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An Interview with Rene de Haven

An Oral History Conducted by Nancy Hardy

The Boyer Las Vegas Early History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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Claytee D. White, Project Director
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Preface

Rene De Haven was born on May 8, 1922 on a farm in Oklahoma. All his life he wanted to become a dancer and dreamed of one day dancing with the likes of Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. Later on in life his dream actually turned into reality when he danced in the show *Les Girls*.

Rene came to Las Vegas in 1959 to open at the Riviera. He discussed what the scene in Las Vegas was like in 1950s, describing the life of a dancer and revealing how different the lifestyle was from that of most people. In California, Rene spent some time in Los Angeles working at the Moulin Rouge and at Marineland. He also found time to start a film career while dancing at night. Some of his more notable film appearances were with Jerry Lewis and later with Elvis in *Jailhouse Rock*.

In 1961, after dancing for many years, Rene suffered a heart attack and stroke while in Tahoe. He recovered and then went to the Sahara where he performed in his last big show. With all his experience in dance and shows he then began the transition from dancer to choreographer. He received an opportunity to go to Portland and choreograph shows there, although he would always come to Las Vegas when he needed a lead dancer for one of his productions. Rene De Haven currently works for Hollywood Props and Design Group where he has spent the last five years.

LAS VEGAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Project Director, Peter Michel, Special Collections, UNLV Library, 895-3252

Name of narrator: Rene' De Haven

Name of interviewer: Nancy Hardy

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Rene de Haven
8/2/03
Interviewed by Nancy Hardy

Today is August 2nd, 2003, and I am at Flamingo Library with Rene de Haven. The release form has been read and it has been signed.

Okay, I'd like to start off today by asking you where and when you were born, and I'd like you to tell a little something about your childhood.

Okay. I was born May the 8th, 1922. I don't know what time it was (he laughs) but it was sometime in the night, and it was on a 160-acre farm where we lived. And we had sharecroppers. We didn't have to farm it. My mother always had a garden, you know.

Where was this?

In Oklahoma.

Oklahoma.

Yeah. And my father had already passed away. I do remember him, even though I was 3½ years old, I still remember him, you know. One incident was where I was following him to the pond with the horses, and a colt kicked me in the stomach. And I was just little then. I ran up behind the little horse and it kicked me, you know. And then after that, why, at 17 I went away to private school; Presbyterian private school in eastern Oklahoma.

Had you attended grade school growing up at all?

Yes I did. Earlier, you know, until let's see...It was called Preston High School, and I finished there, and then when I was in the ninth grade is when I went away to school. But I think I was 17 then. But in the meantime, I had drowned. And according to my

hand, I have a short lifeline. But I had a destiny. I must have had a destiny to fulfill. I'm still here at 81.

I guess so.

Anyway, I went to eastern Oklahoma to Presbyterian school, and then from there, the following year, I went to Wichita, Kansas. Still Presbyterian, but we went to school in town. We stayed at home but went to school in town. The winters were pretty severe, you know. Sometimes we were froze-in for a whole week. And then the following year after that, I went to Tucson, Arizona, and that's where I finished - in Tucson, Arizona.

Were you a good student?

Well, let's say average. I wasn't an A-1 student, but I got out. I graduated, anyway.

What kinds of interests and inspirations did you have growing up? Did you have dreams of doing something...?

I always wanted to be a dancer, and I wanted to dance with Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. I actually made this all come to pass. I can't believe I lived until I made sure that this happened, you know. So anyway, getting to that, I went to business college. Finished business - not finished business college, but I left and I was coming west because I have a sister who lived in California. And I came by the school, met some minister that needed somebody to take shorthand and typing for him, because he was writing a book, so I got like a short job with him. Then from there, I went into the service.

After I got out of the service, I went back to Oklahoma. I used to go dancing every Saturday. Jitterbugging, you know, back in those days. This friend of mine worked for California Douglas Aircraft, and I worked for Sinclair Oil Company. She'd work at night and I worked, and then on Saturday afternoons we would go dancing. One

Sunday -- I mean Saturday -- we said, "Let's don't go dancing this weekend. Let's go to a movie." So I said, "Okay." As we're walking down the street, I look up, I see a sign that says "Alano Dass, Mentalist." I've always been interested in things I don't understand, very curious about it. So we went -- you bought your ticket, but you're supposed to write a question on a piece of paper. I wrote on my paper, "Will I be successful in what I wanted to do?" And then I put it in my hand, folded it, put it in my hand. You were supposed to drop the ballot in a box inside. So I don't know what she wrote, but we went in. She dropped hers in the box, but I did not. I got chicken and held mine in my hand. So we were watching, and the theater was just filled with people, and he was calling out initials. Mrs. So-and-so, blah, blah, blah, your daughter will have a lovely baby and you'll be the grandmother, whatever. All the way down the line, he's calling out initials, and these people would answer. And I looked at her and I said, "Well, I guess I should've put this thing in the box. I don't -- But," I said, "If he's a mentalist, I'm going to concentrate on him." And I squeezed this ballot in my hand so tight, and all of a sudden he called out my whole name. My real name is Joseph Wellington MacIntosh. Now where he got that, I don't know. But that's my real name. And that's what he blubbered out of his mouth. I could not answer him because I was so overtaken by him calling out my name. But he said, "You will be successful in what you want to do, but you're in the wrong place for it." He said, "You either have to go to the East Coast or the West Coast." I had a sister living in California at that time, so I lost no time in turning my two-week notice in to Sinclair and heading West.

Well, things didn't just happen then. I had to go to work at a print company, blueprint company, and we were making ships for the war at that time. Sometimes I'd

work 18 hours a day, you know, and long hours if they ask you, you know, if you want to stay over. I went to a cocktail party, and somebody says, "What are you doing with your life?" I said, "What do you want to do?" Oh yeah, and I said, "I'd like to be a dancer. I'd like to be in pictures," and blah, blah, blah on down the line. They said, "Well what are you doing about it?" I said, "Nothing." And they said, "Well how do you expect it to happen if you aren't doing anything about it?" Got my brain to working, you know. I said, well, they're right.

So I went to a phone booth, looked up in the phone book dance studio, and it said drums and primitive and all that. That was right down my alley, so I called them up and made an appointment. It was Camargo Studios. Cerita Camargo, that was there in the picture that you saw. We went to watch a dance class, and she came over to me and asked me if I'd like to join them. And I said, "Oh my God, yes." Because the drums were going and everything. So I got a scholarship, you know, just by going. So it didn't cost me anything. But I wasn't there that long until Jack Cole, who was one of my inspirations, with his dancers, came into town at Slapsy Maxie's, which was on Wilshire [Boulevard] at that time. And we all decided to go see Jack and his dancers. Cerita and I were dancing on the floor, you know, dancing before the show started. Came back to the table, and one of the waiters came over and said, "What is your name?" And at that time I said, "Well, de Haven." Rene hadn't been put to it yet. So he said, "Well this couple would like meet you." And I guess it's like being in the right place at the right time. So he took me over and said, "This is Mr. de Haven. This is Nick and his girlfriend Sunny Knight." Then Nick says, you know, "Hello." Found out later that he was one of Bugsy Siegel's boys at the Flamingo. He said, "My girlfriend is starring in a revue that's going

to Mexico City, and she likes the way you move, and she'd like for you to help her."

