

AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA ANDERSON

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Today is March seventh, 2019, and I am downtown at Get Outdoors Nevada, talking to Jessica. This is Claytee.

Jessica, could you pronounce your full name and spell it for me?

It's Jessica Anderson; J-E-S-S-I-C-A, A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N.

Thank you so very much. I want to get started by just talking about your early life; where you grew up, what your family was like.

I was born in Arizona in the Phoenix area. We moved to Las Vegas when I was six, so I grew up in Las Vegas. My family unit is still intact. My mom and my dad have been married since forever. I have one older sister who is two years older than me.

Wonderful. Why did they leave Phoenix to come to Las Vegas?

My mom grew up here in Henderson, the original old Henderson, and then went to U of A for college in Tucson, and that's where my parents met. They set up roots in Arizona for a little while and just made the transition back over here. Her whole family was still here.

How did he feel about moving here?

He was fine. His family quickly followed. I grew up with my entire family around me, all my aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents. Everybody was here.

Why did they decide to move?

Everybody has just flocked in and most of us are still here, actually. Some of us have moved on, but most of us are here.

What do your parents do for a living?

My dad is retired now. He worked for the county in their IT stuff. My mom works for the school district. She's an administrator in the school district.

Wonderful. Your father was in IT a long time ago.

Yes. Everybody is like, what does your dad do? I'm like, I don't know. It's something with computers and something with the system that police officers used when they run your name. I don't know. But he kept it up and running somehow.

That's fabulous. And they're still here.

And they're still here.

Tell me about your life. You're real young, so tell me growing up here, where did you go to school?

High school, I went to Silverado, so that's usually the main thing people ask. I was glad I went to Silverado. I was a big-time swimmer; that was my whole life. My whole life was defined by swimming, pretty much. Swimming and synchronized swimming were my things since I was little, so I always grew up in the water. That's my entire life in memories is water. I did that. I made a career out of that for a while, teaching swim lessons and then managing pools and all that fun stuff before I transitioned into the nonprofit world.

Did you go to college?

I did.

Where did you go?

I started at UNLV and then I took the route of getting married and having a kid, so I stopped. But I finished my bachelor's degree from Ashford University, an online school, and then I got my master's degree from WGU, another online school.

Tell me about online education. Since you've been to a regular university and online, do you think that you got as much out of it?

I think it's definitely different. I feel like it's definitely person-dependent. For me, my master's more so than my bachelor's, because even online back then you had to go for six weeks or seven

weeks a class. My master's degree was one of those competency-based ones, so as soon as you wrote the papers or did the test, you got to move on to the next class. For me, it worked really well, because I wanted to keep working and I wanted to do things, and so spending so much time in an actual classroom setting was never really my thing even growing up. I'm like, I can do this at home; I can read the book at home, and I can take the test, and I'll be fine. For me that was the only reason I succeeded at it.

That's great. You did a lot of swimming growing up here. You were born in which year?

Nineteen eighty-five.

So young. Tell me what it was like to grow up in a place like this. What did you do in the summers other than swim?

I think a lot of my childhood is defined by that old-school standard of when the sun would come up, we would go outside and go out and play with the neighborhood friends and whatever and maybe come inside for lunch and then go back out again and just run around until the streetlights came on and then we would come inside and go to bed. I was outside all the time. We were just riding our bikes, roller skating, do all that kind of stuff. That's what I remember growing up here. Or swimming in people's pools or going to swim practice, of course.

I love this because people who came here in the fifties and sixties tell us about the same kinds of things, staying outside all day.

Yes. I think I was a little bit closer because my mom did the same thing. We stayed a little bit closer to home when I was growing up. She talks about just going out and exploring the desert. We had our little city block or so that we were allowed to go to. There was a school right behind where I lived, so we could ride our bikes over to the school and play basketball or climb on the

stuff and skate around and then come back, or go down to 7-Eleven and get candy. But we couldn't go off super far. We were in the middle of the city, too.

Right. Now we have a third generation growing up here, your children. How are you going to allow them to play?

It's way harder. It's much harder. Right now, currently I'm actually raising my kids in my parents' house, so in the same house that I grew up in. One, the dynamic has changed. Kids aren't outside running around like they used to be, and some of that is also us parents. We thankfully have a big backyard, so they go outside and run around our backyard. I try to actually take them out to the parks or to the mountains or whatever because that kind of stuff is important to me and I grew up doing that. But it is, it's a lot different.

It is.

I can't even imagine letting my daughter go out and just be outside without me. At nine, I was outside without my parents.

One generation has made such a difference in the way we live.

Yes. Yes.

