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An Interview with Barbara G. Brents

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized it was a special place that intersected themes of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gentrification. Patrick and Deborah learned that John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an enclave of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

The transcripts received minimal editing that included the elimination of fragments, false starts and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. These interviews have been catalogued and can be found as non-circulating documents in Special Collections at UNLV's Lied Library.

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Interview with Barbara Brents

January 12, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Claytee White

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Preface

When Barbara Brents and her husband Mike moved to Las Vegas in 1987, she had no desire to call it home. It was part of a life adventure, an enchantment with the “Old West” and about a job at UNLV. Sure it wasn’t the ivy covered campus, but “the kitsch of Las Vegas was kind of the appeal.”

Living in John S. Park Neighborhood proved to have a charm on the couple, who have lived in three different homes there. One had a view of Bob Stupak’s World of Las Vegas sign and another was used in a scene for the television series *Nasty Boys*. Their current home was previously owned by Berkeley Bunker, a former U.S. Senator.

Over the years they have enticed others to live in John S. Park and continue live there themselves. Barbara shares historic footnotes, political stories, and what lead up to the historic districting of the neighborhood she so dearly cherishes. As she says, “The reason I like Las Vegas is this neighborhood, and I would be gone in a second if this neighborhood died.”

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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Interview with Barb Brents

January 12, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee White

[00:00:00] Begin recorded interview.

This is Claytee White. It is January 12th, 2010, and I am here in the home of Barb Brents. We are in the John S. Park community.

Could you just tell me a little about where you grew up, what that was like, what your parents did for a living?

I was born in Austin, Texas and lived in Waco. I don't remember any of that. I mostly remember living in Fort Worth, Texas, where I grew up. I lived in the house that my dad grew up in. My grandparents lived there. My dad was an only child and my grandparents lived not too far away. I have two younger brothers. My mom was from Jamaica. She had eight brothers and sisters. Two of them live in the United States, in Minnesota, and the rest of them live in Canada and Jamaica and Trinidad and England and all over. So, it was an interesting contrast between those two families.

Did you ever get to visit the other uncles?

My mom is really close to her siblings and so we went to Minneapolis a lot. I'm still close to my cousins from her brother, who subsequently moved to California and Colorado and all, so I'm close to them, but I'm not too close to the rest of them. We did go to Jamaica one year, when I was sixteen or seventeen, to visit my relatives there. But they all had moved away. I mean they grew up there during colonial Jamaica, you know, and they had plantations and, oh, I could go on. Then when England left and they started having democracy, they elected a Socialist, Manley. My mom was very racist. I grew up

hearing this because my parents were both very political and very right-wing and very strong in their beliefs. So her whole family left, obviously, because they were the ones that were benefiting off the backs of everyone else. They had worked in banks and things like that. Most of her family moved to Canada. A few stayed down there and kept some family land or whatever. But they all split off. And plus, you know, all the kids left. This was in the Forties and Fifties. You know, I need to figure out that history.

Oh yeah, that would be interesting history. So tell me about your schooling. Where did you go to school?

I went to elementary school in Fort Worth and junior high and then in 1970, we moved to Kansas City [Missouri], where I went to high school, and then I went to college in Columbia, Missouri. I went my first year in St. Joseph; I was going to be a teacher and then I decided to be a journalist and went to [the University of Missouri in] Columbia, and then I got into sociology and I haven't looked back, got my PhD, and then I moved here to Las Vegas.

So how did you move to Las Vegas?

