

# TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED

Season 5 - Episode 2

## From Tragedy, a Love Story

**Disclaimer:**

*This episode includes descriptions of real events including a mass shooting that claimed the lives of 60 people. This content may be disturbing to some listeners.*

**Torah Kachur:**

It's a beautiful October night in Las Vegas. Twenty thousand people are gathered. Most of them have been here all day.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I love going to festivals, concerts. I'm just a concert junkie when it comes to country music.

**Torah Kachur:**

There's cold beer, good friends, and the biggest collection of cowboy hats and boots Sin City has ever seen.

**Austin Monfort:**

It was just really happy, fun, dancey. You get to meet people, like you're tailgating.

**Torah Kachur:**

Jason Aldean – one of country music's biggest stars is on stage. He's playing his song "When She Says Baby." It's a gritty, sexy song about how love can win out over everything else. Then out of the darkness — gunfire.

**Chantal Monfort:**

You have no idea where it's coming from. You have no idea like what's going on.

**Austin Monfort:**

Chantal was in front of me. We kind of like looked at each other and we like we both thought it was weird. Like, like, is it fireworks?

**Torah Kachur:**

The woman in front of them suddenly grabs her chest and collapses. She's been shot.

**Chantal Monfort:**

Like almost 20,000 people were just like getting down on the ground. So that's what

we did. We got on the ground.

**Torah Kachur:**

Two minutes go by, but the shooting doesn't stop.

**Chantal Monfort:**

We just made a run for it.

**Austin Monfort:**

We had to run across the entire venue to get out to the exit or at least get away from the gunfire.

**Chantal Monfort:**

Some people were injured and it just felt like so crazy. Like we were just running over them and like couldn't even stop to help because those bullets were just not stopping.

**Austin Monfort:**

There's nothing else to do other than run as fast as you can.

**Torah Kachur:**

I'm Torah Kachur. *This is Tell Me What Happened*, true stories of people helping people, an original podcast by OnStar. Every day when you wake up, you don't know if you'll be a person who needs help, or if you'll be a person that helps someone else. It's important to remember that it's in all of us to be either one of those things every day.

Chantal Melanson is a country girl from western Canada.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I'm a big country music fan. I honestly don't know how it started. I've just always loved country music.

**Torah Kachur:**

She's got the boots, the denim, and of course the hat.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I've pretty much seen every country artist that you can imagine. I just love country. There's nothing like it.

**Torah Kachur:**

So, when a co-worker messages her to say she has an extra ticket to a three-day music festival featuring Eric Church, Sam Hunt, Jason Aldean, Jake Owen, and Lee Brice, her answer is an emphatic 'yes.' It's called the Route 91 Harvest Festival and what makes it even more amazing is the location.

**Chantal Monfort:**

It's Las Vegas, so it's super fun, but like Las Vegas just goes country, which makes it even cooler.

**Torah Kachur:**

The day before the festival starts, Chantel and her three friends step off the plane ready for 72 hours of fun.

**Chantal Monfort:**

So it was pretty much just country music, cowboys and a festival.

**Torah Kachur:**

Three-day music festivals have a distinct rhythm. Each day starts with the lesser-known acts, emerging artists, and then every night there's a headliner. The biggest star gets the last time slot on the last day. Chantel is here to soak up all of it. After the first day's shows, they head to Gilley's, Vegas's best known country bar.

**Chantal Monfort:**

You walk in, there's like all the seats around the bar are saddles. There's line dancing. There's live music and just a lot of country people, cowboy boots everywhere.

**Torah Kachur:**

The four of them dance for a while, have a drink, and then call it a night. Day 2 plays out pretty much the same. They head to the festival just before noon, catch a bunch of great acts and then head over to the same bar. But this time, Chantel meets someone.

**Chantal Monfort:**

It actually happened pretty quick. We were all like, me and my girlfriends were standing together having a drink and I noticed him from across the room.

**Torah Kachur:**

The guy she notices is at the bar talking to some of his friends.

**Chantal Monfort:**

He was just like playing hard to get. He was like looking at me smiling and I was just like kept talking to my girlfriends and eventually he made his way towards me, but I wasn't really nice at first.

