AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN DELIBOS

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 following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

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PREFACE

With roots in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, John J. Delibos epitomizes a true Las Vegan. At the age of eight, his family moved from Wisconsin to Las Vegas to take advantage of emerging employment opportunities. Raised in a devout Catholic household, his mother and father demonstrated a strong work ethic that John would emulate.

After graduating from Cornell University, John returns to Las Vegas. Over the course of his young adulthood, John meets many of Las Vegas' key developers, including the McKellars, the Boyds, and the Thomases. He works in various capacities, in various casinos around town.

Eventually, John retires from gaming and works full-time as an interior designer, a skill he cultivated since childhood.

Throughout the interview, John recollects, with meticulous detail, the development of Las Vegas since the 1960s, neighborhood by neighborhood, street by street, property by property. John now lives at Turnberry, overlooking a very different Las Vegas than that which he first saw as a child living at The DeVille.

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October 2, 2012
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee White

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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John J. Delibos 10-02-2012

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This is Claytee White. It is October 2nd, 2012. I am sitting here in this beautiful home in Las Vegas with John.

John, would you please pronounce your last name and spell it for me.

It's pronounced Delibos, D-E-L-I-B-O-S.

Thank you so very much. Where were you born?

I was born February 12th, 1951, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

And how did your family get to Las Vegas?

Well, in 1958 my father decided that he would like to check out Las Vegas and see what it was all about. So he came here alone to see if there were any opportunities in Las Vegas that he thought were going to be in keeping with what he was looking for. When he decided that there were, in doing so he secured a position in downtown Las Vegas with Sam Boyd at a property called The Mint, which is no longer in existence. It is currently on the grounds of the Binion's Gambling Hall. He came back to Sheboygan, Wisconsin on a 30-day leave of absence from his job and basically told my mother that he thought this was a good opportunity. And so my parents, who were considering moving anyway, decided to make the move. We put our home up for sale and it sold in about two weeks. We moved to Las Vegas, arriving here April 8th of 1959.

So tell me a little about the economy in Sheboygan. Tell me a little bit about that economy and why your father decided that he wanted to leave.

Well, Sheboygan at that time was a city of about, oh, 40,000 people, give or take, on the shore of Lake Michigan. We lived on Sixth Street, which was only six blocks from the lake. The streets started being numbered at the lake. The economy in Sheboygan was what I would call a combination of small to light industry and heavy industry. We had

some large corporations. Kohler Plumber and Heating is in Kohler, Wisconsin, which is two miles from Sheboygan; and these days, just like in Las Vegas when you can drive from Las Vegas to Henderson and not know you've done that, you can drive from Sheboygan to Kohler and do not know you've done that. And also we had Vollrath Stainless Steel, which is a very large, multinational, maker of stainless steel products. They have had many military contracts. They make military mess kits, along with a lot of food service products for the restaurant industry—stainless steel pans and buffet paraphernalia for hot and cold food tables. So it was an industrial community.

At that time coal was still a big industry; and the majority of the homes in Sheboygan, Wisconsin were still heated with coal. Reiss Coal Company was one of the largest coal companies in the Midwest because of it being located on a waterway, namely Lake Michigan, which was accessible to the Atlantic Ocean through the connection of the other Great Lakes along with the Saint Lawrence Seaway. It was an actual inland port, pretty far inland when you think about from the East Coast, and was a wonderful way of shipping coal on barges to the Midwest where it could be, then, loaded on rail cars and sent to places in southern Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota – all those areas, which were very convenient by rail to any railhead located on Lake Michigan. It was a lot cheaper to ship it that way than across the country in rail cars back in those days. Plus, it was a lot more environmentally friendly, even though they didn't consider that in those days. You didn't have to worry about people complaining about the dirt from the rail cars going through the countryside as opposed to the barges where any coal dust was immediately wet by the water and sunk to the bottom. It was an inland port, if you will, a lot of fishing happened on the lakes, as well. We had a number of fishing trawlers that

were harbored in Sheboygan, Milwaukee and Green Bay. They caught Lake Perch and Coho Salmon, which were consumed by people who lived in that geographic area.

Did you grow up fishing?

No, I did not grow up fishing. I had relatives who did. Our family was more of the ones who grew up golfing. My uncle on my mother's side was a hunter – her oldest sister's husband. But my father was not a person for whom sports was anything but a spectator activity or something you bet on, which would definitely make Las Vegas the perfect place for him.

And so did you grow up golfing, fishing or gambling?

Well, considering I didn't grow up fishing, and gambling wasn't something you did as a child, I guess golfing was my sport of choice at that age.

When did you get into interior design? When did you find that you had a flare for that talent?

Well, actually it was kind of one of those odd things where aptitude and opportunity sort of came together. My parents had moved back to Wisconsin, which is kind of out of chronological order for your interview, for a short period of time because my grandmother became ill – it was my mother's mother. Her husband, my grandfather, Charles Werner, had died in 1963. And it was now 1967 and my grandmother, Emma, who was 77 years old at that time, was living alone in a very large home in Sheboygan and she was beginning to show what might have been considered signs of Alzheimer's. The family was composed of my mother's two younger brothers, one who lived in Hawthorne, Nevada. He was the head of the ammunition depot in Babbitt, Nevada, Elmer Werner, and was in the military for many years. His wife, Dorothy Werner, was

extremely active in Nevada politics from the early fifties until her death in the early seventies – about 20 years. They lived in Hawthorne, Nevada; they weren't about to move.

Emma's youngest son, Frederick, had three young children. He was on the police force in Sheboygan, Wisconsin; and his wife worked for a judge. So they really didn't feel that their home was appropriate for an elderly woman, since there was no one there to care for her; and they had a young family.

My aunt, Esther Gollhardt, who is my mother's older sister, was very self-absorbed in her own children and grandchildren and husband at that time.

So my mom, always being the soft-hearted one, who couldn't ever say no to her parents, broached the topic to my father and he said, well, you came here for me in '59, so why don't we go there for you in '67 for a while and see how it works out.

We stayed there until 1971. My grandmother was then no longer able to be cared for in a residential setting. She was too far-gone. She needed professional care 24 hours a day. And that was provided prior to that by my mother working during the daytime as a cocktail waitress, my father working in the evenings as a supervisor at Vollrath, and me living as a high school student with my parents, picking up the slack in between my grandmother being supervised by my father and my mother. So between the three of us we were able to care for her. But when I went off to college and it was just my mom and my dad, it just became too difficult. They did it for two years after I left; and they just couldn't do it anymore.

So my grandmother went to a facility for Alzheimer's patients called Sunny Ridge in Sheboygan. As it turned out, her husband, my grandfather, was on the founding board

that built that facility. My grandmother became a resident there; and they cared for the people that lived there in their own small apartments as best as they were able to in a residential setting. Some needed more supervision than others, as my grandmother did. She would wander off and get lost and it was kind of difficult. That facility was very large so they felt like they had a place to go; but the doors were locked so they couldn't get outside and get into an area where they could get hurt. Worked out real well. Plus they had planned activities and crafts and TV rooms. My grandmother knitted and crocheted and all those kinds of things. It's strange; because those types of things she remembered along with all of the things from her childhood and from her life as a young married woman when she had young children of her own; but her life as a middle-aged and older person was completely lost.