I was finishing my dissertation in the late Eighties, and I really wanted to do something practical and help people. My boyfriend at the time, now my husband, wanted to be an intellectual and an academic, and so he was working on his master's degree and I was finishing my PhD and I didn't really want to go anywhere; I wanted to live in Columbia the rest of my life. We lived in a farmhouse; it was a perfect, idyllic setting. Somebody [00:05:00] forced me to go on the job market (reluctantly), and I applied to three jobs: one in this really small school in upstate New York, one in Hawaii (because it was Hawaii), and I applied to [the University of Nevada] Las Vegas [UNLV] because it was

the only job that had specifically my areas and I didn't see any other along those lines. The deadline was my birthday. So I thought, Oh, what the heck. I had no intention of coming to Las Vegas because who in their right mind [would do that]? You know, a young Marxist, a radical, a feminist, of course, would not go to Las Vegas. [Laughter]

What did your parents think of you?

Well, you know, it's their fault. [Laughter] When I was in high school, we went on a vacation to Wounded Knee, South Dakota, to the Indian reservations, and I was [thinking], What's going on here? You know, my dad didn't know what to think of all that. He's an attorney but he reads a lot and he's a closet intellectual, too. And I was sort of changed at that point and, you know, rebelling against my parents. I was at the tail end of the Sixties and all I wanted to do was get to college so I could protest something, anything. And when I got there, it was just about over. So I got involved in various activism when I was in college, in graduate school mostly.

I interrupted you. You were telling me about coming to Las Vegas and how the job [deadline] was on your birthday.

So I came here to interview, reluctantly, [to] practice, you know, a presentation. I didn't want to move here. And I got here, and they offered me the job while I was here, which was common practice in Sociology back then.

Which year was that?

In 1987. And I do want to preface this that I'd been to Las Vegas once before, in probably the early Eighties. It was after I graduated from college, which I finished college in '78 [or] '79, and I worked a year or two before I went back to grad school. It was in the late Seventies, early Eighties, somewhere in [there]. And we drove my brother

to Los Angeles because he was going out there to work. At that time, he got his bachelor's [degree] in philosophy and went to the Desert Volunteer Corps: also another radical who went against my parents' conservatism.

Anyway, we drove through Las Vegas with my mom and my younger brother and my second (other) brother, and I remember topping the hill and looking down at this town plopped in the middle of the desert and I went, Oh my God, this doesn't belong here. If the water goes away, this town will dry up. Somebody needs to just brush this town off the face of the planet because it's just an abomination, you know.

So we got in and picked the most famous casino we could think of. At the time it was the Sahara [Hotel and Casino]. So we went in and I remember we saw [actor] Frank Gorshin hanging out in the lobby or whatever it was: "There's Frank Gorshin!" [Laughter] And we were trying to get free drinks, but we didn't know how to do it and we weren't getting any, and my youngest brother put money in a slot machine and won like forty dollars, which every time he's come to Las Vegas since then, he wins money at the casino. And then we moved on. So that was my experience of Las Vegas. So of course I didn't want to live here when I first came here.

At the time I was like, No way I'm accepting this job opening, and Mike [my boyfriend at the time] said something to the effect of, Well, I think it would be fun if we went. We? You mean you'd go? So, hmm, well, then. [Laughter] So, I ended up accepting it, begging for a semester before I had to leave, just to buy myself more time.

Had Mike ever been here before?

You know, I say we were here once before. I think, somewhere, a couple of years before, we had taken a road trip with another friend of mine across the West. And Mike was from

Colorado, so he was predisposed towards the West. And I had always had a fascination with the West. I like the idea of the Old West. So that's how I satisfied myself, coming here, that I was in the Old West. And in some ways I still identify with that part of living in Nevada. I could satisfy myself that I lived in Nevada, not Las Vegas. Now of course I enjoy the idea of living in Las Vegas, and I've got Nevada. I'm living in the West. So it's the best of both worlds.

[00:10:00] So anyway, yeah, so I accepted the job and we moved here, and I again remember having that sick feeling when Mike and I topped the hill [at] Boulder City [Nevada], looking down. I mean we stopped the car and we got out and we went, Oh my God, what are we doing?

So was he able to find a job right away?

