

AN INTERVIEW WITH ZOE ALBRIGHT

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

Today is October 16th, 2018. This is Barbara Tabach sitting in the Special Collections Reading Room with Zoe Albright. I'm going to ask you to again say your name and spell it for us.

My name is Zoe Albright; Z-O-E, A-L-B-R-I-G-H-T.

I really appreciate you coming in here today—for the Remembering 1 October project.

My pleasure.

But before we go into that particular day, I'd like you to tell me a little bit about yourself: what you do, how you came to live in Las Vegas; that brief biographical background of yourself.

It's not a place I ever wanted to even visit. So thirty years ago, my husband got a job with the Las Vegas Valley Water District and we moved from Springfield, Illinois to here, where he was an engineer with the Water District, and that was in 1988. My children were one, four, and six at the time, my boys. They were all raised here. Here we are thirty years later, and you couldn't get me to leave. There's no way.

So it feels like home.

It is home. It is definitely home. Yes, it's home.

What's your day job? What do you do for a living?

I'm glad you asked.

I know a little bit about it.

I'm a personal trainer at a gym in a chiropractic clinic called Elevate. I am also a nutrition consultant. When I'm not doing that I work with the Red Cross as a disaster action team responder and the Medical Reserve Corps as a responder for them as well.

Are those paid positions or all volunteer?

Those are both volunteer positions. The gym position is what pays the bills. The Red Cross and the Medical Reserve Corps, they pay the soul.

How did you get involved in that line of work? The personal training and nutrition.

The personal training...I was raised in the middle of nowhere in Minnesota, and if you wanted to go somewhere, you ran or you rode your bike. Our play time was climbing on trees, literally swinging from trees. If you got in trouble, you had to move a wood pile from one side of the yard to the other side of the yard and then back again. So it's always been physical. I competed in high school as a runner and a basketball player, and it just kind of kept going until it turned into my professional career.

We're going to talk about October first. Where were you and how did you learn about the shooting?

First of all, with the Red Cross we have shifts; we have twelve-hour shifts where you're on call as the first person that gets called out in the case of an emergency, and it's twelve hours, so six in the morning, six at night, or six at night until six the following morning. My shift happened to be on October first at six p.m. to October second six a.m.

When it happened I was already in bed and I actually was alerted to it—I was sleeping—I was alerted to it by my brother in England who texted me wanting to know if I was okay, and that was very strange because he never does that. It just annoyed me because I was asleep. So I closed my eyes, put my head back down on the pillow, but something was wrong. Something didn't sit well with that text. And so I woke up and I was about to call him and I got a phone call from the head of operations of the Red Cross, who was our supervisor at the time. She said, "Why aren't you answering your phone?" Well, they were calling the wrong phone number. They had my phone number mixed up and they were calling me using FaceTime, which I don't have

on my phone, so it didn't come through. She finally explained to me. She said, "Just get dressed and go down to the Emergency Operations Center for Metro, their command post. I'm not familiar with all the streets, but I think it's the one off of Martin Luther King and the 15, right in there. She said, "We have a mass shooting and I need you to go there now and set up for the Emergency Operations Center."

By the time I got there, Metro was already in full swing and all the different police departments and the fire department, all the Emergency Operations Center main people were already on scene there and they had everything set up. At that point the Red Cross' job is to support them. Whatever they need done; that's what we do. They're going to be there for a long period of time, so we're also getting food for them, making sure they have water; delivering that stuff to them. Basically anything that we can do to support their operation that's what we respond to.

While that's going on, in another part of the building, they opened it up for any member of the community that came in either directly from the concert or that had family members that they knew were at the concert; this was where they could go for reuniting or to find out, what happened to my friend that I was at the concert with? Or whatever. We had all those people, some of them coming in fresh, and it looked like fresh from a battlefield. They came in and then we have to supply them with food and water and just kind of, what can I do for you right now? What do you need right now? Does someone know where you are? That was a big thing. You were at the concert, okay, and now you're here. Does somebody know where you are? I know you're trying to find your friend, but does someone else know where you are? Does someone out there know that you are okay? Because we can calm down a whole bunch of people if you make one phone call or you send one text. We can calm down a whole bunch of people and keep them

from all having to worry about you. Let's get you taken care of and then we'll find your friend.

