

AN INTERVIEW WITH LISA HANK

BARBARA TABACH

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

Today is May 30, 2019. This is Barbara Tabach. I am sitting with Lisa Hank.

Lisa, would you please spell your name for us?

Yes. It's Lisa, L-I-S-A, last name of Hank, H-A-N-K.

Great. We are here for the Remembering One October project. Lisa, first, before we talk about that day, let's know a little bit about your background. Where are you from? How did you get to Las Vegas?

I am actually originally from California. I grew up, really, and was raised in Fresno, California. Back in the day, it was just oranges and grapevines. I grew up there and graduated from high school and went to the University of California, Davis where I obtained my bachelor's degree and then I went back to Sacramento State and obtained my master's degree in social work. My BA was in sociology. I think I had this great vision that I was going to save the world. I worked at a developmental center in Stockton, California while I was pursuing my master's degree, and my mom took ill. Maybe two or three days before my graduation—it's almost a blur—she passed, but she knew I had accomplished that goal of mine to obtain my master's degree.

It was really that that caused me to begin searching for another place to go. I just knew I was ready to leave California, and so I began looking for different positions and I fell upon a full-time temporary position working with juveniles, which was my heartbeat, working with children, in Las Vegas at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. I interviewed and was blessed to take on that position. After a couple of years it was decided that that position would go away, but they afforded everyone there an opportunity to come on as full-time employees.

I came on as a crime prevention specialist, began to research and take a look at where I really wanted to land. There was a section that really focused on the abuse and neglect of children, as well as seniors, and I felt like that was a really good position for me based on my

knowledge basis and my skillset from school. I interviewed for the position and I came on as an abuse neglect specialist. Four years later I tested and became the supervisor of that section. I was there for about fourteen years.

After having my daughter, my only one, it became challenging to see and respond to some of these things that we were required to go out and investigate. After fourteen years I was ready to change my lens and tested and actually at that point promoted and became the director of our employment diversity section, and so that was a great opportunity to really see our agency from a completely different perspective. That was really just focusing in on all the Title Seven issues with our agency.

I believe I was there for about two years and received a call and I was asked if I would be interested in assuming the role and responsibility as the director of our Police Employee Assistance Program. Again, I was just so fortunate. I think every position in my career has just really fallen in my wheelhouse of that heartbeat of what I enjoy doing, and that's people; feeling as though I'm making a difference somehow in their lives matters to me.

I know we're going to be going into One October, but approximately six months or so after that event, I received another call and I transitioned over where I currently am. I am the director of our Records and Fingerprint Bureau, which is the technical side of things, so I'm really challenging myself to get out of my comfort zone where I had been all of my career. I'm growing a lot as a leader with the agency.

I am married. I have one daughter of my own, but I have wonderful stepchildren and two grandchildren that are just my world.

Life is full.

Life is full. Life is full and blessed. So that's me.

That's really good, well summarized, too. Tell me, what year did you come to Las Vegas? I didn't catch that.

Let's see. Probably twenty-six years or so ago. I believe I was maybe twenty-five years old when I came here.

What was Vegas like when you first came here?

Oh my goodness. Not even being a Las Vegan, born and raised here, I have seen so much growth. It's unbelievable how far out we reach now. It just seemed so much smaller. There was a lot more desert. Now you see so much more housing and there is so much more culture. There is the Smith Center that wasn't even thought about then. But just now you look around and there is just so much more culture, I feel. We've really grown and really evolved since I have been here, so it's been really, really nice.

That's very nice. Let's go back to—the acronym is P-E-A-P; I want to make sure we get that right. What is the purpose of that; the role of that department?

The Police Employee Assistance Program, which we coin as PEAP, was actually developed, I think it was, in 1984 by actually former sheriff Keller. Basically what we found is that after many incidents in officer-involved shootings, we were losing officers; they were retiring or leaving the force. Kind of delving in it was decided that we need to support our officers emotionally. They are seeing things on a day-to-day basis. They are engaging in things that normal, you know what I mean, folks don't have to see and involve themselves with, and so they need a place to come that they feel safe that is confidential where they can share what they may be feeling, what they may be going through, a safe place for them to reach out and get services, if it's counseling services, but psychological help to help them to navigate and to deal with what

they are seeing every day, all of those cumulative stressors that just layer scene after scene, a place for them to go to get help.

