

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAURICIA BACA

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

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SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

This is Claytee White. It is March seventh, 2019. I am at Get Outdoors Nevada, their beautiful downtown location. Mauricia, could you please pronounce and spell your name for me?

My name is Mauricia Baca, and that's spelled M-A-U-R-I-C-I-A. Baca is B, as in boy, A-C-A.

Thank you so much, Mauricia. I am going to start by asking you about your early life.

Where did you grow up?

I was actually born in Mexico. A little background is my father was a Mexican artist, came to the United States, met my mother in a boarding house. She was basically trying to get away from her family. They fell in love. He moved back to Mexico. She followed after him and then they got married and had me in Mexico. I was born there in 1970. I was there for the first couple of years of my life. My father claims—he claimed, I should say, because he passed away—it's because of him that I love the outdoors because he used to put me on his back and take me for hikes in the mountains in Mexico.

He stayed in Mexico for a little longer. My mom came to the United States first and stayed with her family for a little bit. He followed afterwards. Then I grew up in New York City on the Upper East Side in New York City in really railroad apartments, not the fancy part of the Upper East Side.

Tell me about your father. How was that migration process for him?

I think it was a challenging process. I think it is for a lot of folks. Everything is so different. He left his family completely behind and followed after my mother. For fullness of oral history, my mom had really severe depression issues, and so he followed after her. When she fell into a very deep depression for a while, he became essentially the sole parent while she was ill, taking care of me.

Oh, special man.

Yes. They were both special people and they were both very artistic. She was more a poet and he was more of an artist, drawings and paintings. Neither of them were particularly good at dealing with the real world, but they were lovely people.

Do you have any of his paintings?

I have so many of his paintings. My house is covered in his paintings and I have many more that someday, if I ever can get myself together, need to get curated and exhibited because he did really, really wonderful work, beautiful work.

Do you know our new curator at the Barrick Museum?

No, I don't.

You need to get to know her. She is doing fabulous things in our Barrick Art Museum. It's that building right there close to the library. Young woman, your age.

I should go out there.

Oh, yes, you have to get to know her.

Yes, yes. His stuff is beautiful, so I'm very lucky.

I think I'm going to introduce the two of you by email.

We were in the meeting with the interim director, but I don't think that was the curator. Is that the same person?

She is now the director. She is now the executive director.

Oh, okay.

She was the interim when you met her?

I hadn't even thought about talking with her about my dad's artwork, but I should.

She is doing such great things over there.

Yes. His stuff is beautiful. It was so good.

And it has never been exhibited?

He had some exhibits ages ago. He actually had something, I remember, he told me about in Mexico. He had an exhibit that apparently went to the USSR, went to Russia, and they never sent the stuff back. Somewhere there is his stuff floating around. He did a few small things in the U.S., but I could never get him to work with galleries because he would always say, "They take 70 percent." I go, "Right now you have 100 percent of zero because you don't sell anything and you're not sharing it with people." If he liked somebody, he would just hand them the artwork for free, and if he didn't like them, it didn't matter what price they offered. He was a horrible businessperson, but he was a very good artist.

That's amazing. That's wonderful to know.

That's part of why I became an attorney, I think, because I sort of raised my parents.

Where did you go to law school?

I went to City University of New York, School of Law.

How did you get to Las Vegas?

I got to Las Vegas a little bit roundabout. I was working in D.C. as an attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice. I was doing environmental litigation with them. When I was there I met a guy and he was a microbiologist at the Walter Reed Medical Center. He was working as a microbiologist and he decided to pursue his PhD. We met because we are both rock climbers and loved rock climbing and mountain biking. When he looked for a school, he wound up at UNR because Reno is right next to premier rock climbing and mountain biking.

I had a lot of cases on the West Coast. I was doing a lot of work out of San Francisco and Seattle for my litigation. I decided to look and see if there might be a job opportunity in Nevada

and actually wound up getting an offer from the Nature Conservancy. I led their Truckee River project in Reno, which was reestablishing the bends, the curves in the river that had been straightened, so I was hired for that. I came to them in January 2005. Then my state director, Katherine Landrus, decided that she wanted to move me down to Las Vegas because they had a very small Las Vegas office and she wanted to see if she could give it a jump start. She moved me down to the Las Vegas area and I came here in November of 2006.

Do you love Las Vegas?