Tell me about working for Get Outdoors Nevada. Tell me the job you had prior to this.

I worked in aquatics for forever. My job that I had right prior to this I was running the aquatics department over at Lifetime out in Summerlin, the big fancy gyms that we have here. I was running the aquatics department over there, so everything that happens swimwise over there. I got completely burned out by the corporate structure of those types of places and I was just ready for a change. This job came about.

I didn't really know about this company. My mom actually had done some work with them. She had seen the job and was like, "You should apply." But we didn't tell them who I was.

They know my mom, but we didn't tell them who I was or anything until after. I tell Mauricia all the time, I say, "You are crazy for hiring me," because I had absolutely no experience, but she did, so that's that. I started off kind of straddling both the volunteer and the education side of our organization, and then within a couple of months I fully took over the volunteer side, making sure all the volunteer events were growing and we were getting bigger numbers. As that evolved and as new projects came up, then we just switched my title over to community engagement so that I can kind of absorb these different types of things that happen.

Tell me what Get Outdoors Nevada is.

Get Outdoors Nevada is a nonprofit, and really our main goal is just to connect people to the outdoors whether that be the local parks and trails or the bigger federal lands, whatever it is we just want people to get outside and understand them, and know that they're there, and have a little bit of ownership of it because they're public lands.

That is amazing. Tell me what you were doing the day of October One.

The day and not the night?

Tell me about your day.

I don't remember my day that day at all. It was completely an insignificant day. I knew that the music festival was going on because I had talked about going that year, but it was honestly too expensive, so I never wound up getting tickets. I knew that was happening, but other than that it was just a normal day, just regular life.

How expensive is it to go to the event?

It was a couple hundred dollars.

Per day?

I think for the weekend. If you're going to go, I was going to go for the weekend and I just didn't have that kind of money.

I can understand that. What were you doing when you found out about it?

That's the funny—not funny. It's just an interesting story of mine. I happen to have a really good friend who is a police officer and we happened to just be texting that night around nine. It was a slow night and we were just talking back and forth. He was working. Then I get this text from him that said, "Whatever you do, don't go down to the Strip." I'm like, it's ten o'clock at night. I'm in bed. I'm not going...And I didn't hear anything else from him after that. I was like, something big is going on because that's not his area. He was on the other side of town. Then I start Googling and trying to see. Nothing is happening for a while. They media hadn't picked up on it yet. Then it started coming and that's when I started hearing what was happening and everything of that. I was wide awake at that point in time and I knew I wouldn't be able to get ahold of him at all. I just tried to keep following and watching as it happened.

Then my brain went to the fact that I knew some people that were there that night. I was checking their Facebooks and seeing if they posted that they were safe, and luckily everybody was fine. My friends that were there actually happened to be near the exit, so they were out really early and really fast. I just kind of followed it into the night. I don't even know, one, two o'clock in the morning. I just was seeing what was happening. Eventually I went to bed. I touched base with my friend the next morning or early afternoon because he had worked until four a.m. or so.

Do you remember any of the stories that he told you?

Yes. I knew that he had stayed up really late, so I let him sleep for a little while and then I took lunch over to him to just talk. We still didn't have at that point in time the full story yet. As a community, we didn't have a full story yet. It was still multiple shooters, multiple locations; all

that kind of stuff. I just sat and I just talked. He was just telling me a little bit about what he had to do and the areas that he was at. He didn't have to be right in the Mandalay Bay specific area. His group had to go out and around a little bit more.

The story—and it came full circle later—is for a while he was like, “Yes, I was standing outside of Hooters Hotel and these people dropped off this body and just laid her there.” He couldn't tell who she was or anything like that because she had been covered. All he could tell was that it was a girl. She had a dress on and boots. She was gone, so he just had to stand by that body for a while. He just talked a lot about a lot of blood and a lot of injuries and things like that that he saw even as far away as he was because everybody was running in different directions. A lot of them actually wound up coming towards the Hooters' area, so he was seeing a lot of just that.

Did you know at that time that it was good for him to talk it out?

No. He's such a private person. I'm sure it was, but I was like, “If you want to talk...But if you don't want to...” I can only imagine the kinds of things that he had to see. But, also, as a police officer, unfortunately he does have to see some of that stuff often.

Yes. Before we started the project, we talked to a psychologist who told us to talk about these interviews, just talk about them among the people doing the interviews, between people, just talk. That was the best way to prevent PTSD in all of us. You helped your friend probably without even knowing it.

Prior to this event how did you feel about Las Vegas as a city?