At that time, he was waning in his interest in graduate school and started working at the food bank in Columbia, and so when he got here, he had some connections. He didn't work at the food bank but his connections got him working with EOB in their housing, what later became Housing. EOB, you know, in Las Vegas, it was the last of the community action organizations. But actually, his first job here was, you know, putting [in the tubing for] solar swimming pools, laying the tubing on top of roofs, in the middle of [summer], you know, in the heat, doing that, because he got this job with this guy who promised him he would get to do more in solar and he was like, Yeah, solar, all right! It didn't work out that way, and he eventually got into that track [EOB].

Oh, that's great. So how did you like UNLV? What did it look like when you first got here?

I was in the FDH [Flora Dungan Humanities] Building. I wanted to be in a school with ivy-covered halls, et cetera, you know, and so it was not that. Everything was a shopping mall, a strip mall, and it was not pretty. But, the kitsch of Las Vegas was the kind of appeal.

I remember when we arrived in town and we stayed with a friend. One of my colleagues from graduate school had grown up in Las Vegas, or spent his high school years in Las Vegas and early college, and his mom still lived here. She worked at the [Las Vegas] Hilton [Hotel and Casino] And so we stayed with her for the first week while we found a place to live.

We drove around down in, you know, the lawyers' district, hoping to find a house there (not knowing that that was not possible), and drove around in this neighborhood, thought it was of secondary desirability, and limited our search for rental housing down in here, because there was no way we wanted to live out in the suburbs, you know. I remember Decatur [Boulevard] was as far as Charleston [Boulevard] went, and Green Valley was being developed, but I don't remember how far along that was. But no way we were going out to any of those places, so we only looked down here, and I remember our first house was just a couple [of streets] off of Saint Louis [Avenue], on Santa Rita [Drive].

So your first house was here in John S. Park [Neighborhood]. Oh, that's wonderful!

We walked into this house. It was pink. We got in it and it had gold shag carpeting and pink walls and gaudy gold-ish wallpaper in the bedrooms, and then out the back window you could see Bob Stupak's Vegas World [Hotel and Casino], so you could see the dice rolling, you know, that old sign, every night, and I was like, Oh my God! [Laughter]

Mike is not really much of a decision-maker, really fast, and we'd looked at a couple of other places and I was like, thinking to myself, No, and I was about ready to turn to talk to Mike and say, Shall we look at another place? And he was like, We'll take it! I was like, What! And he said, You might as well be right here, you know. So we lived in the house for a year and really enjoyed it. It was a nice house and it was really cool.

And so you were there for just a short time.

For a year. And then we bought a house at 1015 Franklin [Avenue], which we still own, and lived there for about ten years, and then we bought this house in 2000.

Oh, that is wonderful! So you really have a long history here in the neighborhood.

[00:15:00] You described the first house. So now tell me about the house on Franklin that you lived in for ten years.

OK, well, a couple of interesting things about it. We always drove around because we knew which houses we wanted to buy. We saw it advertised in the paper for sixty thousand dollars. We went and looked at it, and it turned out it was this young guy who had bought it from an elderly lady who had lived in it since it was built in 1944, and he bought it to redo and flip it. And he was trying to do that, and he did that with the house next door to us then. I think he was planning on doing a bunch of houses but those two were his first ones. And he had this guy doing his work for him who did a horrible [job]. Luckily we got in and stopped him before he went too far, but we mostly had to undo everything. I mean they sprayed popcorn ceilings in and repainted and all this sort of stuff, and we liked the old way it was.

And just while we were in escrow, this young guy, typical Las Vegas, trying to make some money, probably illegal for him to do this but he was a nice guy and he

rented out our house to a movie-making company to film a scene for *Nasty Boys*. [I think] it was a TV series about a drug-busting cop, you know, the anti-drug guys, and our house was the house of a drug dealer, a black guy with lots of jewelry, you know, who's in there with a cadre of women and these big bad cops burst in, drive into the house with their van and go and, you know, rough up the drug guy. So the scene that was filmed was the van driving into the living room of our house.

