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An Interview with Gregory S. and Jessica E. Brown

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

Recorded interviews, transcripts, bound copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through a grant from the City of Las Vegas Centennial Committee. Special Collections in Lied Library, home of the Oral History Research Center, provided a wide variety of administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

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 Gregory and Jessica Brown

March 1, 2009

Conducted by Claytee White

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Preface



Greg Brown arrived in Las Vegas in 1998 to take a position with the history department at UNLV. His future wife had lived here off and on as a child and relocated back to Las Vegas in 2000. In 2002 the couple purchased a home in John S. Park neighborhood. Living in John S. Park Neighborhood can be simultaneously frustrating and wonderful from their point of view.



They share thoughts and observations about their experiences on a range of topics, including: local politics and redevelopment, the importance of Mid-Century Modern architecture, the obsolete utility poles, neighborhood beautification, First Fridays, and safety efforts.

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Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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Jessica E. Brown _____
Signature of Narrator Date

Claytee D. White 3/1/2009
Signature of Interviewer Date

Interview with Gregory and Jessica Brown

March 1, 2009 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee White

This is Sunday, March 1st, 2009, and I'm in John S. Park. This is Claytee White and I am with Gregory Brown and Jessica Brown. So how are you doing today?

Gregory: Doing well.

Jessica: Very well. It's a beautiful day.

OK. And who else do we have here with us?

Jessica: This is Aaron Brown. He is four months today.

Oh, that's wonderful. So, we're going to get started, and I just want you to do this in any way that you'd like to do it. I'm going to ask you about your early life, and you can tell me about the family you grew up in, what your parents did for a living, where it was, if you worked as a teenager, those kinds of things. So you may start in any order that you like.

Gregory: Well, let's see. I was born February 3rd, 1968 in New York City. My parents were then living in Riverdale, in the Bronx. My parents were both native New Yorkers. Most of my family is native New Yorkers. They [my parents] moved six months later to Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and we lived there for six years, and then to Rockville, Maryland. My father went to work for the Food and Drug Administration [FDA] and for the National Institute of Health [NIH]. And so I grew up mostly in Rockville, Maryland, which is a suburb of Washington, D.C.

I went to college in Philadelphia, at the University of Pennsylvania, and to graduate school at Columbia [University], so I was back in New York. I taught as an

adjunct lecturer for two years at Hunter College of the City University of New York and I spent a year at George Mason University, in Fairfax, Virginia, back in the Washington area, as a postdoctoral research associate in an outfit within the History Department there called the Center for History and the Media. And then I came here to Las Vegas in 1998 to start a tenure-track job at UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas].

So what influenced you or what caused you to go into history?

I think primarily it was my undergraduate professors. I think I had originally started with the intention of doing political science as a major, and I had very good history teachers and I'm not sure exactly at what point I decided to switch but that became something I was very happy about. I got a lot more out of that. And then, went on to graduate school, not with a huge sense of what I was getting into, but it worked out well.

Wonderful. So Jessica, are you ready to share your early life?

I was born in Alliance, Ohio, a very small town with a very tiny but close-knit Italian community there. My mother is Italian. And I grew up in North Canton, Ohio. My parents divorced when I was seven, and my mother and I moved here in 1987, right before I turned ten. She was a draftsman in electrical engineering for the Hoover Company in North Canton, Ohio, and they moved the company and operations to Mexico, and we ended up out here with long-time family friends of my mother's [who] she actually grew up across the street from in Alliance. And the matriarch of the family is still living. She's ninety-four and she lives in Las Vegas. And she actually lived in this neighborhood at one time. [Laughing]

So we moved out here in 1987 and I kind of grew up going back and forth between Las Vegas and Ohio where my father lived. I finished high school and went to

college in Ohio, in Columbus, Ohio, a small liberal arts college called Capitol University. And then I moved back out here in 2000 for what I thought would be a very short period of time. I worked for a dot.com, but then just got successive jobs and I've been here ever since. I now work for the university [UNLV] but I've worked for the library district, for Mars Candy Company, doing all e-commerce or web development stuff, even though my undergraduate degree is in philosophy and psychology.

[Laughing] What a difference. It sounded as if you had not planned to live in Las Vegas again.

No.

Why not?

Well, I was really primarily looking for IT [information technology] opportunities, and I knew there wasn't very many, and then I was going to go to graduate school in some capacity, and I just kind of got sidetracked. [Laughing] So, yeah.

Great. Great. And what do you do at the university?

I'm the Web Portal Content Coordinator. I helped develop an Oracle portal for students that hasn't been rolled out to students yet.

This sounds like something from, what is the wizard's name, the little wizard?

Harry Potter. [Laughing] Yes, yes, yes.

Gregory: It's an entry to magical worlds.

OK, that's great. I like that. So what prompted you to apply at UNLV?

Gregory: Well, primarily it was the availability of a position in my field. But I also knew of UNLV from a member of the History Department who is no longer here, Larry Klein. My work then as now is in eighteenth century European cultural history and that

was the area Larry was very well established in and I had met him at a conference in I think 1994, and I knew his published work. I also knew from a friend who had interviewed for a job here but not gotten it, a year or two earlier, and he was very impressed with the institution, and so when the position was listed I applied, and when I had the opportunity to interview, had a pretty good feeling about it. In other words, I really thought of this as a very attractive job. And I guess one of the explanations for that is that I think the field of history has had period of waxing and waning and the mid-to-late-nineties was kind of a period of waning, that is to say, within the university the humanities are occupying less prominence within the humanities. History I think is occupying less prominence within history, European history, and then within European history, French history, which is my field. So the only trend that one had in one's sort of favor at that point was populations shifts to the Southwest, and so it was really the only region in the country where there were lots of new positions, and my position was a new position at UNLV, and in that sense, one of the things that made me very enthusiastic about it was how much it kind of resembled the sorts of positions that had been available a generation earlier at public universities in California or in other states where it was really a growth environment both physically—there were buildings going up everywhere, I got absolutely lost on my very first day because I had come to interview, and there was no construction going on in the library. The construction had started and I couldn't find my way back to the History Department and it was August when one shows up, so I remember nearly passing out from heat somewhere behind CBC [Classroom Building Complex], unable to really find my way back to Wright Hall. But in that sense that made

it a kind of paradigmatic example of the kind of position one was hoping for in graduate school in my field in the nineties and it made it a very attractive position.

Wonderful. So how did the two of you meet, Jessica?

[To Gregory] You want to tell the story?

Gregory: Sure. We met originally on a website, which was Salon, right?

Jessica: Yeah.

Gregory: Salon.com. This was sort of the early years of social networking software and I think there were like six people from Las Vegas signed up for it. And at the time, Jessica was not looking for someone to date. She was just looking for a friend. But, in part because she was then doing freelance work in web development, and we needed a web developer for the History Department website, we started spending some time together because she was hired to do that as an outside contractor. And that was really how we started spending time together.

Great. Well, I like that story.

And our first date was right up the street at a bar that's no longer here on Sahara [Avenue] and Las Vegas Boulevard called Honest John's.

Jessica: Greg was trying to be cool. [Laughter]

So was it the kind of place where he really hangs out?

No. In fact, he's not telling you the whole story. The first part of the date was an academic lecture.

[Laughter] **That's more like it. OK. I also like some of the things that go on at UNLV, that we can get to go to some of the lectures.**

So how did you decide to move into John S. Park?

Jessica: It was really Greg's [idea], because we had just started dating, so it was really Greg's decision.

Gregory: Well, when I moved here [to Las Vegas] in 1998, and I think this might've been distinct to the History Department but there was not a lot of emphasis given to the breadth of kind of communities. Basically people very much encouraged me to live in Green Valley.

That's right. Or Summerlin.