Well, I didn't even know what the word "choreographer" meant at that time.

How long had you been dancing at that time? Just a very short while?

I hadn't. I hadn't. I just –

A few classes.

Nightclub dancing. I mean, you know, ballroom, and winning many prizes from that. So anyway, I met them and I worked with her and they paid me well, and she said, "I'll never forget this." And I said, "Well it's probably the last time I'll hear from her." Well it wasn't, oh, two months, I guess, and she kept calling to me up from Mexico, and she said, "Nick's going to call you because he wants you to come down here with me. I told him we could put an act together." So I said, "Beautiful," you know. So he called and said, "Is there anything keeping you in the States?" And I said, "No." So I went down there and worked with her. We put an act together, and we stayed down there 4½ years.

Hmm. Wow.

So I became an international dancer before I was ever known, and I hadn't studied at all then.

You were just a natural talent.

A natural dancer. So I came back. After 4½ years, I came back to – I mean we went everywhere in the country, you know. Brazil and all of those places down there.

You toured.

Yeah. Well, Sunny got in good with a lieutenant from the Mexican Air Force, and there was always a plane ready for use wherever we wanted to go. So she always got in with the right people.

What was your act like at that time?

It was – I wish I had a video of it, but way back then, with me not knowing choreography, I don't know where it came from. But we worked at the top places in Mexico. Cyro's at the Reforma Hotel, you know, and I forget the name of this other club, International something, you know. And then, all the other clubs down in South America. And then Nick – She got into trouble. She met this Mexican movie star, Victor Junco, and he wanted to marry her and take us both to Spain. He just said, "Oh Nick would kill me and send every gangster after us."

Oh dear.

She called him up to tell him that she was in trouble -- brave her -- and he was right down there on the next plane. Told her that – Oh, I mean, she said, "Let me go see him first and then I'll call you and tell you the coast is clear." I said okay, so she went, and everything was okay. He said, "You kids have been down here too long. It's time for you to come back home." And I said, "Oh thank God you don't get to go." So I left for Acapulco before them – Because he wanted to take us on a vacation. We'd already had Acapulco, but that's where we went back, and he was scared of the Mexican Mafia, so I had to keep checking us into different hotels every day. I lost more shoes that way.

Oh dear.

He got us on a boat coming back to the States, and I took sick, and I – Hepatitis or yellow jaundice, whatever. I almost died after getting back. It was fun getting back. I felt good, but then it wasn't long until – bloop! Down I went. Anyway, that was the beginning of that side of the story.

So then I bought a home in North Hollywood. I wanted to get into pictures so bad; I even went out there to get a job as a bloop operator. While I was there, I saw all these kids going to – they were doing *Annie Get Your Gun* at that time. All these dancers were going through casting and I just said, “Okay, I’m out here now, but one day I’ll be in there.” And sure enough, it was Gwen Verdon that got me into movies. My first was in ’51 [1951]. I went to casting, and casting, of course, they turn you down. Then they said you’re to come back later, interview you again. I went back and they accepted me. My first picture was *Singing in the Rain* with Gene Kelly, you know, and Debbie Reynolds, and all that.

What was that experience like for you, doing *Singing in the Rain*?

It was great because I wanted, you know, and those things are always a clique. And if you’re in the clique, it seems like they’re the ones that, you know, get all the good news. So to me, that was exciting to be in my first movie.

And then to be living your dream.

Yeah. And Gwen, you know, Gwen Verdon, she was the one that picked me the day we had the audition. After that movie, I went into Paramount for *Just for You* with Bing Crosby and Jane Wyman. And you’ve heard – Oh, now, let me be sure to get her name right. From New York, she was the choreographer -- Helen Tamiris. She was married to Danny Nagrin, remember, that did the big Indian number in one of the musicals?

Yeah.

Well, anyway, she picked me to be in the movie, and so I was in the movie. I had a small acting – not acting, but dancing thing with Crosby in the wings when we’re performing, and I went to the wings, you know, doing some silly thing with him. I haven’t seen that.

Now I've got to see that move to see if they left it in or left it out, because I had most of the movies that I've done.

How much rehearsal was involved for these films?

Well she's creating, Helen Tamiris, and she's – what she did was inside of the sound studio. She had another thing built so if you came to the city, you didn't see anybody because they were inside of this other thing that she had built. I don't know why she was so, you know. But everything disturbed her. If you coughed, it disturbed her, and she's pulling her hair.

She's concentrating.

She creating, you know, she says. But very – to me, when I choreograph something, the music inspires me. With her, they had to write the music to what she created.

Hmm.

And it was kind of a mess. The one thing I liked was *I'll See You in Barilla When We Bring the Lady Back to the USA* which is Bing Crosby's big number, and it was at an airport, you know, and we're going up these stairs and across. It was very interesting, and Bing was so nice. He, like most of the stars, stayed in his dressing room. He would come up and join us. It was the same thing when we were doing *Can Can*. I was the frog in the Adam and Eve Ballet, and that's when I first met Juliet Prowse. She wondered why I went every – We'd finish rehearsing the movie and I would dash out of there because Fluff and the entire Moulin Rouge bunch was at Marineland at that time. They sent us all down there from Marineland and brought another show into the Moulin. So Juliet asked me where I went, and I said, "Well I do another show." And she said, "Oh do you mind if I –" because she was a dancer, she wanted to – And I said, "No." I didn't

even think she'd go with me, but she did. She took in, I drove her down there, introduced her to Fluff and everybody, and –

Fluff LeCoque.

Nick Navarro, who was one of her top choreographers. You know Nick.

Mm-hmm.

Yeah. I introduced her to Nick, and they became very good friends. And –

So when along the lines of your filmmaking career did you begin to work at the Moulin Rouge?

It was...Let's see, in '59.

So that was quite a bit later.

Yeah. 'Cause '51, '52, '53, '54, yeah. '59 - I guess it was '58 and we closed in '59. The show did. I mean that the Moulin Rouge closed. So it was in '58 that we started there.

So prior to that you've made how many films?

Oh let's see. There's *Hiawatha, Mohawk* – Excuse me...Maybe ten, I don't know.

Something like that. Sometimes I say, "Gee, I forgot I was –" Oh, *French Line*, yeah.

Just found myself in that the other day, because I'm doing – The show that I want to do in October, which is a variety show, I'm taking the music from *Funny Face* and putting it in, using that with special lyrics to the music that they used, you know, for the show.

How did you get from one job dancing in a movie to the next job? Was it kind of word of mouth or you developed a reputation, or did you go out and audition all the time?

Oh, you still had to – They would call you, but you still had to audition. If you were the type, you got it, yes.

They'd call you and...

Yes. Like *Green Mansions*. I even forgot that one. Katherine Dunham did the choreography on that, and I was a jaguar.

She spoke here recently, Katherine Dunham.