It's a mystery, isn't it?

It is. And though she would have flashes of clarity that would range from a simple thought to maybe even an entire afternoon, it would just recede again. It was like a veil; and the veil would lift occasionally; and then it would drop back down.

How did you feel as a young man—you were 18, 19—what did you think about that at that time?

I thought that it was an anomaly that you would be able to recall in excruciatingly clear detail your life as a young person and, yet, you couldn't remember what you had for breakfast or even if you had had breakfast, for sure. You thought you might have, but you weren't really sure. And for me it was sort of an eye-opening, almost cautionary tale of what can happen to people when they really don't see their lives changing any more as they already have. They've progressed from youth to middle age to old age and all of that

seems like a logical progression. Then all of a sudden it's like they've gone down the rabbit hole and they've come out in Wonderland. Basically they've gone through the looking glass. They don't really have knowledge of having done that and, yet, in their conversations, and their behavior, the things that they remember and don't, are so baffling. The conversations that they have with you are very disjointed from current reality but clearly seeded in a well-remembered past that simply doesn't exist anymore.

So before we move on, did you see yourself as an unusual young man, as different from friends in the same high school or early college classes? Did you see yourself as more kind, giving, understanding, having gone through this experience?

I would say yes. I was lucky to have a very good relationship from the time I was an extremely small child, being an only child, with adults. So, for example, my grandfather was very involved in politics in the city of Sheboygan the city, Sheboygan County and in Wisconsin. He, in his involvement, would, of course, go places and do things for these different organizations that he was involved in. He was on the board of county supervisors. He was president of the Sheboygan County Historical Society. He was on the board that founded Sunny Ridge, which was the elder-care facility. He was involved in city government as an alderman, which is a common position in the Midwest. We don't know what those are in Las Vegas. I guess you could liken it maybe to a county commissioner or in the city of Las Vegas they have a group of people that are elected to offices.

City council.

City council. Thank you. I couldn't think of what it was for the city, because I don't live in Las Vegas and haven't for so long. My home is now in the county. When I lived in

my previous home, it was in the county. And before that I lived in Henderson, in Green Valley. So my knowledge of Las Vegas and how the offices are here, if it's not in the county, well, I'm not really sure what the hierarchy is.

But he was an alderman. For example, there was a huge strike at Kohler Company in the fifties and it truly divided our community. There were automobiles set on fire. There were Molotov cocktails thrown into businesses. It was like you would think of Chicago during the riots in the sixties or Kent State in 1970. Every night on WTMJ, which was the NBC affiliate in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, there was a twenty-minute segment called the "Kohler Strike Report." It went over all of the day's activities, any meetings that were held, any atrocities that were committed, as part of the evening news – just like you would talk about what was going on in Las Vegas at, say one of the recreation centers. My grandfather and I would sit—and I was four years old—and we would discuss Kohler's politics and how the union busting, or attempts to, was affecting the fabric of our city. My grandfather treated me like an adult and expected me to behave like one.

I always grew up with adults; and I always was an adult from the time I was a small child. I always associated with students that were in grades ahead of me. When I went to elementary school as a second and third grader, my friends were fourth and fifth graders. When I was a freshman in high school, in 1965, my friends were juniors. I was in the first class at Clark High School. We didn't have a senior class when I went that first year. They had brought in eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh graders. There was no senior class. The second year I went as a sophomore was the first year Clark had a senior class, with no eight grade. That was 1966. The senior class president was Keith Boman, who is now Dr. Keith Boman, a cardiologist in town, and a friend of mine that I've known since 1966.

I went to Clark with the Thomases, E. Parry Thomas from Valley Bank's children. Peter Thomas sits on the board of Boyd Gaming today. Peter Thomas was a friend of mine in high school. So I always was surrounded by people older than I. So for me adulthood was something that came pretty much by living in a home with two intelligent parents who simply expected me to behave like I was older than I was.

And to have an opinion and it's okay to express it?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I mean I still went out with my neighborhood friends and rode bicycles and clipped playing cards with clothes pins to the spokes of my bicycle wheels and built forts out of blankets and cardboard boxes and went in wading pools before people in Las Vegas had swimming pools, which we eventually did, and did all those things. But when we would sit around the dinner table, my parents would engage me in conversation as though I were another adult like them sitting at the table. They never talked down to me or treated me like I was a child.

And I want to get back to The Mint, but this is so interesting. How did your friends feel having dinner at your house?

They would feel like they had gone to friends of their parents for dinner rather than their own friends for dinner. To that end sometimes I didn't have friends my own age. The friends I had were usually two to four years older than I was. But that was fine with me; because they were expressing more of the same interests that I had and had left behind the things I already had left behind. I kind of got this *been there, done that* mentality. Not that I didn't enjoy going with all of them to the movie theater and watching "Babes in Toyland" at the Huntridge and all of those things. But by the same token, when I got back from that I wanted to sit on the wall between our house and the neighbors and talk

with the neighbors' son Jack who was three or four years older than I was, and was the son of an executive in the same gaming company as my father worked and we were neighbors. Jack Perry's father was Paul Perry and Paul Perry was the man that opened up the Eldorado Club in Henderson originally and also went on to own the Palomino Club in North Las Vegas. They were our neighbors from '59 through when we bought our first house in 1961, so for about three years.

Where was the first house?

Our first home we lived in was a rental. It was owned by a man by the name of—his first name was Hiene, H-I-E-N-E, (Zigteema), and he was a German-Polish man and he owned the only other dairy in the city of Las Vegas. At that time there was Hiene's Dairy and Anderson Dairy. Now further out towards Apex there is Meadow Gold, but of course that's only been in the last five or six years. In '59 there were two dairies in town and Hiene's Dairy's office was on South Fifth Street about four blocks south of the Fifth Street School on the same side of the street in a building that is still there that was built in 1951. His dairy's office was in one building on the left-hand side of a small alley and on the right-hand side of that small alley there was an insurance company. It was an independent insurance company at first, so it sold a number of different products. The reason I remember was because my parents used to drive by there. My dad working at The Mint, it was only a few blocks from where he worked and when he would go to pick up his check, we would drive down Fifth Street to Hiene's office to pay our rent the first of every month. So I would always have the opportunity of seeing what was in that part of town and it was an insurance agency. Later in the early sixties it became the

Bankers Life and Casualty's office, and they no longer sold a variety of products. It was one of the few independent insurance offices in Las Vegas.

Hiene owned the home that we lived in. Our first address was 5525 Gipsy Avenue and that was in Charleston Heights, off of Upland Boulevard. The closest cross streets at that time that actually went through to anywhere were Upland and Evergreen. Now it would be Upland and Alta, but Alta did not go through in 1959. Alta was only about a half block or so long going west from Decatur because nothing was built on Alta to merit the street going through.

