

AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM PERRIGO AND BRAD JERBIC

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This is Claytee White. I'm down at City Hall today. It is June 26th, 2019. I'm going to start with Tom.

Tom, could you pronounce and spell your name, please.

Yes. Tom Perrigo; T-O-M, P-E-R-R-I-G-O.

Thank you.

Brad, could you do the same thing?

Sure. My name is Brad Jerbic. It's B-R-A-D. Last name is J-E-R-B, as in boy, I-C.

Wonderful. Thank you so much. You may do this in any order that you like. I want you to talk a little about your early life; where you grew up, where you went to school, a few facts about that, and how you got to Las Vegas, if you weren't born here.

Sure, and this is Tom Perrigo. I was born in a small town in Hudson, Wisconsin on the St. Croix River, the birthplace of my mom. My grandparents lived there for a good part of their life. But I grew up in Minneapolis through the sixth grade. My father was an attorney with the Attorney General's Office for the State of Minnesota. He grew tired of that and so he moved the entire family out to Colorado when I was in seventh grade and opened up his own practice. We moved to a small mountain town about seventy miles west of Denver, Dillon, Colorado. I had an idyllic [childhood] growing up in the Rocky Mountains, everything you would expect there.

I left high school in my junior year; I had enough of that. I went to work construction and then went back [to school]. I decided I had enough of construction so I better go to college. I got my bachelor's degree from University of Northern Colorado in finance.

Did you have to get a GED?

I did. I got a GED. I just dropped my tools one day and said, I'm going to go do something else. I didn't quit my job, but I took the afternoon off and went down and signed up. They said, "Just

bring a GED and you can get in.” At the time University of Northern Colorado had a program that allowed you to get in with a GED on sort of a probationary basis. I had to make the grade for the first year, which I did. Then I got into the college party life, which extended my time at school to five years, but I graduated with my bachelor’s in finance.

I moved to Crested Butte, Colorado, a beautiful resort town, with my wife. We were married in Crested Butte, had our first child in Crested Butte, and realized that the resort living, although wonderful and beautiful, it’s hard to make enough money to support a family.

UNLV offers one of the best hotel management schools in the country, and I was interested in the resort industry, so I thought I’d come to UNLV to get a master’s in hotel administration. I got here and realized that I was interested in economics, which they have a fine program here, maybe not known for it, but it was a good program. I got my master’s. I got a job with Science Applications International Corporation working on the economic project while I was still in graduate school. One of the students who I was working with at the time on my master’s with and she was in the same program, she was leaving her job at the city and said I should apply for it. I said, “Well, that sounds nice.” With a family I could have a steady, reliable income with reliable work hours, sort of the tortoise and the hare, with this consultant firm. A lot of stock options, but a lot of travel, a lot of hours. But with the city it’s a good living, but you could spend more time with family, have a better life balance there.

I went to work for the city in 1994. I’ve been here for twenty-five years now. In that time I’ve worked for planning, I worked for administrative services. I’ve done government affairs. I’ve been really blessed to do a lot of different jobs here. Now I have the honor of working with Public Works, building safety, and planning and development.

What is your title now?

Executive Director of Community Development.

Wonderful. Thank you so much. Before I go, what about Yucca Mountain? What did you learn about Yucca Mountain while you were doing that project? Is it safe?

I learned we spent a whole lot of money, the federal government spent a whole lot of money on a lot of studies. Now, the work I was doing was about the economic impacts. I was studying the populations, the demographics and the economies of all the rural towns in Nye County and Lincoln County and like that and Clark County. The economic impact was almost not measurable. In terms of the engineering safety, I can't speak to that because I wasn't an engineer. They did a lot of work to convince us everything would be safe, but I don't know.

Wonderful. Brad, would you do the same thing? Could you tell us a little about your early life?

Sure. It's not as interesting as Tom by far and that's for sure. I was born in 1958 in a little town in the [San Francisco] Bay Area called Pittsburg, California. My mom and dad had myself and my brother, who is a year younger. My dad had a jewelry store in Northern California and just before I turned four he sold it, and the fellow he sold it to died before he could pay my dad the money, so my dad needed a job. His friends told him that Las Vegas was on fire. In 1962, my dad picked us all up and we moved to Las Vegas. My first two nights were actually spent downtown on Fremont Street. The home that my dad had bought hadn't been constructed yet. It wasn't finished, and so the first two nights were at the Eden Hotel on Sixth and Fremont, which no longer exists, which kind of led to where I am today.

But having said that, I grew up in Las Vegas, went from kindergarten through high school here. In first grade, my parents made the decision to send me to Catholic school. I went to Saint Francis. I was in the very first class at Saint Francis when it opened. Then I went to Saint

Joseph downtown for two years and then I went to Gorman for four years, which was just a remarkable experience for a number of reasons. One, probably one of the most influential teachers in my life, Bob Forbuss, was my speech and debate coach. Bob passed away a few years ago, but there's a lot of us that owe our ability to speak up loud and speak in public to him. The people that went there were interesting. They were as diverse from us, who are just little middle class, lower-middle class kids, to sons of casino owners. It was just a real diversity.

One of the things that I got out of Gorman was, you've got to go to college. I wanted to go to Stanford, which I did not get into. But the nuns and the priests wanted me to go to Notre Dame, which I did get into. Just by pure chance, a friend of my father's, who was a wholesaler jeweler, was in town, and he went to UFC. He said, "If I had anyplace I could go to college, it would be Pomona College in Claremont, California, one of the Claremont colleges." I had never heard of it. I sent away for an application and I got in, and that was just a total fluke, so everything you're about to hear is pure serendipity.

