

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAY PLEGGENKUHLE AND DANIEL PEREZ

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This is Claytee White. It is July 18th, 2018, and I'm in my office here in the Oral History Research Center with Jay and Daniel.

Would the two of you please pronounce and spell your full names for me?

Jay Pleggenkuhle. It's spelled J-A-Y. Last name is P, as in Paul, L-E-G-G-E-N-K-U-H-L-E.

Wow, what a name.

Daniel: *Spell it backwards.*

Yes, right.

Daniel, D-A-N-I-E-L. Perez, P-E-R-E-Z.

Thank you so much. I'm going to go back and forth. I'm going to start the conversation with you, Jay. I just want you to tell me a little about your childhood, where you grew up, what the family was like, games you played as a little boy, your passion.

I grew up in Fredericksburg, Iowa, a small town in northeast Iowa, about nine hundred people. I literally grew up on a farm, corn and soy beans. My grandparents lived about a half a mile down the road. I have two sisters, one older, one younger, and we're very close still to this day. I spent a lot of my time playing in the fields and along the creek on the property, building forts, building tree houses, torturing my sisters, just typical stuff of growing up on the farm and filling your time. But we worked hard, too.

What kind of work does it take to grow soy beans?

It's a well-planned thing. You start in the spring cultivating the soil, putting the seeds in, tending the field, spraying for weeds, and then harvest. It's kind of monotonous in a way.

But no chopping, no...

No, no. It's pretty much all mechanized. No really hard physical work except for cutting corn out of soy beans; that was a lot of walking from one end of the field to the other, cutting corn and

weeds out of soy beans, and then, of course, picking up rock where you walk from one end of the field to the other, picking up rocks, throwing them in a wagon so the fields are all cleared and they don't break down the machinery.

Do you actually take the corn off the stalk, or do you take the whole stalk down?

No. The combine does all that. You just have to drive the combine.

What year are we talking about that you were a young boy?

I was born in 1965. It was a good time, the seventies, growing up in the seventies on a farm. It was great.

Yes, because you had farm machinery by that time.

We had farm machinery. I'm not quite that old.

That's great. What was your profession after leaving the farm?

Let's see. We left the farm in the eighties. The farm economy kind of crashed and stuff. When I graduated high school, I went to college; my first year I studied journalism, and then I accidentally stumbled across this profession called landscape architecture when I was visiting a friend. I had never heard of it. But I visited Iowa State and happened to see some really cool models that were there up and down I thought, *oh, I want to do that*. I found out who made them and enrolled in the program and studied there.

Did you have to do those kinds of projects where you were up for weeks at a time in a lab setting?

Completely. We'd share studio space and we'd do projects that would take the whole semester. I did some interesting stuff. I studied for a while in Australia and worked in the Aboriginal communities, helping them with their appropriate technologies for what they need for their culture versus modern life, I guess, and then trying to blend that. So that was an interesting thing.

I want you to stop right there because the next question is going to be how you got to Las Vegas.

Daniel, can you do the same thing? Just tell me a little bit about...

Way quicker, yes. Jay is an interesting man, that's for sure. That's what really magnetized me to him. We've done nothing similar at all in lifestyles. He's from pretty much the East Coast; I'd be from the West Coast.

But anyways, as a young kid I grew up in San Fernando Valley, California. I have three brothers and sisters—well, it's four of us all together and actually three step-brothers and sisters, too, so quite a bit of us. It was always fun having a lot of kids around. That's what made our time go by, with each other playing in the dirt and stuff like that.

Is San Fernando Valley part of the bread basket? You grow a lot of crops?

There is a lot of trees and vegetation there, yes. That's pretty much what my family did growing up; they picked vegetables and stuff like that in the fields and transported stuff from California to Texas and back and forth. Actually as a kid one of my memories was—that's probably the last day I was in the field—was where they were picking chilies, and, of course, I was picking chilies with them—but wiping the sweat off your eyes and that burned the hell out of my eyes. I guess the following week I was dropped off with Grandma and raised there for a little bit. Yes, it was fun though. It was a good experience.

Where did Grandma live?

She lived in Tujunga, which is, again, the San Fernando Valley.

Yes. I lived in Los Angeles for twenty-two years. How did you find yourself in Las Vegas?

What happened?

I was transferred over here with the phone company, AT&T at the time.

When did you go to work for AT&T?

In '94, '95, '96. Ninety-six, yes, right out of high school. Then I just came out here. I stayed in the valley for a while and build out a lot of stuff out there. Then I kind of changed professions a little bit. I got into a car dealership. Because I was out here for a little while, and with the heat, I just couldn't handle it. I passed out a couple of times. This heat is something else. I'm from California and there is heat in the Lancaster/Palmdale area where I grew up, but crazy the heat was here. It was a hundred and twenty, I think, that day. I was like, I'm going to choose something else if I want to live. So that was it.

Now, about a year or maybe a year and a half ago—I was selling cars for ten years before I met Jay, after the phone company. Maybe less than that, ten years. But anyway, we met and he just needed maybe help once a day. It should probably be that again now. But we're going to work it there so he doesn't have so much stress. It was all about helping each other out. He helped me out in a way that words could never be enough. I'll probably have to repay him for the rest of my life. That's the kind of friend I will be for him; I will always be there for him. But it was something great meeting him and then him saying, "Hey, what do you think we should do today?" I don't know. We've become really good friends.

Wonderful. We're going to talk about the project in a bit.

Jay, how did you get to Las Vegas?

When I graduated from Iowa State, I moved back to Australia and eventually my visa ran out and I had to leave. I had an uncle who was stationed here in the seventies at Nellis and he had moved back out here. He said, "Well, why don't you come out here? There's plenty of work. If you want to get out of bed, there's work here."

So I moved out here. I had a three-year plan; get some job experience and then I'd move

someplace where I really wanted to be. And I never left.