And I rented an apartment, knowing that I, if I were to settle here, was going to eventually look to buy a house but not right away. And so I rented an apartment and lived down there [in Green Valley] for about four years. But really from the very first year that I lived here in Las Vegas, I was attracted to this area. I had come from mostly urban environments. I had lived in New York, different parts of New York, for five out of seven years while I was in graduate school. I had lived in Paris [France] for two years. I had lived in Washington, D.C. when I worked at George Mason. And I lived in Philadelphia before that. So, even though I had grown up in a kind of classic fifties-era suburb, seventies-era actually, I really had wanted to live in a more denser urban area. And I knew some people who were living down here, mostly renting houses at that time, and started to spend some time in some of those houses, which were absolutely terrific. And I went with a friend, a colleague, [Maria] Raquel Casas, who bought a house in I think it was 1999, and I went kind of house-hunting with her a little bit and we saw some houses. She looked in this area. She ended up buying just a little bit to the east. But there was one particular house at Ninth [Street] and Ninth [Place]—there's an intersection where Ninth and Ninth cross—which was an absolutely gorgeous house. And at that time, because she

was like an assistant professor and I was just starting, she decided it was out of her price range. I think it was a hundred thirty-five thousand dollars. It was really a gorgeous house.

But anyway, so I had kind of really—by the time I was ready to shop to purchase a home, which was 2002, this was pretty much my first choice. I remember going to the real estate agent and saying this is [my first choice]. I wasn't sure because there were other factors. And I knew some people who were living down here already: Todd Jones from the Philosophy Department who lives over on Sixth Street. Barb Brents from Sociology who, I think, had lived for a while on Franklin [Avenue] and then has a house on Seventh [Street] now. So I knew some other people and I'd seen through the inside of some houses and so I came sort of looking that summer. And at that time the housing market was a market where things were sort of expensive and yet there was a decent amount of turnover of kind of houses that were nice [houses]. I wanted houses in good shape because I wasn't going to be able to really invest a lot of time, especially in the short term, in renovating. And so, that kind of presented itself and this house was there and it worked out really very, very well.

What does John S. Park mean to—I understand the location is good for the university. Does it have any of those hidden meanings that we have so many people from the university living here?

Yeah, I think so. I think so. I mean first of all, yeah, the proximity to the university really is significant. I spend every single day more time looking for parking on campus than I do getting to campus. But also I think that it does correspond for a lot of faculty to the kind of community they wanted to live in. It in some ways represents the demographics

of the university community better. It also, I think, has older housing stock. A lot of the houses, not all the houses but a lot of the houses, are custom-built houses, so people tend to feel like maybe there's something. It's a little more personalized. Also a lot of them have, although the lots are often larger than you'd find elsewhere, the houses are of varied size, so they offer—and especially academics tend to want a house with an extra room to use as a study, or place to store books, and in that sense I think it appealed to a lot of people, and it has—not university, I mean I think it would be a misrepresentation to see this as primarily a faculty area. And I think it's within the life of the community, not a fair representation of the community to say that it's primarily faculty-oriented. It's really not. It's really not. It just so happens that there's kind of a limited density of faculty from a couple of different disciplines and, I don't know that you necessarily find a greater degree of sociability among faculty who live in the area than among the citizens at large. In other words, I don't necessarily feel like I associate more with the faculty who live in this neighborhood than I do with other neighbors. But I think those neighbors tend to in many ways share those same desires they like the housing, they like the nature of the community. And it's not only the university that it's close to. It very central to a lot of things.

Oh, yes. One of the reasons that we wanted to look at this area, to do an oral history, is because it's on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only community in Las Vegas with such a designation right now. We have some others coming on line soon. But that was one of the reasons. Did you even know that before you started looking here?

That was kind of going on when I was looking. No, it wasn't really a factor in part because the house we live in is outside of the boundary. And I came to know this later. I was not involved in that effort. But the boundary was deliberately drawn pretty narrowly. That was in part because there was resistance from people who either misunderstood or understood and didn't like the idea. So one of the things that we down here [have], that is, south of Oakey [Boulevard] in—I always refer to this as the liberated zone because we don't have all those awful restrictions of a historic preservation district. In fact the zoning laws are such that there's not any really more restriction associated with the historic preservation district. But it is something that we've sought and it's now I'm told once again there's an effort to push that through, to get a historic designation for a portion of Southridge as well, which I think is very exciting and I hope we can pull that off.

The thing that is more characteristic to me is that it's the kind of community where people would want to do that or a significant majority of the community would want to do that. The fact that the housing stock is, a lot of it, over fifty years old and therefore qualifies, and that there are historically significant components to the architecture, is great.

But I don't think that I was particularly drawn to it as being a historic preservation area. On the other hand, the things that made it eligible for that were certainly attractive, and I really hope we're able to do that for Southridge.

One of the things that's characteristic of a lot of the older communities in Las Vegas is that the boundaries are not really well known except to the people who knew them originally. And so, we have seen a little bit more of that recently. There was a—the city called it a beautification project on Saint Louis Parkway [Avenue] just south of here,

and one of the very small but I think significant components of that when it was all done was they put in markers, saying, You are now entering Historic Southridge, and they've done that for all the little neighborhoods in this area, in the residential downtown. And I think that really matters. It gives people a sense that this is more than just an area you drive through or some area that can't otherwise be described. It gives it an identity and I think that that makes it a very attractive place.

Well, I'm very glad that they put the markers in because the community will start identifying and it's easier then to get your designations of historic [places].

And the other thing that's very important about that, and this is something that we have been, Jessica and I, very involved in since we've been here, is that because of two things: [first] the fact that the older urban planning of Las Vegas was much denser. Things were built much more closely together, so that we're very close to Sahara, we're very close to Las Vegas Boulevard, we're very close to Charleston [Boulevard], all of which has been an area that the city has tried to encourage economic redevelopment. But it's also, from the standpoint of urban planning, really complicated because there's lots of little parcels, the zoning designations, the land use designations don't always correspond. Basically, the actual history of the use of the land, whether it's for commercial, for service commercial, for residential, has not always corresponded to the plan. And conversely, the plan hasn't always been referred to in making land use decisions. And, emphasizing the residential character of this neighborhood, through things like the signposts, through a historic designation, I think is very [important]. Even though there's not a legal significance to that, it's very significant and I think being able to make the point that this is a

fundamentally residential neighborhood, rather than—another way of viewing this is that this is a residential area that's merely a kind of way station to commercial development.

One very good example, just back over here, just to the south of us on Saint Louis, is the clubhouse of the Mesquite Club. This women's social club that was founded I believe in 1913 and they've been in that site since I believe 1960. Saint Louis at that time was first being built. They were the original owners of that land. There's a lot of civic uses. There's churches on there primarily. But their plot of land was originally designated for residential. And they bought it and they built their clubhouse and they've been there ever since. There have been a few times when there's been some tension with neighbors, having to do with primarily evening uses of the property. But, they only recently went to get the general plan and the land use map revised, amended, to reflect the fact that they're not a residential use of that land. It's never been a residential use but it's been on the books as intended for residential use.

Now that's an example of the opposite of what we're mostly worried about. What we're mostly worried about is the opposite, where you've got land that has been used, or designated for use, as residential, along, say, Sixth Street between Saint Louis and Sahara, which has not always been intended [for residential use]. It was originally intended to be a transitional area between the commercial on Sahara and the residential or the service and civic, that is the churches primarily, on Saint Louis. So it was originally designated for commercial, but it's been designated for residential since at least the early 1970s. A lot of that land still has never been built on. It's still vacant land. But the point is, the other side of the street has been single-family residential since the sixties or seventies. I looked this up. It was about 1970. But because the original map had this

designated as commercial, there are times when property owners there or outside investors or, for that matter, the city has said, look, this is really intended for commercial use, when of course it's a residential street. It's been a residential street for forty years. And I think that kind of anomaly is very characteristic of this area because so much of it predates the real significant efforts at land use planning, which didn't start until the 1950s, and didn't really come to any kind of fruition till the 1960s in the City of Las Vegas.