Yeah. She and Jack Cole were my inspiration.

During that time did you make the effort to study more dance forms, to take classes?

Or did you just kind of fall back on your natural ability?

What I did was I realized I had to learn something, so when this Kirov called me, I had just come back. I was living out on the beach, Long Beach, and I came to visit Serena, who had given me that scholarship, and she said, "You're looking too much like a muscle man." I worked every day on bars out there, you know. She said, "I think you'd better come back in and start taking class again." So I moved from Long Beach back into Hollywood. I wasn't even there a week. Kirov called me and he said somebody had seen me five years ago, before I went to Mexico, dancing, and told him about me. All I did was on the floor, dancing.

Hmm.

But knowing that he was doing different type of stuff. Did you ever hear of Carmelita Maracci?

Yes.

Well, she was another – She gave me a scholarship. And I was so scared of her I wouldn't go.

Tell me about her background.

Carmelita?

Mm-hmm.

Well, she was a fantastic, fantastic flamenco dancer. I mean spiritually, spirit-wise, sensational. She was the most exciting thing I'd ever seen as far as flamenco dancing is concerned. And so was Rita Lupino, Ida Lupino's sister. And then to see her later in life, what happened to her, you know, with arthritis setting in and all.

That's sad.

It's just a shame that she had to start teaching from a chair. Couldn't believe it. I took a class at Dance Theater of the West Coast; Lester Horton's Dance Theater of the West Coast. And then I was Kirov-ing, and when I left his company, we were in Palm Springs doing this layout, and we were doing, oh, everything, gymnastics and everything. You know Horton, guy flips you back. I ran, jumped in his hands and then I got upside down and changed my mind, and fell on my neck. So I hurt myself. Anyway, that's when I quit and decided, "Well, I better go to school." So I started going to cosmetology school. Dance Theater called me, and I'd only taken one class there, and they said, "They'd like to interview you," you know. "Please come in." So I went to Dance Theater, and they said, "We'd love for you to join the company." All I did was take a class. Well, I said okay, because my neck felt a little better, you know. I joined the company and was in Choreo 51. We got all our classes free, you know, and I really studied after I – Well I didn't tell you about the audition with him, when I went to audition.

Tell me about Ivan Kirov. What was his background, and how did you –

Ivan was at the university, and I think he became a swimmer like Weismuller and all those guys, you know.

Tarzan.

Every day we wondered what mood is he going to be in today? He was one of those kinds of people. Even his sister, who was in the act, she – If she just did a pirouette and we were supposed to do two, and she fell out of the second one, he'd make her go take a class with Carmelita. Everybody was scared of Carmelita. (They laugh.) He'd make her go take a class if she missed something. He never did that with me. And he... Well, he loved snakes. In one of the acts that we do, we perform with an eight-foot boa constrictor who was called Lady Melenkoff. When I got the job, I walked in and I told him, I said, "If you call any kind of like a pirouette, or" – I didn't say that, or I said, "Anything that I don't understand, you know, I said I'm not a trained dancer." I was honest with him. Whoever drew my name and I couldn't – So he said, look to just draw my name, he said, "Give him some rhythms. I want to see him move." And I got the job.

Wow.

But he kept speaking about Lady Melenkoff. They invited me out to try the costume. I was at their house and all of a sudden, I'm talking to her, and he's in front of me with this big snake in his hand and he put it right in my lap. Well, I wanted the job so bad, I was so brave and I was more scared than heck with this snake in my lap. But she was very docile, and we – He hurt his back and he was in the hospital, and he wanted to see his snakes, because he had another one that was 20-foot.

Oh dear.

He wanted to see them. So we had to take – I said, "How can we get these snakes into the hospital?" He said, "Put them in a pillowcase, put a coat over your arm, and just bring 'em in." Well, they were heavy. We tried to act as straight as we could, and he's there on the bed where he – He was weird. Because before the sun would go down – I

want to finish this other story – A nurse came in and he quickly put the sheet over the snake. Now you can imagine what the nurse did when she pulled that sheet back.

Oh, yeah.

But we grabbed those snakes and got out of there fast because they would have arrested us or something, I'm sure. Anyway, that was the story with him. Great guy, but didn't understand him, did not understand him.

After that, I – when I was with Dance Theater, they -- You know, you've got no money, you know. You've just got your classes and stuff like that, and the idea of being with Dance Theater, you know, so it was just –

How often did you perform, and in what venues with Kirov?

With Kirov was their company.

Mm-hmm.

The company. I was with the company until I hurt my neck, you know.

Did they tour, or...

Well, our first performance was very unexciting, but anyway – That's what I was going to tell you about Carmelita, the reason I brought it up. I had to learn their show in one week.

Oh.

Not being a dancer, now. It was a big primitive number, and my forte was primitive, you know. So I did this number. Carmelita got up and cheered me.

Wow.

That's when she came backstage and offered me the scholarship. I was scared. I never did accept it. Every time I'd see her, she'd ask, "When are you coming in?" I'd say,

"Oh, I'll be –" Lying, of course. After that is when I told you I wanted to do nightclub.
And Dorothy Dorban, who – You remember Dorothy?

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Dorban, who had the Frontier. She had Bimbo's in San Francisco, and she had the Riviera, and I had already opened the Riviera in '55 with Liberace.

Oh.

We put an act together when we were with Dance Coast of the West – I mean Theater, Dance Theater of the West Coast – with Sonia Shaw. And we became known as the Shaw Dancers, and we opened at the old El Rancho. Remember? That burned down?

Mm-hmm.

That was my first place. I remember the Shaw Dancers.

That was the first time you were in Las Vegas?

First time I was in Las Vegas, in '54. Well, they were building the Riviera at that time. After the show closed I went back to Hollywood, got into Liberace's show, then came back and opened the Riviera in '59 with Hal Balfour. Remember Hal?

Mm-hmm.

He produced the show for Lee. Then Dorothy took it over, you know. She was the first one that – I had already worked for her before I came in. She was opening a show, and there was a kid by the name of Pepe de Chase, who was a dancer, and he was going to be the boy dancer. He went for his fittings at Lloyd Lambert, who was the cos – Remember Lloyd Lambert?

Mm-hmm.

He was a costumer – the greatest, to me. He had Pepe try the jacket on, because it was called the *Black and White Mambo*. And there was just one color; it was the button, which was chartreuse. No – fuchsia. When he was done, he said, “I don’t like this.” He just pulled the button right off. Well that didn’t set too well with Lloyd.

I guess not.

So he immediately called Dorothy. Dorothy says, “Get rid of him. We’ll find someone else, because we don’t need –” She liked a smooth-running company. She didn’t like any kind of thing that went off balance, and I don’t blame her, you know. A kid by the name of – Sure I can’t think of his name now, but he went to New York and opened a big nightclub called Backstage or something like that. Maybe you’ve heard of it.

I don’t know.

But anyway, he was the one who called her and said, “I have a dancer for you.” And he called me and said, “Call Dorothy at once.” I called her even though I’d never met her, and she said, “Well you came highly recommended.” He didn’t see me dance, they just had movies. But anyway, she said, “You got the job.” I didn’t have to audition or anything.