But did it actually do that?

Yeah. We were yelling. We didn't know. He said, I swear to you, we can fix everything that they [damage]. So, what they did is they took out the front picture window. All the houses are the same, so it was the former carport that had been built in. So they sort of removed the front part, the picture window and all that, and then drove in, and then replaced it and, you know, it wasn't a perfect job but it's still standing, so it's working. And he gave us some money for it, I don't know. But it was hilarious, you know.

[Laughing] Yes, it was. So how large was the house?

Eleven hundred square feet. It didn't have central air. We used window units for a long time. We eventually remodeled it, probably in 1994, and we put in a passive solar clear story (we got an architect to design a passive solar clear story). We put a swamp cooler back in and put in central air and stuff, did some stuff to it like that. But I remember the early years, running with window-unit air conditioners. It wasn't pretty. And my car didn't have air conditioning, because who needed it in Missouri?

OK. So what was the neighborhood like at that time?

You know, I was thinking about that. In some ways it wasn't that different. The people that originally lived in the houses, you know, were starting to die and a few young people

were moving in. But it was always ethnically diverse and a mix of incomes. You know, it had a little bit of ups and downs. It went up a lot. Everybody complains about how bad it is now but I don't think it's like it was when we first got here.

Well, tell me, when people complain about how bad it is now, you were here when this community went through the city plan and the historic district designation and all of that. Did you take part in any of that?

Oh yeah. Yeah.

I have a lot of questions. So tell me about the process, what you remember, and then I want to know the difference before and after, so there's a lot of questions there.

The differences before and after are all symbolic. But yeah, there were a bunch of us that were [fighting]. I mean, by that point, every time a new faculty [member] would come in, we'd talk them into moving to this neighborhood.

[00:20:00] So you started all that. [Laughing] That's wonderful!

I mean I got a lot of people to move out here. I didn't get [attorney and poet] Dayvid Figler or any of those to move down here, but a lot of people were of that generation. I knew Dayvid before and I knew a lot of people before. I mean it was sort of like there was no other place to live; this was the best place. But we lived here before all of them [other UNLV professors], and we would have them at our house for parties.

So everybody was already down here by that point. I don't remember too many of the details. I just remember going to lots of public meetings and flyer-ing neighborhoods.

So did you actually walk the neighborhood?

Yeah, I think so, you know, and I remember the people who were speaking out against it.

Do you remember any of the arguments against it?

Oh, I remember there was a guy at the corner of Sixth [Street] and Park Paseo there, and the lady across the street, who thought they could sell their houses for commercial property. And I remember that he, during this time, put his house on the market for like 1.2 million dollars or something like that, thinking he could sell it for commercial [property], you know. Obviously he never did.

So now was he planning to have it rezoned?

I don't know. I don't know. I mean somebody else might know more. I don't know if you've talked to Jo Nell Thomas. I think she was in the midst of a lot of that historic district stuff.

Tomorrow morning I interview Yorgo Kagafas, with the city, who also lived in the community. He helped with the plan and everything.

So people were very, very active.

Well, the younger people were and most people were, but then there were a lot of people who didn't [agree with the historic designation], because everybody was worried about, Are they going to tell me what color to paint my house? That was probably the biggest argument against it: Is the government going to tell us what to do? I don't want to live in a neighborhood where they're telling me how many cars I can park in my yard, and that kind of stuff. So yeah, there were those kinds of arguments: afraid their taxes would go up, that kind of stuff, just more government involvement. You know, there's been a number of issues between that and the Stratosphere [Hotel and Casino] ride and building the condos, so I'm confusing which issues are which. So we were involved and I remember going to [community meetings].

So those political activities at that point: you had already started having parties at your house, so you already had the social [involvement]. Did that help with the political [activities]?

