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An Interview with Elmer Curley

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

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Preface

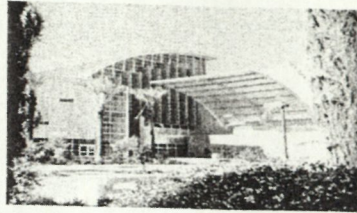
Elmer Curley is known simply as Curley. He came to Las Vegas to work in the area of public service for the UNLV library in August 1967. Thus he launched a lifelong move from a smaller community north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Las Vegas. He only imagined it would be a four to five year move. To his amazement he continue to live here and retired shortly before this interview after a successful career at the library.

During this narrative he talks about moving into the University Park Apartments, working with a small budget in the earlier years of the “round building” library, and the humor of receiving book donations that could result in multiple copies of a title.

Over the years since 1967, Curley worked with a long list of the various directors observed many changes to the city and experienced the inspiring growth of UNLV.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



Use Agreement

Name of Narrator:

Elmer Curley

Name of Interviewer:

CLAYTEE D. WHITE

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There will be no compensation for any interviews.

Elmer Curley
Signature of Narrator Date

Claytee D. White
Signature of Interviewer Date

This is November 1st, 2011, and I am with Elmer Curley. My name is Claytee White. We are located on Flamingo at Maryland Parkway in wonderful apartments. The Vegas Towers.

So how are you this morning?

I'm fine.

Curley, could you spell your last name and first name for me, please.

Okay. The first name Elmer, E-L-M-E-R, Curley, C-U-R-L-E-Y.

And most people, then, call you by your last name.

Right.

Wow. I wasn't aware of that. I thought Curley was the first name.

No.

Okay. So first I want to start by asking you about your early life. Can you tell me where you grew up and what that was like? You can talk about your family, brothers and sisters, what your parents did for a living.

I was born near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on January the 13th, 1929. I was born in the country, outside of Pittsburgh about 40 miles. I lived there for a short time with my grandmother. Then we moved into a town just north of Pittsburgh called Aliquippa, which is an Indian name. I lived there till after I graduated from high school. My father worked in the steel mill and he was killed in an accident in 1942. We remained in Aliquippa until after I got out of high school. My mother then went into nursing since she had been trained at nursing and she lived there.

I went to the University of Pittsburgh after graduation from the high school in Aliquippa. I got my bachelor's at the University of Pittsburgh, and I got my master's at Carnegie Mellon in library science. I worked at the University of Pittsburgh for three years. I left there in 1963 and went to University of New York at Stony Brook on Long Island. I worked for another three to five years at Stony Brook as head of public services in the reference department.

Then through a friend who asked me if I had ever been west -- I said no -- she said that she had met Hal Erickson at the ALA (American Library Association) convention and wanted to know if I would be interested in going to Vegas. And I said absolutely because I hadn't been west. So in September the 1st, 1967 I started working at University of Nevada in Las Vegas.

You were born at the beginning of the Depression.

So tell me what that was like. Did your father work the entire Depression?

Yes. I was born in 1929 in the country outside of Pittsburgh. We moved then into Aliquippa, which is just north of Pittsburgh. He worked in the Jones and Laughlin steel mill. He worked there until he was killed in 1942.

So the Depression really did not touch your family?

Well, it did in a sense, yes, because the steel mill laid almost everyone off during the Depression and he was laid off with everyone else. So the problem was what was he going to be doing? At one point he was going to work for I think it was the WPA. He was going to work on one of these force things, like Roosevelt had. But for some reason the mill started back up, so he was taken back on. So that was no problem at that point. And then he worked until I think it was '42 when he was killed in an accident in the mill.

How large was Aliquippa?

At that point it was probably around 20- to 25,000 [population], a fair size. The only reason was because of the steel mill and across the river there was the American Bridge Company, which built LST boats [Landing Ship Tanks] for the war. So those two places drew a lot of people, and practically everyone worked for U.S. Steel at that point. And I lived in Aliquippa, then, until after I got out of high school. Then I went to the University of Pittsburgh and I lived in Pittsburgh.

Did you see women going to work during World War II?

Yes.

In Aliquippa?

As a matter of fact, after my father died my mother started working for the American Bridge Company because she had taken some engineering and she was able to do blueprint. So as the LST's were being built at the American Bridge, she was a blueprint reader. She worked, then, well, till long after the war, really, and then she went back into nursing.

Why did she decide to change jobs?