I do. I do love Las Vegas. I have completely and totally adopted Las Vegas. I will always love New York City and things about New York City, the museums and Central Park. I tell people that my great outdoor space was Central Park. But I love this area because it has an energy and a sense of opportunity and creativity and there is just a way of creating connections here that I don't think are available in the New York City area or in a lot of other large cities, large metropolitan areas, I should say.

Yes, I like that as well. I want to get started with October One. Do you remember your day that Sunday?

Interestingly, my husband and I had actually gone on a trip, so we were off in Idaho and we were on a plane and came back home. We were with my stepdaughter Natalie and she was exhausted. When we got home we just went to bed. We didn't turn on any news. The next morning I woke up to a stream of text messages from people asking me if I was okay and I didn't know what they were referring to because we had just gone to sleep and then obviously woke up and found out what had happened the night before. I think along with everybody, we felt that collective sense of shock. For me, it felt kind of oddly familiar because I mentioned I grew up in New York City and I was a Department of Justice attorney, so when 9/11 happened I was an attorney in D.C. and

I remembered the feeling of that happening and going to work and somebody at work running in and saying, “There are people jumping out of the building.” Watching that at work and then walking from my office with a friend and a couple of other folks, a friend who lived nearby, because nobody wanted to get on mass transit. It felt really eerily similar even though it wasn’t the same scale of terrorist attack, but that invasion that happened and that sense of being completely unsettled.

I had a meeting that was supposed to happen that morning and I got in my car and started going towards the meeting. I hadn’t gotten anything saying it was canceled. I was thinking, there’s no way they’re going to hold this; they’ve got to cancel it, and they did. I was already on my way into the office, though, but I sent out an email to my office letting them know—this is before I went to the meeting—letting them know that everybody should just plan to take the day and to do whatever they needed to do and making sure everybody in the office was safe, and everybody was safe.

Tell me a little about Get Outdoors Nevada before I ask the next question.

One quick, though, on that day, one thing that really stuck with me on the day after—I can’t remember if I’ve ever shared this with you or not—I was in the office just kind of by myself and the mailman came by. He is a very quiet gentleman. I can barely ever get him to say a word. I’ve been working just to get him to smile. I always just say, “Hello,” and he says, “Mm.” That day I went to the door and opened the door and I think he just needed to talk. He was telling me how he was a veteran and he couldn’t believe that something like that had happened here. He didn’t know what the motivation was, but he’s African American and he was saying, “Why is there so much hate in the world?” He’s like, “My skin is the color it is. Your skin is the color it is. We can’t change that fact.” He talked about a colleague of his who is a postal service worker who

was delivering mail to the morgue and how traumatized she was because of what she saw just delivering mail. He just stood and talked with me for ten minutes. He's never spoken more than two or three words since then. He reverted back to his quiet moment. But he just needed to talk to somebody that day, so I was glad I was in the office because he just obviously needed to chat.

Your question, what is Get Outdoors Nevada? Our organization actually has been around for a little while. It was initially conceived of in 2000 by a group of community leaders and their focus was on really the areas encircling the Las Vegas Valley and the public landscape. Our first executive director, if you will, his name is Alan O'Neal and he was a former superintendent of Lake Mead National Recreation Area. They initially started under the Southern Nevada Conservancy and the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association; that's what they were and they've renamed themselves now. It used to be under them and then it became its own 501(c)(3) officially in 2009, filing in 2008.

I came onboard with them in January 2010. When I came onboard it was a single-person operation, still very much focused on the public lands externally, but we had already started to do some work with the jurisdictions. I mentioned having grown up in New York City, so I've layered in some of my own experiences into the organization. I thought it was really important for us to do more outreach to youth because who will be the stewards if we don't do outreach to youth? We layered in education programs that have grown steadily. It began with just a Microgrant Program and AmeriCorps Vista and now we have a staff running the program and doing great work and it's exciting.

I wound up having conversations with the City of Las Vegas who are interested in whether somebody could help them with a volunteer program. They had talked to a lot of folks who said, "Well, the only people we can think of that might be the right group for you would be

Outside Las Vegas Foundation,” which is what we were at the time. I met with a couple of those City of Las Vegas folks in March and we wound up starting the program in August, which is light speed for the way jurisdictions function. That began our volunteer program and now that program is just going wonderfully well. We had a hundred and two events last year in the volunteer program.

A hundred and two?

One hundred and two events hosted last year in the volunteer program.

Give me an idea of what these projects are.