Oh, yes, yes, because we all knew each other and we were all, you know, concerned about our neighborhood and that was absolutely [important]. I mean there's no social activism that occurs, I believe, without there also being personal connections between people. And so you meet and expand your knowledge of people that way a little bit.

And would you say that some of those connections still hold today?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. That's what makes a neighborhood, a neighborhood, you know, when you get to know people that you may not otherwise know, and other people introduce you to other people, because you have a common sense of [purpose]. I mean, and that's what's nice about this neighborhood is I think it's people who have had different and interesting experiences, between people who have been here a long time who were here when the Strip was something different and Las Vegas was something different and they played a role in that somehow, so they have an investment, to the young people who move here because it's not the suburbs and it's close to something, the essence of Las Vegas, and want to play a role in creating what that is, and that draws people together, so that the people that live in this neighborhood are similar in their outlook in some ways, and are drawn to a place and the place then, you know, creates its own community.

[00:25:00] And would you say that a community like this is able to cross all kinds of boundaries: diversity, class?

Some class boundaries, but not diversity. I would say that my circle of friends is probably more homogenous in terms of race, class, sexuality, than I would like and then have been

at other points in my life. I mean, everybody is all open and all liberal, but there's not that much diversity. I don't know why and I wish it was different. I'd be curious what other people say about that, but I've been very conscious of that. Some of the neighbors here, when we first moved in: Oh, you used to live over in Franklin? Oh my goodness.

Hispanic people live over there. There's this real sense of [the fact that] different kinds of people live there. Not from all our neighbors; I'm just thinking of one in particular.

But that area was known.

Yeah, well, to people that live in these bigger houses here, [the attitude is], I can live here. I mean this is just one person to just go off on it, but still.

But that's interesting to look at it that way.

So when you moved from Franklin to here, did your friends remain the same?

Oh. Yeah.

Did you add new ones, because of the new dynamic on this street?

No, I wouldn't say [that]. I probably still know my next-door neighbor over there [on Franklin] better. Well, and the lady across the street is really nice. You know, I mean we've met our neighbors. The guy that lived here before was an old Mormon guy, and his wife died shortly after we moved in and then he remarried, and moved away, and then a younger couple moved in. He's an architect and [they] were interested in the new neighborhood back when the housing was not that expensive, when you could get a big fancy house cheaper than anywhere else, and they did a lot of work remodeling that house and made really nice. And that guy over there [indicating direction], the lady that owned that house before owned a lot of wedding chapels, and this guy that lives there

now is from San Francisco [California] but this is his second home. And he wants to retire out here, but he keeps saying he's going to retire out here and he never shows up. But he is connected to the people around, I think, because he's owned it for a long time. But he always says how that house is wired, like lighting and music and sound and stuff, because the wedding-chapel lady did all that.

Now describe this house to me. When you moved in here in 2000, what did you like about this house?

Well, I always took a shortcut down this street to get to school, and so I'd identified [that] this was the most invisible house in the block, you know, and we wanted to buy the least-redeveloped house on the street and fix it up the way we wanted to. So we saw a sign go up one day and put an offer that night and we were the second people to put an offer on it. But we paid a hundred and thirty-five [thousand dollars] for this house. It had some serious concrete problems and we had to redo all that. But anyway.

This house used to be owned by Berkeley Bunker. This house was built in '54, so it was after he, I guess, got out of the Senate or whatever. He and his wife Lucille lived here. The house had been remodeled once since they built it. He had died maybe five or ten years earlier? I don't know. We bought it in 2000. Maybe his wife had died ten years earlier and he had just died a couple of years ago. I forget. There was some ten-year [00:30:00] thing. But shortly after his wife died, he married another woman (I guess these guys do this), and they lived in this house. The story I hear is that the family tolerated her but, whatever. The son or the son-in-law was the district attorney at the time. He just retired ten years ago. (I forget his name.) Anyway, she [the second wife] lived here, and they were sort of kicking her out. So she ended up moving once we

bought the house. She was a really nice woman. She moved back to her other house on Ninth Street that she had lived in with her husband before he died. And then she died a couple of years later.