I have no issues with it. It sounds a little bit morbid and I apologize for that, but as these large scale terrorist or mass shootings or things like that happen throughout our history and sometimes big cities were targeted because that's where the bulk of people are, there was always some sort

of inkling that I felt that at some point in time it was going to happen in Las Vegas. I don't know to what scale or what it was or anything like that. I just kind of felt like it would. Unfortunately, it happened to happen. It wasn't anything that I could have ever expected to happen, but it was just one of those things. Las Vegas is a big city. It's like New York.

And we have lots and lots of visitors here.

Yes, exactly. But it never deterred me from doing anything. It wasn't like I was expecting something bad to happen. I just had it in the back of my mind, as I think in some ways people should be aware of their surroundings a little bit more just because of the world that we do live in, unfortunately. Yes, I had no problems growing up here. It was fine. I didn't mind the city. As a local you tend to stay away from the crowds, anyway. You don't spend a lot of time on the Strip or anywhere else. I never thought twice about being here.

When you saw and heard about the outpouring of just love from our city, how did that make you feel to be a Las Vegan?

It was great. I think that Las Vegas, of course, has a certain kind of reputation for being certain ways. Especially working in the nonprofit field you know that there are lots of people that care here and there are lots of people that want to do good and our community really is a community. It's not just tourists, and people don't understand that, and I understand why they don't understand that. It didn't surprise me at all that people just immediately started doing whatever they could to help, and that's what people should do. I think it was really good for the entire world to see that as a community we're just like everybody else. Yes, we have a reputation for being a little scandalous, but when something happens and when it came down to it, so many of those people that were there that night and the ones that were injured and the ones that were killed weren't even from here and it didn't matter. It didn't matter. Everybody was just, whoever

you are, come; if you need a place to stay, sleep at my house. It doesn't matter. Where else are you going to get perfect strangers just opening up their doors for anybody?

When you came back to work, did you come back to work on Monday, the second?

I actually don't know if I did. I can't remember. I can't remember, honestly. I can't remember if we closed down our offices and just kind of said, everybody just collect yourselves, or if we were back in. I just know that I wasn't in for at least part of the day because I had gone over to my friend's house. I don't remember.

When you did get back here and you're together again, put me in that atmosphere. What was it like?

I think everybody here was lucky enough to have a bit of a distance from it. Nobody here was there. Nobody here really knew anybody that was there with the exception of me. When you're not there, if you don't have a direct link to it, I think it just kind of becomes this surreal thing that happened and you don't really have this emotional pull to it. It was definitely a conversation. It was definitely: What happened? Are you okay? Did you know anybody that was there? Do you know anything that happened? All those kinds of things and just kind of telling those stories. But for us as an office, especially because we were so small, there wasn't a lot to really dive into, and that's almost a thankful thing.

Did you help in the community in any way?

At that point in time, no, I did not, actually. My cop friend and I, when we had hung out a couple days later when the garden was starting to be built, we were following that and we were trying to find our time to get down there to help. I think he did, but with work and life and kids, I just never really got the opportunity. I didn't think anything of it at that point in time until then, obviously later, it circles back and falls under me eventually.

Tell me about it. How did it circle back? How did that conversation start?

For us to oversee the garden?

Yes.

The garden was built in its couple of days and then I think it just kind of survived for a little while with nothing really happening. It's on city-owned land, and so they really understood that this is a place that's going to need to be maintained. There needs some sort of coordination and direction here, but, to my understanding, they weren't really wanting to necessarily run it in the city fashion. It needed to have more heart, if you will, and that's a horrible thing to say. They have to run things a certain way; that's just how it is.

We had always been talking with the city about a public-private partnership-type thing as they were revitalizing downtown and as they've been talking about doing more green space down here. We're the only nonprofit that really kind of engages the community in the way that we do in the urban. There are other nonprofits that do more wilderness-type green and stuff. It made sense to start having those conversations with us. Then the garden was built and it was like, well, there is no time like the present. Let's see what this looks like. Let's see what this public-private partnership would look like. Is this something that you guys can handle?

Who were you talking to at the city?

Tom Perrigo and Mauricia, our executive director, were initially having that conversation. Is this something that you guys can do? Is this something that you can handle? Is this something that is even a reasonable ask? Mauricia then turned to me pretty much right after that conversation and said, "Is this something that you would be able to take on?" And I said, "Yes, of course. No questions asked. I would love to." Then contracts and all that fun stuff for written. I think we signed in December. Yes, it was pretty quick.

Tell me some of the first steps that you took to start making the garden the place that is today, this viable healing place.