And then secondly, the close proximity, so that when you do try and either change something, or make a different use even within the same zoning designation, mostly I'm talking about building vertically, it has tremendous impact on residential properties that are immediately adjacent.

What would be the worst nightmare for that kind of property?

Well, the worst nightmare is expressed by the property owner on Sahara, whose business has been shuttered for at least five years since we've lived here. He's done absolutely nothing to develop his property. He's basically holding out, thinking somebody he's going to be a rich guy because he owns property in a commercial district. His vision is, this whole area should be blighted, and declared for a single sort of commercial redevelopment, right? It should be basically just treated as virgin land and sold off to some developer. That's the nightmare. It will never happen because it's absolutely impossible.

The bigger worry is that in addition to the other factors that I just mentioned, the gaming overlay district comes east from Las Vegas Boulevard, I think it's fifteen hundred feet, but Las Vegas Boulevard comes at an angle. It goes in a northeasterly direction, so it

becomes closer and closer to the residential part of our neighborhood, as you move from Sahara up towards Charleston, to the point that up near Charleston, the properties on Las Vegas Boulevard back directly adjacently to residential homes on Fifth Place. That puts them in the gaming overlay district. When proposals like REI Neon or somebody gets the idea that we should really build a big Las Vegas Strip style casino property here, that would really be a more feasible thing. In other words, nobody's going to really take the input. But there is going to be an occasion I think to really worry about that.

Was there ever a proposal of such a structure?

Well, there had been proposals of very significant structures that would directly abut. I mean nothing quite that big but the fear is that what had been proposed for Charleston and Main [Street] as REI Neon will actually be proposed for the area either just north of the Stratosphere [Hotel and Casino] or, even more worrisome for us, on our side of the boulevard. There are real estate speculators who have been trying to get agreements with property owners—these are single-family homeowners—to sign and say, I will give you right of first refusal to buy my property, so that they could then try and put together an assemblage. As the city always says when we raise these concerns, anybody can do anything. Just the fact that they're out there getting people to sign doesn't mean [anything]. But the big worry for us is, let's presume that that's never going to happen, at least not on our side of Las Vegas Boulevard. They're not going to convert single-family residential into a big casino. The worry is when people sign these things, they then think, I'm going to be selling this house within a year, for a lot more than I'd be selling it otherwise. I therefore am not going to invest in its upkeep, I'm not going to invest social capital in its neighborhood, I'm not going to see this as a residential neighborhood in the

future. And that's why, to return to the original point, things like a historic designation or signposting, anything that communicates the reality that this has been and will be a residential neighborhood, which is attractive precisely because it is close to commercial areas. We want to be able to walk to Marie Callendar's on Sahara or other places. That makes it attractive, but that does not mean that it's going to not be single-family residential. But it's got to be clear to everybody, including the city, including office and business development, so that, when developers come in or when homeowners come in, and buy a house, they say, OK, this is a house that I'm going to invest the kinds of things in terms of both upkeep of the house, the social capital, actually living in there and getting to know your neighbors, and the city is going to make its planning decisions presuming that this is a neighborhood, primarily residential.

So people like you who live in here, what kind of activities have you been involved in to make sure that this happens?

Well, I think the primary vehicle for that has been the neighborhood association. The history of the neighborhood association really predates my living here, so a little bit of what I will say is not experiences that I had firsthand. But the association was formed—there were two conditions really in the late 1990s. One was that the city councilman for this ward, Gary Reese, wanted, along with other city council representatives in other wards, to encourage the formation of neighborhood associations as a way to kind of make city government more accessible to citizens and give citizens a vehicle to get their concerns articulated at City Hall.

So that was one condition that made it possible. The other was the need to do it because of concerns about what the Stratosphere was proposing, this by now rather

famous proposal to build a rollercoaster that would've gone over the residential neighborhood. And this was a really galvanizing moment in the history of the neighborhood, which had had its economic ups and downs.

They were going to build a rollercoaster? Now this is the first time I've heard this one.

OK, now, see, this is really a significant thing and this is where some other people who were living here and actively involved then really could give you greater detail. Again, I moved in in the fall of 2002 when that story was really coming to its end. But it had begun in '98 or '99, maybe later even. When the whole thing started, it [the Stratosphere] was still owned by [Bob] Stupak but it was sold to, I believe, Carl Icahn, the investor, during this attempt to get the entitlement to build a rollercoaster that was going to go from the top of the Stratosphere across Las Vegas Boulevard and would therefore go over the residential neighborhood. And the neighborhood association, which I think had been formed by this realtor who's very active here, Jack LeVine, became a vehicle to try and organize opposition to it. There were a couple of people, an attorney who still lives here, John Delakonakis, who lives on Barbara Way. Or is it on Beverly? And Ben Contine, who still owns his house. He and his wife now live up in Carson City. But they were among those who really did a lot of organizing, along with Jack, along with I think Pam Hartley, and basically convinced the Planning Commission and the City Council not to grant the entitlement. The owners, first Stupak and then Icahn, wanted to appeal that and appealed it in court. They tried to sue the city for saying that the procedure had violated I guess their Eleventh Amendment rights, or the takings clause, I'm not sure what the claim was. But they lost and that was a big, galvanizing moment, both for the

neighborhood and I think for the city. It was the first of what had become a kind of series of examples of community activism, really making sure that the city is responsive. And since then there have been any number of ill-conceived projects which have been either modified [or rejected].

Now one of the things that it did was it occasioned the neighborhood to draw up a neighborhood plan, an actual written document, which was done between 2000 and 2002, so it was just about complete when I moved here, which involved both sort of surveying the neighborhood, demographic information, information about living there, things like this, but also identifying what were the institutionalized, that is, collectively decided upon objectives of the residents with respect to development in the area.

Those were, first and foremost, to resist commercial encroachment, especially along some of these primary and secondary thoroughfares: Sixth Street, Saint Louis. There are property owners who own houses on these areas which would like to convert, say, Saint Louis or Sixth, into what's happened on Maryland Parkway or Eastern [Avenue], where they took residential houses, converted them to businesses, but didn't even really do it [properly]. See, when this happened north of Charleston, the city has enforced [and] they basically kept in place the sort of lot line designations and landscaping requirements that were characteristic for residential, so that when you go up to, say, north of Charleston and go to, say, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth Street, the houses are set back and you don't have that on Maryland Parkway. They've paved over the whole front yard, turned it into parking, put signs up. It looks atrocious. It is an ongoing code violation that basically there's just not the wherewithal to stop.

So that was the first goal, to resist commercial encroachment on Saint Louis, on Sixth, on some of these streets that were not designated for commercial, and then secondly, to enforce the element of the city's municipal ordinances that imposes height limits on buildings when they abut single-family homes. It's a three-to-one ratio, that is, there has to be three times the distance from the house as the height of the building. And that's the one that we often have disputes with when developers propose projects, because a lot of times out-of-state developers, when they buy land, they don't realize how close it is to the house, and they say, oh, well, I'm going to build this twenty-five-story high-rise. Now, this is all in the current environment, not what people are proposing. Nineties, early 2000s, everybody wanted the luxury high-rise condos. And very frequently they'd come in with no conception that—it's Jessica's theory but I think it's absolutely right—that a lot of the conflicts—and they're not often conflicts—we often try and simply say, look, if you move it in this direction we want to encourage development too in some of these empty plots or some commercial areas, so we try and simply guide them to say, look, if you read our neighborhood plan, if you read the city ordinance—but they often frequently don't know what they've bought. Our theory is they got sold a bill of goods at the height of the real estate speculation; they bought a property, they were told this is perfect for building a big luxury high-rise, you're going to be real close to the Las Vegas Strip. They often think they're in a gaming enterprise or adjacent to it. They think it'll be an easy process to get that expanded. These conversations you have are often alarming and you realize that, in some ways, what the city has a shortage of is really good real estate and land use attorneys to tell them this is what the law is. They often presume, whether it's because it's Las Vegas or whether it works this way in other

cities or in other wards of Las Vegas, they basically presume they can rewrite the map and the code to suit their project.