Great.

So *Bimbo’s in San Francisco* was my first nightclub job with Dorothy.

What was San Francisco like in those years?

Unbelievably great. Just great, because there were other shows on Broadway, the street Broadway in San Francisco, that we would all go up to see, like Lynn Carter, who – He was a drag. He put his show together just like Kaye Thompson and the Williams Brothers. So he copied, and then she sued him for doing it. He had to stop his act with

him and his boys. It was such a great show that we'd all go up to see. People talk about it even today, you know.

What were the shows like at Bimbo's during that time?

Great. Great because of Barry Ashton, who was a great producer. George Morrow, who I've worked for umpteen times, is a great producer. And I myself, where I had danced before, came back to produce the shows there.

Was there more than one show a night at Bimbo's, or...

Oh, yeah. There were two shows. Two shows a night every night. Except weekends when you're off.

In those days, was there dinner dancing before the show, or...

Yes, right.

Uh-huh.

Dinner theater, you know. It would be where the dance floor was. There was a huge dance floor. When the show got ready to start, this raised stage rolled out on top of the dance floor. When the curtain opened it was elevated up, you know. And it was a beautiful — _____, and it was his pride and joy. It's still a beautiful theater, I hear. He's dead now and his son manages it, you know -- keeps it just for weddings or special occasions or something.

What number were your favorites to do? Are there any that stand out in your mind as being your favorite numbers?

That I danced in, or created, or what?

That showed you off to your best.

When I was with the show dancers, and when I did the solo for Kirov in the primitive number. And for Dorothy, I think it was called *The Moon Is Blue* or something like that. I always had a dance partner, though, you know, so... And then her *Black and White Mambo*. There are so many, you know, because everything was great, a lot of fun to do.

How long were you at Bimbo's the first time you were there?

Eight weeks.

And did you stay, did they put you up?

What she would do is she had the Riviera. So we would start out there. Eight weeks there, then she'd send us to San Francisco, different show, for eight weeks. And then from there, we'd come back to the Frontier. We never burned out in one place, you know? She just kept us working, going from one hotel to the other, because she had all three hotels, you know, at the same – I mean the supper club and then the Riviera and Frontier here.

How did everyone get along doing that?

Just great. She teamed Jack Tiget and Marge, who were husband and wife, and myself. She made a trio out of us. Jack, Marge, and myself.

(END TAPE 1, SIDE 1)

...trio, so we would, and then we'd work on our own numbers. She'd tell us what we ought to do, give us our music, and we had to dump our act into the chorus. That's what we did with that.

You must have been rehearsing all the time.

Well, yeah, because when we would finish one show, while in that show, we had to be rehearsing for where we were going. Before that ended, we had to go into rehearsal

before we got here for the other show, because you had to be ready to get there and put it together. So you had about a week, I guess, to prepare for that.

Did you ever have a day off? (They laugh.)

Oh, yeah, we had plenty of time off. But if you love doing what you're doing, it doesn't matter. Just like right now, people say, "How do you keep going?" I love what I'm doing, so it doesn't matter, you know.

For the most part you stayed in the hotel where you were working, or they took care of your accommodations?

No, well, you see, where Wynn is putting up his big hotel now? There used to be a place there called the Country Club, and all the show people stayed at that Country Club. It was just unbelievable because everybody then went wherever they had to go. When we were at the Frontier...It wasn't very far from there because the Colonial House was right there. We would leave the Frontier and go to that little restaurant, I forget the name now of the little Italian restaurant. And then you'd look and you'd say, "Oh my God." You'd go outside and the sun was ridin' up and you'd see this one rushing and that one rushing, like you were a zombie and you had to get back into your clothes before the sun came up. So...It was fun.

What was Las Vegas like in the '50s? Did everyone sort of adopt that late night lifestyle?

Oh, well, yeah.

Stay up all night, sleep all day?

We didn't. There was a girl, her name was Diane Garrison. She married and became a Hassett. Diane Hassett. She lives in Reno now, but she taught me how to sew, and so we

both – She had her machine, so I bought one. What we would do is take a big table and we would start making smoking jackets so all everybody was – Like if we opened a show, you know, had one number and just opened the show, we had all that time before we came back for the second show. We'd come home and cut and then after the last show we would go home and sew them together. So we did that four nights, and the other four, five, six, seven – yeah, the other three nights, we picked up orders and delivered to whoever ordered them. So we spent our time, you know, making extra money instead of ...

Did you go to see a lot of the other shows in town?

Oh, yes, yes. Yeah.

And the stars?

Still did that. We didn't cut ourselves completely off from having fun, you know. If the Mary Kay trio was showing someplace and we finished our show, everybody rushed over there to catch their second show or whatever show they did. Yeah, Vegas was an unbelievable place at that time. If you went to see another show, the maitre d' always knew that you were in a show, so he'd say, "Come on in. Sit in the back there." We'd watch the show. You were welcomed. But now it's the hand in the back, you know.

It's changed.

You know what? It has really changed.

Did you have a great awareness of the organized crime influence in town at that time?

Yes. Very.

How did that affect you personally? What did you notice?

Well, I got into trouble one time when we were doing these smoking jacket things. These guys moved right next door to me. We always kept the curtain closed so nobody could see what we were doing in there. So they were curious as to what's... they knocked on the door, seeing the curtain was closed and everything. I answered the door, and he said, "Could I get some change? Do you have any change?" But he didn't want any change; he just wanted to see beyond that door. He saw all these coats hanging there, and he said, "Oh, what are those?" Curious, you know. I said, "Well, we make smoking jackets." And he said, "Oh, can I give you an order?" And I said sure. So he said, "Okay, there'll be 36." So he gave me an order of 36 paid.

Wow.

They lived next door to me, and I found out – They'd be out there cleaning their fishing gear and everything. It was just a cover-up. Well, I got up one morning and I saw the maid cleaning their place out, you know. And I said, "What happened to them?" She said, "Well the Federales came and got them." He was in jail, and he kept calling back there – or they did, that he wants to speak to Rene. Well, the lady in the office said, "They keep calling for you, but thank God you have the name of Rene. They think you're a girl and they're calling for you." So I said, "Well, she left for New York. She's not here." Then she said, "I think you you'd better get out of town for a while." So I had to leave town for about a couple of months before I came back here again.

That's a little scary.

But I got movies to do, see, so...

You were working in Las Vegas then, during the mid-'50s, and went back and forth to Bimbo's in San Francisco. When did you go back out to Los Angeles and begin work at the Moulin Rouge, and other film work?

That was in '58, I said, you know. Donn had mentioned for the three of us to come and audition for him.

Donn Arden?

Donn Arden. I was a little late getting there. And I was way up – Were you ever in Moulin?

No.

Oh, well, you came in way up here and then you went down to where the stage was. So I was up here, and I saw him giving a girl the riot act like you wouldn't believe, and I just said, "I'm not going to audition for him." I left.

You left.