Because this is the best place.

It's really amazing. It is a wonderful city. I grew up in a small town, and Las Vegas still feels like a small town to me. Everybody sort of knows everybody. People sort of take care of each other here. It's a convenient city. Easy to fly in and out of. It's nice to go to a grocery store at two in the morning if you're hungry. People say we have traffic. I've never lived in California, but I have visited and I really don't see traffic here.

That's right. There's no such thing.

You look around and it's like, this is a pretty good place. It's really what you make of it.

Exactly. Tell me some of the projects that you worked on once you arrived.

I rolled into town on a Tuesday morning with my little red truck and all my worldly goods in the backseat of it.

Of which year?

Ninety-one. The first thing I did...I needed to learn plant material, so I went to a nursery and they hired me on the spot. I sold plants for seven weeks at Plant World on Charleston. It was a great job. I loved it. I really loved it. But I thought, *I have this degree; I'm supposed to be a landscape architect*. So when I was offered at a job at a firm, I left the job at Plant World. I lasted about six months at that firm and realized I really hated being in an office. It was like my worst nightmare, and so I quit without a job.

I thought, *I'll go get a job at the Mirage as a waiter because at least I'd make good money in tips*. They looked at my resume and said, "Wow, you have a degree in landscape architecture." We had had the freeze where everything in the valley died that year. They hired me on the spot, created a position and hired me on the spot to redesign and oversee the

construction and re-landscaping of the Mirage, which was fun. I had all these little toys to play with, cranes and everything. Money wasn't an object. They just said, "Get it done and make it beautiful." Then, of course, they expanded to Treasure Island and Bellagio. I met a lot of really fascinating people through there. I ended up working with Siegfried and Roy, helping them build their Secret Garden. We're still friends to this day.

Is that how the tree came about?

That's why I called them. Roy has a really amazing imagination and I learned a lot from him. He would say things or come up with ideas, and I'd just scratch my head and think, *the guy is nuts*. But then I see the show that he created and he changed the face of entertainment, and who am I to say he's nuts? Look what he's doing with his life. Through Siegfried and Roy I learned that it is true; if you can dream, it can happen. Everyone says that but they actually showed people that it can happen, and that was a good lesson from them. So that's how I ended up here and got started.

Wonderful. I want the two of you to talk about the garden together. Talk about the concept of it. Whose thought was it first?

I'm not really sure, to tell you the truth.

Just talk together just like I'm not here.

Leading up to the point of the garden, I was at the Mirage for seven years and then I went out on my own because I had my first son and I wanted to take control of my life. I started a little design build company and that's what I've been doing ever since. Then about a year and a half ago, I met Daniel and—

Ruined his life.

No. I thought, *I could use somebody just like one day a week, but who's going to do that?* And he

said, "Well, I'd do that." Then one day led to seven days a week to where I brought him on as part owner of the company. It's kind of rare you find somebody you can truly, truly trust and depend on. It's a rare thing.

So anyway, the night of October first happened. We had this thing where we always meet for breakfast at the Skyline on Monday morning and we'd lay out our week.

Where is the Skyline?

It's on the Boulder Highway. To this day if you walk into it, it's like you're in 1972 Las Vegas.

It's worth the trip. It looks like that painting right there.

It does, actually.

The Skyline on Boulder Highway, I'll have to find that. Good food? Good breakfasts?

Great food. Anyway, we were there that Monday morning trying to figure out how we were going to approach this. How do you just go to people and just start...as if nothing happened? Like I said, I don't know how it really came about as an idea, it's just we were talking about maybe a pop-up garden or something.

That's exactly right.

There was nowhere for people to gather in this town. We have city parks, but everything has always been so casino-centric. The city has always worked really hard as far as keeping people in the resort corridor. We've never really developed like a regular city would, I guess. We're thinking, *it's a shame we don't have something like that*. Like in New York, they would go to Central Park, but we don't have that. I guess we were just talking back and forth like that. I had met the city attorney through another job, and Daniel said, "We should ask the city if they have a parking lot or a little thing."

He was thinking about tree bombing some corner.

That's what we call it, tree bombing.

He wanted to do a corner, I guess anywhere really. He just wanted to do it. I just said, "Hey, give him a call, man, and do it."

What is tree bombing?

Just coming in with a ton of trees, overplanting. We call it tree bombing or plant bombing. So anyway, he said, "Look, there's a reason that you have the city attorney's number. Use it." I said, "I'm not calling him. He doesn't know me." He goes, "No, call it."

So I dialed it and Brad Jerbic, the attorney, picked up the phone. I said, "I don't know if you remember me, but I'm sitting here with Daniel and we'd like to do a pop-up park so people have a place to go to." He said, "You're really calling me to ask if you can do a park?" I thought, *oh, boy, I guess I overstepped my bounds.* I said, "Well, yes." And he said, "Well, we lost somebody in your office and we're all sitting here around this table and we don't know what to do and we don't know how to move forward." He just said, "I wish there was a park we could get out of this building and walk to." And the phone rang and I asked if we could do a park. So he said, "If you're not busy, would you guys come down here and talk to me?"

So Daniel and I went and talked to him, right away. He had Tom Perrigo there with the city. We sat down and they're asking, "What are you thinking?" We didn't really know what we were thinking, did we?

No. We just said, "We would just like to dedicate something, do something."

We just wanted to do something to stay busy, something positive, and gardening is a positive thing; it's growing something.

What's your favorite quote? He who plants a tree plants hope?

Yes. I love that quote. Anyway, they were asking, "Okay, what are you thinking? How big is it

going to be? What's it going to be? Who's going to build it? Where is this stuff coming from?" All this; all that. I was just like, "I don't know, I guess we'll get donations and we'll get volunteers." All this stuff, being really naive, and if you think about it, then you wouldn't do it.