Because when she started working, the men at the bridge company were taken into the service. So the idea was the women could work until the men came back, and when the men returned then they were supposed to leave. When that happened, then she went back to nursing and that was it from then on.

Then after I got out of high school, I went to Pitt, and then she decided to leave Aliquippa and move to Ohio, just outside of Cleveland, and worked in a hospital there until she died, really.

Why Ohio? Why did she move to Ohio after so many years --

Oh, a friend of hers was working at the same hospital that she had been in nursing with. So that's why she moved there at that point. So she stayed in Ohio, then, for the rest of her life.

So tell me what kind of awakening it was when you left that coldness back there and moved to Las Vegas in 1967.

Oh, yeah. Well, I wanted to get away from the snow. Long Island is just -- you know. In March you can have a blizzard. So when a friend of mine who was at a library convention in Chicago came back and said, "Have you ever been to the West?"

I said, "No."

"Are you interested?"

"Absolutely."

She said that a friend of hers here in Vegas wanted somebody to do the public service area at the library. So I got a letter from Hal Erickson, and I'd say in about three weeks I came to Vegas for an interview. Immediately I liked it, of course. So by September I was here, in 1967.

So you just had that one interview?

Yes.

Great. So where did you live when you first moved to Las Vegas?

I lived in University Park Apartments, right in back. When I arrived in August of '67 -- I arrived two weeks early because I knew I needed an apartment. The director was on vacation, as a matter of fact. So he had made an appointment that I stay with a friend of his that worked in the School of Education. So when I arrived I stayed there for about two weeks. At that point the University Park Apartments were already rented. So I waited about three weeks or so before an apartment came available. At that point I just stayed at the dorm on the campus for two or three weeks until the apartment came available.

So we already had a dormitory.

Oh, yes. What was the name of it? I forget the name of the first dormitory. It's still there, as a matter of fact.

Tonopah Hall. I stayed there almost a whole month till an apartment came available and then I moved into the apartment. Then I stayed there until -- well, I stayed there until after I retired, as a matter of fact.

Oh, wonderful. What did this area look like? Right now we're only, what, one block from the university.

Right. In 1967 this building was not here.

Okay. So we're in the Vegas Towers and it was not here.

Yes. So from the library on the campus, the Ham Hall was not erected at that time. The School of Education was not erected at that time. So from the round building, the library, you could look across. There was nothing here on Flamingo. Target and that whole development were not here. It was all sand. So when you had a windstorm, from the library all up to the Strip you'd see nothing but sand. I mean it was just plain desert. And slowly -- this building was started in the early 70s and then things started to be built where the Target shopping area is and things started building up. But prior to that when I came from Tonopah down to Twain, there was the bank, which is still here, there was a little McDonald's, which is still here, and there was at one point on Maryland a little theater.

Where?

Down here where Hallmark card shop is, right on the corner there. In that corner building was a little theater. They showed pictures there for about five years and then finally it closed. Then across the street is the McDonald's. Now, that is still there.

Then at Twain you had the Boulevard Mall and a department store from Los Angeles was in there at the time, not Macy's.

I. Magnum's?

No, not I. Magnum. Another one from -- it closed. Then Macy's came in later.

May Company.

Macy's.

I know. Was it May Company?

No. May Company wasn't there. It was one from L.A. And the mall at that point was just opening. Sears had open and then Penney's open and then all the other ones. So that became the

main shopping thing in this area. And this area then started building up a little bit. But up until, oh, probably in the 70s there wasn't much around here. Then all of a sudden when this building, Vegas Towers, got built, then things started to be built across the street; the Target and all those shops started.

So how many apartments are in this building?

There are two buildings here with approximately 450 apartments. So it's a big apartment building, complex. It encompasses ten acres is what it does. And it's all fenced in. So you can feel pretty safe in the area.

But I lived in the University Apartments in the back here and those were up and open by '67. I think they opened probably in '62 or '63. I lived there, then, until I retired and then --

Which year did you retire?

I retired when I was 65. So I forget now what the date was.

And you were born in which year?

Twenty-nine.

Yes, I keep forgetting the date. It was probably in '67 or -- yes, because I started work September 1st, '67. That's what it was.

Okay, great. So tell me about UNLV. Who was the --

Hal Erickson was the director.

So at that time the person was called a director.

Right. And he was at that point -- it's a little strange. At that point he was acting director. The director had gone on one of these foreign country appointments. He came back, became ill and died. So Erickson then became the permanent director.