At that point in time, then, it was really focused around our officers, and then, obviously, over the years it just continued to grow. This program is designed to support all the men and women, commissioned and civilian employees within our organization, as well as their families who also go through the stressors with their loved one. When you're sitting at home and you don't know if your loved one is going to come home at the end of the day, or you watch the news and you know your loved one is on the scene, or your loved one comes home and they don't want to speak to you because they're trying to process what they saw and what they dealt with that day. Helping the families to navigate through some of those stressors. And then not only them, but our retirees who have dealt with all of these stressors for all of their career, now all of a sudden they're in retirement mode and they don't know quite how to find themselves in that new life where they're no longer connecting to that title. How do they navigate through that? The Police Employee Assistance Program is there to help them in all aspects, the men and women currently employed, family members, retirees, to navigate through those tough, challenging transitions that they may encounter in their lives.

Were you already married to a police officer when you took on that role?

I was.

You can probably relate to what you described on a personal level.

Absolutely, completely. I have a stepson that's also on the force. He is a corrections—well, at the time he was a corrections officer. He is now going through the police academy. I can uniquely relate to the wives and to the mothers who are worried and concerned about their loved one

dealing with those on the streets, dealing with those in custody, and just having those fears and those concerns, I can completely relate.

It's serious business.

Yes.

Dealing with the specificity of One October, where were you when you learned about the shooting?

I was actually at home in the bed. We were sleeping. I believe it was around ten thirty-ish. It was actually my husband's phone began to ring. He gets up, immediately turns on his radio. Shortly thereafter, I believe he said, "We have an active shooter." My phone began to ring. It was actually one of the officers who worked for me in the Police Employee Assistance Program advising me, "We have an active shooter." That's how I first found out. As soon as my phone rang, I immediately went into work mode with regard to trying to ascertain the scale of this, and information was continuing to come in. Based on the information that I was hearing over the radio, my husband's response, what I was getting over here, I knew that it was a very devastating situation.

I had the responsibility of deploying our resources to insure that the men and women that were there engaging in the situation had proper care, emotional care. We're not a large section. Let me count in my mind...Six of us. Now, the blessing in all of this is that we also had approximately twenty-one chaplains. Between my team and our police chaplains, who also fall under the umbrella of the Police Employee Assistance Program, we began to deploy.

Now, prior to this, Barbara, we began having meetings with other like units across the valley, so the peer support North Las Vegas, peer support of Henderson, our Trauma Intervention Program of Southern Nevada, Child Protective Services, the FBI, all of these

different agencies across our valley who also provide peer support to their agency, we began having meetings. I don't know why, but one of the questions...I came in one morning and I said, "You know, guys, we need to really begin thinking about in the event of a catastrophic incident, how do we deploy our resources? How do we come together to help support one another? What is this going to look like?" We began having some dialogue.

After I deployed my team, my first call was to Jill Bernacki, Southern Nevada Trauma Intervention Program. They have access to tons of volunteers who do nothing but fall in to support folks that are going through traumatic incidences. Between our deployment, Jill was like, "Lisa, where do you need me?" We had all of the hospitals covered. I had my folks at the hospitals, ground zero where the incident was occurring, communications. The chaplains were at the area commands. We deployed our resources and just tried to be at every facet to make sure that we were able to provide the support.

Now, keep in mind that when we responded out, Barbara, this became more than just an LVMPD family support. We had officers from other jurisdictions that were hurt and injured. We had officers from other jurisdictions who were seeking and trying to find family members. We were with Jill's team trying to support our community members who were looking for loved ones. It was a very large event.

How did you evaluate yourselves—having the foresight to have conversations about this, I guess it's part of our culture, the news that we get every other day it seems like.

Yes. I'm going to tell you we could have never predicted the magnitude of this incident. We were not equipped to handle an incident this large of a scale. Thank goodness for the communication prior to, the prior planning. Thank goodness that we were able to access resources that were able to come in and assist.