And probably at one time in our history they probably could have.

I think that's exactly right, and I really do think that that's why one of the preconditions was the interest that Gary Reese has taken in all the neighborhoods in his ward, but specifically in this one, and the neighborhood's response to that invitation, which was to really take seriously our opportunities and responsibilities in terms of trying to do that. Now, not everybody, not every office in City Hall is as responsive, not every office shares that vision, so there are often tensions between Neighborhood Services and Business Development, or between Planning, to say whether some of these things should go before.

But basically rather than think about sort of the nightmare scenario, what we like to think about is the really positive things that could be done with some forethought and some collective effort by the city and developers to say, look, you can do things here that really fit well and would greatly enhance this neighborhood, and really buildable projects. If they had come in years ago when the money was available and said, we're going to build a six-story mixed-use thing, they would have them up. They'd be filled. They'd probably be prosperous. Instead, they said, we're going to build a twenty-five-story luxury condo, and they never got close to it.

So that's the thing we've spent a lot of time on, and we hope that we won't be in the future.

Any comments about your community involvement? Any additional comments?

Jessica: Just that it has taken a tremendous amount of time. We have to have meetings with the developers. Before that, we have to have meetings with the developers' lobbyists or lawyers. And we have to go to City Hall and we have to sit all night waiting for our number to be called, basically, when they want to change zoning or what have you. So, it's just taken up a lot of our time. One of the nice things, though, with all of these meetings, is we've really gotten to know a lot of our neighbors, and there's been a lot of camaraderie.

Gregory: And those two are not [related]. We haven't gotten to know our neighbors simply because we decided that we wanted to go to Planning Commission meetings. I think it was the opposite that we got to know neighbors both socially as well as through other efforts working within our community that I think helped us conceive that this that this could be done, in other words, that our point of view would be heard, at least so long as there are sympathetic ears on the City Council and the Planning Commission, and also that people really would respond and would want to participate. We helped organize some meetings; people would turn out. People would really take an interest. They don't always necessarily agree, which is a good thing, but people do have strongly-held views and they don't always know what's being proposed, they don't always know how to communicate their concerns. And there were structures in place that other people had started before we lived here. But we've been pretty involved in canvassing this neighborhood for one purpose or another, so many times, that I think when it did come time to try and do a few of these where we really felt like, there's just going to be a fight here, these people don't want to talk to us, we've always felt confident about our ability,

even though we don't have any kind of organized means at our disposal, other than phone trees, email, and knocking on doors, to get in touch with people.

John S. Park, I think they've actually done a better job of that. I mean there are, specifically within John S. Park as opposed to Southridge, actually fewer households because they don't have apartments, they don't have as many rental properties, which are more people per property. And this is the thing that I think is a part of the neighborhood's history that is different in Southridge compared to, say, John S. Park or what's now known as West Huntridge. I think it used to be West Circle Park. They changed their name. And that is that because we have a lot of rentals, and there is I think a much higher proportion of first-generation Latin American immigrants, non-English speakers, and that does make communication within your neighborhood harder. There's a challenge there. And it's something that, frankly, we have seen could be exploited by somebody who wants to generate the perception of, say, support for a project by saying, oh, look, we've got all these signatures of all of these people. And that's a big difference I think between Southridge [and other neighborhoods].

Even just last night I had a conversation with a guy who's very active in West Huntridge, what used to be West Circle Park neighborhood, about abandoned houses, houses that have been abandoned by foreclosure. We've got a big problem with that. There are some houses around here. And he said, I didn't know that was a problem. We don't have that in our couple of blocks. And I think that shows you that there are significant variations, north and south of Oakey, or even east to west in the neighborhood if you go further east you go going towards Maryland Parkway in a lot of blocks.

Jessica: We did have a lot of success when we went up against a twenty-five-story proposed development, right down the street here on Sixth, right literally across the street from one-story homes. And even though the developer had knocked on doors and had gotten renters to sort of sign the petition, we were able to sort of show the Planning Commission that these are not necessarily long-time residents, and even though the developer had actually hired former Senator [Richard] Bryan to represent them, we were able to sort of make our case successfully. Yeah.

Did you know that Richard Bryan had grown up in the neighborhood?

Gregory: We didn't then, no. But, see, here's the thing, they hired him as an attorney. They didn't hire him because [they knew he was from the neighborhood]. And what he did, in some ways this illustrates I think the ways in which having a few key people [involved], I mean this is where things like elections really matter. When he calls up an elected official and says, Look, I'm representing this company.

And they say, what, Senator? The neighbors don't want it.

And he says, Oh, that's not true. I can give you all the signatures that they collected.

And the elected official says, what? But I've talked to Pam Hartley or [John] Delakonakis and they can tell me who's who in the neighborhood.

And I think that is something that's been a very significant part of the recent history I think probably of all of Ward 3 but especially of this neighborhood. I mean that history that we just described would be very, very different if there was not the same concern to establish ties to the neighborhood, and of course the neighborhood activism. But I think it's an example of how, at the very local level, city government can really be

responsive. But it's not by any means something that I think is ever more than a very tenuous hold on the status quo. We've had no success in trying to propose things that we think would, down the line, be better solutions. For instance, in John S. Park they tried to get the city to pass a height ordinance for just a very small portion of Las Vegas Boulevard, from Oakey up to Charleston, because that's really where you've got properties that abut directly on single-family homes, and that went nowhere. We have tried, at least preliminarily, to suggest to the city it's really time to rezone Sixth Street. That's all empty land. It should be developed. It should be developed in ways that enhance the neighborhood, that are part of the city's Redevelopment Authority goals, and the problem, the reason they've never had success is because developers come in and they misunderstand what they're getting, and that's in part because the maps are out of date.

OK. We were talking about some of the political figures in the area. And I probably shouldn't even say this on tape but I will. When we first started this oral history project, we did a faux pas. We didn't talk to Gary Reese. And he is still not happy with us. Because we never thought politically. We just thought about [the project] historically. How can we get Gary Reese on our side with this little oral history project?

Well, I mean I think one of the things, and I really do think this is true, it sounds a little bit hokey but that illustrates the extent to which I tend to think of Councilman Reese as somebody who doesn't see himself as inherently a political figure, and I think that's why he would be disappointed. In other words, you might say, look, we're not interested in politics, but he really sees himself as very much part of the fabric of the neighborhood. I

mean he doesn't live right here, he lives a couple of miles away, but he comes to neighborhood association meetings and he takes a great interest. And I think in that sense, the answer to the question probably is the same thing that developers should do before they go see him, which is, talk to neighbors and really communicate to him that this is a project that has been working with residents in the neighborhood. And I guess at this moment in the city's history, between here and 2011, almost nothing having to do with anything in the city is going to be non-political because there are elections coming up and all of these offices are going to be open. But I mean I think that that's honestly it, that if you go to him and say, look, we've spoken to all of these people, this is really something that we are trying to do from within the neighborhood, so to speak.

We have to find a way to apologize. We haven't found it yet.

I mean this is in some ways characteristic. This is a problem we always have at the university, that people don't tend to see us sympathetically, and we presume they will. There may be things there. Who knows? I mean I don't know anything about the history of, say, Shadow Lane, which is in his ward. Well, it's now in his ward. It wasn't when they built it. But there may be reasons why he is unhappy with the university. I don't know. But I would think that that's really it and it's the same point we make sometimes to developers. Sometimes they have good projects and there's just one small concern. We [should] say, let's work together when we go to the city councilman. He's going to be very happy to support it if he sees everybody working together. And I think that that is probably the case here.

We didn't do our homework.