So do you remember that person's name?

Not really, no. Well, number one -- I don't know whether the university admitted it or not -- he happened to be alcoholic. And when he returned he returned to San Francisco and stayed there for a couple of weeks and became very ill. That was the end of that. Then Erickson was here, until he retired.

So '67 when you go to work under Hal Erickson, who were some of the other people working in the library?

Alice Brown, who is still living in Henderson, she was one of the librarians. She became documents library at that time after I arrived. Billie Mae Polson was head of the catalog department. Robert Anderl was head of technical services, and his wife worked with me in the reference department. Those were the major [personnel], probably. They had a number of other people working. It wasn't a huge area at the time. There were only -- let's see -- Alice. Then there were three clericals working in the public service area.

At that point the round building had just been completed and they were just starting to move in. The budget when I arrived for the library itself was \$300,000, which for me coming from New York I couldn't believe how small—with \$300,000 you can't do too much when you're building up. The only thing that was in the reference department of use for work in the library was the *World Almanac* and *Information Please*, plus we had an encyclopedia. Every library got an encyclopedia. So there was not much you could do.

The main thing was to get some staff member who had experience. The first staff member that I appointed was the interlibrary loan librarian because at that point the university was just starting and all the faculty coming in were either finishing their dissertations or they're starting to work on their publications in their field and we needed somebody who could get all the materials they needed because the library certainly couldn't support anyone. We needed a professional who knew how to get the materials in, in good time and get it to them. So that's why the interlibrary loan librarian was the first.

Do you remember who that person was?

Yes. Sandra Sharp. As a matter of fact, her husband has been calling. She died here this year. He has a lot of money, seemingly, and is interested in giving it to the library. So they're in negotiations right now.

First, because of all the faculty who were coming here, I would say 95, 98 percent of them were either finishing their dissertations or they were starting to publish, and we needed somebody who could get information here fast so they could keep up their work because the library certainly couldn't support their work.

That's great. So after Sharp was hired who else did you hire in reference?

Let's see. Sandra Sharp. Alice Brown was already here. She helped in reference and then I got

her working with the documents department. And then we hired Robert Ball. He was going to take over the interlibrary loan. He had worked at Reno and left Reno and went to Santa Barbara to work in a bookstore and decided he didn't like that. And I don't think they liked him. So he was waiting in Santa Barbara, and his wife who worked at Reno wanted to know if we could use him here. And I said certainly. So he started working for us and worked until he retired.

So how did you afford these kinds of people, this kind of talent, on such a small budget?

Well, the 300,000 was for books only.

Ah, good. That's acquisition.

Yes. That did not have anything to do with the appointment of personnel. Personnel-wise and salaries were very competitive even though they were in Las Vegas. They were still competitive enough that you could get some good people. Robert Ball for one, I knew his wife very well from different meetings. So I knew that he was very well trained and he'd do it. And he was already working at a very good bookstore up in Santa Barbara. He decided he didn't like it there and they didn't like him. He had a personality problem. I was very interested in getting him here. He came here and then he worked here until he retired.

That is wonderful. So with this group of people and everybody's kind of new to Las Vegas, what kind of entertainment did you do, what kind of fun stuff?

At that early stage in Vegas, when they first came they were interested in the Strip. I mean you know. That soon passed. Then the problem was finding living accommodations because Vegas was not known for apartments at that point. And the University Park Apartments were some of the first ones that were put up. So a lot of university people lived in the University Park Apartments and a lot of from the library worked (sic) there. And then slowly they would buy homes and move out to different areas in Vegas.

Now, tell me what the Strip was like at that time. We're talking about the late 1960s.

Yes. Well, the Hilton had just opened. It opened after '67. It wasn't there when I first arrived.

So is this the Flamingo Hilton?

The one right down here, yes, [on Paradise.]

Okay. So that one off of the Strip. Okay.

Yes. That was built and just opened. As far as the Strip went, the Flamingo, the Desert Sands --

that was a big one, the Sands -- and the Tropicana.

And the Desert Inn casino.

And the Desert Inn. [They] were all known for their good restaurants at that point. We had a book dealer from New York who I knew, and as soon as he realized I was here he started coming to Vegas because his wife liked to gamble. So he would come to the library to sell his books. His stuff got to be a little expensive, so we had to be selective. But he loved coming to Vegas. So when he came to Vegas, he stayed at the Sands. So immediately I knew I had two or three dinners coming because we'd always go to dinner, of course. So that was always a good point. And he was able to get a lot of good stuff that we had had to search around for otherwise.