Those are everything including things that we’ve done at the Healing Garden to working in some of these parks and trails that you can see. In the room that we’re in here, we’re removing graffiti, clearing litter, helping with clearing some—sometimes the city will go through and they’ll trim trees and bushes and then we’ll come through with volunteers and help pick it up to speed that process up. We work really closely with the jurisdictions to figure out what they need. Then there are some projects that are a little further afield, so we’ll do some things with the National Parks Service or the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management or the Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of those also involve trash and litter pick up and then others involve a little bit of revegetation work and things like that.

When you say jurisdictions...

That means North Las Vegas, Las Vegas, City of Henderson, Clark County; those are the ones primarily that we do work with.

Wonderful. Oh my, this is much more than I thought. This is great. Now that we know what Get Outdoors Nevada is, how did you get involved—tell me first, did you know about the Healing Garden?

I had heard about the work going on with the Healing Garden. As that was happening, it was the exact same week that we actually had a big event that we were working on as an organization; we had a Saturday event called Get Outdoors Nevada Day. That was scheduled for October sixth and we were very focused on that event. We actually thought about canceling it because it was an outdoor event for families and kids and we weren't sure if people were going to want to go to an outdoor event. On the other side, I mentioned City of Henderson, and one of the folks who was killed, Quinton, the twenty-year-old, he was killed and he was a member of the Parks and Rec team and we were working really closely with Parks and Rec on our event, so we reached out to them to see if they wanted to move forward or if they wanted us to cancel the event out of respect for what had happened to Quinton, but they didn't want to, and the mayor also felt really strongly that it was important to keep the event, so we moved forward with that event. We wound up being taken up with that and not really being part of the construction of the Healing Garden. I was just, as with everybody else, reading about it and seeing it happen.

Tell me how you got involved with it. What happened? How it happened? How did it come together?

I mentioned we had relationships with the City of Las Vegas from our volunteer oversight. We are one of, I think, the only environmental nonprofits that engages in a really kind of sustained way with our urban parks and trails and those urban outdoor spaces. I mentioned earlier being from New York City. It was always really important to me to recognize that and to recognize the fact that people need somewhere close to home. Our public lands that encircle the valley are fabulous, but many people don't have easy access to those places, and so those are wonderful places to find healing and solace, but you have to drive there and not everybody has a car and not everybody can get to those places. Our focus is connecting people to outdoor experiences.

After the garden was completed, I received a call from Tom Perrigo from the City of Las Vegas. There were a couple of things. Now that the garden was there, there was a realization that they needed partnership and sustained community collaboration to continue with the garden. Because we had a relationship with the city and we were the only nonprofit in that space, he reached out to us to see if we might want to enter into an agreement with the city and if we might consider taking the Healing Garden under our wing as a nonprofit as a project.

I had been thinking about, what could we do to give back to the event, to people that had experienced trauma. I had been thinking maybe we could lead walks and do some sort of nature outings because there is that healing power of nature. When Tom called me I immediately said yes and then I reached out to my board to tell them that my inclination was to immediately say yes, to make sure it was okay with them. Tom is very persuasive.

Good, I'm glad he was.

It's one of those things, though; it's impossible to say no to something like that.

Yes. When you first saw it, what did you see? What was there?

Just a beautiful peaceful place. I've always told people it's a project I wish never existed because it means the horrific shooting would have never happened. But it's, I think, one of the best ways of responding to an event like that that I can think of. When you arrive there, my first visit to the garden was just such a nice peaceful place. It's in such contrast to the horrific events that it was response to. That first impression is just beautiful. Then as you're walking into it and seeing the Remembrance Wall and the images of the people who had been killed and the notes that were left behind, at that moment it was still so fresh, so that was just heartbreaking. There is this combination of, this is such a beautiful place, but then there's so much sadness there, in those initial days and months.

When the partnership started what were the plans? How did you conceive of what the city wanted?

We met with groups of staff members from the city to see what would be the best way to structure the relationship. They were kind enough to offer some funding to help us with offsetting our costs. There was funding. They gave us fifty thousand dollars for the year to help us with our cost for overseeing the management, obviously the landscaping and all that stuff. We entered into an agreement with them. Then we entered into an agreement with the committee to be their nonprofit umbrella, essentially.

The people on the committee are just salts of earth, just regular people. We have guys from Stonerose Landscapes. We have Apache Stone and all these guys who are contractors and hard workers. Their thing wasn't being a nonprofit. They just came together to make something nice happen. Then the next steps and idea of a nonprofit, they were like, what is a 501(c)(3)? What is all this stuff? Learning about that.