**Torah Kachur:**

The guy's name is Austin – and while that's pretty authentically “country,” his outfit wasn't.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I mean, he's at a country bar. He's there for a country festival and he was wearing Vans shoes. So I gave him heck for that. You go to a country festival, you wear cowboy boots. That's just how it is.

**Torah Kachur:**

Austin explains his shoes by telling her he's from Southern California.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I had never been to California and I didn't think there was many country people in California, but his mom is a rodeo queen and both of his sisters are barrel racers. So he kind of is a little bit country.

**Torah Kachur:**

He's also handsome, charming, and it turns out, a decent dancer.

**Chantal Monfort:**

It was just like a fun night and near the end, I really wanted to ride the New York New York roller coaster so I asked him, and we took an Uber to the roller coaster, but it was already closed for the night. So, we ended up just getting pizza, talking, and then we exchanged numbers there.

**Torah Kachur:**

The next morning, her travelling mates decide they want to do some shopping. Chantel, on the other hand, wants to get to the festival grounds.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I really wanted to go to the venue early because there was a few artists I wanted to see.

**Torah Kachur:**

She gets dressed: boots, denim skirt, cowboy hat. Grabs a quick breakfast and a coffee, then heads over. The festival is right on the strip so it's easy to get there, but it's crowded.

**Chantal Monfort:**

It's kind of awkward going to a concert by yourself. Like I was all by myself in a big venue. There's like over 20,000 people. So I thought, well, I might as well text him and see if he's there and want to grab a drink.

**Torah Kachur:**

Austin is there, and like Chantel, he's on his own. His buddies are sleeping off their hangovers. So, it's just the two of them. They have a drink and talk. Just like the night before over pizza, the conversation flows naturally and they lose track of time: two people in a sea of festival goers, enjoying their own little world. Afternoon turns to evening, so they make their way closer to the main stage. The headliner of the entire festival is Jason Aldean. He's a massive star and one of Chantel's favourites.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I just love being up close and personal at a country concert. If I can make my way up front or near the front, I will.

**Torah Kachur:**

A lot of other people feel that way to, so the crowd up front is packed pretty tight.

**Chantal Monfort:**

We're probably six rows back from the front stage. The views were just incredible. You can see all of Mandalay Bay and especially at night when it's all lit up. I mean, there's nothing like it. You don't see that anywhere else. We were having fun. I mean, we were so close up to the front and we were dancing and just enjoying his music. It was very confusing. So I thought I heard fireworks and everyone just the music kept playing for a little bit and people were just like confused. And then people started saying like get down on the ground.

**Torah Kachur:**

This is Tell Me What Happened, a podcast created by OnStar to showcase the importance of a human connection when you need help, no matter what danger you might be facing.

**Austin Monfort:**

I grew up in a very rural area and my mom was rodeo queen of our small town growing up.

**Torah Kachur:**

That's Austin. California boy and son of a rodeo queen.

**Austin Monfort:**

I was into dirt bikes. And in high school, I did wrestling and football and I really wasn't good at football, but I was decent at wrestling.

**Torah Kachur:**

When one of his buddies turned 21, they decided a road trip to Vegas was the perfect way to celebrate.

**Austin Monfort:**

So, like let's go to Vegas and gamble at 21. There's a country concert there. You get to walk right out of your hotel room right at the venue.

**Torah Kachur:**

So that's what they did. It's a five-hour drive from San Diego to Vegas.

**Austin Monfort:**

... with four of us and everyone's luggage all jam-packed like little sardines in my car.

**Torah Kachur:**

It's 2 a.m. when they arrive, but in Vegas, that doesn't really matter. They walk the strip, have a beer and soak it all in.

**Austin Monfort:**

Just felt like, like The Hangover movie. Being there you just get like an excitement. Like it's like the equivalent of like a kid going to Disneyland.

**Torah Kachur:**

For two days, Austin and his friends enjoy everything Vegas has to offer: The music, the casinos, and on the second night they end up at a country bar called Gilley's. Inside there's loud music, neon beer signs, line dancing, even a mechanical bull. But what catches Austin's eye is a young woman on the other side of the dance floor.

**Austin Monfort:**

We just like locked eyes at one point. And then I know we were kind of dancing and skirting around each other, just kind of feeling each other out before we even said anything. And then we finally ended up dancing and talking a little bit.