In those days you didn't put a street through until you had a reason to. It wasn't like these days where they'll put streets through; and there won't be any development, but there will be streets and then later they will assess contractors as they build things for their rightful share of that roadway. Back in those days it was much more conservative; you built a road when you needed a road; and until then, why would you need a road if you didn't need a road? I am a staunch Democrat, but there are some things that still make perfect sense to me and that is one of them. That's like the bridge to nowhere or the road to nowhere. When you need it, you build it. And until you need it, why bother? Use that money for something else that you do need instead of going into debt for something you don't need. And I'm not a cheap person, God knows.

Oh, I know. I know.

I live very well. But there is a point where you kind of scratch your head, going *Why would you do that?*

John, did your mother ever work outside the home?

Oh, yes. Yes.

What kind of work did she do?

But not when I was growing up. My parents agreed that my mother was not to return to the working world until I was in high school. My father basically said my job is to go out and bring home money and my mother's job was to maintain our home, care for our child and do those kinds of things. And he didn't think that it wasn't important. He was the first one to love the hot meals that were on the table and love that my mother was an outstanding cook and perfect housekeeper. He was the first one to invite everybody over and show off her cooking and let them come and inspect how perfect our house was. He loved those things; and he valued them very highly; and he didn't feel that what she did was any less than what he did. It was to him: okay, that needs to be done and we should all do what we're best at; and if I'm best at this and have been doing it since we're married, wouldn't it make sense to do what you're best at because you learned at the feet of your own mother the cooking and the home making. When my mother was growing up that was what you taught your daughters.

And I think at that time most women—I think probably a lot of families that your family engaged with was the same setup, the same kind of role sharing.

Oh, yes. My mother was born in 1917 and so she became a teenager in 1930, which was the beginning of the Depression. So my mother would work for spending money, but what she would do would be go next door and help the neighbor lady who was eighty do a few chores in her house and for that she would get a quarter, which in those days you could go to the grocery store and get a lot of stuff for a quarter. Nowadays you can't get anything for a quarter, but you could then. And so my mother even in those days, when she did do something, it was home centered. That was what she was used to.

Now, before she married my father she did work outside the home as a young woman. Prior to them getting married, my mother went to work. She started out as a gymnast. She was very good in high school in gymnastics. She enjoyed performing, dance, the parallel bars and the rings—all those things. She did that in high school before those were sports that were actually sanctioned for women. In those days they were called intramurals; they were done with other females from other schools in the area, but they weren't on teams like the males who played football or basketball. It was a different time. It wasn't ladylike to do those things back in those days. But it was admired if you were talented, had a good sense of balance and were attractive. Yes, intramural sports, especially those kinds, were definitely looked at as: they will make you poised and will help you have a nice figure. They looked at it like that and tried to highlight the importance of that.

My mother got more involved in that. She went to work for Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus and got involved in performing with the circus. They had more than one; it wasn't just one. They were geographically centered to different parts of the country. She got involved in the one that was in Illinois and Wisconsin and Indiana and Minnesota and Michigan and those areas. She worked as a trapeze artist, and a gymnast in the circus.

Do you have pictures?

Well, somewhere in storage, but not here readily available, no. But she did that for about a year and a half. Then my grandfather didn't like the fact that she was on the road a lot. He felt that that could lead to her becoming a "loose woman". That's what they called

them back then. So he asked her if she wouldn't consider doing something that had less travel.

So she got a job as Walter Busterkeys' first champagne lady, who was Liberace. "Walter Busterkeys" was Liberace's stage name before it was Liberace. And he played piano in all of the hotels and restaurants in the Chicago and Wisconsin area because he was a native Wisconsinite. He came to the hotel in our town, which was the Festie hotel, which was a very beautiful building and so not what you would think you'd find in Sheboygan. But Sheboygan had a lot of very wealthy families.

Owners of some of the industries?

All of the businesses. The Vollraths lived in Sheboygan. Garton Toy was based in Sheboygan, the Garton family. The Kohler family, from Kohler Plumbing and Heating, had homes in Sheboygan. The Reisses from Reiss Coal Company, Sheboygan. So there were a lot of companies that were known throughout the United States that were based in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, whose families had palatial estates right on the lake. It was what you might assume you would see in maybe Chicago. They were very supportive of the Festie family building a hotel in Sheboygan's downtown right across from our Fountain Park, which had a band shell – all the things you would think of in a small town. They built this beautiful hotel on a corner out of all granite with huge windows on two sides with all the chandeliers hanging inside. You would have thought you were in Chicago, probably not New York, but certainly Chicago or Denver.

Liberace played there and my mother was his champagne lady and traveled with him for a while. In fact, when he came to Las Vegas, she so wanted to go see him. We were living near Caesars Palace at the time. She called Caesars and left a message for his

manager and his manager called her back and she told him what she wanted. A couple of hours later Liberace called her and invited us to his show. We went backstage to his dressing room afterwards; and he served cocktails; and we sat for a couple of hours. My mother and he talked about all of the good ol' days and what they did and all the people that they both knew. It was really quite interesting. My mother did that until she was twenty-two when she got married and that's when she stopped working.

What a wonderful, wonderful life.

She became a housewife and my mother.

And had no qualms about leaving that kind of life and—

None.

—raising her family?

No. She wanted children very much. I was the only one my parents had. She was one of those people who just—I mean my mother showered me with more love than any human being has a right to have.

That's the way it's supposed to be.

It is. And if that were the case, I am certain the world would be a better place. I was a wanted child. I was adopted, which proves that I was wanted. My mother could have children; my father couldn't. They tried. They had a few false starts. My mother lost one that was born premature. They adopted. My parents were devout Catholics, so they adopted from within the church. I was brought from Milwaukee at five days old after my parents went down to talk to my mother, who was interested in putting me up for adoption to a good Catholic home. She was a young Catholic woman. Her parents did not know she had become pregnant. She left to be pregnant and have her child away

from her family, the reason was for them not to know. Supposedly it was a liaison with her boss. She wanted the child to go to a good Catholic family. So my parents went down, and she interviewed them; and she said I'm good with it and at five days they brought me home.

When I grew up people said to me, well, do you want to find your mother? And I said I have my mother; I'm not looking. I said that's biological; that isn't what makes a mother. A mother is the person who raises you, who takes care of you when you're sick, who loves you and takes joy in your accomplishments. It's not somebody who births you. That's a biological function. I mean it doesn't imbue motherhood. That is just is a familial tie that will always exist. It's biology. It can't be ignored. It's there. But it doesn't create the lasting bond that a child should feel for his parents; that, your mother and father do. And my father raised me as his son. I never felt like I wasn't. And I didn't even know that I was adopted until I was seventeen when my parents told me.

So how did you take that news? Did it matter at that point?

I was very resentful for about three days. And I was resentful that in my opinion they didn't feel that my affection for them was strong enough to withstand the light of the truth.

Earlier?