But there were some things that needed to happen with the garden. It's part of why I think it made sense for a 501(c)(3) to be part of it, and that was the Remembrance Wall had been made out of wood and pallets and it was just a beautiful creation in the moment, but it was clear that it wasn't going to endure because of the really harsh climate situation that we have here. It's important to have something like that honor the memory, so if it starts to look worn down, it's now honoring memories. Jay Pleggenkuhle came up with a design for a new wall. Really one of our focal points for our mission in that first year was to help develop and fund-raise that new Remembrance Wall, and so aside from just maintaining the garden and making sure it stayed in good shape, was to try and get that accomplished ahead of the one-year anniversary, if you will, a remembrance of October One.

What you did is beautiful. The committee formed a 501(c)(3)?

No. They formed under us. They are not their own organization, but they came under us as essentially a project. We provide the staffing and the oversight for the project and then we hold monthly meetings with the committee, but that way they don't have to be a 501(c)(3) on their own. If you're going to be fund-raising, you have to have a 501(c)(3) for the fund-raising because that involves all the details of financial oversight and proper accounting and acknowledgement of donations and all of that stuff, all the less appealing, less fun administrative parts that come with being a 501(c)(3).

But necessary in an atmosphere like this. The permanent wall, who contracts with you and how do you have enough money to pay for a permanent wall? How is all of that done?

It's an amazing process, actually. Jessica Anderson who works with me reached out to a relative of hers who worked with a construction company and that gentleman connected us to McCarthy Construction. McCarthy Construction just was really gracious from the beginning. We began with this concept. Jay had this concept, kind of a drawing, and then he and Daniel made this model, but you have to take that from the drawing to engineering standards and all the stuff that has to happen to make a wall. McCarthy Construction took on that they would get us to the point of completion, essentially. They reached out to SH Architecture, which is a firm, and one of their principles is Eric Roberts. He is somebody who I was actually familiar with before that. He is a very passionate outdoors person, environmentalist, and just a good human being. When they reached out to him, he immediately volunteered his company to work on the designs and get that to the engineering and permits and all of that. McCarthy and SH Architecture got us to the point that we needed to actually begin construction. McCarthy reached out to subcontractors that

worked with them and most of the subcontractors wound up actually donating work. It was really an amazing process.

And then the community came forward with wonderful donations. Our very first was from Gard Jameson, who is just a dear person. He actually came forward in December of 2017 because he could see immediately that something had to be done that needed to be permanent out there. He came forward with a twenty-five-thousand-dollar donation from the Jameson Family Trust. He's just a wonderful person, just very, very caring. He was very moved by the idea of the Healing Garden and what that represented. He also is one of the folks who injected the idea of having water. As you know, we have our panels and one is water. He felt that there was something very spiritual and soothing and important about having a water element, and so he identified that.

We received some other really significant donations from some of the local companies. I think what was interesting was what we told all the folks that donated was that we weren't going to do any acknowledgements in the garden for donations because we didn't want to have names of people who donated on the Remembrance Wall. We had so many volunteers who had come forward to help and we really wanted the focus on any naming to be on the victims who were lost. Everybody was okay with that. When you go to the garden, you don't see any acknowledgements. There will be a phase two and in that phase two I would like to have acknowledgements of the donors who made it possible. But they were all really respectful of the idea of leaving the garden without that type of—visual clutter is not quite the right word because they were all so wonderful in what they did, but none of them really insisted on having any real significant public acknowledgement, really just wonderful. Wells Fargo came forward with a

fifty-thousand-dollar donation; NV Energy with twenty-five thousand; Southwest Gas with fifteen thousand; Howard Hughes with ten thousand.

There was a lot of work that had to happen with overhauling; as the construction happened you had to work on the landscaping and all the different pieces that came together. Sam with Apache Stone, who was part of our committee, continued to do a lot of work, and Chad Reed continued to do a lot work with us. Everybody just came together in an incredible way, yes. It was just really wonderful.

That's how we were able to pay for it and I think we wound up matching the city, as I say, so gracious with their funding. In cash donations and in-kind donations, we are easily at about two hundred fifty to three hundred thousand dollars of donations that came in to make the new Remembrance Wall possible.

That's great. You said something about phase two a few minutes ago. What is phase two?