A few minutes ago you were talking about diversity in the community, and I want to talk a little bit more about diversity. One of the reasons that we wanted to do this project is because this is probably one of the most diverse communities in the city. And we didn't do just John S. Park; we said John S. Park Neighborhood. And we did that because we knew we would be going outside of that small confined area. Who do you see in the neighborhood now? What do those personalities do for this kind of neighborhood? Just any comments you have on that kind of diversity that you're having now.

Jessica: Well, we participated in the Democratic caucus this past year. Huge turnout, right? And we had many, many Spanish-only speakers participate. We had a Filipino family who was intent on voting for Hillary Clinton because her husband [President Bill Clinton] appointed the first Filipino admiral.

Gregory: Thai. There are some non-English-speaking Thai families or Vietnamese families.

Jessica: And there's a large gay and lesbian community here. So it was just really interesting to see everyone in the same room, trying to hash out politics. We had labor organizers and leaders and their organizees. Is that a word? [Laughing] Arguing about [issues]. It was very interesting.

Gregory: But I think that's a good example of a case where we did have a structure in place. I mean people knew what the Democratic Party was, even if they hadn't had association with it. And I think for like the neighborhood association, we have not done as good a job in terms of getting sort of the diversity of the neighborhood reflected in who comes to the meetings and how we respond.

I think the biggest divide is really a language divide, right? I don't know. I mean in 2000 when they did this, they had reasonably accurate demographic data. Presumably we'll get maybe some census data in a year or two, about like what proportion of the population in this area is non-English-speaking. But I think that that's something that the city, every aspect of our public lives in Las Vegas has to deal with the schools so it would be surprising if the neighborhood didn't have problems dealing with it.

And the fact that we are not really a structure. I mean that there's not a budget, there's no staff, there's occasionally association meetings, so that there's not a lot of support and place to do these sort of things. And it becomes a problem when there are disputes that have to be resolved.

But I think, like I said, what worries me most is that it becomes a problem when somebody wants to be able to speak for the neighborhood who doesn't live here and they can go in and sort of exploit that.

I think it also has to do a lot with the extent to which I think the proportion of houses that are occupied by their owners, to some extent correlates to the extent of that as a challenge. In other words, the more rental properties, the more likely you've got people who are short-term, who are subletting rooms within a house, or who are simply not viewing this as a community or part of a neighborhood. It's simply a place that they rented a room and are going to park a lot of cars in the driveway and sort of come in and out of.

I think that the other point, though, unrelated but equally important, that just talking about sort of racial and ethnic diversity in the neighborhood, is much greater than just Latino and white. It's not only even African-American. There are families of first-

generation African immigrants who live over in the apartments, I think having to do with social service agencies that help them find housing. There's all kinds of stuff, and in that sense, probably not that different from Las Vegas as a whole. I mean I've always maintained when we have out-of-state visitors, when we have job candidates, I always emphasize that it might look like Phoenix, in terms of like the housing and settlement patterns, but it's not in terms of the ethnic and racial composition of the population.

But I do think what we don't have a lot of are either civic or business institutions that cater to the broad diversity of the community, right? That you have primarily supermarkets that cater to the Hispanic population. I mean you don't really have supermarkets that don't, but you've got, I think, a lack of institutions that really generate that kind of interaction.

I don't think in the daily life we see a great deal of tension. I mean occasionally there's a problem that characteristic of any neighborhood. But I do worry that that would really become more and more of a problem, because a lot of the problems that we've got, we've got to work together on. A very small problem that we've got right now, because it's this time of year, is ragweed, right? Empty houses aren't being maintained, and then the seeds spread to everybody's yards. But we need to be able to some extent to work together, whatever, whether it's reporting empty houses to the city or people keeping their vegetation within what the code allows. And when there aren't either venues for or vocabularies for dialogue, it becomes a real challenge. But that being said, it is without a doubt, I think, a much more diverse part of Las Vegas than you see elsewhere, and even more so, very self-consciously diverse.

Yeah, and I think, it's so compact in this small area. I think we see it more than some parts of the city. So, yeah.

I think also, I don't know very much about this part of the history, but it strikes me as a really interesting part of the history of the residential downtown, that not all Spanish-speaking or Latino families are recent immigrants. Not all of them are renters. There are households that I'd really like to know more about that are part of a kind of Latino bourgeoisie that's been here for a long time, maybe even original owners, that are involved in presumably gaming or other businesses; long-standing industries. And I think that that part of the story is one that I actually always thought [was interesting], especially as we've done some of these civic or political things where we were going door-to-door and you're talking to some of these families. It'd be really interesting to know more about that part of the community.

And then of course the other part of the diversity that is on the wane, but which is a very significant part of the history of the neighborhood, which is the LDS [Latter-day Saints, or Mormons] community. A lot of the houses were originally owned by all of these families. I don't really know much about that either, but I think that that would probably be part of what you'd want to be able to know more about to talk about the full diversity of the community.

And that's one of the things that we are attempting to do with this project. I told you that the project was started by Deborah Boehm and Patrick Jackson. They're both Spanish-speakers. And they will be coming down to interview some of the families where there's a problem with communication. So they'll be doing some of that interviewing as well as some of the Spanish families, some of the Hispanic families,

some of the Mexican-American families, they will be doing some of that interviewing also. And because they're going to listen to this tape first, they can get some of your ideas before doing some of those interviews.

There are some people to speak to. I'd have to look up [their names]. There's a couple, a young couple that lived on Eleventh Street, and they were pretty active participants in neighborhood meetings on a lot of things. They were very concerned about like sort of the safety of their kids walking up Eleventh to go to the school. It's less of a problem now but the parking lot for Bishop Gorman High School was across Maryland Parkway behind Eleventh Street, and so the kids driving to school would drive in unsafe ways on Eleventh Street. I'll try and find out the name, because that would be a really interesting family to speak with.

On the other side of the ledger, sort of the LDS side, I would think somebody like Jack Schofield would probably be able to tell you a lot about that history because he's been really at the heart of it. That family, the Schofield family, there's numerous offshoots of it that live in the neighborhood.

We were talking about political [leanings]. How do you see this neighborhood? You just talked about the Democratic caucus. Do you see this as well diverse politically?

Jessica: I think it's a Democratic stronghold. I mean there are Republicans here.

Gregory: Yeah it's a Democratic heartland. Well, I mean there are more Democratic parts of Las Vegas just in demographic terms. In the 2004 general election, the five precincts that comprise what we might think of as sort of the larger John S. Park Neighborhood went something like sixty-forty. It's not overwhelmingly [Democratic]. I don't know; I haven't looked at what it was for 2008. In other years, in some of the off

years, it's about that, between 60 and 70 percent Democratic performance. What's really sort of the story of political participation in this area though is that it's a lower-performing area. Fewer people come to vote. I mean that's what got Jessica and I really interested back when we first moved here in say 2004, was the sense, literally, looking at the map and saying, wow, this is a pretty heavily Democratic area.

More importantly, it's an area that, getting aside from partisan politics or presidential elections, is under served, right? We have fewer per capita parks. We have fewer per capita schools. We have other things that really I think would be better served if more people participated. And we felt that if we could get our participation higher, by participating in things that would help register people to vote and get them to vote, if we could get our participation up into 70 or 80 percent, not only would it become, we felt, a neighborhood whose votes would better reflect the point of view of most of the people. In that sense, yeah, I think that that would be [beneficial], but also would get more attention especially at the local, city and county levels. So it's sort of a Democratic heartland but, like much of central and east Las Vegas, until relatively recently, not very well tilled, that is to say, there was not a lot of organization to get people to participate, and I think that that's really one of the efforts that we really invested a lot of time in. That was in 2006 when our colleague and friend Dina Titus ran for governor, and we looked at that really carefully. And there were well more, four times the number of votes that were needed for her to win, that stayed on the sidelines in just our portion of the First Congressional District.