They started looking through some of the parcels of property they had downtown, and they finally decided on the current location.

Which is?

Ten fifteen Casino Center.

Which is his son's birthday, 10/15.

It was just a coincidence.

Anyway, they decided on that. They give us a piece of paper and told us to go down there. Then the next morning we had to come back with a design. We went to PublicUs then that afternoon and started scribbling on the back of their menu. Everyone says a napkin, but it was actually an eight and a half by eleven photocopied menu. We took a bunch of them, wrecked a lot of menus. We started scribbling.

Daniel had scribbled this heart on a piece of paper and then he was going to wad it up and throw it away. But it looked really cool because he's actually a really good artist. I said, "Don't do that." He says, "No, this is stupid." But to me it made sense because it was a heart and it's in the center of Vegas and our heart just got shattered. We started with that heart in the center, and then I just started—because I do the tree part, I started drawing the trees around it and stuff.

We scribbled it all out. Then we went back and showed it to Brad and Tom. They made a bunch of copies of it and somehow they got circulated. But that was our blueprint.

Then on Tuesday, again I went to work and started calling everybody we knew to donate whatever they could, people we knew who had pavers, people we knew who had plant material,

people we knew who had labor, people we knew for lighting, irrigation, and all of that. For the most part people were very, very receptive. There were some who thought it was a huge scam, and so I got yelled at a couple of times for that.

Give me an example of maybe your favorite call or the most memorable call.

I guess it's okay to talk about Sam, huh?

Of course. I was thinking the same guy.

One of the main contractors that we called was Mark Hamelmann.

I was thinking of him. But the other guy you said, Sam, he really, really wanted to do it, but...Believe me, that's the same person I was thinking.

Exactly. So Mark showed up and met Daniel and I on the job site.

I never met the guy.

The three of us were standing there, coming up with maybe who would have stuff. We thought of this guy Sam who has pavers. He works for Apache Stone. But in the end Apache Stone wouldn't donate the pavers, so Sam paid for it all out of his own pocket, after the fact. He didn't question doing this at first. I had him on the phone, and he was actually really rude and belligerent to me. "How dare you take this and exploit this situation? What's in it?" He was really...So I handed the phone over to Mark.

It's how you forget things.

Yes. And Mark was kind of like, "Wow."

Oh, because I said something bad to him, too, huh?

But Mark hung up and he said, "I'm really sorry you had to go through that one." But about a half hour later this guy Sam rolls up in his truck on the job site. He said, "Now, what are you doing?" I explain everything. We show him our little piece of paper. I have some orange paint by then, so

we're painting orange lines on the ground. He goes, "Okay, I'll bring some pavers." Sam never left the job until it was complete on Friday.

This is kind of fast forwarding. Through this whole process someone brought a skid loader and Sam was moving. We had about three hundred fifty or four hundred tons of dirt we were moving to elevate the pathway and stuff. I see Sam with this little boy, maybe two years old at the most, sitting on his lap. That's the first time I ever saw Sam smile. He looked like he was having the time of his life. Then on Friday I finally understood why. He came over when we were finishing the garden and getting it swept up and getting it ready for the dedication. He gives me this hug and he said, "For the first time this helped." He said, "It's been almost two years since my little boy drown in the swimming pool in the backyard and this made the difference."

Now he sits on the board of directors, overseeing the maintenance of it. Then when it came time to submit the bill for pavers, his company didn't think it was a worthy project, I guess, but he did. He paid over eight thousand dollars out of his own pocket.

What is a paver?

The little cobblestones that make up the hardscape, the walkways. That was a private citizen donation.

What is a skid loader?

A little tractor with a bucket on it so you can fill it full of dirt and move it around. If OSHA ever shows up, I never said there was a kid on it, okay? There were a lot of moments like that or it would have never gotten done.

Tell me about some of the ideas that came around. We know that there was a special tree that was donated. Tell me about that donation. You don't have to say the name of the person if you don't want to.

No, that's fine. I just knew that if we had one really great tree and if we got it there quickly, people would see it and people would come, something really great that would be...And so Moon Valley—well, actually they didn't donate the tree, they had the tree. But it was a ten-thousand-dollar tree. I called Siegfried and Roy and I told them what we were doing. I know that Roy really loves trees. There was never even a question. He said, "Of course, it's not a problem. Just tell us who to write the check to." That was it. So the tree was there instantly.

We went back, Daniel and Mark Hamelmann and myself, and we were kicking in the dirt trying to figure out, where is the heart of this garden? Where should the tree go? We were kicking in the dirt and this little chain comes out of the dirt. Mark bent down and he pulled it up. There was a little medallion on it with the tree of life.

It looked kind of like that there.

Yes. It was a tree of life. So we decided, okay, this is where the tree of life is supposed to go. From there, this guy showed up. We just determined the tree of life and then just painted out this heart thing. A guy showed up, a big burly guy, with Capriati Construction. He goes, "My son was at the concert. He left four minutes before the shooting started. When he got home that night, I hugged that kid like I've never hugged him before. So I'm here for whatever you need as long as you need me."

So I asked him what he did. He said he did concrete work. I said, "Well, we need to make this heart out of concrete." He took care of that.

The people next door who were building—it wasn't finished yet—but the Love store came over and said, "What are you guys doing?" We explained this; we're making this heart out of concrete. And they said, "Who's paying for the concrete?" I said, "I don't know." They said, "Okay, well, let us know. We'll write the check." That kept happening.

Then I started calling around for the tiles because I knew that we wanted to cover it in tiles. I thought, *when we dedicate this, it would be really, really nice if the community could paint tiles and then everyone would have their part in it or their story or whatever.* I couldn't find the tiles locally; no one would donate them. But we found a company in Los Angeles that had fifteen hundred of them in storage.

How many did you need?