The first steps were really working with the city and then working with the people that created it. Jay and Mark and Chad and Sam, they were some of the large contractor-type folks that were a big part of it. We had some of the folks from one of the nurseries, Moon Valley Nursery. It was a bigger group initially. Again, pulled everybody together and just started talking about, okay, this is here. Now what? What are we going to do with it? There was always that conversation that it needed to stay as much of a community space as possible and we needed to continue to figure out ways to engage the community there. We knew it was going to happen with or without us, basically; people were going to go and people were going to do things there. Let's just make sure that we can always allow that to happen, but we can do it in a little bit of a controlled way so that the place is sustainable because everybody has amazing intentions, but you might not know that planting next to this particular tree is not a good idea or planting this here. We want people to get in and get dirty, but we need to keep a pulse on what's happening.

Then for a long time as well, as word got out about the garden, people were trying to figure out who they could contact, who is the person to go to when they had questions or if they wanted to know more information about something. So that was the next step, taking on the social media world and putting our presence out there and saying, if you have questions come talk to us because prior to that it was, well, this person knows that person, and this person knows...Conversations were getting mixed and signals were getting mixed, so we just had to take a really strong presence online and say, this is who we are; come to us; nobody is going to have the answers except for us. Those were the two main things and then from there it was just figuring out ways to keep people engaged.

You mentioned some names. I don't know Mark, Chad or Sam.

Mark unfortunately passed this last December from cancer, but he was good friends with Jay. He worked at the time for Sunworld, which is a landscaping company, until his diagnosis and then he stopped. But the garden was an incredibly important place for him, especially as he was dealing with his battle. Yes, he was really, really big and instrumental from the beginning in the whole process. He worked right alongside of Jay in a lot of it and he was out there every day. He was out there more than any of us, really, just out there making sure that it was good.

Chad is another contact that they had. He is the one that laid all the tile. The tile around the heart and all that, that's all his work, and then the other set of tiles that are out there along that stage area. That's his job.

Sam is the one that likes to just fly under the radar and doesn't really like to be known for anything, but he is the owner of Apache Stone here, and so he helped get all the pavers that are out there. But he doesn't like to talk to people—well, not that he doesn't like to talk to people. He just likes to stay behind the scenes.

But if Chad would like to talk about the garden, we would love to talk to Chad. Sam, if he decides he wants to talk about it, we would love to talk to him as well.

Talk about the healing aspects. Talk about this place as a place of peace and healing.

That's a broad one. I think that from my experience this garden gives people a connection to a lot of different things. It gives them a connection to what happened that night if they survived that night and it kind of gives them maybe a little bit of closure in some ways. It lets them have—we say it here in this office—out of something so horrible grew something so beautiful. They have experienced this horrible night and now they really have this beautiful place to come to. It's not just going to the shooting site, which is just pavement; there is nothing there. There is actually

nothing there. Then the crosses were up for a while, but those, of course, had to get taken down, and so this is a place that is permanent for them that they know is going to be here year after year. If they're having a bad day—and I've heard this from a lot—if they're having a bad day, they can just come and feel peace. How it does that? I don't know. But it just does. They just talk about coming and just sitting. Anybody who visits the garden, one of the things that they usually say is how much life and movement is out there because of wind chimes and windmills and you sit there for ten minutes and you're going to see hummingbirds and butterflies and those kinds of things all year long. It's really weird. There is all this life around you that's just growing. People have various reasons for why it happens, but for whatever they believe, they can take it there and feel whatever their belief system is there whether it's divine intervention or whatever. A lot of people believe that about that place. It just gives them a place to go and just reflect.

With family members that I've talked to, it gives them a place, again, just this beautiful place that their loved one is being honored and remembered and respected in a non-morbid way. There is nothing wrong with tombstones, but they are so final and they are a giant slab of rock with a name on it. At the garden they can continue to add pictures. It's about the people, not about how they died or what happened or anything. It's like their life. Every single tree or the wall or whatever is telling the stories of these people and it's constantly changing. The families love that they can have their loved one remembered in just this beautiful positive light versus something that just so horribly happened to them. That's really what they get. And then it's a connection to Las Vegas because sometimes in some of those situations the family wasn't here. Their daughter or son came here with their friends or somebody and they weren't even here, and so this gives them this connection, good and bad, to Las Vegas. It gives them a reason to come here. It gives them a reason to...I don't know.

This is beautiful. You know that the book we're putting together, there are going to be themes throughout the book. There is a theme called Life and it's combined with Youth. That's the part that we want you to write and what you just said was just so beautiful. We wanted you to add something in there about youth and we want to use some of the photographs with the kids in those pictures. That's what we would like to ask.

Yes.

You said changing; that the garden is always changing. Explain that aspect to someone who doesn't understand how the garden works.