**Torah Kachur:**

Then she asks him about his shoes.

**Austin Monfort:**

She almost wouldn't give me the time of day because I was not wearing boots. Like, I'm in Southern California and wearing vans all the time. Like, I don't think boots are all that comfortable.

**Torah Kachur:**

Other than the footwear issue, they get along great.

**Austin Monfort:**

Yeah, we danced the night away and just had such a great time.

**Torah Kachur:**

At the end of the night, they share a slice of pizza and exchange numbers. The next morning, when Austin wakes up, his friends are all still asleep. But there's a message waiting for him on his phone.

**Austin Monfort:**

She was already texting me that she was in there.

**Torah Kachur:**

Chantel is at the side stage catching an up-and-comer. Austin showers, grabs a bagel, and heads over. It's a huge venue with more than 20,000 people, but it only takes a couple of text messages for Chantel and Austin to find each other.

**Austin Monfort:**

Meet me at, like, the food stand here in the middle like and then like wave your hand in the air and I'll be talking to you. We were able to like find each other that way, I remember.

**Torah Kachur:**

The whole day is playing out like a romance novel.

**Austin Monfort:**

I love to sing my lungs out at a concert and that we both did. And we, we were just

hitting it off in terms of like liking the same music. Like we just felt comfortable around each other and we were like just having a good time being two strangers that live in two different countries that would have probably never met in another circumstance.

**Torah Kachur:**

As Jason Aldean takes the stage, they make their way towards the front.

**Austin Monfort:**

We just started singing the first couple songs, just having a great time until what I thought to be fireworks. And I just remember like hearing a couple more what we thought to be fireworks until the lady in front of us turned around and she was shot in the chest.

**Torah Kachur:**

People start yelling "get down, get down," and the entire crowd drops to the ground.

**Austin Monfort:**

That's when, like, we started to freak out because like we knew what was kind of happening. Someone was shooting at us.

**Chantal Monfort:**

It was just nonstop, and you could like hear the bullets just bouncing off the pavement.

**Torah Kachur:**

Throughout the crowd, confusion turns into panic. We know now that it was a gunman shooting from a room high up in a hotel across the street from the venue. Before he was done, he'd fire more than 1,000 rounds into the crowd. But in the moment, lying on the ground all they knew is they had to get out of there.

**Chantal Monfort:**

Austin ended up across from me, so when I was laying down, I could see him.

**Austin Monfort:**

I probably would have been freaking out more, but Chantel was freaking out. And I think through that it was kind of helped us keep me calm because I wanted to keep her calm.

**Torah Kachur:**

All around them people are screaming, either out of fear, or because they've been shot.

**Austin Monfort:**

I just grabbed Chantel's hand, and we started running. And I just remember, like, pulling her because she was in her cowboy boots and I was in like my tennis shoes and I couldn't get her to run fast enough.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I even dropped my purse with my cell phone in it and I never even looked back and grabbed it. I just kept running.

**Torah Kachur:**

Together, they run as fast as they can, but rather than head straight for the exit, Austin leads them to the middle of the concert grounds.

**Austin Monfort:**

In the center of the venue there was like sea containers that they turned into like drinks and food and everything. So we ran as fast as we could, hid on the backside of it.

**Chantal Monfort:**

Like, it was metal and Austin, like, pulled me in there. But you could still hear the bullets like bouncing off the ground and I feel like I was just full-blown panic. I could barely breathe at one point.

**Austin Monfort:**

And then I like, don't know why, ....

**Chantal Monfort:**

He looked at me and he kissed me

**Austin Monfort:**

... I thought maybe that'll calm her down so we can start running the rest of the way out of here.

**Chantal Monfort:**

... and he said, I'm going to take your hand and we're just running like just keep running with me.

**Torah Kachur:**

They run towards the far side of the venue, jumping over and around hundreds of people still lying on the ground.

**Chantal Monfort:**

I wasn't sure if they were alive, if they were injured, or just laying there. I just kept running.

**Torah Kachur:**

At the far side they reach a section of the perimeter fence that has been knocked down by the panicking crowd. The street is lined with taxis. They see one with the doors open and jump in. Austin tells the driver there's been a shooting and they have to get away from there.