The city has acquired the land that it's immediately adjacent to the garden. Right now it's just a dirt lot, but that will become an area where we can have a tiny house visitor center. We want to have a place where we can have volunteers, docents, people who can greet people who come to the garden. It's always been real important to us that if we have somebody that is assigned essentially to the garden for a couple of hours that they have an indoor place they can go to for safety and for comfort, so that would include that. It would include a covered walkway and a little fire pit and an area where people can gather and talk.

We've had requests from some people who would like to hold some events at the garden that may not be the perfect fit for the garden, but perhaps you could hold in that space. It's such a beautiful area and that space will be, I think, very beautiful. I think there is some interest in things like weddings and stuff like that and we wouldn't necessarily do it at the garden because

of the nature of what the garden is about, but if somebody felt an attachment to that space and to the message and the mission of it, I think the phase two area would be a good place for things like that.

Oh, I love that.

And for storytelling and gathering together the community and things of that nature.

That sounds great. Tell me about how you felt about Las Vegas prior to October One and how that changed.

I'm one of the people who loved Las Vegas before October One. I've had so many people who have said, "Well, now I love. I didn't like the community that much before, but now I feel proud to be from here." I was always proud to be from here. I guess I felt even better about it. It was really wonderful to see the community come together. It was a little sad to me that it took such a tragic event to open some people's eyes as to what a great place this is and to what a great community we have. In terms of something positive coming out of this, I do think that it had probably the opposite intentions that somebody evil could have; instead of breaking people apart, it actually pulled people together. I thought that was a great way to respond and to see people be kind to each other. It was interesting because after 9/11 happened when I went to New York City, if you bumped into somebody on the street, people would stop and ask if you were okay and apologize. There was this moment of just all of a sudden everyone being aware of everyone and being kinder, and I think that that happened to some extent here, but I feel like it's really, really endured here. There is such a feeling of community and coming together and Vegas Strong and Vegas Stronger.

And paying it forward.

And paying it forward, yes.

Just yesterday I was in a line in our coffees hop in the library and someone overpaid just a dollar for the next person in line.

Oh, that's nice.

I said, "Oh, I have to start doing that more."

That's really nice.

Yes. It makes you think.

It does.

It makes us conscious.

It does.

Reflect just a bit on your understanding of the garden and its role.

What I have seen with the garden is that it resonates and is important to the families, of course, of those who lost people. It is incredible how essentially the families adopted trees. No trees were assigned to families; they just gravitated towards the tree that was their tree that they care for. I see the importance that it's held for some of the survivors. Everybody has their own way of working through things. Then it's also been important to people that were not necessarily impacted directly by October One, but who had loss or sadness in their lives and just needed a place to go to.

I've talked to some folks who think maybe it's a little unusual for an organization like ours to be working in a space like that. To me, it exemplifies how even a small outdoor space in a very urban context can be incredibly important to people and how important that natural experience, like hearing the bird songs and seeing the trees, having some natural smells and sounds, like rustles of the leaves, it is really important and it has a soothing effect on people. To me, the garden really plays an important role in bringing that into the downtown. It would up

being really important that it wound up being located in a place that is so urbanized and where a lot of the community and residents don't necessarily have a green space like that very, very close to them, and so this can provide a place where you can come and sit.

And it's in the Arts District almost.

Yes, and it is exactly in the Arts District. I'm thinking about the fact that really that new Remembrance Wall is an art piece. It is just beautiful and it is an art piece and the garden itself is an art piece.

I think what Jessica said about the new wall that's going to be built will also be an art piece.

Yes, yes, that new wall you're talking about. One of the challenges we've had with the garden has been that people want to enter it from all areas, and so they literally will walk over and through the trees and the plantings, and it's not good for the plants and it's not good for the trees. That's part of why there needs to be an enclosure around it. That is the really practical reason for that enclosure is preventing people from just walking anywhere. That will address that challenge. There will be a gate included in case we decide to use it that way, but we would just keep it open.

Yes, there will be parts of that new wall encircling it where we can use the tiles. Of course, with the Tree of Life, it's surrounded by three hundred tiles that were included in the heart. We have roughly two thousand tiles sitting here in our office that have been sent to us by people, and so those will be included in that new wall and that will be absolutely incredible because there is just such a range of messages and colors and different ways that people have captured their memories. That is going to be really incredible to see that go up.

I think so, too. I love the fencing with the musical notes.

Yes.

Tell me about your attitude about guns before and after.