I went to Pomona and found myself just loving every minute of it. Like Tom, I wish I could have stayed another three or four years, but I did it in four. When I graduated I was a government major. They don't call it political science because they don't believe it's a science. It's government. I studied government. The one thing I wanted to do—and please don't take this as sounding portentous—I wanted to work in the area of arms control because in 1979 and '80, my last year of college, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty was a big issue on Capitol Hill, nuclear—well, if not disarmament, then at least nuclear accords were being seriously debated, and that's what I wanted to do. The senior senator from Nevada, who is a great man by the name of Howard Cannon, was not only our senior senator, he was second ranking member of the Armed Services Committee. If I could go to work there, I could actually get my nose under the

door maybe to get into branches of government that dealt with arms control. I graduated on a Saturday. I drove home on a Sunday. I packed my car and I drove to Washington, D.C. on Monday. I had never been to D.C. in my life. I drove cross country with my brother. I lived in D.C. for over half a year working there.

Did you talk to Howard Cannon before going there?

Yes, I did. In fact, I'll show you something. I don't want to have you hold your tapes. If you can hear me far away, there are some things of Senator Cannon I did not know. I'm going to show you...

After I left and after I came to work for the city and Senator Cannon was retired, he would call me from time to time just to say hello and see how I was doing. I thought, how does he even remember me? I was just flattered that he would think to call.

One day when the clerk was cleaning out the clerk's vault, I found all these documents and I learned that Senator Cannon was the city attorney for the City of Las Vegas until 1958. I have his resignation letter in this file, handwritten, hand signed I should say, not handwritten, typed but signed, where he resigns saying, "I know you all are aware that I just got elected to the United States Senate." I think there was that connection there because—I'll show that to you and I can maybe give you a copy if you want.

Don't you want to donate that to Special Collections at UNLV?

I do. I do.

Good. We have it on tape.

I do. Yes, it's yours. It's yours, believe me. I just want a copy to hang on the wall around here.

That's a real gem right there.

Isn't it? And they were going to throw it away.

That is amazing.

You have to have it because it's part of our history. People don't realize that this job, today it's appointed by the City Council. Before me, it was appointed by the manager. But before that it was an elected position. In Reno it's an elected position. In Sparks it's elected. In Los Angeles it's elected. In Las Vegas it's appointed, so is Henderson and North Las Vegas. But back then it was elected, so he actually had somewhat of an electoral base that was his base for running for office.

Your position is?

Is the City Attorney for Las Vegas and I'm appointed by the City Council.

You are actually the City Attorney. How many attorneys work under you?

We have a staff of close to ninety; that's attorneys and staff. We have a lot of clerical staff in the criminal division. In criminal I think we have eleven or twelve attorneys, and over here we have about fourteen or fifteen.

How many direct reports do you have?

Reports in what way?

People who have to report directly to you?

My way of management is to have teams, and so I have a head of criminal and they all answer to the head of criminal on the criminal side. Over here we have a contract team that answers to that chief. We have a litigation chief who answers to him. To be honest with you, the only way I can do this job is for three people to talk to me and that's it. Everybody can. My door is always open. But when it comes to managing the day-to-day business, I'll leave it to the team chiefs.

Fantastic. I want to know more about East Fremont Street and the whole enchilada. Is that okay?

Oh, absolutely.

It's funny. It started as just kind of whim of an idea. Oscar Goodman had been in office for a couple of years. In 2001, just kind of looking at downtown and just loving downtown because my dad later had his own jewelry store downtown. When I wanted to see my dad, I had to come downtown on Saturday and Sunday, and that meant having something to do. I cleaned the jewelry and polished the showcases and stuff like that. I was never afraid of downtown. I just loved it. Later on, to get the opportunity to work downtown and to see it, I kind of long for the glory days, I really do. I long for the days when people used to cruise Fremont. I long for the days when all the neon was lit and it was really cool and hip and when there were clubs and restaurants and places to go downtown.

I started thinking about it then, but it really, really came to a head after October One. There was that moment in your life where you think, this is time to...Events rarely change people, but that one changed me. I thought, why not dust this off? I showed it to my good friend Tom who I spent two years getting to know very well through the most miserable negotiation in both of our lives; we were both involved with the Badlands Golf Club negotiation. We saw each other at seven in the morning, weekends. Lots of brain damage. I went to Tom figuring, hey, who is more brain damaged than Tom? I brought him the plan and he said, "You ought to show it to the manager." Or something like that. He'll correct me. We kind of shopped it around.

Eventually we had a meeting with the head of Downtown Project, which is the company owned by Tony Hsieh that owns all the motels in the downtown area. For the very first time in history, if this project had started five or six years ago, it would have been almost impossible because every motel was an out-of-state owner and most of them were family trusts. If you wanted to get together even five or six motels, you would have to find five or six different

attorneys that represented those family trusts and then try and pitch it to them individually, and any one or two opting out would have made this not worth doing. But with Tony Hsieh owning all of the motels all the way down to 14th Street, there was a chance with a local owner and a local company to go for it, and so we did.

Tom will tell you we both met with the head of Downtown Project, Michaels Downs, great guy. He had never met us and we had never met him. We had cocktails, which is where every good negotiation begins. He said, "Show us what you've got." We brought by a thumb drive and here we are. In November it will be two years since we met Michael Downs and we are starting the painting of the motels, the re-bulbing of all the neon signs, the redoing of the streetscape and the redoing of downtown.

A little bit more on that though. You've seen some of his presentations. That's what really sold the project to all of the city folks and to a lot of the stakeholders. His passion and vision is unbelievable. Because he has personally lived and experienced it, now he wants to very much make it happen, and that comes through. That authenticity really inspires people and that was a big part of getting support, as well as a well thought out plan of putting together a good team.

But one thing that Brad leaves out of the story is the connection with Michael Downs. At the very, very beginning, because sometimes the private side is a little bit skeptical of the public side and a little bit vice versa as well, and there's good reason for that but it's all usually just about getting to know each other and building those relationships. But he was willing to dive in a little bit more than he normally would after seeing what we had accomplished with the Healing Garden. A lot of these things come back. He said, "Seeing what you guys did, it just put government and some of the people who work for government in a whole new light for some of these people that we can get things done."

