted to share that with you because just thought the coincidence of that whole thing.

**Is that your son?**

That is my son Chris, yes, yes.

**That's his sign.**

That's his sign. Then you see a lot of people that are already starting to gather around. It was a peaceful demonstration.

I'm just trying to think if there is anything else to add. No. I just met incredible people here. Like I said, it was an incredible photo journey. You really had to experience it and just see it.

**If you decide to deposit some of your photos here in Special Collections, what would be the ideal? What are some of the things you would like to see Special Collections do with some of your photographs?**

I know you categorize. We make it accessible to people. The tags that we put on these photos, as they're looking for Las Vegas history, for kindness, for community, that they're able to see these images of it. I don't want this to be political in nature. I just want to show people, like I said, ordinary citizens doing the extraordinary and just some of these pictures of what people do. That's what I would like for Special Collections to do, just make it available for people to know that there's kindness out there.

**You know we do that.**

Wonderful. Thank you.

**It has nothing to do with politics.**

Right.

**Thank you so much. I'm so happy that we have the story that goes with the film.**

Thank you. Thank you for your time. I know it was quite long, but thank you.

**This is perfect. I thank you.**

I wrote to Mayor Goodman and I said, "Ma'am, I just wanted to let you know that I just saw this outpour of human kindness and community and I just made this film and here's a copy of it. It's on YouTube." Believe it or not, in a couple of weeks she wrote back to me. She wrote the nicest note to me. I could share that with you later.

I got a call the next day from Channel 2, which is KNLV. It's the local channel here for the government. I got a call from them. I have a feeling it was probably Mayor Goodman that gave the message. They said, "We would like to go ahead and air your film during the month of February." So they showed it a couple of times.

I was just so honored by the fact that, one, the mayor responded back to me. It was the kindness words. I was like, *wow, more people get to see this now*. So I was quite honored and I just wanted to share that with you.

**She's really special.**

Yes. Thank you.

**Thank you for this, for all of it.**

**[End of recorded interview]**