Interesting. I have to preface, as an organization we're not taking any positions on that, so this is completely me as a human being. I have a mixed relationship to guns. My reflex emotion is, eh, like no. I reflexively want to step away from a gun or the thought of it or the reason or the use of it. That is my gut reaction, my reflex reaction. My more intellectual analysis of guns is that I realize there is this long history here in the United States, and so it's so complicated. I know there are people who hunt with them and some people who actually eat the meat all year that they hunt, but I feel like we're at such a sad place where we are the only county in the world where things like this happen on a regular basis, and so clearly we have gotten it wrong because things like this shouldn't be happening this often. We should not have people reaching out to the city of Las Vegas to see how they could do healing gardens in their own city.

When someone reaches out to you to learn about doing a healing garden, how do you approach that?

Jay is really the person who is the visionary behind the garden itself, and so he'll be working with the city and responding to people and help them look at how they're doing it. Our focus is going to stay very much in here within our own Healing Garden and our area because we're Get Outdoors Nevada, not meaning get out of Nevada.

Actually, with the garden itself, it's one of those that we've been intentional about not taking a political stance with regard to guns because it is such a polarizing issue and we don't want to bring that kind of polarizing element into the garden. We want that to be a space that's more of a safe space.

Tell me how this has changed you.

Interesting. I don't think it's changed me too substantially. I think it's more reinforced appreciation of the fact that there are really good people in the world. Events like this make you step back and really fully appreciate the people that you love and the people that you care about and how important it is to let them know. I don't think it's changed me substantially, but it has more reinforced and strengthened some of my thoughts and feelings about things. It's been a very emotional project to be a part of. That October One Remembrance event that we held, I was just so drained the day afterwards; I think so was Jessica, just to be there with so many of the family members and to light fifty-eight candles and the full magnitude of the fact that each one of those candles represents a human being that's not here any longer because of a monstrous thing. I've always felt strongly about this, but I feel even more strongly about the fact that the people who do those things, after the initial few months when you have to just gather information, I feel that they should be nameless.

That has almost happened.

Yes. Well, I hope so. An interesting thing... There are a couple of thoughts around that. I heard a story just recently on NPR and they were talking about the shooter and they kept saying his name over and over again. I found it so frustrating because I feel that that's part of the immortality that inspires people to do things. They want their name said over and over and over. On the one hand, I just find that really frustrating and I think that the person should just be referred to as "the shooter" and not have a name any longer and not have that. I think that's probably become a stronger feeling.

I was actually at the UNLV class that Miriam is teaching with the students. One of the students asked the most interesting question. He said, "Has anybody planted a tree at the garden for the shooter because he died that day?" "No, and I don't think the families and the survivors

we engaged are at that point.” But it did raise a really profound question of forgiveness and healing. That was actually one of the more interesting questions. It was from this young man. I wasn’t expecting that question from him. That, I think, is one that does force you to grapple with your own emotions and what kind of ability do you have to forgive? I think as a city it’s going to take a long time for us to forgive.

But it is possible.

But it is possible.

I think we’re moving in that direction and I think the Healing Garden is such an important part of that. Talk about some of the stories that you’ve heard surrounding the garden, people that you’ve gotten to know. You don’t have to call anyone by name. But just events, happenings, occurrences in the garden that just touched you.

There are definitely quite a few, stories that I’ve heard even from the construction of it. One of the gentlemen on our committee, part of the way he participates is he and his wife lost their son; their very young son drowned. He wound up becoming part of this project because it resonated with him the fact that all these families had also lost somebody. It’s been an important project for him.

Part of what’s interesting on a project like this is you see such a range of human reaction and emotion, not all of it positive, some of it negative. Sometimes people come to a place like that and they associate with it more because they’re interested in getting public attention and getting some sort of odd recognition, and that I find strange. But then the more pure relationships in the fact that we have family members that reach out to Jessica on a regular basis, asking her about the trees or just calling her and talking with her. We’ve had some family members, a couple in particular that were so angry and talking about forgiveness and anger. They were so

angry. They were from out of the country and angry at the U.S., angry at Las Vegas, just angry. Over time they've gotten to know Jessica and felt comfortable with letting go of some of that and that has been amazing seeing her work through that.