Well, I was hoping for four hundred and then I'd fill in the gaps on the heart with whatever. We have to create a lot of extra space now to display all the tiles that we have in storage.

But anyway, the problem with the tiles in Los Angeles, they were there and there was no way to get them here. So I called this lady Kimberly Miles who does our payroll and I told her my situation. She said, "Okay, I'm on it." She called me back twenty minutes later and said, "Don't think about it again. They're on their way."

They drove their own truck to Los Angeles, loaded all the tiles. It's a lot weight with those. Drove back from L.A. On the way they blew their transmission and had to get another vehicle. But they were all there by Friday night. They took their junked truck and donated it to a charity because that's the kind of people they are.

I mean, the incredible goodness, people just showing up, just showing up like crazy. Star Nursery, I gave them a plant list and they just started dropping plants. Moon Valley showed up with the trees.

Tell me about those trees. You're talking about the fifty-eight trees.

The fifty-eight trees. We knew we wanted fifty-eight trees along a walk to create a grove where people could wander through. Because I believe when you're in a grove of trees there's a certain energy from plants. If you go into a forest, especially in an old-growth forest, it's palpable to feel

that energy. Granted, this isn't old growth that we're creating. Moon Valley agreed to donate fifty-eight trees and we got all them in the ground.

Then different people, like Palm Mortuary, they all wanted to donate plaques. But I was really adamant about not giving each tree a name. There are fifty-eight trees, but I didn't want to put names on them because then someone would start with, why is their tree there and mine is over there? I would rather have that one or this one. God forbid, one of the trees dies. But as it turns out over the next couple of weeks every tree ended up with a name on it because as people came, as family members of victims came, they, for lack of a better term, adopted it.

Just an organic process.

Completely organic, like the whole garden was.

Tell me about the wall that you are going to have to replace. How did that happen?

How did that happen? Jay keeps pushing forward. He's the man, believe it or not. He gives credit everywhere, but it's really this man right here.

No.

It really is.

There's so many talented creative people in this community. A friend of ours, Darla, who works at Star Nursery, she has been through a lot of personal tragedy in her life, but she's an amazing, creative woman. When you go to her office at Star, she's always showing us something new that she found in a garage sale that she's repurposed for a planter, a wall hanging, or whatever. I had an idea of this wood wall that I wanted to do out of reclaimed wood or pallets or something.

Then she comes back with these pictures. She researched it, of course, Pinterest and stuff. She said, "Look at this." "That will work. Let's do it."

So I told her how big the wall should be and that's the only thing I did. She got all the

materials together through donations and everything, worked with Daniel as far as how it should go together, and it just went together. It's kind of strange.

Do you have a story about it, Daniel, that you'd like to share?

The wall? The one that's there now? It's really organic. It's got a lot of memories for a lot of different people.

How did you put it together?

We put it together just raw, with just concrete, digging out the holes, standing up the walls and nailing them together and then stacking them.

How high is it?

It's about, shoot, eight feet high?

I think so.

Yes, it is.

Yes, it's much taller than me.

Yes, it's up there. Painting it and putting the hanging baskets in it, Darla was the director on all that. We were just her muscle, wherever they needed things. Just like for Jay, I'm just his muscle to move things around.

He keeps me in check. I never would have made the phone call to Brad if he hadn't done it.

That's right. That's wonderful.

He pushes me continually on that.

I love that.

It's hard to find that in life. When you do, it's a miracle.

Yes, it's a great partnership. How did it start with people putting things on that wall? How did that start?

It really was our friend Darla, her daughter who passed; we had something in the center representing and remembering her.

Cowboy boots.

Right in the center. From there on, everybody just put stuff anywhere, hung stuff. Then the lady that made those little pictures, she did that and she was a really nice lady. She just came out. They're made out of pieces of wood and put the pictures on them and laminated them. I don't know. She did a lot of work with them. She did that right away.

She did. She came and asked if she could put them on the wall. She told us what she wanted to do. It's a community wall. People could put whatever they want. It sounded like a really wonderful idea. So she went home, and this is in the afternoon, and she came back the next morning with all these pictures, all laminated on these boards and covered over it in names.

I helped her screw them on there and spread them around.

She stayed up all night to do that.

Everybody did their part in any which way or form, from babies to adults, kids.

What about the rocks?

That's amazing.

How did that start?

I don't know.

So many different ways, I think. It was women that were in some kind—what was it, a group?

They were some kind of Women Helping Women or something like this.

Yes. Where I think it was minimum once a month they meet and they would do one charitable thing, and so they all met in the garden to paint rocks. But then it just started—

With kids, too, these kids from...

Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

I think they probably did it the most, too. Just every single kid, everybody. We really don't know where it started.

They just started showing up, and beautiful ones. But this elementary school in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, I had talked to their principal after the fact when we got the package. I guess they were having a hard time with the kids explaining how someone would open fire on people like animals. So they created this project, I think it was through their art teacher, where all the kids painted rocks, and then they took an old letter set case from the old type set and made a shadow box out of it because it looked like the wall that was in the paper that they had seen in USA Today or whatever. They sent pictures of all of them painting rocks. Then they must have had a night in their school where they displayed them and everyone got to come in the community and look at their project. Then they had their state flag flown over the nation's capital and they had their governor authenticate it and send that to us so we could fly it in the garden here. They shipped these rocks and then this beautiful wood burning plaque of the back of someone holding his hands up in a heart shape, Vegas Strong. That showed up in the mail.

Yes, it's amazing, the outpouring. What did you learn about yourself, Daniel, through this project?

That you can never give up on people and you need to just push each other forward no matter who it is, race, color. You can't be judgmental even to the guys who call us a butt head or whatever. You've got to love them all. God loved everybody. We've got to love everybody. That's all. I think that's what I learned most, more compassion, and that's what we've got to do is just keep up with that.