And that's really where the history of this state could and will be different, if those people will participate in 2010, for instance, the way that they did in 2008. And I

think our neighborhood is really kind of at the heart of that. Now, there are more localized examples we can point to where there are trends that suggest that that is the direction we're going, the 2006 primary. There was much higher participation than had been the case in previous primaries. It was a competitive primary for what was then an open Assembly seat. It wasn't a huge number, people who voted, but it was more than anybody thought was going to be the case, and that was determinative of the outcome of the primary. If you speak with Assemblyman [unclear name here] he can tell you more about that. And then the number of people who registered, he didn't have competition in the most recent election, but the number of people who registered then within the Ninth Assembly District and who participated, I mean the number of people he had to send flyers to had increased by ten thousand. I forgot exactly what the number of registrants was but it was only in the twenty thousands.

Jessica: I have an interesting anecdote about the 2006 day of the election. We knocked on the door of one of the apartments, back over near Rexford [Drive]. It was a Spanish-speaking family and I couldn't communicate well with the woman. But she saw that I was trying to get people to vote, and she went and got her eighteen-or-nineteen-year-old son. And there was some discussion between the mother and the son and reluctance on the son's part, but then I spoke with him and I said, I can drive you over to the polling place. And he said, OK. And once we got there, he had actually saved the number on his voter registration form. The reason I know this is because he got it out after the people at the [polling place], people who look for your registration, whatever, had been looking and looking for ten, going on fifteen minutes. And she said, well, it just didn't sound like a Spanish name that he had. And it was very odd. His name was Omar,

but she said, well, it didn't sound right. I said, well, OK, whatever. Finally he got in. He got into a booth. There was a man there who spoke Spanish who helped him vote. And I drove him back home and he was quite happy. It took him a while and it was his first time voting, so I think he wanted to be very particular and very precise. And I came back later, and the same election judges threw me out. They threw me out. I was bringing more people from the apartments, lower-income. And he said, I know who you're with. You're with Dina Titus. And I can see through your shirt that your shirt says Dina Titus. Because you can't have campaign [materials at the polls]. And I closed my shirt, tried to put on as many layers as I could to sort of [conceal the shirt]. And he threw me out, and he said, you're not allowed back here. So that was really interesting. But I was so happy that this young man had been able to vote. I mean how many people save their registration number? So that was cool.

Wow. That's right. But I do have my campaign booklet and the pencil that I used to tap the thing and my "I Voted" [sticker], I still have all of that for [Barack] Obama.

So I understand.

With the civic activities that you've been involved with, did it help promote more social activity? It sounds like it did. Can you give some concrete examples?

Gregory: Sure. Sure. Yeah.

Jessica: The Flamingo Club.

Gregory: The Flamingo Club. Sure.

Oh, wonderful! Tell me.

All right, well, here's something else you might want to look into. (I'm sure she'll be very eager to participate.) One of our UNLV colleagues, Heidi Swank, who is in

Anthropology, she and her husband Scott moved into the neighborhood within the last two years, didn't they? About two years ago, I think. So she organized what's intended to be a kind of rotating once-a-month cocktail party known as the Flamingo Club.

Jessica: The house that participates that month has a pink flamingo in their yard.

Oh, wonderful! I love it! [Laughing]

Gregory: And that's a nice thing.

Jessica: It's supposed to be a celebration of Mid-Century Modern homes.

Gregory: Yeah, I mean she has her own esthetic kind of agenda. The idea is supposed to be that, that people think, oh, see, sort of Mid-century Modern homes. Not everybody who hosts it necessarily [has that idea].

Jessica: Yeah. But there's been some great examples of Mid-Century Modern.

Gregory: The ultimate, the classic was last night at Steve Evans's house. I mean he doesn't technically live in John S. Park either. Steve Evans who's the Planning Commissioner, that represents this ward, and his house is absolutely unbelievable. And he knows a tremendous amount about the neighborhood and especially sort of the esthetic of the housing. But he basically gives an architectural and historical tour of his home. It's unbelievable. So that was great.

So that's a nice thing. We had for a while some parties that grew. I mean that was not only people from the neighborhood. But I think that, yeah, I mean you get to know people and then they sort of come over. I guess there are other people who might have more examples of sort of spontaneous sociability where outside of our little block, it has to do in part with the fact that we have these like five or six houses that all are on this one little block. We socialize with a lot of other people but not necessarily spontaneously.

We'll make plans. Well, I don't know. We're out a lot also because we walk the dog, so we stop in on people, sort of spontaneously.

I love that. It sounds like a small town. I love that.

But, yeah, a small town with its occasional loose pit bull. [Laughter]

Jessica: Small towns have those problems, too.

Gregory: But I think is yes, there absolutely are and it's terrific but it's also not, I think, as well developed. It's hard to get people to [participate]. They do a block party, I think it's once a year, it might be twice a year, on Ninth. That's in actual John S. Park.

Jessica: I think the Flamingo Club has been a tremendous success. Just a few days before the baby was born, we went to a house a young woman had purchased, "young" meaning in her twenties. And she had made the interior straight out of *Mad Men*. I don't know if you've seen that; it's an AMC [television] show. It takes place between 1960, and the second season was 1962. So it looked like a set from *Mad Men*. It was very Mid-Century Modern, inside and out. And she even dressed as though she was in the early 1960s. And so it was fun. It was a lot of fun.

And Jack LeVine and Pam Hartley are sort of at the heart of this Mid-Century Modern restoration, right? There are two schools of thought in the neighborhood when it comes to architecture and the homes. One is, you remodel, right? You make the house look like one that would be in Summerlin or what have you, or in Green Valley. And the other is to restore the Mid-Century Modern homes. We're sort of a hybrid. We have a very strange home in a lot of ways.

Gregory: Well, our house is not a Mid-Mod. That's the difference.

Jessica: It was built in 1955 but it's not a Mid-Century Modern home, and the people who lived here before us were trying to recreate a Victorian home in Kansas. A Kansas Victorian. [Laughter] So we have some interesting architectural features in this house.

Gregory: That we could argue about on tape for posterity.

Jessica: About whether or not we should tear down. So.

Culturally, we sort of associate this neighborhood with First Fridays. Do you see that connection, how do you see it, and do you see other kind of cultural things happening?

Well, see, the thing is there are lots of people who live in the neighborhood who participate and who organize First Fridays. We stopped going to First Friday several years ago because it kind of got very sort of out of control. There are lots of teenagers. We love having the Arts District around and we'll often go to some of the restaurants in and near the Arts District, not necessarily on First Fridays. We go and we have friends who have exhibits and things there.

Gregory: Yeah. I mean we did go more regularly when it was newer because it was more accessible. I mean literally we could walk over and whatever. I mean it's harder now. Parking has become this huge issue. I mean I think it's tremendous for the businesses over there and all that, but I guess the upshot of it is that it's not really primarily people from the neighborhood. I mean it's people from all over the valley and people from out of town and that's terrific and it's great to get people downtown. But I guess we don't necessarily think of [it]. We often forget that it's First Friday, until we

notice that there's a lot more traffic. I'm trying to think of like a counter-example of things culturally that do kind of draw people from the neighborhood.

Jessica: At the [Christ Church] Episcopal Church, they have the [lobster dinners]. I've always wanted to go to their lobster dinner.

Gregory: Yeah, that's true, we've never done that. They have a lobster dinner once, I don't know how often.

Jessica: Saint Anne [Catholic Church] has a fair once in a while. There's the Saint Anne's also on Maryland Parkway. But I've always wanted to go to that lobster fair and we've never made it.

Gregory: Yeah, we need to do that sometime soon.

Yes. What kind of changes? I mean you haven't been here that long but have you seen any significant changes in the community since you've been here?

Jessica: When we first moved here, there were several homes in decline. And that changed. Just right here on the corner, Jane's home, that family moved out and Jane moved in and she sort of fixed up the place.

Gregory: I was just out there. At Tenth [Street] and is it Hassett [Avenue], that house that had the dirt lot and it was a rental property for years and there were families going through there?