We were giving them our phones and letting them make that phone call or the text message. That was where AT&T became a huge partner with us, was they brought in a ton of phones and charger banks, and so these people all had access to chargers if they had their own phone, or they had a phone that they could use to contact people on the outside.

When you say you're on call—I'm going to back up just a little bit—every day you're on call?

No. We have shifts. They ask us that we have a minimum of two shifts a month, any six a.m. to six p.m. You go online and you sign up. It's a computer app that you sign up with. Right now we have so many people deployed for the different hurricanes. We still have to keep our operations locally going because we still have disasters here that we have to respond to, so that means we take more than two shifts every month.

I didn't even think about the ripple effect, then.

Right.

How many people were on call and had showed up? What time was that that you actually showed up, do you think?

It was probably eleven thirty, twelve o'clock at night that I finally got down there, and there was one other person there when I arrived, and then gradually more and more people. I would say by the time the sun came up we probably had a half a dozen people where I was, at that location, and then other agencies helping as well that come and do the same thing that we're doing:

Talking to people, getting them connected to people outside.

How would you describe that scene for yourself, how it evolved for you?

I had no idea what I was getting into. You kind of don't think about it. You just say, *they need*

you here, and you go. You don't really think about it. You just know that whatever you're faced with, you're going to handle because that's just what you do. You just go there and just wait and see how it all pans out. You know this is not yours; that your job is to take care of whatever or whoever crosses your path, and so you just do and worry about it later.

You must have training that you go through to get prepared for this.

Yes. One of the things that they look for is—in the day-to-day responding that we do, we'll respond to a house fire, as an example, or flooding or something like that. Usually it's pretty simple, pretty cut and dry, but sometimes we have fatalities. Sometimes we have lives that are lost in a fire; different types of fatalities. In this case there were a lot of fatalities. What they train us for is a psychological first aid class and we go through specific training and they offer it through—I think I actually took it through the coroner's office. But we have another training coming up. It's just on what your role is in helping someone else respond to a highly emotional situation, an extreme tragedy: The things that you say, the things that you don't say. We take that kind of training.

I've just learned a lot from listening to some of my fellow volunteers that have so much experience in this and listening to them on how they manage things and handle things. I've learned a lot just by listening.

How long have you been doing this?

When was Hurricane Katrina?

What year was that?

2002, maybe. That was how I got started. And very much like the 1 October shooting, all I did was get a call to say, get on a plane. "Pack your bags. You'll be gone for a month. Get on a plane. You're going to New Orleans." I had no idea what I was getting into at all. And so off I went.

If we can paint a picture of that part of your life, you still had children at home?

I still had children. Oh gosh, you're going to ask me to do math. My youngest son is thirty and that was—2002, did we decide?

Sixteen years ago.

Sixteen years ago? He was a teenager. He was like fourteen. He was probably a freshman in high school. Then I also had a son who was a senior and then my oldest was in Iraq at the same time that I was in New Orleans.

It was 2005.

2005, okay. So he wasn't quite that young. Two out of school and the oldest was in Iraq at the time. When you watch all the media coverage of what was going on in the hurricanes, I couldn't watch that anymore. I couldn't have my TV on and see those pictures anymore. But, at the same time, I didn't have money to donate to the Red Cross, but I did have time. And my kids are pretty good; they weren't troublemakers. My husband was very used to just letting me go do my thing. And so I called the Red Cross and said, "Sign me up." Then I called my husband and said, "I'm leaving for a month."

What I didn't know was that attitude, it plays out very well with an organization like the Red Cross. Just go and figure it out. You'll figure it out. Just go and be there for people. Sometimes it's not even doing anything. Sometimes it's just stand by someone's side. You don't even have to give them a bottle of water. You don't have to do anything. Just stand by their side. Just the presence of another person is a lot of strength. That was really what happened then in New Orleans. I didn't know what I was getting into. It was exactly the same going into the 1 October; just go and stand by someone's side.

The Red Cross—how does it take care of you as a volunteer, physically, as well as emotionally? What is their procedure for making sure you're okay?