Then we just progressed from there, adding a little staff now and then. And the budget kept increasing.

Do you remember any of those staff increases, any of the people who came gradually over time?

Well, let's see. When I arrived Alice Brown, as I said, was here already. And then we added Sandra Sharp. And then we added Bob Andrel, who was head of the technical service area. And his wife, then, worked with me in reference department, Susan Andrel. After Susan Andrel, we had -- oh, we've had a number of people that came, worked for two to four years, and then would move on. They'd get married and they'd move on. Sandra Sharp was one, the interlibrary loan. She moved on to Pahrump and lived there for the rest of her life.

What was in Pahrump?

Others moved. One took a foreign country appointment to Egypt and worked. Then we had another one who returned from the University of Cairo who worked there on one of these Ford government appointments and then came to work for us. I forget the year she arrived. As a matter of fact, she's still here. She was head of the architectural library, engineering and architecture on the campus, because when they opened that that's where she had worked in Cairo in the architecture department. So then she transferred up to the architecture library from here.

Tell me about the kind of parties that you would have in the library at the time to keep morale up.

We had a lot.

What were some of the things that you would celebrate?

Well, at that point the staff was small and it was almost like a big family. We would have probably almost once a month some kind of a dinner in the library in the evening or at lunchtime where we would celebrate someone's birthday or some special event or something like that. Everyone brought some food. So it was like a big family.

And you said sometimes you would have these in the evening.

Yes. We would periodically have some dinner celebration for some special event or whatever because at that time the staff was still small enough that you could do that. Then as the staff kept getting bigger and bigger, then, of course, it became a problem and it was just disbanded.

Okay. So while you were still having those, what was the location in the library that you used?

In the round building, we used the second floor because there was a large lunchroom and meeting room, which later became the offices for the president and his staff when they were erecting the seven-story building.

The FDH [Flora Dungan Humanities].

Yes. And they moved him from someplace -- I forget where it was -- to the second floor of the library. So then we couldn't have our things up on the second floor. And then he was there until he moved over to his current offices.

So what kinds of community involvement did you have early on?

Okay. The situation in Las Vegas in '67 and prior to that; prior to '67 there was what was known really as a subscription library; that was a small public library that would loan books provided you owned property. Yes. And it was run by a woman for years and years. I forget [her] name now. So when the university opened that was the only library, so-called public. It was not a public library. You had to own property. If you didn't own property, you had to have somebody that did vouch for you.

To check out a book?

Yes. So you can imagine very little library service in the area. And it wasn't until after the university arrived that there was a movement to get a public library. That created a lot of interest and a lot of politics, of course, and then finally, a public library was built.

The current public library here on Flamingo became the public library. It was a very small building, which it's not now. Now it's that Italian-villa thing that they have. Prior to that it was a very small building. Then when that current building was being erected, they moved the public library up to Tropicana where there used to be a Safeway store in that shopping center.

Right there at Tropicana and Maryland Parkway?

Yes. There was a Safeway on the corner, and way up in the corner was a public library when it moved from down here. So it was up there for a couple of years while they built this building. And the so-called public library downtown, it remained open for a while and then it finally gave up.

Now, at one time wasn't the library for some reason over at Flamingo and Maryland Parkway?

That's where it is now. That right down here at the corner of Flamingo and Maryland, right across from Albertson.

Yes. So they weren't in that Albertson's shopping center at one time?

Not in Albertson's shopping center. They were in the Tropicana shopper center up in the corner for maybe two years while they built the first public library here.

Did you have many people from the community going to the library on UNLV's campus?

Yes. That became a major issue, of course. Since the public library downtown was not really public -- you had to own property -- when the university opened then people started coming. So the university, which was a state university -- that meant that, okay, it's a public university; so the public, since they have no service, should have been able. The public could borrow from the university campus and that created major, major problems, of course, because as the library grew the public became more and more interested in it and kept borrowing and borrowing and the students were borrowing, but the money wasn't coming in fast enough to build such a collection to support both.

There was a lot of conflict periodically with that all because, well, we had one situation where an individual kept borrowing art books. Well, art books are very expensive and when you put them in a library, they're even more expensive to get them processed. So we were losing so many art books. We couldn't get them back. You can send overdue notices, but at that point -- I

forget what the fine was, very small fine -- they paid no attention. So that became an issue with the county and with the university.