Jessica: Yeah. And the dogs in the back yard. I always felt sorry for [them].

Gregory: No, it's a different house. It's across the street from there. It's across the street from the filthy house. Anyway, the point is, they just re-landscaped the whole thing. It's been a dirt lot and now if you looked at it [it's totally different]. So, I think that there's constant renewal of homes. There are houses that have not held up very well in

the six years that we've been here, but by and large, you definitely see a lot more houses that have been markedly improved.

Jessica: And shortly after we moved into this house, Kathleen Brooks, the executive director of Safe Nest, they moved in and they sort of remodeled the entire house. It looks fantastic inside. She moved right across the street because her parents lived right next door and now it's just her father [Richard Brooks]. But her mother [Sheilagh Brooks] was the first distinguished professor at UNLV. She recently passed away, and her husband lives there. He was also a professor at UNLV.

Michael Cornthwaite remodeled his house on the corner here, didn't he? The landscaping was really nice and then he [let it go]. But he made some improvements on the inside.

Gregory: There are some other houses. I think the general tenancy has been very much improved. But that's a big, big worry, especially right now, just to know how these houses are going vacant. And again it's a certain number of houses vacant but that's probably been the case since we've lived here. But then, the theory is that it will inhibit other people from investing time and effort and money in their own homes, or especially, people who are acquiring properties because now, properties are available so cheaply because all the bank-owned [properties], they basically just unload them, and it's quite terrible because it pulls down property values but it also means that they're going to be selling them to people whose basic theory is, I'm going to buy this and hold it until some other time. And they buy them so cheaply, they aren't even interested in keeping them up as rental properties. So that's the worry, but the general trend has been, I think, very much towards improvement.

Jessica: You don't know, though. We're afraid that that's going to happen but we don't know that that's going to happen.

Gregory: Right. Yes. Exactly.

We know that it's not.

Gregory: But Saint Louis, that's a big step up. What they did there is really nice, the Saint Louis beautification project. They redid the lanes and they repaved it. They put the median in.

I'm going to have to drive down Saint Louis when I leave. I want to see that.

Yeah, it's quite nice. What you have to do is compare it in your mind to a four-lane road that people [use]. The police did a study and the average speed was forty-eight miles an hour, on a road with an elementary school and a park. So now it's been cut down to two lanes with a median and it's more of a sort of parkway. It's really nice.

And the traffic is slower?

Much slower. Much slower. The other thing is that because it was this wide thoroughfare that people used so much as a cut-through, the fear was it would start to look like Eastern. And so what we hope is that there's more of a sense of it as a [housing area], at least on the south side, which is single-family residential homes.

Jessica: Well, we're seeing actually, the house on Bonita [Avenue] and Tenth that was foreclosed on, there were people in there today as I went to the grocery store, cleaning out. We don't know that people are going to buy the houses and sit on them. We just don't know.

Gregory: You know what else, and this is a sort of interesting story to just add on, that there was a terrible tragedy in December of 2004, up the street, where a man who

had been a long-time resident, his house was broken into and he was murdered. And as far as we know, the police never found out who did it. They got into the house from a vacant house next door. There was a wall and the wall had been pushed down, so that people were able to get access to the back yard, and they were able to finally board that up, and it's not occupied but at least it's secured now. That was sort of, again, a kind of galvanizing moment. We helped put together a meeting that drew a lot of people to talk to the police. I guess that's another part of the story, is efforts by our neighborhood to work with the police to get better police service in the neighborhood. That's something, for instance, Bob Bellis did a lot of. We've done some of that here.

But at that moment, that house then became ... this poor widow, she lost her husband, I think she sold the house. Anyway, this family bought it. I don't know them. I've never really spoken to them. They did an absolutely [gorgeous job]. It's a young guy, and I guess his mother, an older woman, who lived there. But they did a really terrific job, not only with the landscaping. They painted it. It's really kind of a cool-looking house. I think that that's really where you see a turnover that actually contributes more to kind of continuity of the history of the neighborhood because they actually created this really gorgeous house that you see if you drive in off of Tenth, which is right next to the one that I guess you're referring to.

So have you been pleased with your decision to live here?

Jessica: I think at times it's been frustrating, and at times it's been wonderful because we've gotten to know so many people.

Gregory: I think the big concern, and I think the big obstacle that holds back this neighborhood, is the problem of the schools. The elementary school [John S. Park

Elementary School] and the middle school [John C. Fremont Middle School] are schools that are among the first in Clark County. I don't know exactly John S. Park is. And there's been some effort. For a number of years it's been a charter school run by the Edison Company [EdisonLearning, Inc.], which put a lot of money into at least rebuilding the building. But the fact is, they haven't performed that well and it has encouraged a lot of people not to put their kids in that school, and I think that it's an inhibition to people moving into the neighborhood, or people leaving because of it, and I think that it's probably the single biggest worry we have now that we have a child and we're sort of looking forward to that.

Jessica: Before we had the child, we even had conversations with friends. I remember having a conversation with Ben [Contine], and he tried to convince us that we needed to put our child [in the neighborhood schools], that if more families like us, and it would start with us, would just put our children in the school, it would improve the school. And his wife subsequently refused to put their child in the school and they left town. So, we just don't know what to do. I don't think this is possible, especially now, but if we were to leave the community, it would be for a different school.

But what about if you started doing a lot of volunteering at the school?

Gregory: I just want to point out, we both work at UNLV. [Laughter] If the governor had his way, we'd be volunteering as it is. No, I mean there are certainly ways that that could be done over time, but I think that that is probably something where, if you were to take a large number of people who are involved in some way or another in historic preservation and development or kind of community things, that's really not something that anybody's ever really done, right? And part of it has to do with the fact

that generally younger people or people that don't have kids [don't get involved with the schools]. There hasn't been a lot of sort of community involvement with that school, which is true. The closest we ever came was when we were going around in the 2004 election and some of the teachers volunteered with us to canvass in these neighborhoods. But, there's turnover and I don't think any of those teachers are there anymore.

Do you think losing Bishop Gorman will cause a greater challenge to the education in the area?

No, I think it's a potential opportunity because I don't think Bishop Gorman served the area very well. However, it's a big problem because you don't want to have a big vacant lot there. So the [Clark] County School District [CCSD] acquired it, the building itself I mean to say, and it's currently used as what they call a preparatory academy. It's the ninth grade for, I'm pretty sure it's Valley High [School]. It might be one of the other [schools]. One of the big, kind of over-enrolled eastern Las Vegas high schools. I think it's Valley. It might be the one that's a little further east. So they created what they called a preparatory academy. They basically took the ninth-graders and put them all there because they wanted to alleviate overcrowding and they thought it would be good for the ninth-graders to have a different kind of environment. So, those kids actually all get bused in or their parents drop them. They're not allowed to park because presumably ninth-graders don't drive, which has actually freed up that parking lot. Whether that's good or bad, I don't know. And then they had a public meeting about this. Eventually I think there's a new high school that's slated to open and they're going to rezone the whole eastern part of Las Vegas so that will alleviate the overcrowding. They're going to use that building for the middle school while the current building for John C. Fremont is

renovated. And so the projection was three or four years down the line. Don't know. So we have hopes that, well, they should really look at putting a magnet school there.

Maybe a school that could tie in with the Las Vegas Academy, you know, like a performing arts and international elementary. That was sort of our hope. So then I think that there's an opportunity there, because the school district now has that property and, if they are able to do something like that, I think that that would be a huge boon to the community because then, you'd be able to say to people, it's all those things that you've been asking about, and we also have this really great local school.

So have you started lobbying with the school district?