That's true. Tom, I'm glad you reminded me. I did a little homework before that sit down; that first time cold. I asked a friend of mine, and he said, "The only thing you really need to know is that company really doesn't like doing business with government." That's not an unusual thing to hear. I kind of walked into the meeting apprehensive that we might have a nonstarter because we are government. The very first thing I said, I think, when we sat down, after we ordered, was, "I understand that you don't like doing business with government." Before I could get more than two sentences out of my mouth—what Tom said is accurate—he said, "You know, I might have felt that way before, but I saw what you did with that Healing Garden and you did that in one week." It showed him that when we want to do something, we can, and that was enough. I think you're right. If it weren't for that and the fact that they opened everything...Like I said, serendipity. Out of the worst thing that ever happened to this city came something wonderful.

Let's talk about the worst thing that ever happened to the city. Tom, what were you doing that Sunday?

I don't remember. It was a Sunday probably not unlike any other Sunday. I just don't recall, but it was just a regular day. A regular day at my house is get up, have coffee, go to church, have lunch, lounge around the house, relax. But that night when my phone started blowing up—being on the City Manager team, immediately the texts start going because we all keep in touch that way. I'm seeing these texts. I think it was probably midnight. I don't remember what time. I'm like, *is this a drill? Why are we doing a drill at this time? What in the world is going on?* I set my phone down and I thought, *wait a minute. We wouldn't be doing a drill at...whatever time it was.* I looked and then I started getting online and just the whole thing started to...It's like everybody else, *what do I do? How can I help?* But it's in the county. There is no immediate action for city leadership other than our emergency management people or emergency response

people and our communications people and then, of course, the mayor. Yes, it was pretty much a normal Sunday until really late at night and early the next morning.

Tell me about your Sunday, Brad.

Maybe to put it in context I should tell you about my Thursday first. One of the people killed that night was a very close friend named Cameron Robinson. Cameron was not only a friend for the last ten years, he was a city employee for the last five, almost. He came into my office on Thursday and was jumping up and down with glee because he was going to this country western music concert. Cameron knows—no offense to anybody listening to this—I'm not a country western fan, and so I'm giving him a hard time, telling him that country western makes my ears bleed, and he's going back and forth with me. He is so thrilled because his partner is coming in from Utah and they've got a room at the Luxor and they're going to spend the whole weekend at the festival and they're going to take off Monday because they just plan on soaking up every bit of it. I said, "Have fun." I didn't think twice about it.

My roommate, Keith, went with me to Boulder City. I go several times a year. I have friends that live out there. It was a day of just lounging by the pool and just snacking, having a few beers, and then coming home. Cameron sent me a text at four o'clock Sunday afternoon and it's he and a couple of other friends from the city and his partner and a couple of other people after they've had a couple of pitchers of bloody Marys. I kind of smiled. I didn't even return the text because that's not an unusual thing to receive. We left Boulder City about nine o'clock and went home and I went to bed. I was tired and so I went to bed early. I literally went to bed just a few minutes after ten. I had the TV on and I was turning it off and it was the very first report and it didn't sound very alarming. It was, "There were shots fired on the Strip tonight." I thought,

every other weekend you hear a story like that on the news, *and I didn't pay any attention and I turned it off and I went to sleep.*

For whatever reason, I woke up Monday morning about four thirty, five o'clock in the morning, which was unusual, and turned on the TV and they were talking about this Harvest Festival. I thought, what the hell is a Harvest Festival? It's a Harvest Festival in Las Vegas. Then I see the cowboy hats and I went, that's the country western music festival that Cameron was at. I called. Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring. Went to voicemail. I texted and no response. Immediately thought, oh God. Then I thought, there's twenty-two thousand people out there. What are the odds that Cameron is one of the people? I got to work literally about six fifteen, which I will tell you I'm not here at ten fifteen. Six fifteen was a little early for me. But I thought, maybe I'll get a call or I'll get something. I forgot he wasn't coming in on Monday. I thought he was going to walk in. I completely forgot he was taking Monday off. Everybody comes in and Cameron doesn't. About seven fifteen I got the phone call that he had been killed. That day was just devastating. One of my attorneys, Teri, who retired just a few months ago, we were in her office and she said, "Let's go out and take a walk." I said, "Where are we going to walk, Teri? Take a look outside of City Hall. It's desert and nasty. I'd just rather sit here."

The phone rang. Tom can tell you the rest of this, but it was Jay Pleggenkuhle, who you know, Claytee, from the book. He called because Tom and I had met him through the Badlands Golf Course negotiation. Like I say, just a serendipity of meeting him, and that story bears a little telling because Jack Binion is one of the people that lives in Queensridge and he's on the Badlands Country Club. We negotiated with many, many neighbors, Jack being one of them. Towards the end of the negotiations, Jack had a request and that was that the developer keep portions of the golf course green and maintained—not the whole thing, but portions—during the

construction if they were going to do it and to tell us how much that would cost and what would be involved in that. He brought in his landscape architect, who is Jay Pleggenkuhle, and that's how we met. We had a couple of meetings with Jay. Then when the negotiation fell apart, Jay wanted to do something downtown. Just through that chance encounter because of this negotiation, we met Jay and then Jay was the first person to call when I said, "Where are we going to go walking?" The phone rings and Jay says, "We want to build it." That's when I went to Tom and he'll tell you the rest.

Prior to that, while Brad was getting the news and with his staff just trying to wrap their heads around it and all that, the City Manager's Office, we were busy just trying to focus on what steps we take because when you start to realize what's happening, the impact, it's just so overwhelming. But we're like, okay, get the director, start the phone tree, figure out what's going on, where everybody is at, let's account for all of our employees; all that kind of stuff. We're busy doing that and occupying our time with trying to get our house in order the best we can. What time was that? About eight thirty, nine o'clock? No.