Slowly, when the public library -- they slowly started making it that you had to have a card to use the university library. Then came the point where you had to also submit a credit card. So when you took out too many books and you wouldn't bring them back, they'd just charge your card. That's what they did. Now you can borrow, but you have to put up a credit card because we were just losing art books, which were just out of sight. So that was what happened, mind you, with that.

Okay. So do you remember anything about the beginning of the library advisory board, advisory committee, when people would come in for help right there on campus?

Well, okay. You're talking about a committee.

It was called something else before.

I'm not sure. We hired a number of clerical staff. But I don't recall us having a real committee. They may now say something that was a committee, but I don't know of a real committee. We circulated to the community for a long time, although the university at different points was beginning to feel that the public library had to have done more and more. And finally, it did come to that.

So did you at one time have volunteers who would raise money for the library, sell books, do all kinds of things?

When we got duplicate books, we'd sell them in the entrance to the library. At one point they were going for 50 cents and a number of people from the campus or the community would come in and buy our extras.

As far as a real committee, at different times they would have groups that would have a special event for the library and raise some money that way. But most of the expenses were from the state, the allotment for purchasing. And the budget for the library began to grow pretty well. It's very good. Even now it's great, considering. But in the beginning, yeah, it was not that big, really.

Which building was there first, the round or the rectangle?

The round.

So do you remember when the rectangular building was constructed?

The rectangular building was -- let's see. I came in '67. It was in the early part of the 70s that it came. And it was a rectangle building. There was a Japanese woman. What was her name? She was well known in the community. Her husband -- they owned a restaurant. I can't think of her name. Her name's on one of the buildings over there.

Fong?

Fong, yes. She was very, very, very vocal about everything. So she was a very strong support for the library. But she had her own agenda, and you follow her agenda or else. One of the things she could not stand was anyone smoking, period. So that meant that any time Lilly Fong was around, everyone if they smoked did not light up or anything. I mean she was very violent about that position.

Now, is she Chinese or Japanese?

I think she was Chinese, I think. They had a restaurant. They may still have the restaurant.

Probably.

Very well-known restaurant at the time. The Fongs were very well known for different things in the community. As a matter of fact, her son was a student at the university. He graduated from there. But she was probably the strongest -- I forget what they were called at that point. But they were the power, the group.

Any funny stories about the early library that you want to tell?

Well, we had a number of people that -- it was very common for some people who would retire, let's say, to Las Vegas from Chicago—you name the place; that's where they came from. Periodically they would decide that they have a very important book or collection of books and they belonged in the library at the university, of course. So they would approach the university. The president would direct them, of course, to the library. And yes. The director liked to cultivate the public, particularly if they had money. He was well known for some of them who finally moved on to San Diego. He had a group down there of women that he went down to see periodically because there was funding coming. So they all would get to know him. He was overly accommodating at times, suggesting things that we couldn't have really -- so there was a problem there dealing with the people that he talked to and with him, getting an agreement there

because, well, I was told this and, well, I need to talk with the director and different things. It finally worked out, but it could be a problem at times.

Of course, so many people moved to the area here and they would move with a lot of books and then decide I don't have room for them. Of course, when that happens, these books are very valuable, they should be in every library, and we're sure you don't have them. Well, 99 percent of the time we had them. We had them in duplicates. But in order to work with the community he would say, oh, yes, we'll take them. So we had an oversupply at times. So we sold books in the entrance for 50 cents apiece. You were able to get some great deals because some of the books were very good. We couldn't have 25 editions of one book in that library. So that went on for a while. But there was a lot of the community encouragement.

Tell me some of the other directors that you served under.

Let's see. Erickson left and for a while we had Jack Dettre, who was from the School of Education. He came in as a preliminary director at that time while they looked for a permanent director. He was very good. He taught administration in the School of Education. He was very good because as he admitted, "I do not know anything at all about the library service; I know how to manage; you do your job, I'll do mine, and we'll get along." And I thought he was great because he never interfered with the actual working of the departments.

The only time there could be a problem was if somebody -- it was a frequent thing that some people felt they were very important, particularly if they had some books. And if the library was reluctant to accept, they then went to the president immediately. Of course, when you do that then you create a problem. So the president's office would be calling and these people would be coming over. Well, I -- well, yes, ma'am. Then you have to negotiate very fine lines at times with some people. That was a situation where the director had to be very careful, not step on too many toes. That's what it came down to.