Jack and Marge got in the show that year, and the following year... Oh, then I'd run into him and he said, "I thought you were coming to audition for me." And I said, "Well, I was," but I made some kind of excuse, you know, that something happened and I couldn't get there. But I saw him and I just... You know, just – I had heard about what he did and how he was.

He could be terrifying.

Oh, yes, he could. I mean I just felt so sorry for some of the people that he hurt like he did. I know there's one kid, when they had his memorial or whatever it was here, he said just make damn sure it was free. It was Rick Mitchell. You must know Rick Mitchell.

No.

He's a *Lido* boy.

I didn't work with him.

Rick Mitchell.

Didn't work with him.

Oh. Well, anyway...Where were we? Sorry. Oh, you were asking about the year that –

How you got involved in the Moulin Rouge in Los Angeles.

Oh, yeah. Well, the following year, they were going to do this big African number. So everybody came. They said be sure you bring your swim trunks because you had to strip down. They wanted to see your body because you were going to do this African number, you know. And you felt so silly because they said, "All right now, face front. All right. Face to the side. Turn back." We said, "What's going on anyway?" And of course you know how kids are. They'd make any kind of funny comment: "Donn's looking for a new boyfriend." Anyway, I got the job and it was fun, working for him. Larry Maldonado always said, "Oh, you don't have to worry about Donn. I've got him under my thumb." Well, they went out to have dinner, and Donn had, I don't know, umpteen martinis and when he came back he was anything but under Larry's thumb.

Oh dear.

Well, one of the boys was lying there with his head in a girl's lap and it infuriated him. I thought the whole building was going to – It was terrible how he went after those two. For her, they were just lying there. They weren't bothering anybody, you know, just resting. But he couldn't stand that mixture, seems like.

My whole situation started with that psychic. My whole life, giving up what I was there to pursue, what I had grown up doing. My mother would take us to – I'm jumping

back now. From the farm, I don't care how cold it was, if *Golddiggers of '36* was playing, any kind of musical, my mother would take us to see it. Then I'd come home and I'd had an apple box and she'd give me part of her slip that was silky and looked like a curtain. I'd put it on a bow and arrow, on the arrow, you know, and I would roll it for the curtain to go up, and then I'd make the set. You know, these big, large clocks. Well, the thing is, I would turn it sideways and make a turntable out of it. So I'd make my own. I was doing that when I was growing up, way back then.

So the movies had a big influence on you?

Yes, yes, seeing the musicals. I had always wanted to be a dancer, so I guess it was just there. My uncle was a big Indian dancer. No matter what powwow you went to, he was leading the dance.

Is this on your mother's side, your uncle?

My father's side.

On your father's side.

Also on my father's side, my aunts were pianists.

A little bit of music in there.

Yeah, but nobody was a dancer except my uncle, who was [unintelligible].

Was your father Native American?

I don't know.

How did you come up with the name of MacIntosh?

Well, my father was Willie C. MacIntosh, so they named me Joseph Wellington MacIntosh. But when I got the name, when I said "de Haven," I was in school and I was reading *The Magnificent Obsession*. In that story, one guy's name was K.C. Dexter

Haven. I said, "Oh, my God, that sounds so ritzy-titzy." My initials are J.M., so for the longest time I was J.M. Dexter Haven. When that guy at the nightclub asked me my name, I said, "de Haven", and he put the first part on it. Then when I met Sunny and she wanted me to come down to Mexico, when I arrived it was like some dignitary coming. The Mexicans – they had the two motorcycles, one on each side, and the limo that we were riding in. Well anyway...Anyway...What? Where was I?

We were talking about how as a child you made the little theaters with the turntables.

Oh, yeah, yeah. That's right.

Leading back to something to do with the Moulin Rouge and how much you...

I'm getting back to...Oh, it just slipped my mind.

(TAPE PAUSE)

...back on track. Anyway, Sunny said, "You know, the Mexicans hate the Indians, being Aztec or whatever. You have the name de Haven. Let's put Rene before that." So she was the one that gave me the name of Rene de Haven. Ever since then, I've carried the name Rene de Haven. She was the one responsible for that, but in school, it was J.M. Dexter Haven.

I see.

So that's where that name came from. But the MacIntosh is from my father. I'm 5/8ths Indian, see. And I got a little from my mother and a little from my father, because neither one of them are full-blood.

Tell me, at the Moulin Rouge, was that the first time you worked with Fluff LeCoque?

Yes. Uh-huh.

That's the first time you met her?

I'd heard about her for so long, you know, and then finally got to meet her, and...

Was she dancing in the show at that time, or did she have other responsibilities?

Oh, she was sensational! Sensational. Yeah, she helped put the choreography together plus dancing in the show, you know. It was great, and she was – You know, like either somebody has a lecture or they don't. Bonnie Hunt, do you remember Bonnie?

Mm-hmm.

Well, Bonnie liked me, thank God, but I noticed too that she didn't care for some people. They were always picked on or something. She never bothered me or Fluff. I remember one time after they moved us to Marineland, doing this big ballet number. Down the steps we came, and you were supposed to – And Donn is way across the water because of porpoises and he's on the mike, and he said, "Rene, melt! Rene, melt!" Well all I – I didn't know what "melt" meant. You know, into the crowd. I melted, I just sunk to the floor. (They laugh). Like butter. Only time he yelled at me. I felt so silly.

Tell me the experience of working at Marineland. What sorts of things did you do?

What kinds of numbers? And how many shows?

We still took the African number there. There were two pontoons that went out on the water, and you had to go out on these things. It's a wonder some of the kids didn't fall in because pontoons kind of bounce around. It was an exciting number, because we got to burn Fluff every night. (They laugh.)

Someone always got burned at the stake, didn't they?

She was the one. She was like Pearl White, always in trouble, you know? But she wasn't saved by a [unintelligible]. The flames took her. The other number was a ballet number that we did. I'm a modern dancer. I'm not a ballet [unintelligible], but when I

told Dorothy, you know, this was Dorothy – I’m jumping again. I said, “Dorothy” -- She wanted to do *Fountains of Versailles* which is a very balletic number -- I said, “Dorothy, I’m a modern dancer. I’m not a ballet dancer.” She said, “Now, look. If I have confidence in you, why can’t you have confidence in yourself?” And that always stuck with me, and I said, eeh. So I proved that I could do it, you know, and did it.

How long did you remain doing the Moulin Rouge and Marineland and working in the Los Angeles area?

Umm, the nightclub, that was the first place. My first – which one, when I was still with the Shaw Dancers, with the Jerry Lewis thing on TV there at – I forget now the name of the theater. But I think there was a special theater where he’d always do his show. That was way back when television first came out, you know. It wasn’t really big like it was. And ...Ask me some more.

Tell me about working with Elvis doing Jailhouse Rock. Did that come after you’d been working at the Moulin and doing the nightclubs?

It was during the same time.

Oh, you did both at the same time.

During the same time, yeah.

Doing those at the same time.

Yeah, because that was –

You were busy.

You know, we’d do it in the daytime and the nightclub at night. Well, Elvis was real nice. He was real great to everybody. Gene Kelly was doing *Les Girls* at that time, so he came over to watch us do *Jailhouse Rock*, and he hired every one of us for *Les Girls*.