Jay, what do you think you learned about yourself?

It's hard to put into words. It's really amazing that you step back and give up control, what can really happen, and trusting people, really, really trusting people. Because there was a day on Tuesday when Tom from the city called and he said, "We're going to do a press release about this garden that's being built." He said, "You're really going to build it by Friday?" That was the only time I ever really stopped and started thinking, *well, we need trees, we need plants, we need soil, and this should be like a six- or eight-month project.* I thought about it and then I looked around and saw everybody and I just pushed it down and I said, "Yes, it will happen. It may not be perfect, but it will be a garden." When people started showing up as long as the green side was up, we didn't care.

I just learned a lot about people. There was a man there who was working in the garden who lost his father in the 1980 MGM fire and he showed up because of that. And like Darla losing her daughter so young, with those boots on the wall, and Sam with his son. So many people that showed up. They were there for reasons way beyond just that shooting. There's a tree in the garden, a little tree, for Daniel's cousin who a few weeks after the mass shooting was shot in a drive-by and killed. It's not part of the fifty-eight trees, but it's still a little tree I put in there because I wanted to honor his cousin.

Elementary. So he can go get lemons in the spring.

It's a lemon tree? Oh, that's great.

Because he loves lemons.

That's great. So do I.

I just learned a lot about people and just really letting go. Perfection is overrated.

Or the definition we have for it.

Exactly. The Japanese have the term *wabi-sabi*; it's the beauty or the perfection in imperfection;

it's that big chunk in the wood that makes that piece of wood so beautiful.

That's great. Wabi-sabi?

Wabi-sabi. And that's the garden. That's the garden. People ask, how did this all happen? How did you come up with the idea? It's like really I didn't. It was channeled. I mean stuff that happened, it wasn't us. People just showed up.

How big is it?

It's about a quarter of an acre, I think.

There is a portion of the block that is vacant. Is that going to become a parking lot or something? What is that going to become?

The city bought that after the fact. They've just last week turned it over to us. We still get so many people who want to volunteer in the garden. There are only so many things we can do in the garden. This is kind of off subject, but one of the things we did is Bob Kaufman's wife had donated three hundred daffodil bulbs, which was great. I thought, *what if we planted like three thousand?* So we thought, *well, we'll have an event and everyone can come and plant bulbs.* We set the goal at ten thousand. So we got ten thousand daffodil bulbs donated.

My favorite flower.

On Saturday morning we had, I don't know, three hundred and fifty people or four hundred people show up. A lot of them were wearing black shirts because they had been talking online and the black shirts represented that they had lost somebody. It was the first time most of them had ever met other family members that had lost someone. I have some pictures of this whole—it's like a family reunion. They're all up on that little stage area in a great big group. That was an amazing morning. It was really an amazing morning.

Where are the daffodils?

They're spread everywhere.

Everywhere. Wherever they could find a spot, they put them in. Some of them are upside down, some of them are right side up. A lot of them bloomed, a lot of them get trampled because people keep coming through. Again, it wasn't about creating this perfect bed of daffodils. It was about all these people coming together and talking and sharing their experiences and helping each other through it.

And the daffodils will come back every year, right?

That's what they say, yes. You'll see them next year.

Anyway, so the lot next door, because there's only so much we can do in the garden and we want to keep it more of a solemn place—I mean, we wanted to honor the lives lost, but we also wanted to honor life. So it's like, *okay, we're left behind, but we still have life and we want to create something beautiful with it.* So that's what that garden represents.

The heart that Daniel came up with in the middle, I mean, it has the tiles, so the heart was made by the community. Then the top of the heart, we took all the red tiles and shattered them and then put them all back together, because our heart was shattered. We put it back together, but the pattern of the broken pieces put together is way more interesting than the perfect lines of the squares.

I'm so glad you said that. The next time I go I'm going to look at that.

That's why that is that way. The part next door, the empty lot, what we have planned for that is sort of an urban farm. We had a group at a convention that wanted to donate a thousand trees. Well, we don't have room for a thousand trees. But what if they donated the orchard for our urban farm? Then we can do raised vegetable beds and we can incorporate the tiles that we have extra. Because we literally have like twelve hundred extra tiles because people keep sending

them to this day from all over the place, and so they can be on the face of the raised vegetable gardens. We'll have a little barn and shed structure where Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, church groups, school groups can come and plant seeds, and as they grow, then the next group can put them into the garden and stuff like that.

As part of this urban farm, we want to have a fire ring and it will be a storytelling ring. We can have events where people can come and tell their stories. Again, it's about community and bringing people together. Because one thing that we've done really well in this town, to our detriment though, is we've all moved behind gates and everyone has to live in a gated community and exclude themselves and not be a part of the community. Then we drive to pretend shopping centers, like The District or Town Square, and pretend we have the downtown experience, but it's all a polished corporate thing. Then we all go back home and go behind our gates and go into your garage. No one ever sees their neighbor and we isolate ourselves and we don't know each other. And it's really easy to hurt each other when you don't know them because they're not human anymore. What I'm really hoping is this garden and the farm will put humanity back.

That's wonderful.

So that's what's going on next door in the empty lot. That's my short version of it.

I like that. I like it so much.

We have plans hopefully to take it even further.

Tell me about them.

There have been some interesting visitors. One day we had the privilege of going over to the garden to meet someone special who wanted to see it. It happened to be Nancy Pelosi. She had invited Daniel and I to Washington, D.C., which we never have gone or taken her up on it. But I'm thinking that I might like to do that because there have been three mass shootings since

October first. We could keep planting gardens, but my thought is go to Washington, D.C. and find a piece of property, and it can be in the worst neighborhood, I don't care, and create a national healing garden. In doing the national healing garden, I'd like to bring kids from all across the country in buses to build it, volunteers, everything volunteered again. What we do with the national healing garden is we go all the way back to Columbine and we honor all those people who have lost their lives. We can do the pictures of each victim, but in the middle of all the pictures, I want to do mirrors in it so people can see themselves as part of this, either a victim or a part of the solution.