We're still dealing with the aftermath and the effects of One October. We don't know how long we're going to be dealing with this. I reached out to peers from New York, peers from Boston, and more people fifteen years after the event who were coming forward to say, *you know what? I'm hurting*. In law enforcement there tends to be this block, this concern with being able to come forward and say, *you know what? I'm not okay*. One of the things that we really pushed in the Police Employee Assistance Program was it's okay to not be okay. It is okay to not be okay. That does not mean that you are weak. It does not mean that you're not capable. It does not mean that you're not our strength out there in the field. It does not mean that our citizens cannot rely on you to be there when they're in need. It's okay to not be okay. Sometimes to break down that barrier takes time, so we still don't know what this is really going to truly look like. This is still new and we still don't know, Barbara, what we don't know.

That's really interesting that you say it that way. It's really powerful, Lisa. As I mentioned to you before we started the recording, we did the oral histories of almost fifty people and then we added a year, a year and a half later. It's different two years. It is actually more intense. I'm hearing your saying that that's the likelihood; that a lot of folks it's going to be intense.

Absolutely. I think when you finally allow the wall to come down and you recognize, I'm still carrying the visual pictures; I'm still carrying the imagery; I can still hear the sounds and the noise around me. One of the things that just kind of gave me chills was after the incident occurred we then had the challenge of reaching out to everyone to make sure that they had knowledge of the resources that were available. We really made our office a call center. We were able to obtain resources from the Red Cross. The City and County Fire were also in our group, and so they were able to allow us to use some of their resources for peer support in our office.

We needed to have people who understood peer support and were trained the way that we were trained in CISM, Critical Incident Stress Management. We all went through the CISM training, which is how you support and provide critical incident debriefs following a major critical incident. It was important to try to find these individuals that were trained the same way that we were trained so that everyone would receive the same type of support, and we were able to do that because we had one central person train us all, which was absolutely fantastic. Dr. Johanna O’Flaherty trained us all, and so that was wonderful.

After the event our office became the central hub for calls. We utilized counselors from our insurance that would deploy out with peer support to every debriefing throughout our agency. We scheduled day shift, swing shift, grave shift, so you can imagine peer support coming in with a counselor that was going out, deploying, and providing critical incident debriefs, speaking to people who needed help, telling them what resources were available, and connecting those who needed to be immediately connected. Not only for them, but then we did debriefs with family members who were at home listening to radios when this incident was occurring, and so we were able to host different debriefs at different churches and venues across the valley to provide family members with resources and to get them connected to proper resources. It was at that point that I learned it wasn’t even them listening to the radio, but some of them were there. Some of them were actually present, attendees.

Attendees at the festival.

And needed to be connected to services and to help. Without all of those resources—we had peer support from Arizona that came in to help us to provide that support. We were able to all come together collectively, FBI peer support, Arizona, city and county peer support, all of us, and then

counselors connecting in to reach out to our folks, to make sure that we were touching and connecting people and at least letting them know that resources were available.

Who coordinated all of that? You. All these different entities or agencies, you became—

The central hub of it, yes. No one could have—the one thing that I probably was not anticipating was the amount of calls that were just coming through twenty-four seven. You're trying to coordinate all of these moving parts and your phone is constantly going off where I didn't have an opportunity to process. I knew that I was in need of a moment when we were on our way to a briefing and I had my team waiting and I said, "Okay, I'm going to be there." I believe we were going to...I don't know if it was Convention Center Area Command or South Central Area Command to conduct a briefing. I know where the area command is. I arrive at one of those and I receive a call from my teammate that worked in PEAP. He said, "Lisa, where are you?" I said, "I am here. I am on my way up." He's like, "On your way up? You're at the wrong area command." I said, "Oh my goodness, okay. Go ahead and proceed. I'm on my way."

I get into my car. The location where I needed to be may be a ten-minute drive. I ended up at North Valley Complex completely opposite of where I needed to be. I sat in my car in that moment and I think for the first time the little tears dropped. I actually responded to UMC that evening. Seeing all the devastation, seeing folks coming in, family members looking for their loved ones, it was overwhelming, and I hadn't processed any of that because I needed to coordinate and make sure that our folks had what they needed. That was the first time that I realized, okay, Lisa, you need to be still. I ended up at North Valley Complex, miles away from where I needed to be. I just wasn't processing anymore what I needed to. I sat in my car for about fifteen minutes and just let the tears roll. I pulled it together and continued on.