Yes. And I realized that perhaps at age two or three or four might have been a little young to understand, but I felt by the time I was ready to go to school that my parents could have indicated that I was chosen, just like I would go to the store and pick my favorite cookies; they went to the hospital and picked their favorite child. You can tell a child that in a way that they will not only understand but feel special as well. And they

shouldn't be left to find out through a family member that says something unmeaning and inappropriately. They should be told that at whatever age you feel will work, if it's five, seven, eight, but certainly before seventeen. So it took me about three days to get beyond that. I didn't talk to my parents or anything during that time. I wasn't sad; I was disappointed, in them. I did finally confront them, because after three or four days my father said we really do need to talk about this because this can't go on forever. I said, well, it's not going to go on forever, but it will go on until I'm ready.

Do you know how special you are?

No. I said to him I'm real disappointed in you and in my mom, not as parents but as adults in that we are adults and you treated me like one from the time I was five years old, but in the way that it would have been probably equally as important for me to be treated as an adult, in that way somehow or another you didn't feel that I was able to understand the situation. So do we have a double standard going here? And if so, how do you explain that to me? They couldn't. There was no good answer because they knew they were wrong. Then after about another week of kind of being a little tentative with talking and everything, it just sort of went away. It was like, okay, I'm over that. But what bothered me most was I was disappointed in them. It was probably the most profound disappointment I had in my parents. I was disappointed in them before, but it was always for what I call more temporal things, like maybe not getting what I wanted for Christmas or not getting to stay out later with my friends, all that garbage that when you're older and look back on you realize it didn't mean anything. Of course, at the time it's sure important. But this was something that was important at any age, whether you're forty or four, and that to me was a real failing on their part. I think what bothered me

most about the failing was that they didn't have enough confidence in me and didn't think I loved them enough to be willing to accept this information and process it on my own level and grow up with it rather than have to deal with it at seventeen.

You talked earlier about your mom going back to work when you were in high school. So what kind of occupation did she go into at that time?

Well, she knew that she needed to do something that she felt comfortable with. So at that time we had lived, as I told you, on Gypsy Avenue, 5525 Gipsy Avenue, and then we moved to our next home, which was 6108 Alta Drive, which was across Alta from what then was a vacant lot that later became a Mormon church.

We found out when we bought the house. They told us they bought the lot a few years ago eventually for a Mormon church. They said to my father, *Do you have a problem buying a home across the street from a Mormon church?* The Mormon faith was not well understood at the time. And in my opinion to their discredit it still is not well understood. I have no ill feelings and never have toward any religion; but I do feel like from an intellectual perspective anything that's understood is better and anything that isn't understood is always viewed with suspicion and fear. If someone wants their belief system to be understood and appreciated for the things that it brings to the table, which would be considered by anyone positive attributes, those things need to be discussed and understood. In my opinion if they don't feel comfortable discussing them—and that "they" isn't just Mormons; that "they" is anybody, whether it's a belief system that's religious or governmental—then "they" have real concerns in my opinion that are manifested in that lack of interest or lack of courage of making it public and in just how

well it will stand up to the light of day and what people will think of it. And if they think people will think it's foolish, well, sometimes the emperor is naked.

So where did you go to school after high school?

Second through fifth grade, Red Rock. Sixth grade, Rose Warren. Seventh grade, Robert O. Gibson. Eighth grade, Frank F. Garside, which was Torrey Pines and Alta. Ninth through tenth, Ed W. Clark. And then we moved back to Wisconsin for that period of elder care that I spoke of and that's where I went to junior and senior years of high school.

And where did you go to college?

Cornell.

Why Cornell?

Well, first of all, it was less of a stretch from Wisconsin than from Nevada because it wasn't halfway across the United States. Secondly, the recruiter came to South High School. I was a language major in high school. By the time I graduated I had had four years of French, four years of German, two years of Spanish, four years of English – all of the English courses were honor's courses. I had also had four years of math. I had had biology, molecular biology, chemistry and physics. I usually took six or seven courses every year in high school. At Clark and at South I would go to school an hour before everyone else so that I could get in a seventh period because there weren't enough periods in the day to go to more than six classes. Clark was on a modular schedule at the time, so you only had five seventy-minute periods four days a week anyway. So in order for me to have a seventh class, I went four days a week on the city bus, not the school bus, from my home at Monticello and Alta Drive to the nearest intersection, which was Sahara and

Pennwood, and then walked all the way down Pennwood to Clark High School, which was probably a mile or more, mile and a half maybe, but no more than that, so that I could be in the civics class earlier with the other students who were taking a seventh period.

Whose idea was it to try to get this kind of education?

Mine, always. My parents never pushed, but my parents supported. When I said I wanted to take another class, my parents were good with it. My mom, some days she could drop me off at school and then I would take the school bus home because I finished with everyone else, and other days she couldn't, so then I would take the city bus. When I was in Wisconsin, I did the same thing; to go to South I took the city bus in the morning earlier than other students to downtown Sheboygan, changed buses and took the one to the south end of town to go to South High School, and then I would come home on the school bus because, again, I was getting out with everyone else unless I had extracurricular activities which were frequent. And when my parents could take me in the mornings, they would, and when they couldn't I rode the city bus. That usually added about an hour and a half to my day in addition to the hour additional class time. I would be in school at seven, and I would have to be on the bus stop usually by 5:40.

I don't understand people who have that drive at that age.

That was in Sheboygan. It was cold in the winter and it was dark outside. Thank God the bus stop was only across the street and down to the other corner.

So how do you get that drive? Where does that come from?

Well, I was lucky enough to have parents who really were hard workers. My mother worked odd jobs as a youth from the time she was thirteen until she graduated from high

school. She did not go to college. She worked as an entertainer. And then when she married my father and until my parents adopted me, she worked for a while after their marriage at a dairy and then as a cocktail waitress. That was right before I was born. Then as soon as I was born she no longer worked until I was fifteen.

So hard-working parents I understand.

Yes. And my father always worked at least one very full-time job. He was in the liquor distributing business. He owned 20- to 25-percent at that time of a company called Eastern Distributing and they were headquartered in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. It was a small liquor-distributing firm. The other 75 to 80 percent was owned by a man by the name of Michael Smith and his wife, Alice. They lived on what was the nice side of town, which was where my parents eventually ended up living, because they were very industrious. And my mother's relationship and my father's relationship with them caused them to aspire to more. Plus my father's boss's wife made clear to her husband that anyone that was an owner in their business and worked hard should be able to afford a nice home that she could help my mother decorate, because that was what Alice liked to do. She didn't work outside the home, but she loved to do her friends' houses. And so my father worked probably ten, twelve hours a day in that business, making calls on all of the people who owned restaurants, country clubs and taverns in the state of Wisconsin going west to the Minnesota border, north to Lake Superior and south into Illinois taking beverage orders. He would be on the road sometimes eighteen hours a day between all of the stops and then come back home whenever possible.

And always came home at night and not stay on the road?

No. He stayed on the road when he went to the northern and western parts of Wisconsin. But if it was a four-hour drive or less, he would drive back home in addition to the four hours he spent getting there in the first place. So that was eight hours on the road plus the calls he made on the different proprietors. So a sixteen-hour day was easy to see, eight hours doing the calls and eight hours doing the commute. People talk about commuting these days. They don't know what commuting is. Eight hours is commuting. Anything else is really kind of close.