So anyway, we bought this house and it had shag carpeting throughout. When we stripped some of the walls (there was only like a layer or two of paint on them), we stripped a lot of wallpaper off, but we kept the wallpaper on the other side of this wall here. You can see it. And it's got that big huge pantry. The study had hooked cable to a TV. In subsequent years, Bunker's daughters, maybe his granddaughters, you know, I've done this too, the house I grew up in, you drive by, and we saw them drive by one day and we like talked to them and showed them the house and they pointed out and reminisced about things. So they said that apparently in that room there, their grandfather had a TV and it was supposed to have been the first TV in Southern Nevada or something like that. I don't know, do the math, if that adds up right.

And then of course when we moved in, he was active in the [Mormon] Church obviously and there were a lot of his papers left: all his whole Congressional record from when he was in office. They were going to throw those books away, so I grabbed them and kept them, although what am I going to do with them now, you know? I think they're all online.

They might be, but talk to the library.

I should. So the house was old and, you know, we were able to get it and keep some [of the features]. It wasn't all that Mid-Mod [Mid-Century Modern] and we're not architects. And sure enough, we bought this house thinking we're not having any kids, we're not doing anything, and as soon as we bought the house, nine months later, we had our

daughter, and then we did this huge remodel, and then, sure enough, after that, then the twins came, and so it was like, how did that happen? So we haven't really, you know, done the decorating.

Oh, but this is a great house.

We like it. The sink used to be there, and this was the only door outside [indicating features in house]. These are the original windows. And that was closed off; that was just a patio, that room there.

Oh, you wouldn't be able to tell that.

But where the bar is here was a wall, so the sink and all that stuff was right in a narrow galley right here, and then back around here must have been where you did all your canning and stuff, because it was like a second little kitchen thing, and then there's a huge pantry in there. It was a Mormon pantry, they say.

That's right, because they [Mormons] have to [store] seven years' worth of food.

So it was fun.

The Mormons were very, very influential in this neighborhood, early on, and they had the temple there. Of course that was just torn down not long ago.

I know. That was horrible! Oh, that makes me so angry.

That's right. And all of the kids in the neighborhood would join all kinds of activities at that church, whether they were Mormon or not. So it was a very influential church.

I know when we moved on this street, most of the people were Mormon. I mean I think at the time there was the Defense of Marriage Act [DOMA] or something and so you could tell the Mormon families because they all had the anti-gay marriage signs in their yard,

and so we would go talk to the people who didn't. But this was notably Mormon, whereas where we lived on Franklin was not, to our knowledge. That just wasn't part of the [neighborhood].

You would have known, probably.

So we've talked about the political and social [activities]. Political: what about some of the other [activities]? I know that all of these campaigns kind of run together now, but do you remember some of the campaigns that you participated in?

[00:35:00] Yes. Early on, we didn't do too much because it was mostly people who lived on Fifth Place, but I think there was a gorilla going up the Stratosphere that they stopped. But we got active in the rollercoaster that was going to go down, and that was fun. And then the condos that were all going to be built and we thought we were going to be fighting that one for a long time. I guess it was before the [proposed] historic district, and so we were trying to use that as a reason not to get the condos built. I don't know how we managed to do it, but there is a sense that if they had wanted to and if the economy kept going, that they would still sell us out. I mean there has been a sense that the city is kind of sort of behind a livable neighborhood in this area, and I think some are, but you know, this town has been and I hope it won't [continue to] be, development at all costs. So there's a sense that the right project and they would sell the whole neighborhood out. And in fact, somebody once had an idea that wasn't just a pipe dream and I think they actually started doing it, to get all of the neighbors together and form a collective and collectively sell the whole neighborhood to a developer, just so, like, All right, you can piecemeal us to death and ruin our lives, or we're going to benefit from it,

you know, and just sell it all to a developer and you built one of those mega-casinos right here, you know, and it may happen some day, but this town is just stupid if it does that. The reason I like Las Vegas is this neighborhood, and I would be gone in a second if this neighborhood died. I mean, it's beautiful to walk to your friend's house and live in a place with a sense of place when nobody else in this valley [has that]. Maybe they do now. I don't know.

