

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONNA ROBINSON

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REMEMBERING 1 OCTOBER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV LIBRARIES

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVE

This is Barbara Tabach. I'm sitting in the American Red Cross offices in Henderson. This is Henderson, or is this Las Vegas?

Las Vegas.

I can never tell. We're always such a blur here in this area. I'm sitting with Donna Robinson.

Donna, would you spell your name for me, please?

D-O-N-N-A. Capital R-O-B-I-N-S-O-N.

Thank you. Today is December 20th, 2019. We are sitting for the Remembering 1 October oral history project at UNLV.

Donna, first I'd like to know a little bit about you. It says that you spent your childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Tell me about Pittsburgh and growing up there.

It's a big sports town, and having five brothers I was involved in being a spectator for sports for my brothers. I had a few of my own. I did badminton and interschool type things, but mostly sports with brothers. Pittsburgh is the home of the Steelers, the Penguins, and the Pirates, and all of them have had their heyday of national championships and everything. It's been good to be from a city that's so united around something even if it is sports. A lot of people come together for those things.

I grew up in Pittsburgh with brothers and sisters; there were nine of us, five boys and four girls.

That must have been a very chaotic household with that many kids.

It was.

Were you the oldest, youngest?

The youngest. I have a twin brother. My mom passed away when we were two, so we were really raised by our father and brothers and sisters, mostly brothers and sisters because my dad worked a lot.

That had to be a unique upbringing.

It was. It was.

It's interesting you mentioned the sports. We estimated we both have been here twenty to twenty-five years. To see the change in sports in this city. I will add a caveat. If you need to answer the phone, go ahead and do that.

No. I want to turn this off simply because it's not the one I have to answer and I don't want it to ring again. Thank you so much.

No problem. Seeing Vegas change so much from no professional sports to a lot of sports, how do you react to that?

It's amazing because I used to go to the 51 games when they were the 51s. That was about the biggest sport thing to go to then. Now we have the Lights, we have the Knights, we're going to have the Raiders, and we have the baseball team, which right now I forget what they are. Do you remember?

What are they called now? I know it's changed so much. But I know what you're talking about and I love the ballpark.

Me too. The ballpark is beautiful. But I have forgotten the name of the team. That's a complete turnaround from when I got here.

Yes. What brought you to Las Vegas in the first place?

My daughter. She moved here so that my grandson would be near his father, but his father didn't step up to the plate like we had hoped. I was living in California by myself and my daughter asked me could I come and help raise my grandson who was five at the time, so I said yes.

That makes him a grownup now.

Yes, he's twenty-five, twenty-six; something like that, exactly.

That's great. It's nice to be involved in grandchildren's lives.

It is.

It really is. You said you lived in California. Where in California were you living?

Anaheim. I was working for Staples. I've always been in retail. I have been in retail for thirty years until I got my position then at the Red Cross.

You had not worked for the Red Cross before moving to Las Vegas?

Not at all.

Tell me about that. How did that come to be?

I fell in love with someone. My wife and I have been together twenty years. She passed away two years ago.

I'm sorry.

She was a schoolteacher and she always was not happy that I always worked weekends and she was always off weekends. She asked me, when she was either near retirement or even just thinking about it, would I consider doing something else other than retail. I was working the Black Fridays, the Thanksgiving, working on all kinds of holidays and everything else. One of the women at my church was telling me about a position here at the Red Cross, so I said, "Yes, but I've never worked with volunteers before." She said, "Yes, but you're a manager, so give it a

shot.” I did and I got my first interview. Then I eventually got the second interview and got the position.

That’s wonderful.

I was quite happy. Although it turns out, because I’m in the disaster field, I don’t get weekends off, either, but not always; it’s only if something is going on that I have to go.

Yes, disasters aren’t calendared, are they?

No, they’re not, so I still work weekends now and then.

For sure. Your title right now is Disaster Program Specialist. Has that always been your title?

I worked a bit of time at the front desk in the administrative part of the Red Cross. I worked at the front desk as a receptionist for almost two years. I started out in disaster, but it was part-time and it was almost doing the same thing I’m doing now, but part-time, and it just got to be so much that I said, “I want to stay with the Red Cross, but I just can’t do this position anymore.” That’s when I transferred to the administrative side and worked the front desk. After two years they were going to make the position full-time and make the reception area volunteers only, so I wasn’t going to have a job at the front end anyway, and since I already knew this job, I applied for it and got this job.