We don't really regulate what comes in and how it looks and everything like that. We have our basic structures. We make sure that the trees are taken care of and the plants are taken care of and that there is nothing vulgar; all those kinds of things, which there never is, but we just keep our eyes on things. People bring paintings, rocks, pictures, little tokens of whatever, and they bring them and they place them at the garden all the time. Sometimes there's fifty-eight of something. Sometimes it's just a specific tree. We don't stop people from doing that. Every time you go you're going to see something different there that you didn't see last time because always new things are coming.

With that we also keep trying to engage the community in planting opportunities and stuff like that so that there is constant life and new color there as well. In February of last year, we planted ten thousand daffodil bulbs. Then the summer happened, of course, and we did the construction with the new wall, which is, of course, a whole change in and of itself. Then right after that we planted hundreds of flowers right before October one of this last year. We are in two days doing another planting again. On March ninth we're doing—I don't know how many

plants it turns out to be—like three hundred and fifty, I think, little petunias, so just color, color, color everywhere to plant around the garden.

If someone wants to help out on March ninth, what do they do? Just show up?

They just show up.

What time?

Nine o'clock. Nine to eleven. You find us a lot of ways. You can find it on Facebook. On the garden Facebook page, there is an event page there. On the Get Outdoors Nevada website there is a posting there. But other than that just spread the word. Everything we do there is spread the word, which is really amazing. Come nine a.m. bring a pair of garden gloves if you have it and a little shovel if you have it. We have some, but we always expect two hundred plus people at these events. Just come and get ready to be all dirty. That's it. We'll bring everything else.

When there are just too many items, how do you determine what is to be moved and preserved? How does that work?

Since the beginning up until January of this year, City of Las Vegas Cultural Affairs Department and their art curators and things, they were the ones that were handling it all. They would go out every two weeks and take things that were going to be too fragile to stay out there and then take them over to the Nevada State Museum. Nevada State Museum, I believe, up to this point has archived I want to say close to thirty thousand objects from the garden and now they are just full. They are maxed out. There is just nothing else that they can do about it. We are going to be working with—I'm going to start getting together some volunteer teams to just go through the garden and maintain things and if people want to reclaim their stuff, then they always could, but if not it's just going to have to be respectfully disposed of because there is just not enough space. But if people leave things, like rocks and well-preserved things, we have absolutely no reason to

take those things away. It's just paper and seasonal items. We don't necessarily think that Christmas ornaments should stay up all year. They can come down. They're going to get faded and worn anyways. But other than that we're trying to leave as much as possible.

When the garden was first built, there was such a large influx, and after the anniversary there was such a large influx. But the in-between times it's not as intense so that we can just leave it and just let people bring stuff. Otherwise, we would be covered.

Yes. Tell me about some special items. Tell me about the original fencing and how that had to be replaced and tell me about the process.

The wall?

The wall.

The original wall was built obviously when the garden was built and it was just made out of pallets. Pallets in Las Vegas just don't agree with each other.

Because we're just talking about wooden pallets.

Yes, just straight wooden pallets, nothing special to them, stained, but that's it. They survived as long as they did somehow, but there needed to be something there for people to place things on and that was understood in the beginning. That wall was built for people to place their pictures and notes and things. It was definitely starting to get some wear and tear. It was always known that once the reality of the garden is a permanent thing, then the reality of a permanent wall needed to happen. I think when they first built the garden, they didn't even know if it was going to stay. It was just this idea in this pop-up and then whatever happened would happen. But it was never going to go anywhere once it was built. It just needed a permanent wall.

We needed something that very loudly stated in a way that this isn't going anywhere because people were always asking that. Is the garden going to be there in a year? Is the garden

going to stay? Because the other things had gone, the other monuments. The crosses had to go eventually and all those kinds of things. No, the garden is staying for as long as our lifetimes will allow it to. Here is a wall that is literally made out of steel, which is one of the strongest metals, so it's not going anywhere. It's going to be here for forever.

It doesn't look like steel.

It doesn't look like steel, no. It has fake wood across it so that it mirrors the original wall because the original wall became so iconic. The whole process at that garden is to really maintain that natural feel. While there is some iron fencing and things like that that you'll see, for the most part it is all just natural elements; it's the trees, the ground, the flowers. Having a wall that had water and had wood was very important to just keep that. We never wanted that wall to be a memorial-type wall. That wasn't the right space for that to happen. It needed to be interactive and it needed to be able to be added to and taken away from and to grow with the garden.

Describe the water feature.