I think what we have to also remember is that while we're, again, providing the support, this much needed support to our community, to agency, to family members, we lost an officer that we were also dealing with emotionally, helping the family through a very difficult and challenging time in their lives, helping to coordinate the service, it was a very challenging time. I cannot be more proud as I sit here and reflect today, probably really for the first time and I was speaking about that, I couldn't be more proud of the team of men and women who were there who worked tirelessly. I can't even remember sleeping. It's just like you're there the next day. You made it through the evening and you're there the next day. It didn't matter how long the days were, fatigue...It was so important for that team to be there. We were doing briefings back to back just to make sure that we were reaching out to folks. I had folks in the office calling people on the phones: *Hey, just making sure you're okay; do you need anything?* They worked so hard because it mattered; the mission mattered to them. As I reflect, I tell you not only the PEAP team, but everyone who joined us in providing the support and the resources necessary to help our agency to begin to process and to begin to heal, which we're still doing today, but I'll tell you what, I couldn't be more proud of the Police Employee Assistance Program and the folks assigned to that section. At that time, in that moment they really, truly rose to the occasion.

Did you have a way as a team later to come together and process what you had experienced?

We did. Actually, it was Dr. Johanna O'Flaherty who came in and did a debriefing with our team. It's difficult because you can't really process when you're doing the work because you're worried about the work, so it's almost like the work has to be complete and then you can process what needs to be done. To pull people in and to process something very traumatic such as this while you're still trying to get the work done is ineffective. It's ineffective for the mission, for

what has to be done, and then for them emotionally because you're still in it, and so it took us a little bit of time before we were really able collectively to sit down as a group and really process this, but we were able to do that as a team. I think that it was extremely important for us to do so.

Then we had to debrief for us what worked, what didn't work, because this is a first for our community, and hopefully the last, but there was nothing written to say, okay, these are the steps; this is what you're going to do. We created it. We had to create that. As we went through it was important for us to really take a look at what worked, what didn't work, what could we have done differently; in hindsight, what would we do differently today? That was a very important piece.

That is one of the topics that is definitely a thread that I follow through these interviews from the different perspectives, unfortunate need for a manual. Did you find other cities or communities that were victim of mass shootings reached out to you or you reached out to them after October One?

I reached out during, after. It was really, really cool because then they would reach back, "How are you doing? How are you holding up?" Unfortunately, we were all in a situation at one point or another where we were writing the book. We writing it; it wasn't written before us. There were still some questions that I would ask, and it's like, *oh my goodness, there's not written*, but you're relying on that person's account of, *well, this is what we tried and this is what we did*. All of our situations were very different, and so you take what you could. It's like, okay, yes, I covered that; okay, I got that covered. Then it's like, okay, so what did you do in the aftermath? Well, we're still in our aftermath; we're still dealing with that. So what are you doing now? It was really just trying to share the stories, and then me sharing with them, okay, this is what I have done to my peers. Am I missing anything? What else would you do? Unfortunately, there

wasn't a lot of—it's kind of like past the support, making sure that the deep roots are done, making sure your folks were okay, there really wasn't too much beyond that. We were writing it.

You were writing it as you were living it.

Yes.

I don't know if there's a way that you cannot have to do that because of the uniqueness of each community.

Yes, yes.

Talk about community. You've been in Las Vegas long enough to see all those changes that you mentioned earlier on. How do you reflect on how our community as a community handled the aftermath?

Unbelievably. So many people say that Las Vegas is this transient type of community; you have people that come and go; there is really implants, people that move here, but there is really no real connection. So wrong. The outpour of support that not only our agency received during this time, but so many different facets of our community just really came together. That slogan, Vegas Strong, unbelievable. I think honestly the response that we received as a collective whole, the response of Las Vegas as a collective whole, honestly I think that those tireless nights when you didn't know where you were going to get just the strength to get back up again, to put your feet back on the floor again, you would turn on the television and you would see something that a community member was doing, a citizen was doing, and it gave you the strength to keep pushing. It just gave you the strength because we were all pushing. Everybody was in it and was trying to do whatever they could, big or small. That's where I think I drew my strength. But it was truly amazing to look around our community and see the outpour of love and support for one

another. It wasn't cultural divides. There wasn't agency divides. It was one collective whole, one strong community, and that was amazing. That was truly amazing.