We've had some incredible family members. The family of Neysa Tonks reached out and their reaction to this horrific thing, they realized that they were able to help take care of her children, but that other families may not have the same resources, and putting together a foundation to help the children of other families, which I thought was just a beautiful thing. At that remembrance event her father was just the nicest human being. He was helping us carry things and just pitching in. It all felt so normal except it wasn't. There are so many really beautiful, really kind people.

I think one of the saddest moments that stays with me is when we did the daffodil planting. It was beautiful, but such a sad event because there were so many family members there and so many survivors and people holding each other, and smiles and laughter and hugs. The son of one of the women who was killed putting his mother's picture on the Remembrance Wall. He was so young, three or four years old. Thinking about it with my own stepdaughter, there are a lot of things past the age of four she just doesn't remember. That to me just got me because I'm think about this is the way he remembers his mother, with these photographs, and so he's not going to have the human being and he's just going to hold on to stories and photos. This person robbed him of his mother. That moment of his father picking him up to help him put the picture up, uh. I was asked to do a presentation on the Healing Garden on healing and the process and I put that photo in and as I was telling people about it, I just started bawling. Those moments... You can kind of separate yourself sometimes from the reality when you're doing a

project, but then that type of thing just brings you into the real human experience behind it. Ugh, yes.

Tell me about the book.

I talked for a bit with members of the committee and different people about the fact that this is such an extraordinary thing that has happened with the garden and that we would like to document it and be able to share it with people in Las Vegas and people beyond Las Vegas. We talked about unfortunately there are too many other places that are grappling with similar things. We wanted to document this response and, I think, something that's really special that's come out of the community. Earlier you were asking about how I and other feel about it. I think it just shows such a side of our community that most people don't realize is here, and so it's important to share that with the world.

It's exciting to be able to bring this project closer to see the book happen. As you know, of course I reached out to UNLV because I don't know how to do this stuff. I don't do books. I don't know how to create a book, and so that was my initial moment I was reaching out to (NAME) at UNLV to say, help. It was actually Gard who had suggested, "Why don't you reach out to UNLV?" I'm like, "Oh, that's a good idea." So I reached out to Su just trying to figure out how to do this. You could always just do your own self-publish thing, but I wanted to do something with some more heft and not just publish the collection of photos. I guess we could have done that through one of those online book things.

But I think this is going to be special. As you know, we've mentioned it that we'll have themes. We want you to write the one on the beginning of the garden. That would be the introductory piece. We want you to write about the garden, how it started. It's only about two hundred and fifty, three hundred words. That's what we'd like for you to help us with.

I would be honored to. I'm almost hesitant in some ways because I feel like we're the stewards of the project, but because I didn't create the garden...

Would you like for Jay to write it?

I'm not sure. I almost think it would probably be more appropriate.

How do you think the world's image of our city has changed after this?

Substantially. I do think substantially. It's easy to see Las Vegas as being very well known, just the Strip, and not even downtown Las Vegas, but just the Strip and just the glitz and the glamour and the fairytale, kind of the unreal aspect of Las Vegas. People forget that there are real human beings here and a real community and a depth and there's an evolution, and so I think people seeing how folks have responded and come together to take care of each other, the incredible outpouring that happened right afterwards with the lines and lines of people waiting to give blood and donating blankets and clothes and just stepping forward and this garden, I think it helps the world to see that this is a community and that there is a depth and there is so much caring and it's a wonderful place with good people. I think the overarching narrative for me that comes out of this is that—it might sound trite—but that good can triumph over evil because there was a horrible human being, but really there was beauty and kindness and good, and so that's what I prefer to move forward with.

Wonderful. My last question: Tell me what you would like to see as the future of the garden.

Some things we've started, like Jessica has reached out to the Performing Arts School, to the high school nearby. She's reached out to them. They have a Garden Club and so they're going to engage on the garden on helping us with their Garden Club and doing photography and documentation because, of course, they have a Garden Club, but they also have visual arts. I love

the idea of young people being able to engage with it and learn. I would love to see the garden obviously stay beautiful and evolve. I think that in the long term some things might adjust. It's a desert. Maybe some of the plants will get shifted bit by bit in making sure that everything is desert and water appropriate. I'd like it to stay beautiful. I look forward to having that new wall encircling it and the addition of the tiles. I look forward to phase two where we can have a place to engage the community and to have some storytelling opportunities and have some appropriate events that are the right match for the garden. I think also just helping to create that community generally, specifically in reaching downtown and bringing them more to our downtown and just continuing to contribute to this wonderful place that we have here in the Las Vegas Valley.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]