Yes. I think Jay came over around nine thirtyish. It was around ten; I remember that because I remember he left at ten thirty.

Brad calls and I said, "Of course, we'll make it happen," which was just such a welcome distraction to begin immediately focusing on something that is like, *this has got to happen.*

Tell me what makes something happen. Tell me what the something is.

To make the garden happen without even really knowing much about it, but we had worked just enough with Jay that clearly he was a really visionary landscape architect. We had worked with him enough so that when he brings the idea, immediately he is the guy that can make something happen. We don't know what it is. We don't know how it's going to come together. But...

He wrote the concept immediately, too. On the phone his words were, "I can't work this week and Daniel and I would like to do something so people have a place to go." I think that was the first time he used the words Healing Garden. It might have been in that phone call. He already wrapped his head around something before he walked in the door. I think he even said, "If the city could find us a piece of land, we don't want it be necessarily donated or whatever..." At that point I think it was going to be maybe even a temporary garden.

A pop-up garden.

A pop-up garden, right.

But we quickly decided this had to be permanent.

Yes. It rolled so quickly. When he came down Tom was the one who just grabbed it and grabbed it by the horns.

I'll pick up the story, but a real quick fast forward on the Healing Garden, it was interesting because we had to communicate to the public that something was going on here. It's going to start to get legs and become known and everything. The communications people are like, "Well, what do we call it?" So they're starting to come up with answers. No, we're not going to go through all of this. I looked back at the napkin sketch that Jay did and right on there he had titled it Community Healing Garden. I said, "That's it. It's Community Healing Garden." That's what the communications folks ran with.

It was immediately find a piece of land. It was one of those times where you have to bypass government. I have to be very careful how I say this. I was very intentional on who I worked with to make sure it didn't get pulled this way or...like any bureaucracy. This isn't a criticism of governments, the city or anybody who works here. It's any large organization. Something like this, it really required being laser focused. It was just a few key trusted folks that

we knew could keep this thing from, *well, we better talk to all of the members of the board; we better talk to state; we've got to do this.* Pretty soon you're, what, three years just trying to come up with a concept. I grabbed immediately the maps and started poring over some options and I selected a couple downtown that I thought could work well and that's when I went to Jorge Cervantes who is the chief community development officer, my boss, and I said, "Here's the concept. Here's what we're going to do." He's like, "Okay. How can I help?" "Well, we've got to identify a piece of land." Which we did, the land that it's on. It's a remnant piece of a right-of-way. I brought that into the City Manager's Office because the whole team was still in the conference room working through stuff. I sort of tried to go sideways a little bit because people wondered, *well, we already have a memorial over here; we have that over there in the northwest.* I said, "No, no. This is something that's got to be central to Las Vegas. It's for all of Las Vegas. It's not ours. It's the community's. The community is going to do it." Even though people started thinking of other places, all I needed was the city manager, my boss's commitment to that spot and that was it.

I called Brad and said, "We've got a location." He called Jay. Jay came in. This all happened within, like I said, an hour, hour and a half. He comes in with his concept. We show him the property. He said, "That will probably work. Let me go look at it." He went and looked at it. He called back or came back, whatever, and said, "That's perfect. That's it."

Yes, he got the dimensions and he came back at four o'clock with the drawing, that drawing that's in the book that you've seen. I don't think the meeting in your and Jorge's office lasted more than fifteen minutes. I think everybody looked at it and it was like, this is beautiful. It was like, what do you do with this now? Normally, as Tom would say, you go through permitting and you would go through this and you would locate utilities and blah, blah, blah. I think we all

found ourselves abandoning our first role, which is I'm trying to protect the city from liability, and Tom and Jorge are trying to make sure it goes through planning properly and this properly. Everybody kind of knew that day that that was not the day to put on your city hat. It was your day to put on 'We're Las Vegas' hat.

When he says go through permitting and entitlement and everything properly, what he means is that anything that we would do would not violate any code or other requirement. But we certainly weren't going to have the time to go through and do proper entitlement, proper securing the title to the property and all this other stuff. There are still things out there that maybe could still kind of be addressed, but everybody completely supports it and is fine with things the way they are. We didn't violate any building codes. We didn't violate any zoning codes. We didn't violate anything. We followed every single process as if we had taken the time to take it through the normal process. I don't know. There's probably a better legal way to say it.

I'll go a little bit further because for prosperity this ought to be said so that everybody understands. There were a couple of things that happened. We tapped into some electricity that wasn't ours. We took some water that wasn't ours. We made it all good at the end of the day.

We paid all those bills. We got it all connected right.

Everybody got paid and everybody was fine. But for anybody who listens to this in the future, and I hope to God there is never another group that has to listen to something like this, but once in a while you've just got to do what's right and even if it means small fixable mistakes are made along the way. Tom is right. There was nothing seriously flawed with the execution of this project, but if we had gone through every single step—the goal was to have it open on Friday—we wouldn't have come close.

It's a nine-month project.

We have a piece of property across the street that's a fraction of the size that has gone through the process and we're three years into it. No criticism. But I'm saying that's sometimes what happens and it didn't happen here. When Jay got the approval, I remember Jorge or somebody said, "How do we approve this?" We just put our hands on the piece of paper and said 'approved' and that was that. In the next day he got everything donated.

Who came up with the four days, five days?

That was Jay and Daniel.

Yes. We did what we do best once in a while: We stayed out of it. We were there all the time, but nobody was inspecting, nobody was telling anybody what to do because they knew what to do. Jay clearly knew what he was doing because he went out—that tree of life, that huge sixty-inch box oak tree. Jay got Siegfried and Roy to donate that. Then he got Moon Valley Nursey to donate the fifty-eight trees that are trees representing the fifty-eight we lost. Then he got Star Nursery to donate the lower plant life, the shrubs and things like that. Then he had another friend named Chad who does masonry work and the like work on the heart with the broken tiles. He put together this entire program where victims were painting tiles and volunteers were installing plants and other people were...How he coordinated that is beyond me.