Right, right. We complain because we have to drive from Green Valley to Summerlin.

It's like, oh, my God, how far is that? How can I do this? I'll get lost. Do I have GPS? The way my father figured out where he was was when he didn't know where he was, he knew he was lost. That was the end of that. You stopped a farmer or you went to a house and you said I'm lost and they said, well, where do you want to go? That was pretty much it. It was real simple, not difficult at all, a little annoying sometimes, but that was the way it was.

So after Cornell, by that time your family had moved back.

Correct.

So you moved to Las Vegas after Cornell.

Yes, exactly. I came here during summers. My father came back to work. My father had worked for Sam Boyd until The Mint, Sahara and The Lucky Strike were all one corporation called the Sahara Nevada Corporation.

Lucky?

Lucky Strike Casino downtown. That's on the block of the Golden Nugget. Originally that block was home to four casinos. There was the Golden Nugget on the corner of Third and Fremont that went about 40 percent of the way down the block. Then the Lucky Strike Casino was in the middle and it had two big men sitting on the sign that were panning gold and they moved. It was really quite amazing for those days. And then next to that was Diamond Jim's Nevada Club. And Last Phil Long's California Club and now you're at Second Street. Now, of course, it's all Golden Nugget, just like the other side of the street, which started out as Binion's Horseshoe at Third and Fremont, next to that was the Boulder Club, then there was The Mint, and then on the corner of Second and Fremont was the Bird Cage, which was directly across the street from Ida Lupino's Silver Palace, which was on the corner of Second and Fremont, which was owned by the movie star Ida Lupino and her husband, Howard Duff, who we met because she did come to look in on her investment about once a month on a drive from California. She made a lot of those film noir movies in the fifties. She was quite famous in that period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. She was a popular actress – very popular.

Yes. What did your father do at The Mint—or for the entire Mint, Sahara, Lucky's, what kind of work?

He started as what they called a jackpot runner and that was someone who—when a jackpot was hit on a machine, the light would come on. And the casinos were much smaller, so you could pretty much see everything that was going on, but you did have an area that was your area that you watched. It might change from day to day or if someone was on vacation or if someone went to lunch, but you pretty much had a certain area. And The Mint at that time was divided—the slot floor was divided into three areas. My

father would watch for these jackpots. The machine would spit out, in those days, a lot of the money in coins. For example, a twenty-dollar jackpot, you would most likely get ten dollars' worth of nickels and then my father would have to go and verify the jackpot, open the machine—

No matter the size?

There was an amount of time that the machines were given to pay the hit and smaller hits would stop ringing very soon. For example, if you won two dollars, it would ring for maybe five or ten seconds. And you didn't pay attention to all of those. But when a machine was lit up and it was ringing and ringing after, like, 45 seconds or a minute, you kind of made your way over there to see whether that was one of the machines and the jackpot was one of the sizes that would be paid out or whether you had to intervene and finish the process. So he would then go to the machine and he would turn off the ringing, first of all. Then he would open the machine to see whether or not it needed a fill because if it had disgorged all of its available coin or if it was down to a certain point where, say, a two-dollar or a five-dollar payoff would bankrupt the machine, then it became more difficult because at a ten-dollar jackpot if it was supposed to pay all ten or, say, pay five and it paid two eighty-five, then my father would have to figure out that it paid two eighty-five by counting those coins at the machine in front of the player and then decide what the difference was and get that money from the booth in addition to the other five dollars—those were big jackpots those days—and then refill the machine. So it was to your advantage to make sure that that didn't happen because it was a lot of extra work and it would also hold up the process of the machine being played and every nickel in was another nickel for the joint. In those days when penny machines were very

common, nickels were the most common machine of all. Dimes and quarters, those were high rollers. People that played the quarter machines, oh, my God, they were given comps, unbelievable. Even when The Mint's hotel opened, the quarter machine players from out of state, they were given hotel rooms and everything.

At one point The Mint did not have hotel rooms?

No. The only hotels downtown at the time originally were the Fremont, the Horseshoe and—

What about the El Cortez?

The El Cortez and the Golden Gate, which was called the Sal Segev, the hotel portion was, and the Las Vegas Club had some hotel rooms, too, above it. You could see them behind the sign. But that was pretty much it. And we're talking like ten rooms, 20 rooms. Now, Binion's had more. The Fremont was a 12-story building. That was the high-rise downtown. That had like a couple hundred rooms. But even the El Cortez, maybe 90-100 rooms. It was a hotel; it wasn't a motel. But it wasn't anything like you would—no great shakes by today's standards.

Right. So are the machines rigged?

No. Oh, no. No. And then my father went from jackpot running, he went to what they call a section boss and that was a man who was in charge of that entire section that I said was divided into threes. He was in charge of that whole section. So back in the days when they had change girls who walked around with the belt and you had jackpot runners – which is what my father did – who serviced that section. You also had a mechanic that would come out on the floor if a machine needed a repair that couldn't be un-jammed by the jackpot runner or the section boss. And then there were cocktail servers who serviced

those sections and every section had their own separate waitresses. That way they would assign them like two to each section. And so my father was in charge of all the people that worked in that little section.

Then he became a shift boss, which meant for eight hours a day he was in charge of all the people in the slot department, which would be anybody that worked there. Then he became a shift manager, which was someone who managed everything that happened on the shift in the casino whether it was a slot or a table game or anything like that.

Now, that he didn't do at The Mint. At The Mint he got as far as a shift boss. Then when the Sahara Nevada Corporation was sold to Del Webb and the Boyds were not in that business any longer for a period of time, a lot of the people went to work at the Eldorado Club in Henderson, which was called at that time Paul Perry's Eldorado Club, because although it was Paul Perry's Eldorado Club on the sign, Sam Boyd's sister was the controller out there and a number of Boyd people went to work out there after The Mint closed including my father. A number of the other people that worked at the "Lucky" and the Sahara, they weren't so lucky, no pun intended.

But there was a new project in the works and that was — the Aladdin – Milton Prell's Aladdin. He and Sam Boyd had formed the Sahara-Nevada Corporation – The Mint, the Lucky and the Sahara. Well, when that was sold, Sam Boyd and Milton Prell were content for a little while not to be in gaming, but naturally the urge was there and a property became for sale on the Strip, which did not have gaming. It was called the Tally-Ho and it was on the grounds of the current Aladdin. So Milton Prell, Sam Boyd, Perry Witt, Karl Hastie, Alex Shoofey and Harry Crow all pooled their money together and bought the Tally-Ho out of bankruptcy and then built the Aladdin in front of it. So

basically what they did was kept the Tally-Ho's hotel rooms, which were long, motor lodge-type rooms, and its lobby and kept that separate for the hotel; and they built the Aladdin in front of it as the casino. The Aladdin had a showroom. The Aladdin at that time was high end. It was on that lot, which is kind of oddly excavated, and you could drive up to the side, which was off Harmon, which was not even a through-street then, and the Aladdin had the largest escalator in the state of Nevada as part of the new casino building in front. My father went to work there as a shift boss.