Just the idea of having the word *disaster* in your job title, there is sort of irony to that.

I know, it is. It means that that’s my playing field. Of course, we always hope that there’s always blue skies; that’s what we call it when there are no disasters or anything. But we come to life when it comes to disasters and we all do the job we were trained to do when it comes to disasters or anything that occurs, a plane crash, shooting, you name it, tornadoes, hurricanes, and we’re right there.

I'm thinking this is only a question I could ask you, but being of a really extensive retail background myself before I had career changes, what about that retail experience were you able to adapt into the job that you do now?

A lot because I dealt with the public, which is what I do now. I still deal with the public and all types of people, all religions. Anyone that walks into the store is going to be different, and it's the same thing when we go out on disasters. If I go into a disaster in Texas, it's different than when I go into Florida, it's different when I go into New York. It will all depend. My background with retail prepared me for working with a lot of different people and learning how to adjust to different cultures.

That's really important. I think that could be overlooked, people's adaptability from retail backgrounds especially if you've been managing or doing it for a long time because it becomes part of you.

Right.

You've mentioned already several cities and different types of disasters. When you first started working here, can you recall the first disaster you went out on and what you did? Can you describe that to me?

The first big disaster for me was a multifamily fire that occurred in an apartment structure. Now, for us that's a big disaster. Anytime we have over thirty people involved in a disaster, we open up a shelter. That was the first time for me to have to open up a shelter and take care of a lot of people morning, noon and night, feeding them, making sure they could shower, making sure they could rest. There were resting times and things like that. The first one actually occurred right here.

Right here in Las Vegas.

Right here in Las Vegas. My next really big one was the Carpenter Fire that we had. I was in charge of a shelter in Pahrump because a lot of people came down from the mountain on that side. We were fortunate we had a shelter. We had crates and things for animals that were brought down. But we didn't have a lot of people staying in that shelter because the hotel in the town put up most of the people. If you have a chance between a cot and a mattress, I think most people are going to pick the mattress, so the only ones staying in the shelter were the Red Cross people. But people came in during the day to get snacks, get food, to get information to know what's going on; things like that. People came in and out of the shelter, but no one really stayed overnight because they had places to stay.

What kind of training does the Red Cross give you to be in charge of that?

A lot, trust me. There is so much training. It's not only training, but it's exercises to develop that training. But we're all trained for certain what we call gaps, and that's just a term we use for what position you hold. I hold the position of a shelter manager, so I had to take a lot of classes for that, a lot of prerequisite classes to even taking the shelter management class, and that's an eight-hour class, and then you have to have exercises to go with it. My primary one now is spiritual caregiver, and that's what came in to factor at the October One. I'm also a caseworker, so I was able to fill several shoes during the October One incident. I've gone on deployments to Harvey and been there for several weeks as a caseworker just trying to get funds to people to be able to start taking care of themselves.

When you go away to a different state or different disaster that way, do you go in and then the local Red Cross tells you what they need you to do?

Pretty much. But you go with the assigned gap that you have. I'm either going to go as a caseworker or I'm going to go as a shelter manager or I'm going to go as a spiritual caregiver;

those are my three jobs when it comes to deployment and disasters. Now, my blue sky job is totally different.

Explain that.

My blue sky job is I take care of everything that is in the realm of preparedness for the Red Cross. We prepare with Pedro Program for kindergarteners through second. We have a Pillowcase Project that's for third graders through fifth graders. We have a Be Red Cross Ready Program that anyone in the public that says, "Oh, I want my people trained in preparedness," I go out and teach them Be Red Cross Ready and I talk about what local disasters we have, but I mainly talk about home fires. I teach hands-only CPR. We have this little bus that people practice on to just learn the basic CPR. I also take care of the home fire campaign, which every Monday and Wednesday we go out and install free ten-year smoke alarms in homes of people that call us and tell us they need smoke alarms. They're totally free and we do the installation and everything.

Do other agencies within the community contact you to fulfill some of those services with them?