I was on site the whole time. I thought I would just stop by once in a while, but I ended up staying there the whole time. A couple of reasons. One, I wanted to be able to answer or resolve any issues that came up right then and there. Like, okay, we're going to need lighting. The city crew comes out and says, "Okay, we can put the lights here, here and here, but we need power." All right, call NV Energy; you've got to get somebody out here right now. That kind of stuff. Call the Water District; we tapped into the wrong water. We had to fix it, but whatever. A lot of the folks volunteering are professionals and they understand, do we need to get a building permit

for this? No, we don't; we're good. I get the building official out there. He says, "You're good. We'll take care of it later." There was a lot of that coordination. But Brad is right. To witness what happened, it was like magic. It was like a dozen conductors working together on a symphony with one composer who is literally—

Still writing the music.

—composing as it was happening. I watched Jay running around with a can of red landscape spray paint, or orange or whatever it is, outline that area. There would always be somebody who knew enough to organize all these volunteers that would just make it happen. Then somebody would say, "Well, what about this thing here?" All anybody had—when Jay translated his napkin drawing to a piece of paper, it still didn't have dimensions. It still didn't have any scale. He had that and he's running around with it. People were asking questions. I grabbed it and made fifty copies, so now everybody had a copy. They would ask questions. "Where do you want this?" He would run over there with his spray paint, *boom*, and then he's back on the phone getting trees or bushes or shrubs or this or that.

It was phenomenal.

The way it came together, unbelievable.

Like I say, that Tuesday morning when Mark pulled out the Tree of Life medallion out of the ground and held that up...

Tell that story.

You've heard it, but I'll tell it for whoever is listening. The second day, Tuesday, is when trees started to arrive and it became necessary to identify the site for the planting of the Tree of Life. Mark was out and they pretty much had figured out where the fifty-eight were going to go and where the heart was going to go. He literally picks a site for the Tree of Life and he's kicking in

the dirt because that's never been planted; never been occupied. It's not like there was a building there before or anything. He was kicking around with his boot and his boot picks up a gold chain. As he removes the gold chain from the ground, there is a medallion on it. When he rinses it off, the medallion is the Tree of Life. It still makes the hairs stand up on your neck to hear it. When he showed it to me, you just knew something was happening. So that happened.

But while Tom was doing the day-to-day supervision, I was dealing with Cameron's loss. I met his family at the convention center to identify the body on Tuesday night and then went to the funeral home on Wednesday to meet with the people at Davis Funeral Home. Davis Funeral Home, the owner showed up and I got there first before the family by about five minutes and he said, "Tell me about Cameron and what's going on." I told him and he said, "I want you to know something. We're picking up the cost for all of this. They don't have to worry about anything." We were doing that at the same time that we were doing the garden, and so the garden for me was a wonderful distraction and the fact that Tom handled the details and Jay just had this down.

On Thursday we actually had the first services for Cameron at Davis Funeral Home at four in the afternoon and it went on for two hours and people still showed up. It was so wonderful that the garden could be finished the next day because after that gut-wrenching kind of day to actually go and have Cameron's family and his mother there and we gave her the medallion that night when the garden was dedicated, it couldn't have been more perfect for what an ugly thing it was.

I remember the first time I met Mark he was standing at that site talking on the phone and all it was, was a vacant dirt lot, and this is Tuesday night. It's a vacant dirt lot even still, right?
Right. Just marked out, not a hole dug yet.

I remember the sun setting and I'm like, *how is this going to...?* But, sure enough, materials started rolling in and volunteers started showing up. I remember one of the tasks I had. I tried to leave Brad alone, but every once in a while I'd have to give him a call, because I knew what he was dealing with. I remember a bunch of students from UNLV out there and it looked like they had just come from a pool party, bless their hearts, because it's warm and so they're in flip-flops and shorts and all this stuff and here they are with pick axes and flip-flops. There is a bunch of them and they're digging with spade shovels. I'm like, *oh wait a minute, this is a liability on somebody. It's probably the city.*

This is an OSHA issue.

I'm like, "I need some liability waivers or something, volunteer forms." He said, "Call Teri." I called Teri Ponticello and John Ridilla and they put something together and ran down. I said, "Just send me down thirty copies." That was Wednesday I think. Those were gone almost immediately. I ended up making five hundred copies. Then we were trading off. I had some of our maintenance who came just to kind of help locate stuff and see what was going on because they would likely have to take it over at some point, and so I wanted to make sure they understood what was being planted and where and all that stuff. They ended up staying the whole time and they were manning the volunteer table, they were handing out water, and they just became completely part of the whole volunteer scene. It was amazing.

He is so right. There is a store on the corner called The Love Store and they sell adult products. They're not a dirty book store. It's just for adult stuff. They bought pizzas every day for all the volunteers, so ten pizzas every afternoon they would deliver. The guy who lives behind it is a guy named John Pacheco and John is a local artist. He would get up every morning and blow

“Reveille” on his bugle and make coffee and breakfast for anybody who was out there. The people that showed up were just...It started small.

Friday morning, to complete the circle, I am back in Boulder City with the same people I was with that Sunday before. They own PDQ Printing and they volunteered to print the temporary banner for the Healing Garden and any identification, anything for anybody’s services and the like. I was out there having breakfast with them, kind of a thank-you breakfast, and it’s like eight in the morning and the phone rings and it’s Jay Pleggenkuhle. He says, “Brad, I’ve got a problem.” And I said, “Well, what’s the problem?” Because it could be a million things, the way this thing was going so fast. He said, “We have too many volunteers.” I said, “Everybody should have that problem, Jay. What do you want from me?” He says, “I don’t know what to do.” You know Jay. You’ve met him. The most humble guy on the planet and just a wonderful soul. But he didn’t want to offend anybody and that’s why he was calling me. [All laughing] When you want to offend somebody, call the attorney or call Brad, either way. I said, “Look, I have an idea. Why don’t you just find the biggest rock and stand on it and tell everybody what you just told me? Say, ‘We have too many people here, so why don’t half of you go in Starbucks and go get a cup of coffee, take a nice break, and then when you come back in two hours, the other half of you got to Starbucks and just take a break, and just rotate.’” And he said, “Do you think they’ll be okay with it?” I said, “Everybody is going to be okay with everything now, Jay, trust me.” And they got it done literally minutes before the dedication.