Didn't have to audition, he just hired us. So we're in the last section of – Did you see *Les Girls*?

I've seen it a long time ago.

There's a motorcycle number where Mitzi dances at the jukebox, and Gene comes in with all the guys. And I – there was something at that time that, I don't know what it was, but I just – Gene was – I don't know, I didn't care too much for Gene.

It must have been disappointing since he was...

He wasn't like Fred Astaire, you know, Fred Astaire was so warm and so much fun.

Gene has an ego that you know, just...

He was not very approachable.

Well, yes, I guess that's what I could say. But anyway, you see me come in, but then I go back behind Barbara. You see me just once and that's it, but then you see everybody else. When we leave, we'd do this last big number with our leather jackets and our caps and motorcycles and everything. So it's the last number in *Les Girls*.

About how long did it take to make one of those movies, or did it vary quite a bit?

Well Mitzi, bless her heart, twisted her ankle, so she gave us like two extra weeks on the movie. We learned the movie in no time, because it's – Gene was the one that did the big dance. We just walk in and, you know, the guys had things to say and what have you -- there was just action to do. Gene did the dance with her, with Mitzi, but when they did the thing on the stool, she pretended that she hurt her ankle just so that we could get more work. You know, some of them were real sweet like that. With Debbie it's the same way. I did *Give a Girl a Break* with Debbie and Gower Champion and I'm right in the middle of both of them. I have a big picture of it on my wall.

Were you represented by a union during the time that you were making these movies?

Yes. Central Casting is what it's called. They handled both dancers and extra work. If they called you for an extra job, you had to take it or else they'll drop you out of the guild. So you'd say, "Well gee, I'm a dancer. I'm not a – Don't want to go just –" But you had to take it or else you didn't get anything.

After that, I had a heart attack. I was with Dorothy in Lake Tahoe in '61, so I had to quit dancing at that time because I had to take therapy for – oh, God, I don't know how long all this – I had a nice stroke with it, also. So all this started deteriorating, so I had to go every day for I guess two months. You know, working, trying to get this built back up. And then I told the doctor, "I want to go back to work." And he said, "Well if you promise me that you'll run $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile a day, I'll let you go back to work." I said, "But my heart." He said, "Well, that's to build up your heart." So I said, "Well, okay." So I'll finally drop dead at [unintelligible], so I did that. My last big dance number was the big Indian number for George Morrow at the Sahara. You know, big, I was the soloist. I'm also the soloist in *Hiawatha* and *Mohawk* with Rita Gamm and Scott Breedy.

I was at the Riv [Riveria]. I had already done *Hiawatha*, but the same director was directing *Mohawk*. I was in the show for Hal, and they called and said they would like to get me out of the show to come and do the thing. So Hal says, "Oh, why not?" you know, so they took me out of the show for two weeks [unintelligible] done this movie. Then I came back and [unintelligible].

You were very much in demand. That's a nice feeling.

Yeah, so...Made me feel very good, you know.

Was moviemaking and also working in the nightclubs a good living for you? You made a comfortable income?

It wasn't bad. I made very good money because I worked all the time. There was never, it seems, like a slow time. Then after I had the heart attack, and in – I forget now, what, '60s, because I had the heart attack in '61. That was my last big number. Then I went to Lloyd Lambert, and he said, "Jerry Schafer is looking for a choreographer."

And who is Jerry Schafer?

He's a producer. Do you remember *C'est la Femme*?

I know of it.

That was my show.

Ah.

And I did that for him at the Thunderbird.

That was the first thing that you –

That was the first big thing that I did. *C'est la Femme*. Well, no, there was another one. It's a lounge show. *Girls a la Carte* was the first for him. He came and said, "You know, we can have the big room if we put it – you know, for a big show." So I said, "Well, I have to go back to Hollywood to put the music together." And I didn't know which – It seems like I never – I don't know where, but somehow, there's a force or whatever there to guide me into what happens. It's just not...I say, "What am I going to do?" Well I must have spent 14 hours on the floor putting this music together. When I brought it back, played it for him, he just flipped. And so –

So the music sort of provided the impetus for the ideas of the show and the concepts of the music came first for you?

Yeah. And so we got the big room and did the show. Judy Garland showed all the way down. All of them. I'm a card reader, so this girl and I would exchange readings every three weeks or something. Every time she would read for me she was saying, "I see a dark lady coming into your life." And I thought, "Dark lady? I don't know, who?"

So all of a sudden I get a phone call. This lady calls from Portland, Oregon. Her name is Gracie Hansen. She – Remember Totie Fields? She looked exactly like Totie Fields. She patterned herself after Totie Fields. Her legs were cut off just like Totie Fields. (She died.) But anyway, she came, she called me up and she said, "I have a job to offer you if you will accept. We need a choreographer." And I said, "Well, I'm the choreographer here at the hotel." So she said, "Well, this would be like home, you know, it's your job." And I thought, well, gee, that's doing my own thing and what I want to do and everything, so I turned in my two week notice and...She came into town, dark lady, Italian, you know. I had met her at Lloyd Lambert's because she produced the show for Barry Ashton for the Seattle World's Fair. The show was called *A Night in Paradise* with topless girls and everything, so everybody thought she was a madam. This old man who was opening a big club in Portland, Oregon, came to Seattle and hired her to come take over this club. And so they needed a choreographer, so she said, "I keep seeing your name in *Variety*, and so that's how I know of you and I'd like to offer you this job." So I went up there for 4½ years.

Wow. How did you make the transition from dancer to choreographer? Was that difficult for you, or –

Not at all.

No, it came naturally?

No, I just fell right into it. As I said, music inspires me, so when I go to do a show with the music, I can see everything that I want to happen. And so like somebody says, "How can you do a show in two weeks?" I say, "Very easily." I learn a number every three days. That's six days, and then I polish them the rest of the time, you know.

Almost mathematical.

Yeah. And that's what would happen.

Did you oversee the hiring of the dancers for the show, and the costumes and sets and the whole show?

Mm-hmm. Yes. Mm-hmm. I did in Portland, you know. That's what I did, the whole thing, you know, produce the whole show. And also at Bimbo's, too. He just let me do whatever I want to do. It wasn't like Barry Ashton coming in with his show all ready, you know, or Mora Landes.

So you auditioned dancers in Portland and hired them and [unintelligible].

Yeah. And they were mostly kids out of dance school. The old man didn't pay them any money at all, but I told them if they worked for me, I didn't change shows but every...every three months. So the show ran that long. And then these girls that work for me, I would have to teach them, you know, how to get styled and everything. And I would always bring my lead dancer from here. I'd come here and pick my lead dancer and take her back to Portland. During those three months before I put the show together, I was working with lounge groups. In my – where I work right now at Hollywood Props and Design Group, I was their choreographer until he got married to one of my dancers. They wanted me to come to Portland, because that's where Hollywood – I mean West Coast Productions - is. And I said, "I was already up there 4½ years, and I left merely

because of arthritis, you know.” And so they said, “Well, all right.” So they bought Hollywood Props and Design Group here, and that’s where I’ve been working for the last five years.