Some do. We have a hotline for home fire that anyone can call that number and get free smoke alarms. Most of the time when I teach Be Red Cross Ready preparedness, it's to aspects of the community that have called us and said, "Can you come and teach my company; teach my group preparedness type of thing?"

After One October did people call you a lot for some sort of training or how to use Red Cross more efficiently?

No.

There was no cause-effect there?

Yes, there was. We took in a lot of new volunteers who wanted to help us do what we do. Yes, there was a cause and effect from October One that we took in—not take in. I don't know why I'm using that word. But a lot of people decided to volunteer.

That's good.

It is good.

That was one of the themes that we do. Everyone wanted to contribute in some way, so this was another way.

Exactly.

That's really great. Let's talk about October One. What were you doing that night? How did you learn about the shooting?

I was actually in bed and my coworker called and said, "Something's going on. There's some kind of shooting." I said, "Okay. What do they want us to do?" "Well, first of all, Metro has a lot of people being directed there." I said, "Okay, then that's where I'll go."

A lot of the survivors arrived at the big Metro station. At first I was just as much in shock as if I had been there as some of those. We immediately started talking to them and talking to the Metro police, and they were trying to find out from the different hospitals where someone was taken as much as they could. Meanwhile, we assessed the situation that we had going on there, and we went out and got food, we got coffee, we got drinks, we got blankets. Some of them needed blankets. We got a lot of supplies together and we just started taking care of the people that were there. People trickled in; people trickled out. That was my sheltering part.

But my spiritual care part started going around, talking to people, because that's what I do in that position is I listen and see what their needs are, what's going on with them. A lot of times in spiritual care, people were more inclined to speak to someone that's spiritual care than

that's religious or what have you because we're not. We also provide mental health if the spiritual care person thinks that it needs to go to the next level. But people are more inclined to talk to us than, say, a mental health person right away, but they'll talk to us.

That part of my job was so hard because walking around there talking to people, they were scared, they were frightened, and they didn't understand everything that was going on. Some of them didn't even know how they got there; they just ran type of thing. The other part of it was that they're looking for loved ones or whomever they came with, and that was the hardest part of not knowing where their friends or family members were.

The police department was doing everything they could. They would come in with any updates that they had with names of who was in certain hospitals. But they were also asking them not to bombard these hospitals right now because they were trying to take care of a lot of wounded. People didn't quite understand why they couldn't go. They didn't bar them from going, but the recommendation was that they stay here as long as they knew where their person was; that they stay here and give the hospitals a chance to receive all the wounded and everything to take care of them whereas they were already in a safe place, getting fed. Like I said, we fed everyone in the whole building, the police department, everyone.

Until we got directives from not just Metro but from our own regional people, *okay, this is our next step; this is way bigger than just Las Vegas*, in the Red Cross we have people that are higher up in the region and division that can bring in more expertise people than just the local people. They came in almost a day or two after that and basically took over. We established a headquarters and then they decided what we were going to do.

That's when the Family Assistance Center was to be opened. The Red Cross played a huge part in that on two fronts: Our casework front where we had health services people there

and mental health people there, and barring anyone that was in the hospital, anyone that could make it to the Family Assistance Center we took care of. They talked to our mental health nurse, they talked to our health service nurse, and it was determined if they needed one or both of those services. Now, a lot of people don't know because the Red Cross in a mass shooting such as that we don't solicit funds like we do for tornadoes, hurricanes. We don't do that in a mass shooting. That's one of the few times we don't. But a lot of people didn't know that we were giving everyone almost a thousand dollars each because it's five hundred for mental health and five hundred for health services, except the people that actually got these funds.

We were there every day. Personally when I was not doing spiritual care work, which was a lot of what I was doing on the floor with people waiting to be seen by the different agencies that were there, when I didn't have spiritual care, a lot of people out there to talk to or what have you, I would go to the Red Cross desk and start doing casework, start opening up cases of what we call clients that would come to our Red Cross desk. The thing is that when they went to the Family Assistance Center, they got a piece of paper that said what agencies that they want to talk to or engage with. Of course, they had an escort, every person, couple, whatever had an escort. Sometimes I would see on their piece of paper though that they wanted spiritual care, but I was sitting at the casework desk, so I would talk to them then so they didn't have to wait out in the main floor. But I would talk to them then and see how they're doing and what they needed. What are your immediate needs right now?