What was interesting, some of the things early on that I observed, and I wish I could remember names, but a gentleman whose construction company built the planter. I forget his name. He just happened to be driving by Tuesday or Wednesday morning. I’m forgetting my timeline now, but when we were just, just getting started. He was just randomly driving by and he stops. He said,

“Hey, what are you guys doing here?” I think it was Mark Hammelmann or Jay, one of the two explained it to him. And he said, “My son was there that night and he called me and said, ‘Dad, I’ve heard this artist and I don’t think I’m going to stay. I’m going to head home.’”

I forgot about that.

And then he said, “He did.” He goes, it’s just been driving him crazy that his son just barely left in time. He said, “What do you need?” He brought his whole crew and they built the whole planter.

If you were there on the ground watching this, you had to think Tuesday, certainly Wednesday morning, how is this ever going to come together? It did.

People just drove by.

Daniel was picking up trees. Daniel was picking up forty-eight-inch box trees or however big they were, picking them up alone and chucking them in the holes to plant them. It would normally take five of me. The adrenaline, the enthusiasm, the passion on behalf of every worker was so over the top.

There is another kid, probably in his young thirties, young guy that drove by in a landscape truck and a big trailer completely full of debris from landscape trimmings and everything else. He just stops in the middle of the road and jumps out and says, “What are you guys doing?” I told him. He just brought his truck around, got out, and he worked all day. He said, “I’ll be back tomorrow.” He closed every job, brought his whole crew back, and helped finish the garden. I don’t remember his name. He’s a young guy.

I don’t either. But you bring back so many memories I haven’t thought about.

So many people, so many things like that.

The thing I will remember most of not just being there during that whole time—I don't want you to use a calculated code word therapeutic, but that is exactly what was going on and we didn't even know it. We weren't talking to counselors. We were talking to each other. We became each other's counselors. It was just a family experience. But that night when it was dedication time and all of a sudden the light next to the Healing Garden was just brightly lit, and if you were on stage, I couldn't see anybody and I couldn't even think straight.

It was just a sea of people there.

Yes, just a sea of people. I think there had to be two or three thousand people there. It was incredible. It was so natural. Then the next day, people all over the garden. I can safely say I can barely remember a time since it opened, night or day, weekend, two in the morning, when there hasn't been somebody there. Think of where it is. It's in the middle of downtown where all the things—not all the things you hear are true, but a lot are. We have a lot of homeless. We have a lot of people that are mentally ill. We have a lot of people on drugs and things like that. That makes it more of a challenge to maintain anything in the downtown area, open space in particular. It's not uncommon to see it turn into a homeless camp. This did not and it's never been desecrated. There have been minor things here and there, but the minor things are interesting: People not destroying something, but planting something. You go out there and you'll see corn growing out there right now; you see sunflowers growing right now. You see people planting tomatoes out there right now. Nobody is encouraged to, but nobody is discouraged to not, either. For whatever reason, it works.

I've never seen in all my years working downtown and working for the city, I've never seen a piece of property situated like this one that didn't get overrun. There is no guards. There is no fence. I was there one day and the closest I came, I saw a gentleman who looked to be homeless

and, indeed, he was. Somebody had put out these little pagodas at all the trees. I saw him pick one up and walking down the aisle, and I thought, *oh shoot*. I had never seen that before.

Somebody was there I think from Get Outdoors Nevada or somebody. I said, “Have you seen this? That’s kind of unfortunate.” “Oh, no, no. He comes here, he picks them up, and takes them and cleans them, and brings them back.”

Yes. And that tells you something. Every pagoda has got the name of one of the fifty-eight, and so now every tree is associated with one. People took ownership of the tree that belongs to that name. The very first Christmas after October first, my daughter and her husband were out. After Christmas dinner there is not a lot to do. My daughter said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “You know what I want to do? It sounds weird. I want to go down to the Healing Garden and decorate Cameron’s tree.” We got down there. Cameron’s family had already come out and decorated and everybody else had, too. I can’t tell you, it couldn’t have been a more perfect Christmas night than to be down there doing that. That continued last year as well and it’s continued in between. We don’t tell people what to put up or take down or whatever. Once in a while you’ll come up and there will be a picture of somebody two feet tall screwed to the back of the wall. That’s fine. That’s absolutely fine because if that’s what helps them, then let them do it. It’s just all so appropriate.

Yes. It’s just so strange that this place just became...Instantly we knew this is not ever coming down. This started as a pop-up garden. Everybody knew it was not coming down. That led Jay to not give up even after it opened. Jay went back and started thinking, what would this look like if this were permanent? He started, once again, redesigning his creation. The original wall, and a lot of people don’t know of, was made up of wooden pallets and those wooden pallets, somebody just dropped them on the site, and Jay and his team put it together in the form of a wall. A huge

windstorm came up not long after the garden opened, like the next week, and they had to go out and prop that up because it was about to go with Dorothy's house to Oz because it was a big wind. The tree was going down and some guy—I forgot about that—some guy tied a rope to the tree to the back of his pickup truck and pulled the Tree of Life from going down.

Then that guy, which is interesting too, is a musician, a retired university professor or high school teacher, I think. He was a musician on the side. But he was so passionate about music and he was really a talented musician, he put a piano in the back of a small Toyota pickup. He had it really elaborately painted and everything. He would go around playing music just as a volunteer. He came out and parked his truck the last two nights that we were there and just played music for everybody, all the volunteers. That night that the big wind came up, he was there and that's when the Tree of Life was blowing over sideways. He and everybody who was there, he drove his truck right over next to the planter, and they all tied down the tree. I went the next day and took pictures of it. Then we sent our crew out and they staked it properly to make sure that it was secure. But it was interesting.