We have spiritual care and mental health counselors that work within our organization both for our clients, but they also are there for us. Everybody has their own way of dealing with tragedy and stress and things like that. For me it's physical; for me it's getting outside and running or go for a long walk or go for a run; things like that. Being here in October was easy for me to debrief, but it's not enough, and so we have a really great spiritual care guy. I would just talk to him at the end of the day, and sometimes it was as simple as his hands on my shoulders, "Look me in the eye and say, 'Are you okay?'" Then he would just stare and he wouldn't let you go until he was convinced that you were okay. Sometimes it wasn't that you had to talk things through; it was just he would check in with you. We do have mental health people and we do have spiritual care people and then each other. Your fellow volunteers are really good sounding boards—not necessarily sounding boards, but just debriefing, and so oftentimes we'll do that. There's one of my partners, she and I will ride together to and from an event for that reason, to prepare each other to go in and then afterwards for debriefing. You sort of find those people. And then I have a good, supportive family.

That's always nice.

Yes, which is really good. Not just here, but my mom and my sisters and brothers, they were all support, too.

Checking in on you.

Oh, they did, yes, they really did. During this October thing, they really did, yes.

What did they say when they were reflecting on you living here and what was going on in Las Vegas, from the outside in?

From the outside in, they can't grasp it. It's just like when we see something happening in another city, it's still not in our city. It's somewhere else. It's tragic and it's horrible, but it's somewhere else. Until it happens in your own city, you can't grasp it. While they were very supportive, I also knew they couldn't—you can't possibly know what this is really like. That's just the way it is. We couldn't know what it was like in some of these other tragedies, in some of the school shootings and Boston and things like that, unless you were there. So the same thing. It's part of human nature.

How was responding to Katrina different than here other than the geographic location?

Two terribly different events, each throwing a community into dealing with a tragedy so quickly.

One of them was Mother Nature and one of them was your fellow human being. Dealing with Mother Nature is in order; that makes sense; in a weird way, Mother Nature turning on us makes sense to us. Our fellow human being turning on us; that doesn't make sense, and so that really adds salt to the wound. Fifty-eight deaths—and I'm just going to compare numbers to numbers; I'm not trying to be cold hearted or anything—but numbers to numbers, if you had fifty-eight people that died in a hurricane and you had fifty-eight people who died at the hand of a fellow human being, both are very sad and tragic losses, but the fifty-eight that died at the hand of the human being, that's harder to handle. Now, is that because it really is, or is that because that happened in my own community? I think it's harder to handle when it's your own human being that turned on you.

That unknown. That's one of the haunting questions that will likely never be answered, the why?

Right. We'll probably never know.

Why would anyone do anything like that? Looking for clues that we don't find.

They're examining his brain. They are literally examining this man's brain for any sign of anything. I would say we'll probably never know.

Then in the aftermath, you're at the Metro station; is that right?

Yes.

The one on Martin Luther King.

Correct.

People are coming in. How many people—I don't even know if you can guesstimate it.

I don't know. Hundreds.

How are they getting there?

Every possible means of transportation. Some people were walking in; some people were driving; some people were being dropped off. I was inside the whole time, so I didn't see the outside. I know that they had a lot of security around, a lot of armed security. It was a very secure location.

As people came in, they had to sign in if they were at the concert; they had to sign in and they were taking statements. We had people from Metro taking statements right away. Then we also had announcements from the hospitals. They would come out periodically, every half hour maybe. I don't remember how frequent they would come out, but they would list a hospital. They would say the name of the hospital and then they would list the names of those people that had been identified at that hospital, alive. They went hospital by hospital and listed everyone. That was the first thing was to identify the victims that were in the hospital that were living and to get them connected with someone. Then in the days that followed, then that was when we moved to the convention center after that and then the coroner's office was doing a lot of the work.

You arrive around midnight. How long did you continue to work? What was your work schedule like for the next days or whatever?

We didn't have one. I just called my boss at the gym and said, "This is what I have to do." I was covered. They were great. I didn't have to do anything for a couple of weeks. My husband took care of everything at home. I just was checked out of my regular life.