Just then they see a woman in the crowd staggering towards the cab, clutching her stomach.

**Austin Monfort:**



We just opened the door we got her in. She was obviously shot so the taxi driver was like, we need to go to the trauma center.

**Chantal Monfort:**

So I was in the front seat and Austin went in the back seat. So he was able to help her. She had gotten like grazed by a bullet on her leg and then shot in the stomach. So Austin was like holding her stomach and like just trying to talk to her and while the taxi drove us to the hospital.

**Torah Kachur:**

Throughout the city, emergency response teams have kicked in. Police have blocked off incoming traffic to facilitate getting everyone away from the grounds. The trauma center is setting up temporary beds. Chantel, Austin, and the women who has been shot are the first to arrive.

**Austin Monfort:**

I ran into like the emergency room and like told them we had someone that had been shot in the car. So they think they went and grabbed her and then they just started pulling stretchers out, waiting for people to show up because it wasn't long after that that people kept coming in.

**Torah Kachur:**

There was still a lot of confusion, specifically about whether it was safe to leave the trauma center and go back to their hotels.

**Austin Monfort:**

They had like SWAT out front. So, like, they were like, you're probably safest here.

**Torah Kachur:**

They also had adopted the responsibility of looking after this stranger who had been shot. They used her phone to call her family.

**Chantal Monfort:**

We had no idea if she was going to make it. No one could tell us anything because she went straight into surgery when she got to the hospital.

**Torah Kachur:**

Chantel and Austin stayed there the entire night. With nothing else to do, they sat there and talked.

**Austin Monfort:**

I feel like it was all over the board because like we were having a light conversation, and someone would come in, or so you could hear someone else talking and then you kind of get brought back into the situation, and then you kind of get quiet for a little bit and then you could start talking again. But it was just a weird up and down of emotions the entire time.

**Chantal Monfort:**

Like I felt like, thank God for Austin. So was just surreal that, like, he was there with me and I was just so thankful that like he helped me out of there and we kind of just helped each other.

**Torah Kachur:**

The TV in the waiting room filled them in on the horrific details. In all, 58 people were killed that night, and more than 400 others were injured. It was the deadliest mass shooting event in US history. The next morning, after they get word that the woman they had helped was out of surgery and recovering, Austin and Chantel take an Uber back to the strip. They share a waffle shaped like a guitar at the Hard Rock Café and then say their goodbyes.

**Austin Monfort:**

It was a crazy first date.

**Chantal Monfort:**

We were so tired and we were just so in shock. We barely knew each other, but then again we had just gone through the craziest thing and I felt like if anyone understood what I was going through it was him, so I told him to come visit me in Canada.

**Torah Kachur:**

Six weeks later he did. He met her friends, and they visited the Rocky Mountains.

**Chantal Monfort:**

It was very cold for that California boy.

**Torah Kachur:**

And if they weren't already, they fell in love.

**Austin Monfort:**

We just went through this huge crazy thing that was terrible. And we both were able to come out of it together, probably stronger than we would into it. So, it's like I was able to see how she came back from that, like see how strong and independent of a woman she was. I loved all that. And then I just knew that she was the only one I wanted to be with.

**Torah Kachur:**

Two years later they got engaged.

**Chantal Monfort:**

Yeah, we are happily married. And we have a 3-year-old daughter, and we just welcomed a son. Life is great.

**Austin Monfort:**

I honestly don't know where my life would have taken me if it wasn't for her coming into my life. I'm excited to see where our life and love goes.

**Chantal Monfort:**

We are just enjoying every minute and making memories with our family because it can be taken away from you so quickly.

**Torah Kachur:**

The attack on the Route 91 Harvest Festival was horrible and deadly. But concerts and festivals continue. Every day, all across North America, huge crowds gather for music, for sports, parades, political rallies, all sorts of reasons. Daniel Ward is in charge of training at the National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security. His job is to teach the people working at large venues how to keep crowds safe.

**Daniel Ward:**

Anytime we bring people together, you have to consider the crowd itself. What type of crowd's going to be there? Is it a calm event or is it a, I'm trying to think of the right words here.

**Torah Kachur:**

Rowdy?