Tell me about crime in the neighborhood.

I don't have any problem with crime. I've lived here [in Las Vegas] twenty-two years. We were broken into twice on Franklin: they broke into our car, and kids broke into the house and mostly stole just little things. I mean they didn't steal all the things that a serious criminal would steal, and it was not bad. Insurance replaced it all and it was fine. We've been broken into once here. We were having some work done in the back bedroom and it was somebody that knew the construction people, and they came in and took [some things]. That was the most serious rifling-through. The son had friends and they came in as soon as the people left for the day and stole stuff.

People who live on Fifth Place talk about people walking down the streets that look shady. I mean, there occasionally will be people walking down the street that look different than me, and I don't have a problem with that and nobody has ever bothered me. There's no craziness.

Tell me about the park.

Circle Park. Yeah, OK. So, I wasn't on any of those committees but I was friends with people who were on the committees and we spent a day out there, helping to build the wall and worked really hard, you know, real supportive of getting it developed, went to

all the events they had, went and took the kids there and played and, you know, was getting into having a nice neighborhood park, and then they [closed it]. I never had any [problems there]. And there were homeless people there, but they're not going to hurt you. I mean, I had no problems playing at that park with my kids with the homeless people there. But, you know, wackos. And too, when it got cold, we wouldn't go there and, you know, they got it [to themselves], so there began to be more of them and you [said], Oh, I don't know, I don't feel like going over there today. When there's more homeless people taking up space than there are other people, then you feel a little weird. [00:40:00] But I could've continued on that and all we had to do is go regularly and get to know people and I think it would've worked out. And I was fine with feeding the homeless there.

So what do you think should be done now?

Well, I'm naïve, I'm not a policy-maker, I don't understand all the issues, but, gosh darn it, open the darn park back up, you know? This is crazy. It's crazy. And I think they should take the land where the Mormon church was and make it into a park. Wouldn't that be nice? You know, I mean because really, there is a problem with Circle Park in that it is surrounded by a street, and that will make anybody a little nervous. So, open it up, make it a homeless park, and then give us this park right over here and that would be fine. Probably realistically, I hope they give it to the school. I mean, I don't think the city has the money to purchase it right now.

What is the social life like in the community? Is it mostly house parties?

Inside house parties? Yeah, and I don't know that I would have too many parties. The parties I have where I invite people over, I mostly don't invite neighbors that you only

know just because they're your neighbors. They're usually friends of other people, or have little kids, or work at the university, or some other connection, you know. And there have been block parties on Ninth Street. Every year in October, they would have a block party that would be organized by the community.

What are those like?

Oh, they were nice. It's a little dark. They finally got lighting one year. I mean it was nice and you got to meet people. It wasn't the most wild, raucous party, but it was nice to know it was there. It would be potluck and everybody would come and you'd see neighbors and I'd see the neighbors I used to have on Franklin. So it was good. And I think it could've grown. I say "could've" because I suspect they're cutting all that stuff now. I suspect.

Because of the economy?

Yeah, because the city had a budget for neighborhood services where they would help the neighborhood organizations. I bet that's going to go.

Oh, that would be sad. What kinds of things would you want to see the neighborhood association doing now?

Well, yeah, I think the block parties are good. Anything to create social connections among people in a friendly way that fosters good feelings. I would like to see the whole neighborhood go historic, but I don't think there's [support for that]. You know, they were talking that it would be stepped-in. I don't know what's happened with that.

Yeah, we talked about the Westley neighborhood.

Yeah. Where's Westley? That's on the other side.