I was there that first night until noon the next day. I think it was that day, it might have been the next day, I don't know, I don't remember. But at one point, either the first or the second day, so either October second or October third, I had to leave there, go home and change, and go to a funeral for a friend of mine's father who had died. Then I had to go back and change and go back to the thing. That was kind of...I didn't remember that funeral at all. The first day it was a twelve-hour shift. Then I came back that evening for a few hours and then slept and went back in early the next morning and still had some of the same families. Do you want me to jump to the convention center?

Sure. Go ahead.

What happened at the Metro station was as people were gathering, they had tables set up and we had food and water for them and phones. They started sort of clumping themselves into little groups. And you could see who was who after a while. The faces started to become familiar: People who were waiting; people who hadn't heard. That was October second. October third, the crowd had really thinned and by now we were at the convention center, but now people had come in from California because there were so many people from California.

We had big round tables, and in the center were baskets of food and hygiene products because these people were camping. We had blankets and pillows and air beds and places for people to wash up. The therapy dogs were there. We had a children's play area for kids. It was to

get the little kids away, to give them toys and let them color and let them be children and play, which was a really nice sound in the midst of all of this sadness. It was really nice to have a children's play area to hear these children laughing, the little ones that didn't really know what was going on.

That was when, then, they were starting to identify bodies because by then most of the live victims had been identified, and then they started identifying the people who had died. You would sit with these families for days, the same family, and you would go through, like the pictures, they would talk about their child or their husband or their whatever. They'd show you pictures of them and you really felt like you knew these people. You got a real sense of who these people were.

There's clusters of people at all these tables. Then someone from the coroner's office would come in. You could feel the emotion and the tension in the air when that representative from the coroner's office came in. You just thought, *whose table? Where are you going? Is it me? Is it my turn?* You could just feel that sense in these people that were waiting.

This will be hard. One of the girls whose parents I sat with, [Teresa] Nicol Kimura, her parents were amazing. The mom was worried about the dad; the dad was worried about the mom. "I don't know if he can handle this." In talking to him, he didn't know if she could handle it. They knew, they knew how this was going to end because in today's day when everyone's got a cell phone and we have a million ways of identifying people, if you're still alive, we're going to hear from you right away, and so they knew. Deep in their gut they knew how this was going to play out, and they were very worried about each other.

We walked from the table with the rep from the coroner's office. I walked with them. You could see her shaking more and more the closer we got to their conference room. They go to

these little conference rooms and they have pictures. They have to identify a body from the pictures. You could see she knew; the mom knew. You can see her getting shakier and shakier. The parents weren't walking together; he was ahead with the representative from the coroner's office and I was with the mom. I just stopped at the door and I said, "Now, you have the option to go in there by yourselves or I can go in there and sit with you." She looked at me and she just like stood up really tall all of a sudden and she said, "I'm going to be okay." Just like a bold, strong momma. And she did pass away. She did die.

Tough situation. As we reflect a year later—and this is actually how I learned about how you had participated; for the record I see you a couple of times a week the past few months and to suddenly—

The lights go off? Oh, is it motion sensor?

Yes, we sat too quietly.

When we reflect a year later, how did you approach October One? Were you aware of it?

Yes, I was aware of it. I think what I learn in all these things, in all of these deployments that I've done with the hurricanes, because I've done several of them—and in all the disasters here including the One October is that I really have to protect myself first. We're there to help other people, and so we go into it with, *this is not my accident; this is not my house fire; this is not my flood; this is not my mass shooting*. You go into it with that attitude, but then you also know that at some point you have to step away from it to take care of yourself. Because if I can't take care of myself, then I can't help you. If I am taking in too much grief and too many tragic stories—I really want to be there for you, and if I take in too much, then I can't be there for you. Then I might just break down and flip out myself, and I can't do that; that's not why I'm here. I can do

that later away from you. I can have my breakdown later away from you, but I have to take care of myself so that when I'm in front of you, I can be that person that says, "Yes, I will stand by you." Then you flip out later.

I run; my exercise stuff is really good. Sometimes I just sit. Sometimes I sit and just...quiet. You asked, how did I approach it? One night I was sitting outside. I believe it was on October first that I did this. I think maybe I told you about this.