So do you remember who came after Jack?

After Jack Dettre -- let's see. Who did we bring in?

Did Billie Mae become --

No. Billie Mae [Polson] was head of the catalog department constantly. After Jack Dettre we had a director from North Carolina, Mark. What was his last name? He came in as a director. I

wondered when he arrived why he came here from North Carolina because it was a situation where I felt the only reason he came here was to retire. This was a challenge because we were just growing too much. He wasn't up to it because he was ready to retire. For some reason I think he had the idea he could come here and do it, and this was too much, and he left. He went back to North Carolina, as a matter of fact. Then, of course, we were looking for another director.

I was never interested in being director. I didn't want to face all the administrative problems. However, wherever you worked you had administrative problems, period.

Then we did get another director. Most of the directors were pretty good, but it was a situation where sometimes they felt limited because of the situation. Most of them were pretty good while the situation was there.

Do you remember Myoung-ja?

Oh, yes. Myoung-ja [Kwon]. Let's see. She went to BYU. She was working in Utah. We were looking for a librarian at the time. The director and I were at the meeting in Chicago for the American Library and we were interviewing people for a position. While we were gone Alice Brown was still in the library here. And Myoung-ja moved here with her husband, who was going to be teaching in the social science area at the university. She arrived in the library and had graduated from BYU. So Alice, without really thinking clearly about it, practically promised her the job. But Hal and I were interviewing at the convention in Chicago. When we arrive here, we had set up interviews. Then we get hit with, well, this woman was here. And it became a very touchy problem because her husband was going to be employed at the education school. So here we have a situation where we've practically promised his wife a job in the library. We ended up we hired her. She worked in the catalog department for many years. Then they divorced, but she remained here in the catalog department. She worked here for, oh, up until the time she left. Then she left here and went to California where she is now. She likes it very much up there. I've seen her a few times.

Yes. So anything else about UNLV itself that you remember that you'd like to talk about?

Well, it was a very, very small school in the beginning. We had a lot, a lot of the local public interested in the university and coming to the library, of course. We had a continuous problem about them borrowing the books and the students wanting them and the library being so small that

at times the public would have books out that the faculty wanted on reserve. And getting them back and all of this became a problem at times, which was normal. But there was a lot of public interest. Some people liked it, a few people didn't. Those who wanted to borrow had problems, of course, because why don't you lend it to us? We're a state and all this. But we worked through all that situation and in time with the growth of the public library then that did not become much of a problem. But, yes, the university and the community were very much connected for many years. How did the directors of the library and the president of the university get along over the years? As far as I can remember it was very rare that there was any problem with the administration, the president and the director. I don't know of any real upheaval.

Okay, good.

There were a few little incidents periodically that could come up. At one point there was an assistant president and he was put in charge of the library. That created a little bit of a problem with a couple of people. But that was soon resolved because one left the university. But overall, no, it was not a major, major, issue, really.

So what do you think is your major change that you've seen in Las Vegas? It is now 2011 and you came here in 1967. What do you see as the major change?

Oh, population. The population has just -- and then the university has gone on to -- well, in basketball especially, it has become a major issue. For many years when you mentioned Las Vegas and they have a university, the question was, [Do] you really have a university in Las Vegas? You must be joking and, you know, the whole thing. But after the university and the basketball team, then that question went down the drain because yes. And now it really is, it's a center. Well, the hotel school for one is probably one of the best in the country.

Exactly.

Even beyond Houston and Cornell. Cornell at one point was the big one and then Houston became very big. But then slowly our hotel school. And it has developed into one of the major hotel schools. So we have a huge, huge enrollment from the Pacific area, huge, huge. I would say 95 percent of them are here in the hotel school because this is one of the places where we get the training and it's a good school. They have many dinners and such, which is really great.

Yes. Do you still participate in activities on the campus?

Periodically. Things that happen at the library, as emeritus faculty I get involved in a few things that come up. I go to a lot of hotel dinners and such all the time and different luncheons and different things that happen on campus. I've been involved through different committees and stuff. So, yes, I keep -- somewhat.

Looking at the early Strip, when we talked about the Desert Inn and the Sands, what do you tell people about the Las Vegas Strip?