The people who were accompanying them through this process, they were Red Cross volunteers?

No, well, some of us were. They got volunteers to do that and Red Cross was part of that escort service, yes. A lot of Red Cross people knew people that came onboard. It was something that we didn't have to do a lot of training with, just explain to them what needed to be done, yes.

Because people needed kindness and reassurance.

Exactly.

At what point in all of this—the shooting happens a little after ten o'clock—do you remember at what point you felt like everyone could be reassured that there was no other shooter or anything? Was that a conversation that was going on?

No, it was not, not at all, not in my realm, and I guess because my first place was the Metro Police station and we felt pretty safe there. I never heard anything about a second shooter or anything like that. That was never brought up anywhere within my earshot.

The idea that you had gone to other disasters and here you are doing a major casualty disaster in your hometown—

I know.

—how did that differ for you?

I'll be honest with you. I was a little stunned and numb to that part of it. I was more client based, taking care of people. Red Cross talks about self-care, but a lot of times when we're in disaster mode, we don't even think about ourselves; we just go in and do what we're supposed to do, and so it took me a long time to really grasp what was going on and how people were all over the place. We had so many people there at the Metro station that I thought this might be everybody, but people were everywhere, I found out. People had even gone on the airport ramp and stuff. It just amazed me where people went.

Yes, it is staggering.

Yes.

It's like this puzzle, especially with this project when you talk to people, all the different places that they became safe at least for a temporary period of time or whatever their needs were at.

Exactly. That surprised me. The Red Cross, anytime when it comes to anything in the community and what's going on, we want our presence to be there so that people will know that we're there to help. Even when the Healing Garden started, we were a part of it. We went out and we helped. We took water and everything out there. It's those little things sometimes that other people might forget that people need. I'm not a gardener and I've got bad knees, so I was just so happy to just be able to take a wheelbarrow and tote stuff around for them.

You still found time to help there as well as what else you were doing.

Yes, yes. To me the way they were talking about, it was going to end up being a place where people could go and cry and laugh. I don't know. I got there and every time I go it's something different. Right before this last anniversary they asked the Red Cross to come out twice when they were sprucing up the garden more, making some other new little pathways and things. We went out to just be present for the people that were helping to work on the garden because that's very emotional for a lot of people and even me. As much as I've been there and I see something new, sometimes it brings a tear to my eye that so many people could have been gone in just one day, one five minutes, and I don't even know if it was five minutes. Young people that were enjoying life, having a good time, it still boggles my mind.

Do you know how many cases you actually opened up, the Red Cross actually opened up?

I did two years ago because we talked about, but I apologize, I do not know the exact number.

I imagine it was a lot.

A lot, yes. People forget when we have incidents, tornadoes, whatever the...I shouldn't call them hazards...the devastation of an area at any time, the Red Cross is there for two, five years after these things happen. We're still working on Harvey. We're still working on Sandy. I think we're almost ready to end it. But it doesn't end when you see it on TV when it seems like everyone has gone home and this and that. It doesn't end. It's a continuous thing in helping the people. We're fortunate with the October One that there is the Resiliency Center, but we were part of that in the beginning, also. Then when it got smaller and smaller, the center, anybody could actually come to the actual Red Cross place to talk about their case, or if they already had a case open, talk about what they could do now.

I remember that we were given certain cases, and I had one that was in England. I had to work with the Red Crescent over there as opposed to anything else, but that's the Red Cross over there. Once we got word that certain people—we had several people from out of the country, and we had to work with other Red Crosses, also, to see about getting them help because, of course, they went back home. We had people from Canada, but they all went back home. How could we help them over there? That was an interesting part that I had when I had to call clients to see how they're doing, what's going on, what phase are they in, and trying to get people back home or just get people reunited.

Then at this point we were visiting people in hospitals, also. Now, a spiritual caregiver is part of the team that goes to hospitals. We don't go to hospitals as one person. We have a mental health person, we have a health service person, we have myself, spiritual care, and then we have a caseworker. Four people make up that team. Sometimes only three of us go, but we make up the team that goes to visit people in the hospitals. We visited people in their homes. We had

several clients that did not want to come out for a while, so we had to go and visit them in their homes; that sort of thing.