Yes. This was good, though.

I had been working at the Government Center at the opening of this portrait project, so I was there most of the day for this. It was a pretty quiet day, a lot of media that first day. Not too many family members came in during the first couple of days. They sort of trickled in later as we got closer and closer to 1 October. This actually started the week before. Then on October first I stayed home. I had worked this portrait project up until October first.

On October first they had all the memorials that I heard were lovely. There were beautiful services all over the valley to honor the victims and their families. Everywhere we had celebrations of life, everywhere. I stayed home from all of them and I stayed outside on my back patio that overlooks the whole valley and I can see the entire Strip and I can see the Mandalay Bay. That's what I did on October first; I just sat.

My husband came outside with his computer, sitting next to me. He said, "Oh, I thought you were on your phone." And I said, "No, just sitting." So he closed his computer and he started talking. "Look at the clouds. Look at the sky. It's so quiet out here. There's no wind. There's no this." Finally, I just looked at him and I said, "Are you going to keep talking?" He said, "Oh. Oh, no. I'll leave." So he left and that's what I did on October first, I sat quietly.

That's how I take care of myself is I know when to step away. It's hard to step away

sometimes because you think you're not pulling your weight, but you have to step away. There's a thing in disaster response; it's like a hero attitude, like, *I have to stay there; I have to keep working; I have to be there; I have to be there; I have to be there; I have to be there*. There's people that you end up grabbing by the scruff of the neck and saying, "Go home. You can't be here anymore. You have to go home. You need to sleep. You need to shower. You need to breathe." I don't have the hero thing. I know when to go away. I know when you go away because you've got to be able to take care of the people that it's your job to take care of, and you can't do that if you're burned out. It was easy to burn out on this one. It was really easy to burn out.

Because?

Because for the first couple of weeks we were at the convention center. Now, this was last year after it happened.

Until the middle of October of 2017.

Oh, it was way past the middle of October. We were at the convention center and we had service set up for anyone who was there, who was working there, or who had some connection to it. Sometimes it was someone who worked in a shop nearby or one of the other hotels or something that they either needed mental health or they needed physical health or they needed financial assistance. They needed something because of what they were involved in that night, what happened to them that night. We had some people who were victims, actual gunshot victims. Some of them weren't gunshot victims, but they broke a leg jumping over a fence or being trampled.

These two guys came in together and they're sitting across the table from me. My partner that I was working with at the time, she is a good friend of mine and she's also a mom and a

grandmother, and I am a mom and a grandmother. We both have a lot of boys; between the two of us I think we've got like eight boys. These two big guys come in and they're assigned to me. They look like they are just tough as nails and can handle anything. Then they started talking about that night and one guy talking about pulling bodies out and throwing them in the bed of a truck and stealing the truck and just driving away, just telling those kinds of stories and running from the gunfire. They were shocked. They were just shocked.

All of a sudden, I just looked across at one of them because he just was lost. He didn't know how to even react to this. I walked around my desk and I stood in front of them and I looked down on this guy and I said, "Stand up." And he looked at me, like, *uh, okay*. I said, "Stand up. This is coming from your mother. Stand up." And he stood up. He's a foot taller than I am. I just wrapped my arms around this guy and I just hugged him and he started to cry, this big, huge...

But I thought, *okay, if that was my kid and some lady was talking to him, I would want her to just grab my child and hug him*. So that's what I did. I'm sure he thought I was very strange, but he started to cry. That's kind of what we were there for is to listen. They had the therapy dogs and they had us.

The sad part is that as time went by and people found out that they're giving financial assistance to people who were involved in the shooting, then you have the people who are coming that had nothing to do with it trying to get some free money; you have those people too that are trying to take advantage of the system.

You had to deal with those folks as well.

That's when it really became hard because then my job shifted from simply asking questions that were on a sheet of paper, scripted for me basically, helping fill out this form. *Did you talk to FBI*

about getting your things back? Did you talk to whatever agencies: Mental health, physical health? Now they put me at the front of the line where I have to weed people out. Basically, in as kind and gentle a way as possible, I have to make them prove that they were where they said they were. *If you have pictures on your phone, show me the pictures. If you have your wristband, show me your wristband. Anything that can put you in that location on that night.* That's sad, but that's real, and you have to be nice about it. That was what we did for those coming weeks was we helped people get the assistance that they needed.