It manifest itself in so many ways; some tangibles, some public memorials, some less known. I've interviewed a middle school librarian who has a random acts of kindness board in her library at the school. Her daughters happen to have been shooting victims, survivors. I don't even know what the right terminology is to use anymore for this. How everybody in small ways wanted to do something.

Absolutely. And those small ways mattered. Every little thing mattered. I'll tell you what, again reflecting back, the response of the community, the response of Sheriff Lombardo... To work for an agency and to see your leader out there in the forefront and just so proud to be a part of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, so proud to be a member and a citizen of the Las Vegas community, so proud. We were all finding our way. But you know what? All said, I am really, truly proud of our response. Those that lost their lives will forever, forever—and I know because I look around this community—forever be remembered and there is power in that and there is pride in that.

We always ask about people's attitudes, if they were changed after the shooting, towards gun and gun control in our general society. Do you have any thoughts about that? You live with a person who has to carry a weapon for their job, and we need that.

I can't say. With relation to this, I think my thought has really just gone more towards senseless acts where innocent people lose their lives, where children are now growing up without their parent because of senseless acts, mothers and fathers without their children, children without their parents. Senseless acts, I think that that's really where my mindset has gone. It's a challenging time for those in law enforcement; it's a challenging time for us as citizens where

you now go to a movie theater and you don't know if you're safe. You send your children to school and you don't know if they're safe. Senseless acts, I think that that's really more of where my mindset has gone is the prevention of these types of devastating senseless acts that devastate and take away lives. I don't understand it.

That's well put. I totally agree with that. I assume there are officers that still don't take advantage of the resources. It's just like anybody, I guess.

Yes. The Police Employee Assistance Program, we are voluntary. We can't make anyone do anything. I would say that's probably one of the challenges working in this program is that you can see someone who is in need of assistance and help and have a desire to connect them to services that you know could really truly be a benefit, but you can't make. You can't make them. I think that that's a really challenging part is that you want to make them; you want to make them see the benefit, but with anyone, with anyone, they have to connect to services and resources when they're ready to do so.

Is there a way to evaluate effectiveness afterwards? I'm not sure how to even phrase this question. Is there awareness of how many people took advantage of the resources?

Yes, there is an awareness of the number of folks that we are connecting with, but, obviously, due to confidentiality you would never know who. You know what? It's meant to be that way and it is for a purpose and no one should.

But intuitively everyone knows that this is beneficial—

Oh yes.

—and that this agency should not section—I guess that's how you refer to it—should go away?

Absolutely. We receive so much support from executive staff within the agency supporting this program because they know the benefits, they know that folks do take advantage of, and they know that the resources are real; that we need to connect to resources. Absolutely I think that everyone knows of the benefits. The Police Employee Assistance Program has been around for years. I think that we are starting to really break down the stigma associated with getting help. It shouldn't be that way. It just should be...again, going back to it's okay to not be okay, and to remove those stigmas. It's been around for a very long time and I think the proven effectiveness is the reason why.

You mentioned to me before we started recording that you went with Charles, your husband, on a presentation. Were you part of the program to present that day, too? Talk a little bit about that.

Following One October, our sheriff really was vested in sharing our story with other agencies that could learn from what we went through and to take some note on some of the things that we did, to help them. We really went across the country speaking; different people would go out speaking about our response to One October. There was a presentation that they requested actually in California and they wanted both parts. They really wanted to understand our tactical response, but they also wanted to know, what was our response to deal with the emotional aspect of One October? We both actually had an opportunity to go down and speak about our roles on that day.

It was very interesting to sit and hear his response because that was something we really didn't talk about. He responded out. I responded out. I had no idea where he was. I had no idea where he was. Ironically, I'm going to move a little bit here. I had no idea where my husband responded that evening. I love Janet Jackson and prior to the incident my husband had surprised

me and we got tickets to the Janet Jackson concert. It was a couple of weeks after One October that the concert was coming up. The concert happened to be at Mandalay Bay. We were in the car and we were driving to go pick up our tickets. My husband got a little emotional. I'm like, okay, what's going on? It was in that moment that I realized he responded to Mandalay Bay that evening. I didn't know until that day that we were going to pick up Janet Jackson concert tickets at Mandalay Bay.