**Daniel Ward:**

Yeah, is it a rowdier event? The venue itself? Is it a newer venue? Is it an older venue? Is it indoors? Is it outdoors? Staffing. Do you have enough staff to cover all of the venue needs, the public safety needs?

**Torah Kachur:**

How do you prepare for different crowds?

**Daniel Ward:**

I'll give you an example of a concert I attended a few years ago. I brought my wife, she absolutely loves Journey. We went to a Journey concert. Everybody was very orderly, the lines were organized. Once we got into the venue itself, everybody sat, there were no issues. It was a very calm crowd. There are other artists out there where it's gonna be, by their very nature, a different demographic. You're going to have people that are a little more excited, possibly more rowdy. Some events still encourage mosh pitting. So, not to say one's better or worse than the other, but it's things that we have to consider.

**Torah Kachur:**

I've heard concerts and festivals referred to as soft targets – why is that?

**Daniel Ward:**

We don't treat venues or events like a prison. We don't have that level of physical security or it's not what you would see in an airport, for instance. We're screening people, we're trying to get people in safely, but we're also trying to make sure we get them in, they enjoy the event itself and we're trying to provide as much safety and security while they enjoy that experience. It's challenging to find that middle

ground where you're not taking away from the experience or people's joy or their good time, but at the same time, you're maintaining an appropriate level of safety and security.

**Torah Kachur:**

When we're planning and we're going to a big event and we know there's gonna be lots of people, how do we prepare?

**Daniel Ward:**

One of the first things that people need to do is know their exits. Be familiar with the venue itself. When you show up to an event, it's common for people to leave the same way that they come into a facility or into a venue. I don't know about you, but there's several times I've went to an event, and I have not went through the best entrance. It has not been the most convenient entrance. So anytime you go to an event, know your exits.

The next thing we would recommend is having some type of buddy system. Most people move together. During an emergency, you need to know where your friends or your family members or the other individuals coming with you are located. Another thing we recommend is staying calm and making sure that we're calm enough, and we have our composure and we can assess the situation. Almost like when you sit through the airplane safety briefing and they tell you put your own mask on before you start helping other people. It's the same thing in any type of emergency. You need to make sure you remain calm and collected. Make sure you're taking care of yourself.

**Torah Kachur:**

What should you do if you're at an event and there's just something that seems off?

**Daniel Ward:**

You often see signage in venues and facilities that say, "See Something, Say Something." And venues provide a means for you to say something, whether it's approaching a staff member or whether it's a texting system. So, the biggest thing there is if you do see something, never write it off. Absolutely communicate with the event staff, reach out through whatever means they've provided.

**Torah Kachur:**

What do you do if chaos, violence, or something does break out and you can't avoid it?

**Daniel Ward:**

Don't hesitate. Go immediately make sure you're listening to those instructions, help others if you can but again if you're not staying calm and collected during those emergencies, it's going to be very hard to help those around you. If you can't get out of the area, if you can't evacuate, try to hide. Conceal yourself somewhere, seek cover, seek protection. We know that some events are outdoors, an open area, that can be challenging. So, hide is that next approach.

And certainly alert the authorities. One of the things that we've seen is people have a tendency to assume because of the nature of an incident that someone else has already reported it. That's something that we need to avoid.

**Torah Kachur:**

I'm thinking here, I have a nine-year-old. So, when we go to events, we go to a hockey game or concert or whatever, I always have a plan with her. If we get separated, you know, look for this, look for that. I've never done that with my partner, my friends. I've just realized it's just as important for them as well, right?

**Daniel Ward:**

Yeah, absolutely. Having that buddy system is really important. It's not just sticking with your friends and family. People have to go to the bathroom, they run to concessions, there's a lot going on, especially when you further complicate it with some type of emergency. It's important to agree on a meeting spot before you ever arrive, or once you get there, pinpointing where that meeting spot would be. If we get separated, this is where we're gonna get together.

**Torah Kachur:**

Daniel, thanks so much.

**Daniel Ward:**

Thank you, Torah.

**Torah Kachur:**

That's it for this episode of *Tell Me What Happened*, true stories of people helping people.

We share a new story every other week, but if you are in the mood for another one right now. Scroll back in time to one of our earlier episodes. On behalf of OnStar, I'm Torah Kachur. Please be safe out there.

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