You stay as a group, you're saying, when you go to the hospital, for example? If somebody is having medical care, the three or four of you would go into the room together to have a conversation with them?

To introduce ourselves and see which one of us was really needed to do all the talking. It didn't always have to be the mental health person or the health services person. The caseworker, if the person was able to verbalize with us, maybe the caseworker just needed to get information to open up a case.

Here we are over two years since that shooting. What you're referring to, really, is how we heal by letting the memory fade if we can depending upon our involvement with that. Are there people still today that you are interacting with that were at the shooting?

Just this year before the renovation at the garden, they asked the Red Cross to come and participate just to make sure, and they sent me specifically as spiritual care to make sure that the people working in the garden were going to be okay because it can be emotional, and to be there. Some of the volunteers there were actually survivors, so we were there to make sure that they were okay. We took water. We took snacks. We're still involved in that sense.

We are not involved with the Resiliency Center other than one of our casework supervisors, they have a meeting every so often and she goes to that. But myself personally, the only thing that I've done is actually go to the garden or go when we're requested, like we were last year right before they renovated it again.

Would I be correct in saying that the first thing with the Red Cross is that you're ready to get in there immediately?

Immediately.

And then to sort of ease yourself out as the situation allows?

Well, we never left the Family Assistance Center. We were there until it closed, which was quite some time. I'm not even sure how many months. But the Resiliency Center opened up after that. Keep in mind, we had opened up a lot of cases while we were there, so the Resiliency Center was still pointing people to us if that's where they needed to get assistance from. Then the cases that we had opened there, we were still calling people to check on them. What other resources do you need? Because we give so much in financial aid and then the rest is resources. We had a list of mental health places and doctors that were willing to take on some of these cases, some free, some pro bono, some not. But, like I said, we were giving five hundred dollars to each client to seek mental health.

When you look back and you reflect on how the community of Greater Las Vegas reacted, the whole trauma to the community, how do you describe that to friends or fellow Red Cross workers throughout the country? What do you tell them?

I tell them that we do what we always do, but now it's in our own backyard and we have more help. I'm never going to say that we needed, but more people came to volunteer and to see what they could do. It's the close-upness of that that really touched me because we have a reputation of being Sin City or this and that, which I've always hated.

I agree with you on that totally.

I totally hated that. But they don't understand. I saw little kids in the garden. I don't know. It was just so heartwarming that people just, "What can we do?" Look at our biomed, people that do our blood. People were lined up around corners to give blood to help out and everything else, not just everyday people, but corporations. We had pallets of water there at the Family Assistance

Center. We had all kinds of snacks. There was always things on the tables for people to munch on to eat. There were so many volunteers that were needed to not just escort people but to just talk to people, see how they're doing until they could get the assistance. The airlines that came together to help people get flights back home. Just the community in general. It was a lot for me. When I go to a disaster, the local people have already got things together. This happened with us and we had to get it together. Like I said, we got so many volunteers, people that came and said, "What can we do? What can we do with the Red Cross? What are you guys doing? How can we help?" A lot of them didn't just come then and then stop afterwards. I've got a couple that have been here since then.

There was retention of that.

Yes, yes. Because they saw what we do even on an everyday basis with a home fire or something. It's not like we don't do anything. That meth lab that exploded last week, we had to take care of sixteen families, but it was over forty people that we had to take care of and give funding to and give them funds for a place to stay and things like that. It's like our work is never done. I do love how the community comes together even for little things, like that type of situation where there is a big apartment fire. People find out about it and want to bring things to help out. I've had people bring towels to a shelter so people had nice towels to dry off on, just the little things.

I picture from how you're describing that as this terribly ugly event happens and then you see the kindness in people come shining through.

Exactly. I couldn't put it better because people didn't care what you wanted them to do; they just wanted to be doing something. What can we do? This is happening to our own people. Yes, there were a lot of people from out of state, but the majority of the people were from right here. I don't

care what people think outside of Vegas. I joked about all those “something strong” and this and that, but when you personally witness people coming from all walks of life and kids and people wanting to do something, what can we do?