During that year it becomes a focal point for people. Nathan Adelson, which has a butterfly release every year, they did it at the Healing Garden that year. Everything that you would think of as healing ended up in that garden.

Going full circle, Jay redesigns the wall to be a permanent wall. He designs it to be in five pieces now. He hand selected every single thing you see out there. That was all Jay. Then when the pieces showed up, he had to figure out how to put it together. Here this landscaper has to figure out how to weld these things and how to make this water feature work and how to make this work and this work, and he did. Every time I would go up there I'd go, "How are you doing,

Jay?” And he would go, “I don’t know,” and he would start laughing. He would, nevertheless, plow through.

The new improved garden, so to speak, with the permanent features opened exactly one year later. I feel really humbled to have the mayor to ask me, “Would you emcee it?” I said, “I’d be happy to.” I got on it early and started thinking right away what to say. I didn’t anticipate for one minute that this drew everybody. When I looked out and saw Gabrielle Giffords there from Arizona with her husband, and not just the governor and not just the senators and not just our people, but everybody, you kind of knew that this was more than... We appreciated and others did too. They brought it with them. Maricia with Get Outdoors Nevada, what a great soul to step in and say, “We’re going to work this thing. We’re going to take it over.” This is not in their wheelhouse. It is now. But they do it and they do it well.

Anyway, that night—I’ll show you this. I think I might have shown you before. I didn’t send it to you, I don’t believe. We are having the dedication and it’s supposed to begin at six thirty. At six—there is Jay Pleggenkuhle calling.

I think you should answer.

See what I tell you? It’s all serendipity. Just before, at six twenty-eight, I was standing at the podium looking towards the mountains and that’s what it looks like. Now, this is what happened.

This is amazing.

This is the amazing part. I showed you. The mayor gets up at six thirty exactly and she says, “Is this microphone live?” That is what it turned into instantly. It turned into this beam of light. I took two pictures because I knew nobody would believe it. This beam just came right over the arc at exactly six thirty.

It was amazing.

There are so many strange things you can say, but you think if you had to go back in time and say, how did this first ball bearing end up in this machine planking around until it ended up at the Healing Garden, it starts with this negotiation for this golf club and for the commission of this golf course and meeting Jay. We would have never met Jay. That phone call would have never occurred. Then all the people that already knew each other...Tom and I because we had this tremendous relationship. Tom is like my brother. But we have this relationship because we spent two years in hell in that negotiation. You look at all those things and where it all led and it's not a straight line by any means.

You know what else is interesting? You talk about the reverence for the place and how there is something about it that keeps it so pure, I guess. But that same respect—and you talked about Gabrielle Giffords—that same respect, there have been a number of artists and high-ranking federal officials, Nancy Pelosi stopped by, but not one person, not one cent of media or publicity or any of that. It's all been just...Like Brad said, there is something special that people want to go there and be there and see it and understand and experience it, and it's not a media thing. It never has been, not once. There is a respect.

I totally agree. Quick side story. Mark Hammelmann a few months after the Healing Garden opened, which he dubbed the 'no can't' zone—when you walked onto that space, the word can't isn't a word, the 'no can't' zone. It's do and that's it. We can do anything. Unfortunately, Mark was diagnosed with liver cancer right after the garden opened and he was given six months to live. Mark went through chemo and radiation. I remember some days Mark would come up to me and say, "I can't hug you today. I can't shake your hand today." I would say, "Come on, Mark. At my age, what's a little radiation? I live in Nevada." But Mark made it past six months. When the second phase opened, Mark was there every day in his wheelchair and he was directing, from

his little stage up there, what happens here and what happens there. You kind of thought to yourself, of all the people in the world, he's got the excuse to stay home, and he didn't. He didn't miss a beat. One day Jay called up and said, "Mark just kind of wants to get out and hang out with the guys and have a beer and forget about having cancer." We made it a regular habit many times a week to just go out with Mark, sit around a table, and I swear it wasn't phony in the least. We were having such a good time, he didn't think he had cancer and we didn't think about it.

Right.

It was just...He made it more than a year after he was diagnosed. He died the day after Christmas. Just before Christmas—he lived in a neighborhood that has an HOA that tells you every weed you have to pull and, of course, he wasn't pulling many weeds in his condition at this point in time. We got the call before Christmas that the HOA is going to fine him if it doesn't get cleaned up. Jay put together a team of people and we all went out. By the time I got there, they had completely cleaned his yard. Then we decorated the whole house for Christmas with trees and reindeer and lights around the house and then went inside and spent time drinking with Mark as he's lying in bed with cancer. There was just something beautiful about the way...If he was going to get cancer anyway, let's assume that was true, that it wouldn't have ended the way it ended but for this.

Right.

I look back at Mark and I can't do anything but smile. He was just such a great guy.

Yes.

That's a side story I thought needed to be told.

There is the truck tied to the tree. Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

That's great. How do you think the world's attitude about Las Vegas has changed?

I don't know. I think our attitude about ourselves changed. I can't speak for the world. I can speak for us as Las Vegans. I remember Oscar when we did the Centennial. Somebody asked him the question, what do you hope to accomplish by having a hundredth birthday for Las Vegas? And he had a really good answer. He said, "I hope that people stop thinking of themselves as New Yorkers or Chicagoans or San Franciscans or Angelinos and that you're really a Las Vegan." I can't say that at the end of that...It didn't move the dial much, if it moved at all. I think two things happened in 2017, and I tell people from my point of view the best of things and the worst of things, the worst obviously being the Route 91 Harvest Festival and the shooting. Of course, the weird thing contrasted against that is this brand-new hockey team going all the way to the Stanley Cup. I think it changed how we look at ourselves. I think both things changed the community. Overnight you saw Golden Knights license plates and signs and banners and every billboard in town, it didn't matter where it was. At the same time, people have not lost track of this.