It's huge. I think that particular wall is fourteen feet tall, maybe twelve feet tall, four feet wide or so, and the entire thing is just a giant piece of acrylic and the water just flows on both sides and it just is natural and beautiful sounding and it lands on river rocks. It is just this huge water wall and it's beautiful. You can kind of see through it, but you kind of can't see through it. You take whatever, again, belief system you have into seeing through to other sides. For me, it's just more movement. It is never just quiet there, and I think that's really important because it's not meant to be.

I love it and I love that water feature. There was a slab that had a heart, I believe. It was a big stone creation that someone donated. Tell me about that.

The one with the names in it or just a rock, just the big heart rock?

This was the big heart that broke and you had to take it out.

Oh, the wings?

The wings, yes, that's what I'm asking about.

The wings, yes. There was an artist in Upstate New York who heard about October One when it happened and then quickly heard about the garden because the garden started being built right after. They had contacted Jay actually and said, "We sculpt angel wings; it's one of the things that we do. We have one at Dell Children's Hospital and some other different places and we would love to donate a set of wings to the garden." That's where it started and they just continued to work on it.

It was two six-foot angel wings made out of blue stone and on the back it had all fifty-eight initials carved into them. They were installed right before October one of this last year, so later September. The artist had them shipped down and they were installed and everybody loved them.

Unfortunately, sometime in late December one of the wings cracked, completely split in half, and so it then became a safety concern, obviously, because those are heavy, heavy, heavy stones. The city worked with the artist to figure out what the next steps were, and I honestly don't know what those steps are. They're gone now and I'm still trying to figure out what's happening.

I love what you said about the motion in the garden. In one area of the garden, it's more than just the pinwheel. It's on a stick. It's off the ground maybe four feet and it's big and it's colorful and it's round. It's so beautiful.

Yes. There are a couple of different ones that have come. Those are becoming more and more popular, just those big...And then they have their friends and family sign them and they are just

there by the trees, which those are the perfect types of things to have there because they're going to survive the weather. They're not going to get damaged and they can stay there until they fall apart.

What is your favorite feature?

Gosh, I don't know if that's a possible question to be perfectly honest. I have no idea because the garden is still changing. We still have to build a wall around the garden, or a fence, slash, wall around the garden that will enclose the garden space where it's at right now. It will just be a short wall and then some iron fencing, like the iron fencing along the stage area.

Describe that iron fencing because I love it.

It's just black iron and then it's kind of created in a more artistic music staff. It's got notes and treble clef and bass clef signs, not in any specific way. It's not read as anything. It's just to tie in that element of music into the space because music has been such a uniting and binding force for a lot of these people, obviously because of what happened and where they were at. Bringing in that music element was really important. The exterior fence will have that same feel. Then it's going to have more tiles on it, too, just like the ones around the heart and the one along the stage. I still have about two thousand tiles here in my office that need to find their way into the garden, so that's where all those tiles are going to go.

I believe the designs that I saw, then there is just this beautiful gate that can get closed if we need to close it for whatever reason, but we're pretty big on keeping it open at all times. But if we need to close it, we can. Then that will actually, with the exception of some plantings, kind of finalize what the garden space is, and that's not to say that things can't be brought at that point in time because they can. But all the physical structures will be done and then we'll be able to look and say, this is what this place actually is and what it was meant to be.

Talk about the trees.

Those trees, man, those things are little miracles, let me tell you. I think that when the garden was being built, there was a need for fifty-eight of something because fifty-eight is such a big number, and so they happened to have—I can't remember if it was Moon Valley or Star Nursery happened to be able to get fifty-eight of these Tipu trees.

What was the name?

Tipu, T-I-P-U. That's their street name, if you will. That's the fifty-eight trees. They were planted just around and somehow survived. Those are not trees that would typically, to my understanding, lose their leaves and all that kind of stuff. They'll just stay green all year long. Through that first winter, so right after it was built, they all lost all of their leaves and people were really concerned that they weren't going to survive because it went from October to December to cold. The trees didn't have time to really grow their roots there and everything. Then somehow those trees just bloomed like crazy in the spring and have just taken off. Not one of them was damaged in that first winter at all. It was amazing. Nobody really knew if they were going to [live].

Each tree very organically was assigned to—I don't want to say assigned—but assigned to a victim. Again, it all happened in the beginning and my understanding of it is that somebody just came with fifty-eight pictures of people on these cloth tapestry-like things and they just hung them on the trees. It wasn't that anybody was like, this is my person's tree or this is my person's tree. Once they were hung they were just adopted and that was that person's tree, which we figured would happen, of course, but it just happened. There was never an argument about it. It wasn't like, why is this person's tree here? The families just took it and they just grew their trees to what they wanted their trees to look like.