I love that idea. I think everybody would love that idea.

Hopefully on October first we can announce that.

That would be wonderful.

There's some amazing young people. This young man who contacted us who just graduated law school, he's taking the bar. He just doesn't want to be a lawyer. He wants to do something special with his life. And so he called and asked if I'd talk to him. I'm like, I don't know what to tell him about being a lawyer. I did ask him what his favorite thing was in law school. He said when he was working at the Boys and Girls Club mentoring kids. There are young people like that that could step up and help us with this national healing garden. It would be a really great way to draw attention to—because like, oh, wow, now we've set a record of fifty-eight people killed. But add it all up. How many thousands have died? How many thousands? People are like, oh, we're in this war in Afghanistan and all these U.S. soldiers have lost their lives. But I don't think it's as many as we've murdered on the streets in this country at our own hands. So that's one goal.

Then the other thing is I'd ultimately like to start a foundation and make it the rest of my life's work to do gardens across America, so we're proactive, announce a prevention versus a

pounded cure, where we can go into at-risk areas or wherever and we help them do gardens. Then all these kids are working together and they're doing something positive in working and talking together instead of being isolated.

Yes, and they're planting trees and they're eating vegetables from the garden.

Daniel has to reel me in on some of this stuff.

Oh, no, no, no, just continue.

Keep going.

Don't come back. Oh, that's great.

There's a lot of stuff I hope that comes from this.

I love the fire ring because our weather here permits that for ten months out of the year.

Can you imagine what you're doing right now?

Oh, yes.

There's so many fascinating people in this town. I've had the privilege to work with a lot of really amazing people; Phyllis Binion is one of them. Her father came here to work on the dam. She was telling me stories about being in high school and how they were bussed out to watch them detonate the bombs with the mushroom clouds, all this stuff that you think, *how crazy is that?*

Right. Phyllis Binion's father was?

Phyllis married Jack Binion and Jack Binion's father was Benny Binion.

She is the one who married into the family.

She is married into the family. She's probably one of the single most amazing people I've met here, just in a sense of humility and humbleness. Some really cool people that way.

I agree wholeheartedly. Yes, some amazing people. When people tell me, there is no culture here, no nothing here, why do you stay? I don't even understand what they mean by that

anymore.

I don't either because somehow we sort of fell into the middle of all of this. It's weird.

Yes, this is an amazing place.

Daniel, anything else you want to add to the national healing garden or anything else that Jay just talked about?

I'm here just to support him in anything he wants.

He does a lot with kids and stuff, too, especially his own. He does some really neat stuff.

Did kids work on the garden? I understand that some kids did.

Yes.

Were there quite a few kids working?

We had college kids, young kids, my own kids, his kids. It was great having everybody there. It was really good.

The wall that's there now will have to come down because it's not going to be able to—

Stand the weather.

Yes. What do you plan to do with the current wall?

I think Jay has spoken with the city. Jay can mostly get into that.

Well, we sketched out another idea and then Daniel built a model of it, which is actually really cool.

This is the new wall?

The new wall that he has for—yes—with the fountain—well, not a fountain, but actual bubbles going through one of them. It's going to be really cool. Really big.

It's going to be five panels that will be—the wall is going to be laid out on a fractal, just a natural mathematical formula that you find in nautilus shells or cumulus clouds, but there will be five

panels, and so there will be breaks in between as it spirals back so you can wander around the five panels. The first panel will be—it's all going to be Quarantine steel so it looks sort of like old mine, but then we will have wood on it so people can still attach. So it will still look sort of like the pallet wall, but it will be much more durable.

Are they going to touch or am I going to be able to walk in between them?

You're going to be able to wander between them. The first wall will be—I think we had, what, eight feet tall?

Yes. The highest one is like—

Sixteen. It goes up in two-foot increments and it will spiral like a nautilus. People can still attach everything they want to it, bring plants and all that. But then one of the panels will be the story of the garden and how it came about and what the intention of the garden is.

And you have photographs? The entire way?

Yes. I've got a whole bunch of stuff if you want to see there, too. Then there will be a wall that has the names of everybody, but probably not pictures just because pictures can fade and then look really bad. Because people can attach things, they can continually bring pictures and photographs.

Then one of the benefactors gave us twenty-five thousand dollars towards the wall who just showed up out of the blue and said, "I have this foundation. Our mission is to change the world through compassion. What you guys did follows that." He gave us a check for twenty-five thousand dollars. His only thing was, "I'd like to see water incorporated."

Well, with water you have a problem with homeless bathing. So we've got this idea for a bubble wall that will rise up fourteen feet and it will be lit so the bubbles will just keep ascending up.

Then the fifth wall is sixteen feet tall. It is going to have the quote that the city attorney read from Romeo and Juliet about stars in the heaven, after they died. That will be at the top of that. But then it will have these perforations and it will be a constellation of fifty-eight Swarovski crystals that will be lit like stars in the heaven above that then. That's what's going in permanently.

When do you think it's going to happen?

It will be dedicated on October first.

Wow. So you have another challenge, another real challenge.

Again, S W Architecture showed up to do all the drawings for us. McCarthy Engineering, they showed up to do all the engineering. People just keep showing up.

And Jay keeps pushing them, like, "You can do this." He's the director.

It's amazing, this community.

It's a blessing to have so many people—it's changed their lives in so many ways, not just Jay's, not just mine, but anybody, like Dre. It means a lot to a lot of people who have taken pride in that place. I believe that's what we should all be doing every day. If we can show that kind of love, pay it forward, man, we'd be a great, great world.

Oh, yes.