Well, in the early days the Strip was really something. Most of the Strip -- well, with the Flamingo and then with the Sands, of course, which is no -- the Sands was probably -- Sands and the Tropicana were two of the major dining rooms at the time. It would be a toss-up as to which of their gourmet rooms was the best. The Sands and the Tropicana had great. We had a book dealer from New York who came here with his wife who liked to gamble. They also liked to eat the restaurants. So I got them to a number of dinners at the restaurants. They were gourmet rooms, really.

So was the Copa Room the gourmet room?

The Copa, Copa Room? I think it was at the Tropicana.

In the Sands.

Okay, yes.

The Copa Girls.

Oh, that's something different. Yes, the Copa Girls and that, that all came much later.

The Sands, their gourmet room was a very, very -- well, it was an expensive room. Ordinarily you didn't go there for lunch unless you were visiting the hotel or you were a businessperson here usually. I never went there alone just to eat lunch because it was expensive. That's all there was to it. And dinner there was expensive at the time, but it was very nice.

So tell me about downtown. Was there ever any connection or any reason for you to go downtown Las Vegas?

No. Downtown at that point was a small, western, rundown city. Other than there was a hotel down there, which I'm not sure it's still there now, but they had a restaurant up on the second floor which was well known, got a lot of traffic. I went there. Other than that you never went downtown. You went over to the Strip if you did anything like that. And there was a tendency

once you moved here and settled in that you didn't even go to the Strip that much. You went periodically, different restaurants would be opening. Down here on Flamingo you had different restaurants that opened.

So do you still find that; that you don't go to the Strip that much now?

No. I very seldom go to the Strip. There are too many other -- usually if you're going out, you're going out to eat. And if that's the case, then there are so many other good restaurants around.

Because once you go to the Strip, you're getting involved in all that traffic and everything.

I went with a friend of mine to a -- it was supposed to be a dinner at the Paris. Well, the Paris is just a nightmare. We had the name of a restaurant or group we were supposed to go to. We had no idea where to park. So we park at the main garage. That was on one end and we were on the other end. I never walked so much in all my life. I swore I'm never going back to the Paris unless I know exactly where I'm going and where you're going to park. Otherwise I don't go. I never walked so much in my life.

So what about the shows in Las Vegas over the years? And I'm talking about the shows like Cirque du Soleil, Broadway shows.

Well, that wasn't here at the beginning.

Right. So what does that mean for the public?

Well, the public generally is sort of noncommittal once they're living here for the Strip. When they came here in the beginning, they went to the Strip for a few times. Once they move here, then they settle into the community. If they've got friends coming in, they go to the Strip. Otherwise, very, very few go back to the Strip. And with so many other restaurants and other stores opening in different areas, you just don't go to the Strip much at all. As a matter of fact, I rarely go to the Strip anymore unless there's a special thing that's happening. There are just too many other good things around the area. And the Strip is always so crowded, no matter when you go.

So any closing comments that you would like to make about the library, anything else that comes to mind now that you've had a chance to -- over the years?

Well, first of all, I think the university has now become a university that is well recognized and the library is a very, very good library now. I've been to too many and seen them, and this one

compares very well. They can stand up to practically -- unless you're going into the national libraries, like Congress and such.

The university knows it's well established and well organized and well run. I think it deserves what it has, yes. And the university I think has become a university that is well recognized not only for the athletics but also because of the hotel school here for one and it's got some very good physics people and stuff. And it has attracted -- I think we have one or two Nobel physicists on the campus at this point. So not too many places can --

Yes, I agree. And the final question is: How do you feel about what the library does for its retirees?

Well, for the retirees one thing they do they keep you well informed. There's a little newsletter they send out to all the retirees. They send you invitations to everything that's going on, with the library especially, and they do want you to attend. When they have dinners, whatever they're having, you get an invitation. They're very prompt. If you don't respond, they do ask. They keep after you. But they're good. They're good about that. I like that. They keep you well informed. If there's a problem getting you there, they even make arrangements to help you get there. They'll stop by and pick you up and stuff. They're very good about it.

So do you stay in touch with any of the people that you worked with over the years like Alice Brown or --

Yes.

Oh, good.

Oh, yes. Billie Mae Polson and I go to dinner frequently.

Oh, fantastic.

Then another woman that still works in the library, she and her husband, the four of us go to dinner, oh, at least twice a month. So, yes, I'm in contact with a number [of people] and with different groups that are doing things. When they have things at the library, I go over. And I go to the theater and to the ballet and the music things they have, the symphony and stuff. So I keep in contact with different people. And with a number of current faculty I know and I keep in touch with. So, no, there's a good relationship there.