Going back to this presentation, it was just really honor to have an opportunity to go and speak about our roles and to hear the tactical response and some of the things that he was dealing with and that he saw and felt that I didn't know, and then I think likely for him on my response, not knowing where I was and what my team was dealing with and navigating through. It was really a wonderful opportunity to be able to share those lessons learned from the tactical and the emotional side of this together. That was really a wonderful, wonderful opportunity.

That's amazing.

It was a wonderful opportunity. It was great.

How was the Janet Jackson concert?

We left early. We left a little early. I was really concerned about him and he was trying to push through for me. We left early, but good concert. Again, it was so close to that event that I think clearly we both felt, *we're going to try this out*, but, at the same time, being very cognizant of what we were feeling emotionally. I think we both felt, *okay, we came; we were able to get into the building and see this, but now it's time to go*. I respected that for him and I think, likewise, he respected that of me. I think that that is really what this is about now is people really assessing and evaluating where they are, how they're feeling, acknowledging that, and then taking action however they feel is going to be a benefit to them, but then taking some action. It might be just

getting up and removing yourself, as we did, and it could be connecting yourself to talk to someone about it. But whatever that is, I think it's self-evaluating, where I am? How am I feeling? How am I dealing with this? What is still bothering me? What am I still seeing? What am I still hearing?

One of the things that played over and over for me was the stories about those that actually responded down to the actual event where you had those that had lost their lives and you had family members searching for them, so all the sudden you hear all these phones ringing. About two o'clock in the morning they kind of die down. Then six, seven, they start again. Those are things that folks were processing. I think as we continue to move on and to continue to heal it is going to be continuously evaluating where we are and how you're feeling and then taking action.

As we talked about, it doesn't mean a year later or two years later and we're learning on twenty years later that the impact of tragic events like this it can have on folks.

Absolutely. It was funny because when you are notified, you get an alert. It's like your phone rings and you pick up the phone and you get this alert that something is going on. I remember, man, maybe two days or so after this event my phone goes off and this alert comes on and my anxiety, and it just really wasn't that major of a call and somewhat I'm a little irritated. I had to process that. What is that? Where is that coming from? Well, because the last one was devastation. My body is gearing to respond to here. It is just all those little triggers that you may have along the way that we have to delve in and recognize, where is this coming from?

My last question or topic, if you don't mind, is: How do you take care of yourself when you're dealing with all of this story?

I think not only maybe for me, maybe I'm going to speak from a whole, I think that is, again, being willing to say, I'm not okay. Recognize it, own it, and then take action in whatever way you feel is needed in that moment. I think recognizing that getting help or going to speak to someone about what you may be feeling and/or experiencing, it's not a sign of weakness. It really takes courage to step out there and say, I need to speak to someone about what I'm feeling.

I think trying to get back to the things that are important to you, they sometimes call them getting back to the used-tos, so I used to hike; I used to play tennis; I used to go out in the yard and play with my children, I think it's about getting rid of those used-tos and getting back to doing it. If hiking is where you find that peace, if getting out in the yard and just rolling around with the kids is where you find that peace, it's trying to incorporate that back into your life again. I think just being able to find and connect with me-me, getting back to that thing that's important to you, identifying that and being a part of it, if it's working with children, whatever that is, wherever you find that meaning and that connection, connect with that; that spirituality, if it's something, but connecting with that.

May I ask, what did you do?

All of that. [Laughing]

You had your list of used-tos, huh?

Yes, all of it. Talking about it, I think talking about it with my team helped. Laughing with my family, my children helped. Getting out and doing some of the things that I love to do that I had stopped. You stop because you're trying to do all of these things, and so all of a sudden you don't have time anymore or you don't have the energy, so you stop. Getting back to some of those things was very important. I think all that. I think I did all although not right away, but as time went on beginning to incorporate those things in my life again.

Fantastic. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your time and sharing your perspective and personal story. This really is important to the project. I appreciate it.

Absolutely.

Thank you very much.

Thank you for having me.

[End of recorded interview]