Daniel's son did the one tile at the base of the heart. There's a spot for three tiles. When he painted it, he didn't know where it was going. I just happened to see it. I didn't ask for a lot because it's community, whatever anyone wants to do. But the one tile, I insisted it be on the point of the heart because it sums it really nice. It's "One love."

I'm so glad I had this interview. Next time I go down, there are certain things I have to look for now. This is great.

There's a lot of symbolism in it that we don't talk about because church and state and this and that. I'm not an overly religious person.

Yes, but you're very spiritual.

Like the walkway, the reason it had to be mounted, I wanted people to ascend up through. And the bubble wall, the bubbles are going to ascend up.

I love that when you said that earlier.

There's a movie out called The Shack where there's a scene with the guy in the cave looking through the waterfall. That's why I wanted that to be, like you're looking through. The garden gets more beautiful every day with the stuff people leave there. The stones, the artwork on the stones, you could spend a whole day there just looking at stones.

Exactly. Who decides when it's time to take things away, take it to the museum, to make space for more items? How is that done?

The city comes through. You know her and I forget her name. It starts with an "A."

I thought it was Amy.

Allie? They take care of all that although they're running out of space. She told me the other day they've collected over twenty thousand items that have been left in the garden.

Twenty thousand items.

That means more than twenty thousand people have visited.

This is at the State Museum. They probably have as much as that at the County Museum out on Boulder Highway as well.

It's amazing.

At least it's giving people that idea of keep your mind thinking.

Everyone is a part of it.

Because people just were not thinking. That guy was not thinking.

No. We brought a lot of people together.

Yes, you did.

Good job. You did a good thing.

You did.

Any other thoughts?

I try not to think too much.

Any other stories that you'd like to talk about related to the wall?

There's a bell story.

Tell me about that.

This guy showed up with a bell. His wife passed away, untimely death. She fell and hit her head, I guess. He showed up with this bell and he wondered if he could hang it somewhere. So I helped him hang it in the tree of life. That afternoon there was a little girl there and she was looking at the bell and she said, "Wow, my aunt used to make those, but she died." Someone heard her say that and knew that the guy who brought the bell was still there, and so he got them together.

Evidently they hadn't talked since her death. I don't know if they were estranged or what exactly, but the family reunited there. That was kind of a crazy thing.

Oh, yes, when they say surreal.

A lot of stuff like that went on. It still does. It still does.

It's a place of miracles as well.

It is, down in the crappiest part of town, a place of miracles.

But I love downtown.

I do too.

I love the new restaurants. I just love downtown.

I do too.

It's a wonderful place.

Full of characters.

Oh my God.

You know John, right? John Pacheco, the artist?

They've made him mayor.

He's our honorary mayor of the garden. And you do need to probably meet him. He'll tell you stories.

John...What is his last name?

Pacheco. I've got it right here.

You thought I knew him because?

Everybody seems to know him. No other reason than everybody—he's on a first name basis with Mayor Goodman. But he lives down across the alley down there. He's a guy who showed up and started handing out cups of coffee when people started showing up. He'd come out with his trumpet and he'd play "Reveille" to get the day started. He doesn't do it anymore because his bridge broke and he doesn't have the teeth, so he's waiting for someone to give him money so he can have some teeth. That type of guy. He's a very interesting character. I was going to pull up his last name because he had just called me. I think I have it in here. Right there, John...It starts with a "P."

Oh, wait a minute. I think I do know that person.

He was just appointed to the Arts Council or something.

I know him.

I figured you would. Everyone knows him.

That last name, I just didn't know how to pronounce it, but I think I know him. What else are you working on right now?

Ourselves and...

Ourselves. It's changed my life greatly.

Spiritually?

I just rethought who I am as a person completely and totally, how I deal with people, people I allow close to me, people I don't. It was very interesting the people who showed up and gave of their time versus those who didn't. This says a lot about a community, too, and where I want to direct my attention versus not, and so I'm shifting the way I think.

What do you see for yourself other than the national healing garden and gardens around the country? What do you see for yourself?

I, for most of my adult life, have had a dream of opening a nursery. Daniel knew about the dream. So one day he drags me to this piece of property on the Boulder Highway and said, "I think this will work for your nursery." I have a nursery now. We want to create a product line, but we want the product line to be fair trade. We've been coming across some really amazing products from Haiti and all over that are just giving people in this world some hope and a source of income, and so we would like to do that. I want to do a foundation with that where a percentage of all sales will go into that foundation because in the last twenty years the world has lost ten percent of its wilderness, in twenty years, and it's gone forever. So Siegfried and Roy are working to save all these animals, but where will they live? If we have this nursery and people come there and they buy plant material or fair trade artwork or whatever, a little percentage of that will go into this foundation and then we can replant and repair.

Replant trees and reforest, get people out there doing that kind of stuff, try to rebirth our earth before we destroy it, like we've been doing.

That's a good term, rebirth the earth. That's catchy, Daniel.

Yes, it is. That's right. Rebirth the earth.

That is really good. See, that's when he wadded up the heart and I'm like, "Wait a minute, that's really way too good to throw away."

These stupid ideas.

I don't think it's stupid at all. I think it's great.

It's wonderful. Were you there the night of the dedication?

Yes.

What did you think about it?

Like one of the most humbling experiences of my life.

There were so many people. I saw one person that I knew and I couldn't even get close to the person, there were just so many people.

To be sitting on the stage with the woman who lost her son from City Hall, Cameron, and to sit there and then the mayor on the other side and just trying to get your head around it. That woman, you could just feel her grief. She couldn't sit still, her hands and everything. I don't know. It was an amazing night. It was incredible to see the line of people painting tiles.

Oh, all of that. Just the people walking, just walking up the steps, up the walk.

And the school that brought all those balloons with the little tea lights lit in them floating over the park and that youth choir.

I love your plans. That's wonderful.