I have a crazy question to ask. Did the Catholic Church ever have anything to do with the Tally-Ho?

To my knowledge, there was some talk of a loan because it was a non-gaming property. But whether that was just talk or whether it was true, I am not sure. I do know that the Catholic Church was given the property where the cathedral is from Wilbur Clark, at the Desert Inn.

When we first came to town, we were parishioners at Our Lady of Las Vegas, which is near Rancho Circle. Then when we moved west we became parishioners at, oh, Saint—it was on Michael Way. I think it was. It's still a Catholic parish today. And Monsignor Elwood LaVoy was the first founding pastor there. He was transferred from Our Lady of Las Vegas to found that church. Saint Francis de Sales.

Okay. I've seen it.

It came to me as soon as I said Father Elwood LaVoy, Saint Francis de Sales. And then we left Las Vegas. When we moved back in 1971, we moved into an apartment complex called the (DeVille) and it was on (Dauphine Way), which is now where the Mirage is. Very near there was the corner of Flamingo and the Strip. Where Bally's is now, which,

of course, used to be the MGM, before that it was called the Bonanza. Where Mr. Bill's, which was formerly the Barbary Coast was, that was a motel called Empy's Desert Villa. My father sold Mr. Empy insurance on his business when my father was an agent at Bankers Life and Casualty. Then on the other corner was the Dunes, which is now the Bellagio. And then on the other corner was nothing before Caesars Palace was built.

Which was 1966.

Yes, 1966. It opened in spring of '66. Further down the street right next to Caesars was a Shell station and then next to that was another motel and then there was a short street called Dauphine Way. That street had the DeVille Apartments on it and they were owned by the McKellar family.

Kind of how life goes in circles, McKellar Development—the father who I did not know; that was when I was a sophomore in college, because we moved out here while I was in my sophomore year. I spent my junior and senior year commuting from Las Vegas—McKellar Development bought that building. As it would turn out now, one of my friends who happened to stay in an executive suite near the one we lived in was Jim McKellar the Second, who is "Kim" McKellar; that's his nickname, and now one of my friends who I met through his son, James McKellar the Third. They were members of the Sterling Club here at Turnberry Place. So I'm no longer as close with his son who is in his thirties, but his dad and I—his dad was over here Friday night drinking wine with I and (Kristi Giudici) and Kim's wife (Orlene.) And after we left here, Kim took us all to Piero's where he loves to go because it's old Vegas, Freddie Glusman's place, and we all had dinner. And then we went into the lounge at Piero's and danced and watched the entertainment, just like old Vegas. So it's really kind of funny how this has made a full

circle. The guy who was twenty-five or -six and lived in the executive suite around the corner from my parents' one is now a dear friend of mine and he owns five hotels on Paradise. He owns the Red Roof Inn, the Candlewood Suites. He owns the Fairfield Inn. He owns all those on Paradise Road. His family owned the building that my parents lived in. The Deville had the only glass elevator in Las Vegas that was not in a hotel. The other one was at The Mint. But there was nothing else like it in other buildings. Nobody would have thought to spend that kind of money. But in those days when you took that elevator to the executive suites at the DeVille on the third floor, and the motel across the street was only one floor tall, with the view of Caesars Palace and the fountains and the Dunes, it was absolutely breathtaking. It's funny because where I live now, I look out on this view from Turnberry and I see so much of what I saw, but it has metamorphosed over the years. I've come full circle.

Yes. What is the greatest change?

The greatest change is the metropolitan demeanor of this city as opposed to being a small town with mob ties where you didn't do anything that was remotely suspect unless you were prepared to go to prison or end up in the desert to nowadays where it's a city beset by all of the same opportunities and issues that other large cities are, and yet, Las Vegas is still a small town. Many of the core people and their families that were movers and shakers in Las Vegas when I was a child still are. And the people that I grew up who are their children are now my friends. You have the same circle of people; it's just that some of the players are now second and third generation.

The Thomases no longer own Valley Bank, and, yet, the Thomases—Thomas and Mack; Roger Thomas the designer for Steve Wynn at Wynn Resorts; Peter Thomas, Boyd

Gaming board of directors—just one example of a family that the patriarch is no longer alive, E. Parry, but the children are nonetheless very much a part of the business and arts community that forms the real heart of Las Vegas. And if it weren't for those people, this city would have no soul. They have the loyalty to what they remember as being the best of Las Vegas. They want to preserve that through civic involvement, through monetary contributions, through civic activism. They want what they knew was good; it can't be the same, but the good can continue on in a new form.

Is that why we have the Smith Center?

Oh, absolutely. Oh, my gosh, Don and Dee Snyder. Don Snyder was president of Boyd Gaming. I've been to Don Snyder and Dee Snyder's home. Keith Smith, CEO with Boyd Gaming, I've been to their home. All of these people still play a very important role in our community. Were it not for them this town would not have many of the wonderful things it has. The Greenspuns, Barbara and Hank Greenspun and their son Brian, oh, my gosh, the things that they've done for the community. The Boyd family and the Houssels family, oh, what Mr. and Mrs. Houssels haven't done for the cultural side of Las Vegas—Nevada Ballet Theatre, the Smith Center. Nancy Houssels is a pillar in our community. Elaine Wynn, I've been invited to so many events that she has held, even at the Wynn, which is literally right outside my dining room window. Were it not for these people and Steve Wynn, this city would be nothing.

What do you see for the future?

I see a fork in the road. We have an opportunity to take the right turn. The fork in the road, in my humble opinion, was propagated by two things. Number one, the growth of Las Vegas and the inevitable handing off of positions in the community to a new

generation, and, number two, the economy. I have great hopes for Las Vegas because at that fork in the road when so many others were pulling back, what were we doing? We were building the Smith Center.

That's what I tell my friends.

We were spending 460 million dollars to build a monument to the value of civic engagement and cultural arts.

State of the art.

We weren't worried about whether or not the buses were going to run. We weren't worried about whether or not unemployment was going to run out. We knew that those problems had to be faced just like you have to face planning for breakfast and lunch and dinner and having gas in your car. We chose the high road. We picked the fork in the road that showed that we could answer a higher call and to the hope for a greater success that would provide for future generations of Las Vegans in a way that in my mind only testifies to the courage of the residents.

Look at the Ackerman family, same thing—Gaudin Jaguar-Porsche-Aston Martin—well, it's now Gaudin Jaguar-Porsche-Fisker, and Gaudin Ford. I mean they were very active in the Smith Center as donors. The Ruvo family, Camille and Larry Ruvo, from Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health, to Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary, my church, to every other activity in this town. They've been extremely supportive, always. I mean the first families go on and on and on and on. You could list hundreds of them. To my mind that's just outstanding. When we moved into the DeVille, who would know that I would now be going out to dinner with the second generation of the same family that owned

those properties? We lived there for a year before moving into Huntridge, an older part of town where Sam and Mary Boyd lived on Griffith Avenue forever.

So was that called the John S. Park neighborhood?