Yes. They had some opposition that was louder than the people who were for it.

They were very loud at the Planning Commission meeting.

Well, who [opposed it]? Why?

Same thing: We're going to have to paint our houses all the same color.

There's been no visible impact to this neighborhood over there, except that when they sell their houses, they can say it's in a historic district.

That's right. So, what changes did you see after it had become a historic district?

Any changes at all?

No. No. I mean, the neighborhood seems better. It seems like the houses are kept up a little better. You know, now you've got Jack LeVine who's very vintage Vegas, so you know, you can market historical [houses], and the houses that are advertised will say "historic district" and things like that. Those are the changes that I see.

OK. You talk about a lot of things that you like about the community. What do you not like about this community?

I think, for all the diversity, we don't have the opportunity to talk to each other much. Even [at] the block parties, you didn't see a lot of the Hispanic people that I know live in this neighborhood. You know, kids is one way that families get to know each other who [00:45:00] wouldn't normally talk to each other. Occasionally, you know, I or Todd Jones would take his kids over and hop the fence and go play in the schoolyard and you see other kids, you'd see, you know, Hispanic kids and stuff playing soccer, doing stuff, and that would've been a great opportunity to start playing together. But, you know, you have to hop the fence and break the law to get over there, so that's hard.

And that's the John S. Park [Elementary] School.

Yeah.

So they don't open the playground to the community.

That's an idea. They should do that. I mean the school would have to pay for maintenance, so I can understand why they wouldn't [open the playground to the public]. But that's what should happen. I know Saint Louis Park, the one down on Saint Louis, I hear people saying wonderful things about that park. I've only been down there a couple of times, but I know it's used and draws a lot of people from that part of the neighborhood, so that's good.

Now this neighborhood has a large Gay population, some artists, Hispanics, intellectuals. So there's no venue where all four or five, probably a group that I didn't name, [could] get together and interact?

Well, certainly the artists and the intellectuals and there's a group, it's mostly single people and people without kids, the Flamingo Club, they get together. I hate to categorize and class people this way but, you know, the Gay Community that's not also the artist community or the intellectual community, I mean I get together with the artists' group a lot for some reason. I find myself in places where that happens. Well, I mean there hasn't really been any political activism around Gay issues lately. And Hispanics who are not also part of these other communities, you know, working-class people, it's a class division as much as anything else, and that whole intellectual [community], it's not like we're moneyed class but it's an education class thing, and a security class thing, you know, with more secure jobs. There's just not an occasion to get together, unfortunately.

OK. What does this community mean to you?

It means everything. It's where I've grown up, where I'm going to get old, where I am getting old, you know. It's a place that's not too full of itself. The whole thing about Las Vegas is that it is never going to be all high-and-mighty and I'm holier than thou kind of thing, and that's what I like about it. People are open-minded. You know, that whole Libertarian thing, while I may not agree with a lot of it, in some ways it makes for a better community for an open-minded person than a religious, conservative, traditional [community] in the Midwest.

What do your parents think of it?

You know, they like it. They like coming out to gamble. My mom died ten years ago now, but she would come out and my dad would come out and they would gamble, and my dad's come out since my mom died, a couple of times. And you know, being in a small town, really, you know everybody and so he's like all impressed with all the people that I know, so it's kind of fun.

Well, I really appreciate this. This is the kind of information that we'd like to collect.

Oh, good. Well, I'm glad. I would love to see, you know, what all you're getting. At some point in my life, I'm sure I'm going to be digging into your archives, because this is great.

Yes, you will. You will see that. And we're planning for [researcher and neighborhood resident] Patrick [Jackson] to do a lot of analyses and all kinds of things with this material.

Good. How many interviews are you shooting for?

[00:50:00] About sixty-five. We have probably about twenty more to go. I really, really appreciate this.

Oh, no problem. Thanks.

[00:50:06] End of recorded interview.

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