You came back down here.

Yes. But I just work there obviously in the morning, and then I’m off in the afternoon.

Oh, that’s not bad.

I get three hours in. Depends. If I want to go four, I go four. But I just handle the linens and stuff like that, you know. Nothing that’s going to kill me. I have a muscle that tore and fell.

Oh, ouch.

See, like that, you know? I was putting on a T-shirt and heard something pop, and I looked and there was a big knot down there. Oh, my God.

Ruptured it.

So lifting this arm is out, feels like it’s paralyzed because it doesn’t have the strength in it, you know. I keep working on it, working on it, but...

The show in Portland. What theater was it?

It was the Hoyt Hotel.

It was at the Hoyt Hotel?

Yeah, and it was called *The Roaring Twenties*. I don’t know why they called it that, because everything was Grecian in it. (They laugh.)

Did you borrow from Donn Arden and Larry Maldonado, or people that you’d worked with before? What did you learn from them that you could take with you when you put together your own show?

Well, Larry and I both went to Dance Theater, see, so he didn't know any more than I did. I always watched George Marlin when I was working with them, how they staged. With Donn Arden, who is the greatest in the world, I did the same thing. So then I just started taking – That's what I learned from them: staging, you know.

When you go back now and watch some of the movies that you did – Do you do that very often? You watch your old –

Well, I have most of them at home on videos myself. What I'm going to do is, instead of watching the whole movie, I'll just take my segments out, you know. I'm going to put it on one video so it's just right there.

How does that make you feel when you see how you danced in the old days?

Well, I don't like the way I danced in *Jailhouse Rock*. I don't. I didn't like the one particular thing.

The style of it, or do you think your technique?

I think it's the style of it, you know. But Alex Romero did it. He and Gene are like that, you know, because he did a lot of Gene's work. He's a hooper, also, but a good choreographer, and it was fun working with him because he's a great guy. Dorothy Dorben couldn't be any better. She's just tops as far as I'm concerned. She's never emotional; you just feel at home, you know, with nothing to –

Have you stayed in touch with some of the people that you worked with in the early days?

It's so strange. I always look up friends that I knew, but they never look me up. (He laughs.) We're getting up in years. "Oh, is he still alive?" But I always, even like with classmates, I think it was – Oh, it must have been ten years ago, I was in a retirement

home. I didn't know that these two ladies that were in this retirement home lived where I did. I was on the sixth floor, and I heard this noise, and I looked. The windows went all the way down to the floor. That's the only reason I moved into Fickett Towers, which was the name of it. And there are these two women who are lying in the street. And I found out that they were in the same building I lived in, and one of them was an oriental lady that always pushed her husband around. What really disturbed me was that they were coming from church. They looked and the light changed. So they say, "There's no cars coming, so we'll cross the street." Where the car came from, who knows? They never did find it, so it was their time to go, you know?

Oh, I guess so. That's sad. Hmm.

So it just stuck with me. I mean, I would never let myself get depressed or anything like that, but I tell the doctor, "I can't get this out of my mind. I just feel like something's going to happen to me." So I called my uncle in Oklahoma, and he said, "Well if you feel like that, come on back. You know, come on back home." So I said, "Okay." So I closed that, packed everything up and took off. And they had a big thing for me and of course Lloyd Lambert painted a gorgeous Indian picture of these Indians going, and there's a horrible storm in the back. I left Barstow and broke down 75 miles from Barstow, 75 miles from Needles, and 125 degrees.

Oh, no.

I sat there all day long.

That's almost dangerous.

Nobody came to help me or anything. It was at that time where people were scared to stop, you know. So a friend of mine –

(END TAPE 1, SIDE 2)

I broke down, and I sat there all day long. And then the sun is going down and I thought, "Gee, I'm going to spend the night out here. What am I going to do?" I remembered that she had two things blessed by the pope: A St. Chris – Not St. Christopher, but St. Jude and St. Anthony. (Uses pronounced southern accent:) Anth – ooh, I sound very southern. But I took them out and I read them and what they said, you know, little old things, and I sat. And so I sat there. Pretty soon, an old car came up and someone said, "Do you need some help?" And I said, "Yeah." I had already written down AAA's number, and gotten some money ready to give to whoever stopped, you know, to call at the first station, which was 35 miles from where I was. So I said, "I do need help. But how you can really help me is to take this money. It's for you. This is for the phone call. Call at the first station to let AAA know that I'm out here on the road and I need help." So he said, "Okay." I just took a chance thinking well, is he going to help me, or will he just take the money and go on? But anyway, I sat there and I waited and it was getting dark, and I prayed to this, I prayed again, I said, "Please send it." I looked up, in the back, and saw a bunch of lights coming across the meridian. It was them coming to pick me up. Anyway, that was another little incident, you know, that...

Do you go to see shows in Las Vegas today, to keep up with what's going on?

If it's a good one, yeah. When *Storm* was here, I loved *Storm*. I must have seen it I don't know how many times, mainly because my company did something so that we could get passes to go see the show. And also with Wyrick, Steve Wyrick, you know. Oh, with *Legends in Concert*, too.

Mm-hmm.

That Donny Moore says I did *Jailhouse Rock*, you know, who is *American Superstars*. When he had the Flamingo in Reno, he hired me to go up and do *Jailhouse Rock* for his girls [unintelligible]. So...

That had to be fun.

Yeah. To do the number my – you know, create the number myself.

Did you have to recreate it from the film -

No, no, no. I had to put –

- or was it in your memory?

Yeah, yeah. I had good dancers, too. Top dancers. That show ended with *Viva Las Vegas*, you know, Elvis' *Viva Las Vegas*.

Was Jailhouse Rock the only Elvis film you danced in?

Yes. Uh-huh.

It was. Did you get a chance to get to know him personally?

I did. He was very, very nice. And I thought well gee whiz, you know, like later, when he got at the Hilton, and he became very – You couldn't even get to him. I went to see his shows so many times, but you couldn't get backstage. It was just – everybody else was cramming back there, and I just hate crowds, you know, so I just said, "Well, okay. Next time." But next time never came, you know, because he was...

I have heard that he was a really magnetic performer in person. Did you find that to be true?

Oh. You never saw him?

No.

Oh. Unbelievable. He was like Liberace. Right to the audience.

Something special.

'Cause you could feel that warmth from him, you know. Did you ever see Lee?

No. Not in person, no.

You never saw Lee either.

No.

He was so different offstage.

Was he?

He was very shy offstage. But very showman onstage.

Exactly.

It's just as different as day and night, you know.

I think that's true a lot of times of performers. They're very –

They live for onstage.

- private persons.

And then when they come off they're very different.

Uh-huh.

I couldn't believe it, you know, 'cause I'd gone to parties at – oh, God what were their – different parties, you know, that he would be at, and he was very quiet, you know. He wasn't wild like he was onstage, flying in wearing a fur coat.

Apart from having your heart attack, were you plagued very much by injuries during your career as a dancer?