Fantastic. That is wonderful. Well, I like that. I really like the way you reach out to the

community. That's great.

Oh, it's a good place. That's why I stayed when I retired because I had thought about going back to the Pittsburgh area and that. But by that time most of the people that I knew were not there any longer. So going back would be like going back to another city that I knew places, but I didn't know people. And I knew people here. And I love the weather. I hate the snow. So it was not a big problem to stay here and stay with the people that I knew and stuff. So I'm in contact with people constantly.

Oh, that is wonderful. When you first came in 1967, there was just the round building. Compare that with the new library today.

Well, there is just no -- well, it's hard to believe what was here in '67 and what we have today. I mean the growth has just been tremendous. There are very few universities that started at that time that have come at this level because we are now at a point where -- you get Berkeley, you get UCLA, you get Cornell, whatever -- they are sending here for different items and such. So there's a communication that would never have occurred. The big thing is the university was able to get the money and get a staff and really work. And they've done it. They've done a great job. And then with the athletics, of course, that has been a big help.

Did you go into the old round building recently?

Oh, yeah. Well, the old round building is now the law school. I've been in there a few times because they have made a lot of changes, of course, since it's not used as a library. I've been in the current library a lot. I go up there frequently, different committees and different organizations and meetings and such. So I would say I'm there two or three times a month at least.

Fantastic. Do you do any special research?

Not now. I got lazy. That's what happened; I got lazy. There are a couple of things I have worked on a little bit, but I got lazy about it, particularly this year. Well, I had an eye problem. I had cataracts. So I finally had those taken care of with Shepherd's. So for this year it's been very little actual work because the sight was not that good. But they took care of that and now it's fine. So now I'm getting back into --

Good. Good.

But I keep up with different people in the library and different groups and going to dinner and

such.

Yes. Steve Fitt is one of the people who's been after me for years to interview you.

Yes, I know. Yes, I met Steve. As a matter of fact, I was over the other day and we were talking for a few minutes. Yes, he wanted Billie Mae and I to be because -- well, Billie Mae was there before I was and she was there when it was down in that small building. What's the name of the woman? Right down in the front of the campus?

Oh. The building that is no longer there.

Yeah, it's still there, this one.

The little building?

The one that she was at is still there because it has all the classrooms for the art department.

Tam?

No. The art department uses it.

Oh, okay. So I'll ask her. I'm interviewing Billie this afternoon.

Well, she'll tell you because she was in that. Before the round building was erected, she was there in her office. The library was down there for a while.

Wow. Thank you for that.

As a matter of fact, she'll tell you about the snake that was in her desk. That's her famous story.

That's great. And do you have any famous stories that you'd like to tell?

Not really. I don't know of any. But the snake is her big one.

Good. I will make sure to ask her that.

Well, that happens here in the desert. You get snakes every once in a while. And she had one around her desk. That was when they were building the round building because she was down there in -- oh, I forget the name of the woman.

Okay, good. I will definitely ask her about that.

Yes. Because the art department now uses that building for its classrooms.

Okay. So your very last question: Right now, if you were writing a book about your life, what would you name it?

The Las Vegas Adventure. Yes. Yes, it's been an adventure.

That is great.

I had no idea I would be staying here. I thought I'd be here maybe three or four years and I'd move on. But it kept growing and growing and growing and the state kept getting us more money and more money. And before you know it, five years, ten years passed and you think, no, why would I leave? Because every place has its problems. I knew the problems here and they were being worked on. So I decided no. And this place is so easy to get in and out of. When you say you want to go to Vegas, there are flights all over the place.

Wherever you wanted to go in the country, you could get there very easily and get back. If somebody was coming, they knew how to get to you. And the weather was so great. I love the weather.

Yes. I feel the same way about Las Vegas that you do.

Yes. Because up on the north shore of Long Island this time of the year you could have a blizzard. Ah. There was a blizzard in '67, March as a matter of fact, when I decided I had had enough of snow. When she said something about Vegas, I said, "Yes, yes."

Curley, thank you so much. This has been wonderful.

Yes. It's been an adventure. That's why I stayed, because I like the area, I like the people. You meet so many friends and stuff. Frequently people, oh, I want to come visit you.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Anybody that you think you're going to miss them because you leave the East Coast, oh, no.

No. They're coming here.

They're going to come to Las Vegas.

Yes, they do. Not as many as they used to in the beginning, but over the time, yes.

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