This year the trees are huge now. Full grown, it's just going to be like a giant canopy, basically. It's just going to be covered. They are big trees.

Then the middle tree, I don't know exactly where it came from, but it was donated by Siegfried and Roy who happened to be friends with Jay, and when they found out about the whole thing, they wanted to help, and so they financially donated for that big oak tree. Again, that thing is the same way.

Nothing was maybe necessarily planted in the ideal way because it happened so fast, but everything just goes and grows and who knows how, why, or anything, but it just happens.

I think we have covered everything that I wanted you to talk about. If there is anything else that you would like to say about...How has this changed you?

That's a big one. It's an interesting dynamic sometimes because...I come at it from two points sometimes. This is my job at the end of the day, but this is one of those jobs that it can't just be a job and you learn very quickly that—I never went into environmental nonprofit to almost be a counselor or an ear for people to talk to or whatever that is, but that's kind of what has happened. As the families have gotten to know who I am and everything like that I have some very deep connections with some of the family members and sometimes they just want to talk. Yes, they just want to talk. Nowhere in my job description is “just listen to people as they talk.” But that's what it's become.

It's been—fulfilling is not even the right word, but it's the easiest word that comes to my mind. It's been incredibly fulfilling to be a part of something that is so massively important to people. I always said that in my lifetime I was a swim coach and did all these things and I've always like to make an impact on people and to help them along their way, but I never really figured it would ever be anything like this. Working with kids and teaching them how to swim,

that's teaching them life skills and that's great, but it was never envisioned in this way. Having those connections in this kind of a way has been—I don't even know what kind of words there are to describe it, honestly. It's been incredibly impactful getting to know these people and their stories and their lives.

I've shared it with you and I think I've shared it with Mauricia and you guys have heard about it before. That weird circle back of life and how it works and in regards to my friend who is a cop and then the body that he happened to stand by out at Hooters, lo and behold, it was Tara Roe; she was one of the victims; it was her body. Her family is from Canada. Early on in my relationship with her parents was very—they were just so consumed with grief. It was a very emotional back and forth where they just felt like they were so detached, I think, from Las Vegas and had even maybe some anger towards us as a city because of what happened. I just let them vent themselves out and just made them promises that I would make sure that their wishes in regards to what happened there around her tree would be met. They want certain things and don't want certain things, and so I just always took it upon myself to say, "It's fine. I'll take care of it for you guys because you're not here and I understand."

As time went through and we're a year over now, the relationship has just become into this world of just emailing back and forth, talking about weather, talking about different things. Their other daughter just came down recently, and so I got to meet her, to visit. I didn't really know the story of what happened to Tara that night because I don't know the stories of any of them. I don't push there. It's not my job to know. If people want to tell me, I'll listen. Her mom just emailed me one day. It's like, "Can we just talk?" And I said, "Sure, I'll call you." Through other things, she started talking about what happened to her that night and how they didn't know necessarily how Tara's body wound up at Hooters. They have no idea what happened.

As she was telling me this story, I got goosebumps up and down my entire body because it just clicked in my head that her body was the one that my friend was standing next to that night. I said, “I need to check, but I’m pretty sure I know the officer who was just standing next to her body throughout a chunk of the evening.” Of all people, these parents who just kind of attached themselves to me for whatever reason—I’m their connection to Las Vegas; I’m their connection to their daughter; I’m their connection to everything—it just so happened to be that I know the other person in the mix of the whole situation.

Well, if that’s not life telling you something, I don’t know what is, because what are the odds out of the millions of people here and all the cops that responded that night that I happen to be friends with that particular one, because I didn’t know any of the other ones that were there; it was just him. Her family, I literally am their direct contact here. It was just an interesting thing.

Those kinds of things really cement in that there is really a deep purpose here. It might not make sense and sometimes it’s hard and sometimes it’s emotional and sometimes it’s a struggle, but we’re really changing people’s lives and really doing something that is going to make a huge impact for years and years and years to come. That’s part of what I take out of it, but it’s still ongoing. I learn new things all the time.

That’s amazing. I think I have asked everything that I wanted to about the garden and how it grows. Tell me about your feelings about guns; did it change with this event? Pro, con, makes no difference.

My personal views are that obviously gun violence is a thing and it’s an issue. Some people might not like me for some of my opinions, but a lot of times I feel like guns are like drugs; just because you outlaw them doesn’t mean people aren’t going to get their hands on them. It is really more of a dialogue to figure out how to make it safer for everybody. More so than guns, more so

than drugs, more so than anything, this is a people issue. What are we doing as a society that is allowing these types of things to happen and for these people to do what they do? Whatever that is. I don't have that answer. But that's really where my mind goes more, what causes it? Because it could be guns, it could be bombs, it could be anything that's happening, and the root of it is the person behind it. What are we doing as a society to fix that?