No, not so much. We will. I think there's only so many things you can do. But yeah, I think that that's something we'll [work on]. And who knows? The other thing was, I suspect that if there was any positive impact from [the loss of] Bishop Gorman, it would be on local businesses, right? These kids who went out and bought lunch and so forth. So presumably that might need to be sort of addressed. But I think that there was a sense [of anger at Bishop Gorman High School]. For instance, this family I mentioned that lives over on Eleventh, they really felt a lot of resentment about the fact that these kids came in with big, expensive cars that they probably couldn't drive very well because they're sixteen, seventeen years old, and they were driving down a residential street that wasn't [in] their residential neighborhood, and Eleventh Street happens to have no sidewalks, so basically what they said was, Look, my kids are walking to school, getting run off the road by these kids driving fancy sports cars. That's not a criticism of Bishop Gorman but I don't think it was something that was a very strong part of the community so much as it was more of like a local business that's moved.

There's another thing I'd like to mention. This is nothing we've talked about but I think it's sort of significant about the older residential downtown, [something] that we got a little bit involved and needs to be addressed, which is telephone poles. When they build telephone poles, the expected life expectancy is fifty years. Our street has recently passed fifty years old. If you spend some time driving around, you'll see a lot of them [telephone poles] are starting to lean a little bit. We had an incident. There had been seasonally, fortunately not this season so far, a problem with rats on the power lines. Because we all have above-ground lines around here, which is very different from some of the newer neighborhoods. The rats had probably gnawed through a power cable, the power cable fell into some bushes, lit the bushes on fire. Fortunately an alert neighbor saw this and put the fire out with his garden hose, because it was an elderly couple inside who probably would not have been able to get out. And I called up and spoke to some folks at Nevada Power, like, what are you going to do about this? And they basically said, nothing. But what we did learn from those conversations was that basically the telephone poles or the utility poles are obsolete, and there does need to be something done about that. [In] a lot of the older neighborhoods, there are right-of-ways. Sometimes they're alleys or sometimes it's just the land. But like in our case, for instance, the power cables run along the back yard here, so Nevada Power actually has right-of-way. They can come back there and, for instance, cut down our trees if they need to. They can send people back to work and so forth. That in and of itself could be a problem someday.

Jessica: There was also a fire down on the corner.

Gregory: Yeah, we never knew if that was the utility pole or the tree. Our crazy neighbors. There was a fire in their backyard.

Jessica: Well, come on, let's be fair. Explain why they're crazy.

Gregory: Because they have a lot of detritus in their backyard and they almost lit the whole neighborhood on fire. [Laughter] That would be point number one.

Jessica: Also, they somehow got a hold of manhole covers.

Gregory: [Laughing] Oh, yeah, they decorated their front yard with utility box covers. And the Nevada Power guy came by one time because he was reading the meter or something. No, he needed to get back to inspect the right-of-way to see if there were trees. So he happened to be coming by and I said, yeah, you can come in the backyard, and he looked up and down to see if there were trees blocking [the utility lines]. And so on the way out he said, You know anything about your neighbors, where they got all those utility box covers?

Anyway, for instance, our state assemblyman did try and introduce a bill in 2007, which went nowhere, but it needs to be done, which would have involved basically requiring Nevada Power to underground the utilities in older neighborhoods, and to distribute the cost over the entire valley. You know, Nevada Power is claiming they're bankrupt, right? They want 36 percent more in rates so they say, we can't afford to do this. But it's got to be done because those utility poles are going to start to fall down. And as you know, the undergrounding of utilities is something that newer communities do as a matter of course, I mean nationally, right? There are health hazards associated with above-ground power cables. But it's a kind of characteristic older residential issue that is somewhat new to Las Vegas, but it's actually got to be done sooner or later.

Do the two of you know that Bob Bellis is moving out of the neighborhood?

No! Oh, how disappointing.

Isn't that sad?

He's going to Seven Hills?

No, no, not that far away. I'm sure that he'll be talking about it, but they found this house that was just a steal.

Well, his house is really nice. They renovated it a lot. Is he selling his house? What's the story?

Well, he probably won't sell it immediately because of the market right now, but eventually. And he said he might come back to the neighborhood. He's not sure.

But, you know that he loves the neighborhood. He loves his house. But he said they're running out of space.

Yeah, yeah, theirs is a smaller, older house. It's a bungalow really.

Yeah. But they've done such beautiful things to that house. I just love it.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

So, any closing remarks? This has just been great and you've talked about all of the things that we want to talk about. This has just been wonderful.

There's one other thing that you ought to sort of throw in and especially to interview other people, which is Circle Park. Circle Park is really kind of at the heart of John S. Park in the sense that the whole neighborhood was planned around it. As I understand it, it was land that was donated by an individual, and it's always been both kind of a great public resource, until very recently when it's not a public resource at all, and sort of a challenge because it's open space and my understanding is some problems there with vagrancy have been there for decades. But there was this more recent problem with [the fact that] it had kind of become really just overrun, and then there was a murder there,

and it was shut down by the city. And it's still not open. And you know what's interesting about it is that in 2002, right when we moved here, it was renovated as a park. And that renovation was done with a lot of input from the community. This was again something that Councilman Reese would have spirited through. There was a committee of people who devised it. There was a local architect who actually did a lot of the work on sort of laying it out. There was volunteer labor. I remember the tires that were intended to be a little bit of a barrier for the playground and people went and volunteered to stack up the tires and everything. And it needs to be there. We are under-parked, so to speak. We have less access to parks. Most recently we've had a real problem because until just this past week, the Jaycee Park was closed. That's now reopened. They did a really nice job there. And we spent a good bit of time at that point trying to get the city to look at other options for what they can do with that park. Once it was closed sort of, the solution was to keep it closed. And it's not something that I think there's been a lot of input on recently. But we do need to have more parks. We need to have better access. And it could be a great resource for the neighborhood because it's so centrally located. It's a shame that that incident happened, but there's got to be a better solution than just shutting it down.

Well, I really appreciate this. I appreciate you taking your Sunday afternoon to talk to me. This is great.

Jessica: Thank you. Thank you so much for coming.

OK, so a few minutes ago you were saying that there was a tie-in with the neighborhood and the labor unions. What did you mean?

Gregory: This is a little bit out of my knowledge. Others can sort of confirm this or be more precise. But I think there's a higher-than-average density of labor union

members in the neighborhood, and especially among people who work in casinos and restaurants in the resort corridor. I think part of that is the geographic proximity. I mean I know this mostly again from canvassing or participating in some of the political campaigns where you talk to people. Just one example: the guy who lived across the street when we bought the house worked at I think it was New York New York [Hotel and Casino]. I think that there's probably a higher percentage of people, especially longer-term [residents]. Probably it's the case that in more recent years, as people have moved in, if they got a job in one of the Strip resorts, they might live anywhere in town, maybe more likely to live elsewhere because there was probably more available housing to buy. But I think that historically the original impetus for the neighborhood was not the union members; it was the executives, right? And that was really what helped drive the growth of the neighborhood. But I think it has been the case that there's probably a higher-than-average incidence [of union members in the neighborhood]. For instance, some of these development projects are ones that could be a great boon because these are opportunities for jobs and opportunities for economic development, both downtown and along the Strip, some of these things that haven't been done. This is why it's so disappointing to us that they come in with bad ideas because they don't get them done. But I think it would be an interesting thing to look more into the history of the neighborhood with respect to the role that some of the unions have played, both in terms of bringing people into the neighborhood. You know the Culinary [Union] offices are not very far from here. Their pharmacy, which is a big thing, is right near here. It's just right up here on Saint Louis and Las Vegas Boulevard. I guess now they have it so people can buy stuff at drugstores but I think for a long time they had to go to that pharmacy. And I

think that that's a sort of interesting part of the history of the neighborhood. And it certainly plays a part in some of the things we were talking about earlier in terms of the political participation.

And the Culinary Union was known for saying things like, this is a city where a maid can buy a house and have a car and all of that.

Yeah, and I think some of those houses absolutely are here, without a doubt. Without a doubt.

Well, thank you. I appreciate that last comment. Thank you so much.

Sure.

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