No. That was really older. John S. Park was early fifties to beginning of the late fifties. I would say 1950 to probably 1957. Huntridge was the area that was bordered by Sahara, Las Vegas Boulevard, probably 16th or 17th Street, near the temple.

So that far over.

Yeah. And Charleston. It included the Lamplighter Estates, which was on Bracken and down that area by the old temple and the Methodist Church. It included the area around Saint Anne's and Gorman High School. I mean on all those streets, 15th to 18th , all that. That's where Judge Mowbray and Tony Marnell lived and all those homes back in there. That's where we moved to, a place called The Chancellor, which is now someplace you wouldn't want to live.

Because some of those houses were built by special designers and they're just beautiful.

Oh, yes. We lived at what's called The Chancellor. In 1972 it was, at four stories, the highest apartment or co-op building in the city of Las Vegas because the country club's, Regency Towers, was not yet open in '72. It was mapped out. It was under construction. But it wasn't nearly done. On East St. Louis where we lived, the next cross street over from our building was The Saxony, which is where Paul Price the columnist lived. That whole neighborhood was full of the well-known people of Las Vegas. They lived either there or the Rancho Circle area around Our Lady of Las Vegas. That's where the Thomases and the Singletons lived.

So Scotch 80s and those areas.

The Scotch 80s area and the area around Rancho Circle and Huntridge; that was it. Everything else was just another part of town. And we lived there from '72 to '83. Then in '83 we bought in Green Valley. We did that on the advice of Chuck Ruthe from Ruthe Real Estate. His wife is Donna Ruthe. They said that Green Valley was the up and coming neighborhood. In fact, it was billed as the Beverly Hills of Las Vegas.

I didn't know that.

When it was first opened, yes. All there was was Sunset, which was a two-lane road that went up to Green Valley Parkway which went from Sunset to Warm Springs and stopped. It did not go across the street north. Off of Green Valley Parkway to the right were Collins Brothers Homes that were built in the period from '79 to '81. Then when you went down High View Drive to Valle Verde and you went either left to go back to Sunset, which it did do, or right. It went up to Nuevo Road, which was the last street. Those were all Pardee Homes on the right-hand side. There was no Fox Ridge, there was no Fox Ridge Park, there was no fire station, there was no Mormon Stake Center, there was no Carriage Park Homes, there was nothing. There were U.S. Homes on the right from Navarre to Nuevo, and on the left were Metropolitan Homes. That was all that was out there, and Valle Verde stopped. We could see the railroad train going behind our house about a mile and a half away. You could see all the way to the Calico Ridge and Basin. There was nothing out there. No roads, nothing. It was in 1982 when we bought and in '83 when we moved in. We lived there till '97.

Then in '97 we built a home in Section Ten on the west side of town, which is bordered by Rainbow, Sahara, Buffalo and DI. We lived at 7591 Silver Meadow Court. Our

address in Green Valley was 1809 Nuevo Road. Our address in Huntridge was 525 East St. Louis. And our address on Alta was 6108 Alta Drive. Our address before that was 5525 Gipsy Avenue. So that's going backwards to all the places that I lived in town. We lived on Silver Meadow Court from '97 until 2006 when I moved here to Turnberry. This unit had to be remodeled, so for three months I lived at the Stardust, which is now defunct.

Why Turnberry?

Well, I had a 28-year relationship with Robert Boughner that ended. Robert came to me and he said I would like to sell this house, which we built; and we were living in. It was almost 11,000 square feet. I was living there by myself and he was maintaining it.

Eleven-thousand square feet?

Uh-huh. And he was maintaining it. He said I really would like to sell this; and I really would like to have you live somewhere where I feel not only will you be taken care of, but I will feel that you're safe.

And this place is the safest place I have ever entered.

And he lives at Park Towers and this place is safer than Park Towers, I think.

Where is Park Towers?

In Hughes Center. It's right next to Lawry's. There's Park Towers South and North, One Hughes Center Drive is the south building and Two Hughes Center Drive is the north building. He lives there. He bought a unit there on the fifth floor to start with that was about 1900 square feet. Then when he decided he did like it there, he bought a second unit on the 15th floor, which was Tim Poster's (from the Golden Nugget) old unit. That's where he lives; and he kept the one on the fifth floor as a guest house. So he lives

on the 15th floor and that's his home and the one on the fifth floor is his guest house. One of the reasons we built an 11,000-square-foot house was because Robert said when we have guests, be they your family or my family, we have one guest bedroom; that is all. They may stay here, but the best part about it is I may never see them.

And I think that's marvelous. That way I can feel like they're in my home and I'm being a good host rather than putting them up in one of my 6,700 hotel rooms, but I don't even know they're here.

That's great.

So isn't that just wonderful?

Yes, it is. And while I like the building that he's in, this one is just, to me, it is far superior.

Being an interior designer I've been called to work at Park Towers for contractors, including the one that built our home and one that I work with now. R.W. (Scott) Bugbee built our home on Silver Meadow. Did a wonderful job. Scott's a wonderful man. He and his construction foreman Rick Johnson split up. Rick owns Futures Building Company now. Rick does all the construction for my clients when I do work. Rick did do Robert's remodel at Park Towers. He did mine here at Turnberry as well. I've also worked on other jobs at Park Towers with Rick. I can truthfully say that if I had to live in one or the other, I would choose this one first simply because I like the way it's built. It seems more like a home to me and less like a condominium. Of course, everybody's different and I'm sure there are people that live at Park Towers that feel the opposite. But that's my personal preference. So that's how I ended up living here and he ended up living there. He's just right down the street.

I think that's wonderful. That's great. We started by talking about downtown, The Mint. When was the last time you were downtown in that area?

The last time I was downtown? Okay. Now let me be absolutely sure when the very last time was because I've been downtown a lot.

Okay, good. So you've answered my question. So looking at downtown today—

The last meal I ate downtown was in Oscar Goodman's new restaurant.

Wonderful. So looking at what they've done downtown, what they're doing, East Fremont, I want you to compare it with the early days when your father was down there at The Mint. And then I want to know how you feel about what's happening, Zappos moving down.

Oh, I think that's wonderful. That's wonderful. I think that's marvelous. Tony Hsieh is a visionary. He is a man I would love to work for. I really would. I mean if I could work for him, I would consider that to be a privilege and an honor.

And you probably can with the people you know if you really wanted to do that.

I mean I would love to work for him. He strikes me as somebody who has really gone out of his way to epitomize the meaning of a good citizen who is willing to share the outstanding successes that he has had with a locale that is embracing him. I'm thrilled for him; and I'm thrilled for what he will mean to downtown Las Vegas.

How it's different? Well, it's grown and growth oftentimes is fraught with positives and negatives. In my mind, our growth downtown definitely comes down on the side of a positive that's not even open to question. I would have to say that there are times when I am disillusioned by what ends up turning out to be, looking back on it, say, a year later, as a very intelligent person I admire, Barack Obama said, "Only a bump in the road."