The thing is people have this thing, *well, I wasn't shot. I'm here and I'm fine physically, so I don't really need help.* They have that attitude. But the problem is that further down the line—and we're seeing this a lot right now, one year later—is people still have really, really serious PTSD issues from this that they didn't think we're going to exist. Because when the adrenaline is high and you have these people who were so much worse off than you are, you think you're going to be okay, but you're not. It has a long-term, far-reaching effect even on people who weren't there. It's that pebble in the pond and the ripples continue.

Some of the things that we had to do in those couple of weeks is we'd have people come in that would say, "My roommate was there. She didn't get hit. She's home. But she hasn't gone to work and she won't come out of her room."

We went to a couple of apartments to interview people. If you can't come out of your house, you need help. If you're that traumatized that you can't leave your house, you need help. We would just go there just to get them in the system so that when they are ready to come for help that's just one less thing they have to deal with.

Do you have a resource list of mental healthcare people or organizations to send people?

Yes, a really lengthy list of people that they can go see. Right now, through the resiliency center,

Vegas Strong Resiliency Center—they had this deadline that said October one; everyone had to file by October one of 2018. Apparently, there's some law that's an arbitrary law, one of the attorneys was telling me. Like in California, there is no one-year rule, but here we have a one-year rule; you have to file within a year, or after that year is up you can't get any assistance. They're working on getting that changed and they're encouraging people even after One October of 2018 to continue to file because they're going to take it case by case. Some of these people, they didn't know that they weren't going to be okay and they're finding out now, a year later, that they're not okay. Now they're saying, "Oh, maybe I'm not okay. Maybe I do need help." We're putting a deadline on that? That's not right. That's not right. They're fighting that; Vegas Strong Resiliency Center is fighting that in trying to get that changed and they're going case by case and the attorneys are helping the victims. There's a lot of people who are really hurting that didn't lose someone directly, but they were there or they're just community members.

The number of people who came into the Government Center that didn't know that this project was there...They came into the Government Center for just their everyday business, to pay a tax or whatever they were doing there, and saw this. It stopped them in their tracks and a lot of people...

Describe that. You've referred to it a couple of times. I'm looking at a booklet that you've brought me that's from the Las Vegas Portraits Project exhibit that took place from September 17th to October 19th of this year. Can you give me the background and how it came to be that you're there?

Sure. The Portrait Project was started by two girls back east; they put out a call on Facebook to get artists to paint each of the victims, so each of these portraits is done by a different artist. Then they were all shipped here. At the end of this project, after October 19th, they'll go back to the

families of the victims.

The Red Cross was asked to supply first responders with psychological first aid background just to be present at this event because there were the fifty-eight portraits and then there were also the fifty-eight crosses that were originally on the Strip. They have the original ones that they've kept at the museum, and until the nineteenth of October they're going to be at the Government Center. There have been families who want to come in and take pictures of their cross, of their family member, and so we'll put that out for them and let them spend time with it and take pictures of it because a lot of people wrote on those crosses messages to their mother, son, friend. Some of the messages you really feel them. The family members, a lot of them, wanted to take pictures with their cross. We had the crosses that if you wanted to we would move your cross and bring it out for you and let you spend time with it. I believe six of them were already given back to the families. They wanted them back right away, so six of them went to the families, but the museum has the other ones.

There's also a painting display by Las Vegas Academy high school art students. There were three triangular-shaped displays, and between the three of them there were a total of fifty-eight teddy bears on the three displays, and then there was room on each display—there were three panels and one panel was blank and a can of markers was next to it, and so you could write a message, and there were tons. The first day, of course, they were blank, but now they are covered; there is no room to write anything else on those, so lots of messages from our community.

It was a great exhibit. I happened to go. I think it had only been open a couple of days. It was very wonderful.

Yes, it really was.