I really appreciate this so very much. Tell me about the book. Tell me your hopes and dreams for this book. Talk about the book just a little.

The book...As the garden has survived over this last year and some odd months, it has been documented pretty thoroughly via photographs. We have a company that we work with that takes all of our photos. They were coming out every two weeks and just taking photos of the garden. They were at every single one of our events taking our photos. We kept looking at it and saying, "Gosh, these pictures, something needs to happen with this because there's a story here." Even if it's just pictures, there's still a story there.

The idea started to be tossed around. I think I was saying it fairly early and I think Mauricia was saying it, too, but then Tom over at the city started talking about a book idea, too. We were like, "Yes, we're on the same page. We just don't know, how do you publish a book?" We're nonprofit people. We don't know these kinds of things. That's how the relationship with UNLV started because we just didn't really know.

For me, the book from the beginning has always been about giving people something, one, tangible that they can keep with them in their house to just reflect, remember, maybe get the same peace that they get when they're there because, again, not everybody lives here, so it's not just an easy drive to come visit the garden. But to really also remember the story in a positive light versus a media negative light because for us it's really always been about—we're not

telling the story of what happened the night. We're telling the story of what happened after. What happened after is amazing. Unfortunately, it took a horrible event for it to happen, but what happened afterwards is amazing and the community has been amazing and what has grown has been amazing. Let's tell that story and let's share that story to the entire world and understand that bad things happen and we can choose look there or we can choose to look at the positive and we can choose to make something out of it and make a difference. That's what I want the book to be able to do for people is to really cement that idea that there are good people, there are good things happening, there are good stories, there is life, there is growth, and what happened is not going to be forgotten, but let's just keep moving forward and make a difference in the world.

The last question, very last: What are some of the events? I'm not sure I am aware of events other than the event to open the garden and the celebration at the end of the first year, October 1, 2018. What other events have you had?

We've had those couple of planting-type things where people came and planted. In April of last year, we partnered with Nathan Adelson Hospice. They always do a butterfly release for their patients and families and stuff. They had some extra funding through, I think, the Country Music Cares Foundation to do one specifically for our October One. We held that butterfly release at the garden. It was some talking from the mayor and the Academy of Country Music and then we had Collin Raye, who is a country singer. He sang "Amazing Grace," and one of his original songs. We released five hundred butterflies that day. Everybody just had this little pocket and then you just open it up and the butterflies just flew everywhere.

I've got to follow your Facebook page closer.

That happened this last spring. Coming up we have another planting. We know that October One is always going to be a thing, so we are going to continue to figure out what that looks like. What we did last year is probably not what should happen every year, but it might. I don't know.

Tell me what happened last year.

It was kind of a double last year because it was the dedication of the new wall because the new wall had literally just finished two days prior. It was the dedication of the new wall on behalf of the city and us that this is the new permanent place. Then at ten o'clock that night, or 10:05, it was a candlelight ceremony reading the fifty-eight names. Their names were read and a candle was lit for them and we actually had each of their trees light up during that time, too. Getting through all fifty-eight and then just some quiet time. That's what happened at that time, which is great and it might continue that way. But we don't really know what it's going to look like. We are always open to different things as they come. We don't put a hard yes or no on anything until they approach us. We would have never thought about the butterfly thing until it came to us.

Who knows what's going to happen?

As of today, we have a planting. We have to get through the next set of construction with that wall. Then we'll probably have another planting in the fall and then we'll have an October One.

Tell me about the new wall that's going to be put around. Is it going to go all the way around?

Yes.

You already have the people in place to do this?

Yes. I just saw the construction plans I think last week, and so they're going to...whatever they do next, their permitting and all that kind of stuff. The city is building it for us. It was designed by Jay and the city architects and then the city is going to be putting it all together for us.

That's wonderful. When we think about 9/11, they still have a celebration every year.

They do, yes.

And so I would expect the same thing to happen here.

Yes, yes, yes. We know it will. We just have to figure out what it's going to look like.

So far it's been so organic and so beautiful. I really appreciate this so very much.

Thank you.

You are ready to write a little essay, two hundred and fifty, three hundred words.

I can. Okay.

Life, youth is your theme. Whenever you can get it to us, we would appreciate it. Of course, we want it at the last moment, as always. But we would love to have it by Tuesday. I don't know if that's possible for you, but that's what we'd love.

Okay.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]