Vegas Strong suddenly took on purpose and meaning.

Yes, I looked at it differently.

That makes sense, yes, for sure.

I looked at it differently. I always thought, well, they just tag that on to everything ever since the Boston Marathon, which my daughter was in.

She was racing in the Boston Marathon?

Yes.

How did you hear about that? I know where I was when I heard about that. My daughter lives in Boston, so I remember that day vividly. Where were you?

I was at home on the TV. But the thing is I could download her and know where she was at.

Because she was participating.

Because she was participating, I knew where she was at in the race because I could use my smartphone to download the app for that and then I have her racing number and everything. They keep track of where people are. When they get to certain places, okay, she’s past this place; she’s at mile this. I knew where she was at. I heard it on the news, and I was like, “What? What do you mean an explosion?” Even with knowing that I could track her, I’m still bananas. Then I realize she had already finished. I said, “Oh, thank goodness.” Then it was like, okay, what’s going on with the rest of the people, the people affected by it? Yes that was a scary one.

But ever since then when they talk about hashtag strong, I just think that they just throw that up there, but I saw it firsthand here when I saw the people coming together to do whatever

they could to help out. That's all that matters. Even with the Healing Garden, just seeing people come together to help out. I could carry a wheelbarrow and take them the stuff they need, but I wasn't one of those that could get down on the ground and put things together. But I felt better that at least I could do something. That's how I saw people then was, let me do something; let me feel like I'm participating, I'm helping; this is my city.

Shooting events are way too frequent. I don't care what side of the gun issue a person is, you can't ignore that it's too frequent.

That's right.

In your capacity with the American Red Cross, have you had to go to other cities that have had shooting events?

No, I didn't. I wanted to go to Orlando simply because I'm gay myself. My church sent people there because we know the pastor of the MMC Church there in Orlando, and they were a big part of helping the survivors and everything like that. Now, the Red Cross was there, of course, again. I just personally was not a part of that other than through my church and our donations to go down there. I just came back from my church conference last July that was held in Orlando. We got to go on a tour to that nightclub.

How meaningful was that to you?

My gosh. They have a wall that's outside the wall of the actual nightclub, but they have certain sections of that wall that are cut out that you can see the wall and you can see the bullet holes and stuff. It just hurt me. Then all the drawings, it reminded me of our Healing Garden of all the drawings and things that people sent in and they were placed on that wall. It was very emotional. It was very emotional because I never got close to where the shooting took place here. The closest I got was the Catholic Church that's right there on that corner out there. When the first

anniversary came, the Red Cross took our vehicles and we were stationed there because if people were going to be gathered at that gate, the fencing I should say, we were going to be able to give them water and snacks and stuff. That's the closest I ever came to that particular spot. To be even closer in Orlando to where that shooting took place, it just...well, I ended up crying.

Well, sure, you're human.

I ended up crying.

I don't even know how to ask the question even listening to what you are talking about.

Locally at what point would you cry; that you come in touch with who you are in the mist of all of this?

The first time I cried was when I found out one of our volunteers was there. She was being very... "I'm okay; nothing's wrong." When I found out she was there, I just gave her such a big hug and I'm the one crying. She's not, but I'm the one crying. Then she started crying and she said, "I didn't cry until you started to cry." And I said, "I'm so sorry, but when I found out you were there and that now you're here and I can hold you, it makes a big difference, but it makes it scary; it makes it too, too real." I did not know a lot of people at that festival. I knew a couple, but I didn't know one of our volunteers happened to be there. She was at a concession or something she said. I just cried.

I've seen the difference in her. Our disaster action team is a team that goes out anytime there's a fire, so we're twenty-four seven. She won't go out at night anymore. Only if there's a daytime fire, she'll go to any of them that you call her to, but she will not go to a night one. She will not go to a night one, so I did notice a difference in her from that.

I asked her did she need to talk to someone. "No, I don't need any help. I'm okay. I'm fine." I said, "Okay." But I always kept an eye on her. I always kept an eye on her to see if there

were any changes and this and that. She helped us at the Family Assistance Center a little bit as an escort, and then she took time off, too, which we encouraged.