There were so many different ways to celebrate the lives or commemorate the horror of the event transpiring throughout the whole valley of that week of October first this year. We have had so many natural disasters and events going on in our country. Since then, have you been called to travel or do anything else?

I have. I have and it's really hard because I can't go right now. I was asked to go back east. I was asked to go down to Florida. I can't because of my real job. We're new, so I have to stay and support the ship.

Do you recruit people to come in and be volunteers for Red Cross?

I always tell people that, yes, if you can, do it. Not everybody can give money. Not everyone wants to give money. Some people really, really want to give just time. That's kind of how I feel is I just really want to give time. My kids are grown up. I'm youngish and healthy, so why not? My husband supports it. I encourage people to volunteer with any community organization to give back to your community. It's important.

As a community member of Las Vegas and having participated in this in such an intimate way, what kind of permanent memorialization do you think we need or should have? Do you have any thoughts or opinions about that?

I really like the concept of the Healing Garden because to me healing is hope. A place for people to heal is good. Someone said there were fifty-eight lights shining from the Mandalay Bay. I didn't see it. I thought that was a really nice idea. I sure felt bad for the people at the Mandalay Bay that they had to...I mean, all of them. You don't think about who this affected, but it affected everyone on every employment level, not just in that hotel, but all around. The stories that we heard that night were of people running from one hotel to the other and barricading themselves in the casino Gold Room behind a table that was thrown up against the doors because there were so

many people running and screaming and so many people wounded and running that they thought there were shooters everywhere. The stories that people told that night of running all the way down..."I knew my boyfriend was working at the Tropicana," or the Excalibur, and they ran all the way. The horror that these people went through. Everyone along the way, taxi drivers, gas station employees, people in restaurants, it affected everyone. It was a pebble in a pond and the ripples were far-reaching and they're still going. It is still going.

But good stuff happened, too, from that. I met a couple that were both at the concert. They had weekend passes for the concert. He had passes with his friends; she had passes with her friends. The two groups did not know each other. But as often happens in concerts, everybody is happy and probably drinking and it's a big party. They were in the VIP area with all these other people. You really get to know the same people in a VIP section over a three-day concert, so they became friends. They came into the Portrait Project together. They've been dating ever since. Sweet couple, very sweet couple.

Did they live near each other?

They were both from California. I don't know where. I don't know any more of the details except I did get out of them that that's where they lived. Yes, so that came out of that.

We hear about the friendships forged. I haven't heard the romantic story. But the tightness of the groups.

The tightness of the survivors' group is really amazing. They find each other online. Through Facebook, support groups, they find each other online and then they meet each other. A lot of them meet each other because they were the one that was with...Like there was one guy who was with a girl when she died; he stayed with her. It was that kind of thing. It was these parents that were there. I can pick her out. The parents came in and told us about their connection with the

guy who was there when their daughter died. As people were coming through looking at this, we would ask them if...This girl's parents were there. She looks like her mom. Yes, the stories they told us about their daughter and just all the people in there. Friends came in that this was their friend. You felt like you got a personal feel for that person. Her parents were really sweet, too, the way they took care of each other when they came to visit the Portrait Project.

That's nice. That's wonderful. Any other stories or thoughts that you'd like to share?

I know when I leave here, I'll probably think of a million. I think the ripple effect that this had on our community, someone who knows someone who knows someone, and so it hurt all of us in a really deep way. Survivor's guilt for a lot of people. I heard a lot about survivor's guilt and that's a real thing. They feel guilty. They feel survivor's guilt because they survived, but then they also feel bad because they feel that way; they think that's kind of a crazy way to feel. One of the jobs with psychological first aid is to let people know there's no right or wrong way to do this; you're absolutely okay and survivor's guilt is real. You just hope these people can find the help and the healing that they need; that we all need.

For sure. What's one thing you've learned about yourself through all of this?

Wow, I hadn't thought of that one. Nice job. I did try to go over details and I had not thought of that. What have I learned about myself through all of this? I think that it's something that I can do this. We all have things we're good at. We all have things that we can do well, and I don't have a lot of them, but I'm a really good runner and I'm really good at this.

I minimize that comment.