I have a picture of me lying on my stomach, and this girl checking my back, you know, so, yeah, I had my back. And now I have a knee replacement, too. A new knee in my right knee.

When you were injured, say, dancing during the making of a movie, were you compensated in any way? The union took care of your –

Oh, yeah, they'd take care of everything, like they – if you're on a table five foot high, you're paid for the height that you're on that table, you know. Or if it rains and you're wet or you get wet, why, you're paid for that, you know.

And was the same thing true when you worked at the Moulin Rouge or in the nightclubs? You were cared for during rehabilitation?

Well, you are covered by some sort of – you know, the union was still going at that time, so you were covered by AGVA [American Guild of Variety Artists].

Mm-hmm.

'Til that fell apart. (He laughs.) You must remember that.

Yes. For the most part, in the '50s when you worked in Las Vegas, there were always live musicians accompanying every show. Always. And that's changed now. We don't have that anymore.

It's like an empty feeling, you know. You saw the orchestra there. My last big thing was with Billy George at *City Lights*, you know, at the Flamingo. You'd sit there, you'd see the big orchestra up there, and it's so sad to see they closed that off and just put a drummer there.

Yes.

One drummer; canned music, you know. Or with Bally's, you know, where it was done under the thing. Yeah, it was kind of sad to see them go, see all of that go. So when you actually see a show come into town that has a band with it, you sort of give praise.

Yes. It's like the old days.

It was all part of it, you know. It was all a thing.

You're still putting shows together today. I have heard people who say that as far as creating a new show, there's nothing that hasn't been done before. You just kind of go back farther to the past, and that seems new again after a few decades. Do you see Las Vegas perhaps turning around and bringing back the live musicians?

I'm hoping. I'm hoping, and so is everyone else. Because everybody sees the change, and it's, it's...But the whole world has changed, it seems like. Not only us here. It seems like everything else has changed. Look at Puerto Rico. We used to have all those big shows. Look at Cuba. You know, Rio and all that. Of course, they still have their shows, but we just – I don't know what happened.

Yeah.

Like Bimbo's, no more. San Francisco, no more. Portland, Oregon. And yet it's a big city, you know. It could support something like that. But they don't have it. You just can't put your finger on what happened here, you know? Of all things. Every hotel used to have a line of girls. Every hotel. And now it's just not like that anymore.

Yeah. My hope is that one day that will seem like a new concept that hasn't been done before, and they'll go back.

And it will return. I hope so. I hope so.

What about your career are you the most proud of? What stands out in your memory as –

(He laughs.) My dance career -- proving to myself that it could be done. I mean coming from a farm, being Indian, I never thought I had a chance, you know. And like I said, I made this prediction for myself years ago that that's what I was going to do. And I

remember all the people that helped me get there, you know. Many times I would rent a room someplace, and first thing I know, the old lady, whoever owns the house, is either asking me to come and eat, or saying, "You're staying in there too long. Take this money and go to a movie," or something. Just to have been offered stuff like this. And you just say, "Well, there are good people in this world."

Yeah.

One great incident was when I first hurt my knees when I was working for Hal in a big African number. I hurt one knee, so I changed it to the other. And then I hurt both knees. When I was in the service I was going to see my mother. In Dallas I ran into this lady, who's there helping all the soldiers and sailors and everybody. I met her and she said, "I'm Mom Herrington, and I have many children, always boys," you know. So we became very close, and I told her I was going to visit my mother, who was dying in Oklahoma. She said, "All right. When you come back through, please stop and spend a week." And I said, "I'll see what I can do." So after I saw my mother, I stopped and visited with her on the way back, told her that I was going into a show here. She was a nurse also, but she also came to volunteer to take care of the boys. So I came up here and I was doing a number, and wrecked both of my knees. So naturally, I was out of the show. So I called and told her. Do you know that she left her – She and her daughter left Dallas to come take care of me when I got out of the hospital, in my home. Now who in the heck would do something like that?

That's amazing.

Unbelievable. I just can't [unintelligible] that many friends that are –

That's really special. Yeah. Is there anything that you would still really like to do?

Yes. My last wish is that I'd like to do a big show. And then I would be – That would be it.

And what kind of a show would that be?

I'm real happy with the girls that I'm working with right now, to see how it's pulling together, you know.

What sorts of numbers are you working on?

Maybe you can come out and see us rehearse.

I'd love to. I'd love to.

Well, we're rehearsing tonight. I don't know how many are going to be there, but last night was my – really, 'cause I could see. You know, when one can't be there and another kind of leaves the stage, you know, you try to...and...But last night they were all there and I could see what was happening.

This is for a benefit. Are they numbers that have been done before?

No.

These are kind of bringing back?

No, no. I'm just creating as I go.

Okay. All original.

We're doing one from *A Chorus Line*; *Dolly*; and the next one I want to start on is *Mame*.

Fabulous.

You know, lively musicals. Then we're also doing this thing we did from the Bill Rogers Follies, you know, that we did in the rainbow. Golden Rainbow.

So you're still as active and busy as you've always been. Is there anything that you regret not doing? Did you turn something down that you thought later, "Oh, I

should've done that?"

No, I just – I make the remark when people ask me things about the life I've lived. I've had a great life and I have so many friends that I wouldn't change it for anything. I would repeat the same, you know. Always.

Just for a moment, I want to go way back to your time in the service. What branch of the service did you serve?

The Navy.

And this was during World War II?

Yes.

In the Navy.

Yeah. The Navy, uh-huh.

How long did you serve?

Well, not too long because I went in and I didn't tell them that I had hyperthyroidism or whatever you call it. When they found out, then the captain – I mean our company guy – came to me and said, "You know, I'm going to hate to lose you, but we're going to have to let you go because you didn't mention about you having this thyroid thing." And he said, "Merely because you'd get us all killed." You know, I mean I would probably drop everything and run, and so...

So it seems like many turns of events pointed you in the direction.

To put me in the direction that I'm going. Because I said, "Okay. So I'm going to try to get in the Army." Same thing. So then I went in the hospital for this and when I came out, that's when I went to work at – No. It's so funny. It was during July and a physical year, I had an operation in Tonkawa, Oklahoma. They found out that I typed and took

shorthand. They needed help in the office, so they would give me my clothes to go to the office to work while I was recuperating. They'd give me my gown to go back to bed when night came. It was after that that I said well – oh, then I got a job at that hotel one summer and that's when I left from there and went to Tulsa, and got the job at St. [unintelligible]. Then I moved to Tulsa. That's where – Well, Maxine was there, 'cause we knew each when we were growing up, you know. Then we'd go dancing. She loved to dance, and...And then I'd see all these musicals, and my greatest musical was *The Gang's All Here* with Carmen Miranda, Alice Faye, and oh! That was some – Did you see that?

Uh-huh. I've seen it.

The Gang's All Here. I've got it on film, too. I put it in every once in a while to get inspired, you know, to...

Uh-huh. It seems to me that you've definitely lived the life that you were born to live.

Yeah.

Well, I thank you so much for sharing that with us.

Well, good.

(END INTERVIEW)

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