I just was thinking of memorials, like the Healing Garden or what they've done in Orlando, and I've been to Oklahoma City. At one time it was so random to be driving through Oklahoma City, but I thought, I'm never going to be back in Oklahoma City that I want to go see that memorial. I didn't even know anybody there, but it was huge in this country.

Yes, isn't it?

How important do you feel that these kinds of places, this physical, tangible memorial or healing garden, whatever it is, how important are those to us?

I think they're very important because it gives people a place to grieve with others and sometimes that's the best healing is when there is someone there that has either been through it or it's touched someone that they know that they're there for, or just to be with other people that want to give their respect and condolences to the people that passed away because of a certain incident. It's like 9/11 when we go to New York to see the memorial that they built.

Half of my family is in New York, and we were scrambling like crazy to find out where some of them were on that day. My sister-in-law works on Staten Island and we were just on pins and needles until we could find out where everyone was. It still affects people in New York after all these years.

I can't imagine any of the memorials not being there to help people gather and commemorate those people that passed away even for senseless causes. We have cemeteries for our military and everything else. That's why I think these centralized places for people to go and gather are very important. I didn't know anyone in Orlando, but I cried just seeing the bullet

holes in the building and all the pictures all around that people sent in just from all over the place.

I try to see as much as I can when I'm at the Healing Garden. I try to take a lot in, but I really sometimes concentrate on the little rocks that are all around there that people have painted and put messages on. They are just so beautiful and so touching. If you go there you'd have to go more than one time because there are so many. Then I found out from the caretakers that if they get new things in, they archive things they have and replace it with new things. It's an ever-changing garden, which I love, too. But I always think, I better take it all in because they're going to change it again. I knew the company that did the waterfall that went down. Oh my gosh, I happened to be there with the Red Cross on the day they were installing it. Just absolutely beautiful, the things. When we last went in September to assist the people there to make sure that they were okay, they were making a new path at the time, so you'll miss something if you don't go often enough, if that's something that...Some people can't and some people want.

Yes. I find that even out-of-town visitors want to go and we take them or encourage them to go, friends of ours that visit.

Yes. I find peace. I like to see things about those that were killed. I like to concentrate on at least one or two trees and find out more about that person. It makes it more personable to me. I don't know. I just think these things are great places to have.

I thought it was really special how they—I don't know if they added it or not—the fifty-ninth tree.

I don't know if they've added it yet.

But they plan to do that, which I think is important.

Yes, it is.

Because it does demonstrate to all that the aftermath is not done. I don't know if it ever is when it's a tragedy like that.

I know. You're right.

Human scarring, you deal with that.

Yes.

Anything else I should know about the American Red Cross or things that I didn't explore fully in relationship to One October?

No, other than the fact that I talked about how they sent people from our national on down to division on down to regional people to help with something of this magnitude. That to me made it one Red Cross where we all come together for this one particular thing. We had never had anything that massive happen here other than the Carpenter Fire, and that was totally different than this particular situation. It's nice to see in my own organization how much we come together when something happens and it's not just a tornado or a hurricane; it's something different. When things happen in your own backyard, it makes a difference that people come together and help even in your own organization that people come together to help because we don't—and hopefully we won't again—have any type of situation of that occur of that magnitude. I know that the Red Cross comes together for all different situations that happen all over the United States whether it's that chemical explosion that just happened in Texas. They came together. The Red Cross was there.

I don't know how to phrase this question. Do people react differently, in your experiences, to natural disasters as opposed to manmade tragedies?

I think so. I think they do. There is nothing to blame for a natural disaster. The weather is what it is. Things come together to make a hurricane or a tsunami and different things happen,

earthquakes, those things happen. But when you feel one of your own, meaning a human being, would do this to other human beings, it makes a big difference. I think that's what makes this type of situation, the Orlando situation, the Sandy Hook, I think that's what makes it all different is that we as a human being decided that we were going to kill other human beings. I don't get that. We have enough stuff that can hurt us. We don't need to hurt each other. So, yes, I think there's a difference.

Anything else we should talk about? I really appreciate everything you've shared.

I don't think so.

I thank you for your time and sharing your experiences. It's really helpful.

I appreciate being asked. Thank you.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]