No. I think that this is something that I feel like I have a calling; I can do this. But I also know that I can only do so much. My job sometimes is just to stand by your side and shut my mouth. I don't know. What have I really learned? I don't want to sound...But I think I handle this stuff well

at the time. Then I cry. And then I have my little meltdowns and I cry, in a healthy way meltdowns, because we see it all the time where people don't handle it in a healthy way. I saw a lot of that in the hurricanes. Whether you were a victim or you were there to help, at the end of your shift how do you handle it? Some of it is not all that healthy. I don't mean like go binge drink on the roof or anything like that. Even just sit around eating and just doing nothing. I have to move; that's how I handle stuff. I think I heal through movement.

If I were to think about what you've said, knowing yourself and your strengths is a powerful way to be of help to others. That's wonderful. You've obviously done a good job with that. Your eyes have teared up and you've made me tear up, but this was part of being a participant in the human condition—

It is.

—and bringing what we can to the table to make it better for others. When you go places now—this is another question we've asked a lot of folks, both people who were at the concert as well as the rest of us—do you survey your surroundings differently since this event? Are you cognizant of that at all?

Yes, I really, really very alert, very, very highly alert even to the point of in church. I go to church on Sundays and I am scanning. I put myself in a position near an exit and I put myself in a position to where I can see people coming and going. I don't think I ever did that before, but now I do. We'll go somewhere and I'll say, "I'm not going in. I'm staying out. I'm not going in." He'll be like, "Why?" "I'm just not. I'm just not going in." That's something I never did before. Then I think, *come on, you weren't even there*. Then I become that person who says, "Am I crazy? Why am I feeling this way? I wasn't even there." But, yes. Did it affect me? Yes, yes.

Now I don't like crowds. My husband just went to an outdoor concert at someplace

without me because I wouldn't go. Then the question is, well, did you enjoy it? Because this is one of the things that in dealing with people after something like this, are you staying away because of fear or did you really never enjoy it to begin with? If you didn't enjoy it to begin with, stay away. Then don't go. But if you're staying away because you're afraid and you really enjoyed it before, then you should probably think about going back. Right now, crowds are not my thing.

This may be my last question. With the Red Cross and in any service event that you go to, is there a download where they collect your observations and stories? Is there any process for that?

You mean our big events or our local events?

Any of them, where they ask about your experience and check in on you and try to learn from the volunteers. That's kind of a big catchall question.

That's a big question. After you are on a long deployment, then you out process.

Okay, that's the term.

Yes, you out process. When I was in New Orleans and New Jersey, I had to have a car. I was in charge of a large group that traveled and I had to have a car. You give them back the car and the keys and you sign off on that and you sign off on your gas card and all those things. The rest of it is mostly process stuff. There's not a lot of debriefing on, what did you learn? How could we do this better? I would imagine that happens at some point. On some level it has to. Maybe at the end of a big thing, like a cold wash a couple of weeks later. But not with us as the individual volunteers, no.

But now, here, we had our spiritual care people and we had the therapy dogs. We could go hang out with the therapy dogs. On October second this year one of our lead volunteers

invited everyone to her house and we had a really big dinner at her house just so that we could all be together just to hug and just for the higher-ups to say thank you. It was people from the blood services, Red Cross Blood Services, just our office people, our disaster response people. That was really good. That was a good healing thing after October first for us. We kind of end up taking care of ourselves.

I would imagine that seems important in the sense that this was a community. Even though it had people from so far geographically that were not in Vegas, still you're taking care of this local community you live in, you've raised your kids in, and you want to protect everybody.

Right. These are your people even though you didn't know them, but these are your people. You still hear today about people who had to quit their job at Mandalay Bay or a nearby casino or somewhere else because it was just too much after October One. But I think as a community, I was really impressed as a community for a city with the reputation of Sin City.

I never liked that phrase much.

I never did either.

I dislike it even more now.

Yes, I never liked it either. We kind of showed them.

Yes, we sure did.

Yes, yes. Unfortunately, it had to be that way, but we did a good job as a community. The healing is going to take a long time.

Absolutely. Anything else?

I don't think so.

It was great. I appreciate that very much. I appreciate the booklet, too. Thanks so much for

coming in.

You're welcome. Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]