Well, if you're interested in helping push it forward...It takes a community, right?

That's right. It takes all of us.

We haven't gone to see Nancy Pelosi, but maybe this would be a good thing to go see her about.

I think so, too.

Because her comment was, "How did this all happen and no one thought?"

I think she would be a good one and somebody also on the other side so that it's a union so no matter who you are, you can be a part of this.

Exactly. I'm not sure who that would be exactly, but I don't think it would be hard to find because there's one thing that they can't argue.

No, not on the other side. I mean, Paul Ryan, one of the Republicans.

He might actually be a really good one, Paul Ryan.

He might work. That might be perfect.

Because it was his—

I was thinking you.

No. I'm not on the other side, believe me.

We try not to go there. That's off the record.

Yes. I am not there. But, yes, that would be wonderful.

He would be a good one because it was his state flag that came here with that elementary school.

That would be perfect.

Oh, wow, then it's a great idea.

I do respect him. I just don't agree with him.

Exactly. And he's a family person.

He is, exactly.

Well, there you go. You can call him.

That's right.

See how pushy he is? He's telling me to do it.

You can go to Google to find it.

That's true. We could. You know what? Reach back out to the principal at the elementary school and let them go to him.

Yes.

That works. That actually does work, doesn't it?

That works. He would listen to them. He's stepping down from Congress. It would be perfect timing. He's got the name recognition. Most people respect him, even if they don't agree with him. But they respect the way he's carried himself.

And that would be a nice part of his legacy.

Yes, and he needs that.

I have a lot of really great friends from living in Australia. They all have kids and they all travel a lot, but a lot of them won't come to the United States now because we're too violent. We see the pictures of what goes on in the Middle East and think that's how everybody lives. And they see the pictures of us shooting each other in the streets and they think that's how we live, which it is how we live, I guess.

Also, right now we've been given the permission to hate out loud.

Yes, from the leadership all the way through.

That's why we didn't allow him to be at the Healing Garden.

Evidently he wanted to come to the dedication, and someone from the city came over and asked what we thought about it. And we said, "No, it's a community project, not a political statement."

Good. Even though you had politicians on the program that night, they were all local. They

were all people doing all of these kinds of things all the time.

Nobody was campaigning. Because that would have been extremely disrespectful. Because we are very protective over what happens with it.

Good. I admire the two of you so very much.

Thank you.

This is amazing.

Thank you.

I thank you so much for sharing these memories.

Thank you for doing this. When we get phase two with the ring, you need to come to the fire ring and record.

Oh, I'll come to the fire ring.

Because it needs to be directed where there's a speaker maybe once a week or once a month and it could be a Phyllis Binion or a Siegfried or a Roy, anybody.

I would love to tell a few stories from the stories that we've collected. We've collected now about fifty-five interviews, so I would love to tell some of those stories from the interviews.

People are amazed when I tell them some of the things. An Uber driver who takes people to the hospital. Just amazing stories of just ordinary people. A photographer who doesn't even realize what's going on because he has been told that there are problems with the sound system and that's what he thinks it is. So he continues to take pictures as people are running because he thinks it's just the sound system. Then he goes back to process his photographs and he realizes that there is blood and he didn't know it before. It was just amazing, the photographs that he was able to get because he didn't know. He just took his photographs. We have amazing stories, just simply amazing stories of this city.

There was a bartender who was bartending there. She's a small woman, too, very young. She had been almost catatonic since this happened. She came to the garden. We planted some plants together and she started talking about what happened to her. The guy next to her was shot, the bartender. They found a wheelbarrow and put him in the wheelbarrow and got him out that way.

People just...Amazing. If people ever come by who have a good story and they want to tell it, we want to record it if they are ready to talk about it. There are a lot of cards there.

The parents of Stacey Etcheber from California, they showed up the day before we did the daffodils. I told them we were going to do that and they showed up the next day to plant. They text me quite a bit about what all this means to them and their healing. On Father's Day they actually texted me because it was his first Father's Day without his daughter.

Do they come back to Las Vegas?

They do. If you want it, I'll show you.

I would love the next time they come back if they could reserve an hour.

That's what I was going to ask you.

I'll go to them. I'll go to their hotel room. It doesn't make any difference.

They'd probably do it at the garden with you, I bet.

That's wonderful.

I'm trying to remember their mom's name. But she sent me a lot of texts that are just pretty amazing. I just can't remember her name off the top of my head. But really nice stuff. Really incredible people. Linda; that's her name. I'll share this one with you that she sent. We didn't really know what effect this was having on anybody. She sends a lot of stuff. They're going to be here in August. She already reserved time for them.

That's wonderful. Please, if they do, if you would tell them about us and what we're doing

here at UNLV.

I think they would do this because this is her comment: "Oh, Jay, we were so honored to meet you and participate in the tulip bulb planting. We never expected to find anything but heartache coming back to Vegas, but in the garden we found peace and comfort and we made lifelong friends. We look forward to seeing you again soon. We will be back to the garden every time we are in town. When people ask what they can do for us, I usually say nothing; your prayers, love and support are all we need. But now I talk about the garden and forward your card to them so they can contribute to this beautiful, beautiful peaceful place that you've created for us all to come together and find comfort. We are forever grateful. Please let us know when events are happening. We want to be a part of it if at all possible. If you are ever up north, we will welcome you and your partner with open arms and always, always have rooms open for you in our home. Jay, you have touched our lives forever. Big hugs always and much love." They communicate a lot.

They're in the apparel industry and one of their friends started the women's apparel trade show here. His name is Roland. They're interested in doing sort of a like a scholarship thing or whatever. There are all these people coming together that you want to do things to push this forward. It's kind of cool that that garden helps that.

I love it.

It's really good.

Anyway, that's some of the stuff going on.

Thank you so much.

Thank you for having us.

[End of recorded interview]