I was in Denver last week and I was stuck at the airport. The bars were full because everything in Denver was shutting down because they had a storm. There was this group of guys going to Vegas and they're about my age. One of the guys is getting married. We start talking. He was at the Route 91 festival and was shot four times. I mean, what a bonding experience. He was going to Vegas because it didn't scare him away. What he saw happen in the community made it the place he wanted to get married and have his bachelor party.

I met a guy at the park a year ago. He had to be seventies, eighties, cowboy hat. He was just sitting and we were just walking by. He said, "Do you know anything about this garden?"

And I said, "I happen to." We started talking. He was there that night and he came back. He wasn't hit, but he didn't know how he was going to feel about it.

But in a weird sort of way, all the families who lost people have come back. People in the community who either knew somebody or didn't came back. There is a fence not far from my house where somebody painted ribbons with all fifty-eight names on the side of their block wall. There is no license plate for the fifty-eight, but there's something even more important than that. It hasn't left. It hasn't left the community yet. To see television commercials where they still talk about if you need counseling, if you need to talk to somebody. I know in your book you've got sections devoted to that. I can very much relate to that. It is a lingering thing. But in a weird sort of way I think we all feel like Las Vegans now just like Oscar wanted.

Yes. We maybe felt like that before, but now we believe that the people that we meet at the store or cross on the sidewalk, they believe it too and we know we have that connection where maybe it was there below the surface, but now it's like peel the back of an ear and here we are and we're all Las Vegans. It's interesting because I think it absolutely had an impact. In the weeks following One October, the amount of cards and banners that came from other cities, from schools, just people really rallying behind Las Vegas, and seeing how our community responded was inspiring for a lot of people. I think it changed opinions. I remember the weeks following being at the garden and running into so many people who were there that night and said, "I just had to come back."

I don't know if it's still hanging here, but we got a huge banner from Orlando from the Pulse Nightclub shooting.

We just took it down today.

It was hanging in the lobby of City Hall.

It's being archived with all the other stuff.

Good. It's going to go to the State Museum?

I believe that's where everything is being archived, yes.

Because people don't know how to get ahold of Cameron's family, but I have a building with a name on it and they know how to contact the City Attorney's Office, I get things sent to me in the mail randomly. I got a bunch of bracelets sent to me recently that some group had made. I had somebody call me up and say, "We're making a blanket for every family. Can you give us the name of the person in Cameron's family to send it to?" You wouldn't believe the phone calls.

And then the reciprocal is—I can't remember the name of the town now. I want to say Spring Hill, Texas. Right after the Las Vegas shooting, there was the church shooting. I don't know what compelled me, but I picked up the phone and I called the city attorney. I thought to myself, I know what happened to us. People came and said, "We have stuff we want to give. How do we do it?" And we didn't know. Nobody thinks of this stuff and then you're in the middle of it. I called him and he said, "You're the only phone call I took." He said, "I knew why you were calling." I said, "Look, all I can say is whatever you need, we're there for you, and you're going to have a lot of questions that are very practical questions. How do I help with funeral expenses? How do I do this? How do I do this? Having gone through it, I can walk you through it." I've done it with every shooting since. It's a shame. It's a shame that it takes that. Those are the things that came out of it that you kind of value.

Gentlemen, this is amazing. I really appreciate your time so much.

Thank you.

You're welcome. Thanks, yes.

Thank you. I hope you got Jay, too. I'm sure you did.

Oh yes.

He is wonderful. But as we go through more things...Like I say, I swear to God, the enchilada wouldn't be on the table right now if it weren't for this. If it weren't for our relationship that was built through Badlands...The layers keep building. Jorge, who we spoke very little about it, Jorge Cervantes, the whole Public Works Department had to deal with this pesky little dude like me who is not a planner, not an engineer, not a whatever. That Public Works Department is the best in the country and those planners that Tom trained are the best in the country. Everybody kind of went, this is not...Typical projects are you go out to Summerlin or you have a new subdivision or you have a this. Nobody wants to play with this old stuff and all the issues that go with it socially. That group just came alive. All on the wall right there, the street projects and everything, I can't say enough good things. They are fantastic.

Yes, we have a great team.

Yes, I believe that. What is this that I'm looking at on the wall?

This is Fremont Street, the new Fremont Street. You won't see the motels here. I got one of these because this is what the nuns used to hit me with when I was in grade school, so it really works well for this. But this is the street design and this is Las Vegas Boulevard. It's so long, it goes all the way down to Tenth Street here and then it picks up on Tenth Street and goes all the way down to 14th Street.

Fremont, rather.

It's twenty-three-foot-wide sidewalks for the first two blocks. These X's are gigantic oak trees. I don't know if you saw them in the presentation before. They went down and tagged a hundred and five seventy-two-inch box trees in Houston, Texas in late March, and they're going in the ground on Fremont.

When?

The first two motels are beginning now. The first two motels are going in the ground now, but the project will fire up October seventh and it will be done by April of next year. Phase one will be completed. I'm really hopefully. Those are the trees that they picked. Look at the size of the person standing next to them.

Oh, look at these.

Isn't that going to be crazy?

This is going to be amazing.

This is the first three blocks. Look at the original 1929 streetlights. We found the original pole and we found the original headpiece in L.A. and we got it donated and they're manufacturing those right now. This is fun. This is a lot of fun. I won't tell you I don't practice law anymore. I just make other people crazy.

When you retire what are you going to do?

I don't know that I'll ever retire. I really don't. I may leave the city someday, but I can't sit still. I just can't sit still.

That's good.

I don't think he can, either.

No. There's plenty to do.

Like going skiing with this guy in the wintertime is fun and having a cocktail every now and then, too. Thank you so much.

Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]