But when you're there it doesn't seem that way. It seems like things are maybe not as familiar and comfortable as they used to be. And then they build something like the Fremont Street Experience, which causes the clubs to turn into more of a mall than individual entities, and all of a sudden you have the beginnings of a downtown community. And then you have good boosters and supporters who go, "You know, we need to take this momentum outside of the casino corridor and move it out into, first of all, other businesses, and other shops, as evidenced by the fact that we now have Fremont Street East." It has developed from east of Fifth Street, or Las Vegas Boulevard as the newbies call it, to what will probably be the intersection of Charleston and Fremont. Those are blocks six through twenty-five and that doesn't happen overnight. But it's already past sixth through pretty much ninth. And as the city grows those areas that were considered—the German word is verboten—forbidden, because you didn't want to be there; aren't there anymore because one block away is dynamic activity—restaurants, bars, lounges, clubs, stores—and all of a sudden that unsavory element that needs to hide in the shadows doesn't have shadows any more. Now the light is shining on these parts of town; and they are becoming far more developed in a very community-oriented way. Las Vegas has been lucky enough to take some lessons from some other cities that preceded us in these kinds of developments, such as the gas light district [Gaslamp Quarter] in San Diego, the river front district [Riverwalk] in San Antonio, the district that was developed around Orlando, around Disney World in Orlando [BoardWalk] where they already had an old town developed.

Bob Snow came here to Las Vegas and brought a lot of those artifacts and put them in what became the Main Street Station and that was bought by the Boyd family and is now

a Boyd property. But it was originally built by Major Riddle and called The International. Then, of course, Major Riddle died. He owned the Dunes, The Silver Bird, The Silver Nugget, and the Four Queens, which was named after his wife and three daughters. Those properties ended up being separate entities, Four Queens being bought by the Hyatt—Jeanne Hood was involved in that—the Dunes being bought by Steve Wynn and becoming the Bellagio, The Silver Bird being bought by Ed Torres and becoming El Rancho, and the International being bought by Bob Snow, who made it the Main Street Station, but then lost it because he couldn't keep it running. He didn't have a large enough bankroll behind all of his grandiose plans. You need to be able to not worry about making money the first year or so. And if you can't, it's real rough going. And that was his problem.

But the Boyds are infinitely more well positioned financially and they did things like build a bridge from the California over Main Street to the Main Street Station and things to cause that property to become more a part of downtown Las Vegas. And it helped that The Plaza was also on that side of the street and now has undergone a renaissance since Jackie Gaughan sold it to developers that are slowly rebuilding it. Those are the important things that create the downtown that we're all hoping to see. Now with Zappos moving into the old City Hall and the new City Hall being just beautiful, I mean all of this is further evidence of how hard the people are willing to work in Las Vegas and the support that these visionaries are willing to give our city whether it's the first families or new people like Tony Hsieh.

I really appreciate this. I love what you have to say about Las Vegas. I'm one of those people who have fallen in love with this city and I just love being here and living here.

Oh, me too.

And collecting this history.

Oh, I've always loved living here. I loved going back to Wisconsin only because I knew what the reason was and I loved being able to have that precious time with my grandmother. But when my parents moved back here, there was no doubt in my mind that I would come back to Las Vegas. As it turned out, where we lived, my mother worked for Claudine Williams at the Holiday Inn Center Strip as an assistant housekeeper and to get there she walked a half a block to the corner and across the street and she was at work. I got a job at the Sands, which was also across the street, as (Sy Manus's) assistant at Sy Devore's Men Shop at the Sands hotel. Sy Manus owned it. And I walked to work in three minutes as did my mother, and we were a block apart and a block from our house. Now, talk about living locally and working locally. I would come home for lunch because when I first worked there that summer, my mom wasn't working in '71. The Holiday Inn Center Strip wasn't open yet. But when it did open in '72, she went to work there and walked to work, just across the street.

When did you work for the Sands?

From 1971 through 1973. On all of my vacations from college I was hired in the men's shop and I sold men's clothing. We would get a call in the men's shop that Diahann Carroll was staying in one of our villa suites at the Sands as she was appearing there. And at that time she was dating David Frost and he flew into town without any luggage.

She wanted him to be able to come to her show and take her out. They asked if we had anyone we could send with clothes to her villa so that David could try things on and she could pick out, with the assistance of a representative from the men's store, outfits for him? So Sy sent me because he said if anybody's going to fit in with these folks, it's going to be you. The rest of us, we just don't fit in, but you'll fit in just great. So I went to the rooms with a golf cart. He would call the bellman and he and Barney Fife—Barney Fife, that's Don Knotts from Mayberry—(Barney Steffens). Barney Fife, wow, that's an old one. Barney Steffens would load up the golf cart and I would get in with the bellman and we would go back to Diahann Carroll's villa and there they would be. She would be sitting in a beautiful peignoir and he would be dressed in walking shorts and a rumpled shirt. And we would pick out clothes. Then it was really funny because the second or third night he was there, he made it a point of stopping by the men's shop to show me how nice he looked. He said, "See, look how good you made me look!"

Oh, wonderful.

And the same thing, oddly enough, when Dionne Warwick was appearing at the Sands. She was seeing Steve Wynn. They weren't involved, but she was seen on his arm. I'm sure that was not during the time when he and Elaine were together. I'm sure that it was purely because he was so well connected and she was arm candy. Likewise, so was he. So she would want a present to give to him. We would bring a few things by and she would pick something.

What kinds of gifts?

Well, she was real generic, a necktie or a shirt. In fact, the most personal thing was a shirt. It was a necktie a couple of times. It was pocket squares. Once it was one of those

kind of golf-hat-type things. All of those weren't for him; some of those were gifts for other people like executives at the Sands, people that she felt that she wanted to share a little remembrance with. So I went to her villa also with items, but she pretty much put in an order; I would like to see ties or this or that, because she had specific people in mind with specific gifts that she wanted to give as remembrances.

I waited on a couple of the members of the Rat Pack that would come into the store. I waited on Dean Martin. I waited on Sammy Davis Junior. I waited on Peter Lawford. Not all during the same period of time, but over the course of two years. They would need a shirt or they would want to get a bathrobe or something they forgot. Or they needed pajamas or something like that. They would come in to buy those items and I would wait on them and then sell them other clothes.

What kind of people were they to interact with on that level?

Diahann Carroll was extremely gracious. David Frost was very unassuming. Dionne Warwick was—she was a little highbrow.

She was a diva?

She was a diva. She was a diva before we had the name diva. We called her something else back then, which probably shouldn't be printed. Diva's a good word, though. I can do diva.

Sammy Davis Junior was an absolutely friendly person. He was just very unassuming. So was Joey Bishop. Dean Martin was a little bit more—

Movie star.

Yeah, he was a star and he acted the part a little bit more than the others, not as much as Dionne Warwick did but definitely more than Sammy Davis Junior or Joey Bishop did

and certainly not anything like Diahann Carroll or David Frost. Or even as far as my family was concerned, like Liberace.

What was Liberace like offstage? Oh, you were talking about the conversation you had backstage with your mom.

Yes, yes, yes. He was a consummate host in his dressing room. He would do everything to put you at ease. But he was also a diva, but he was a diva in a very down to earth way. He was one of those people who you could imagine being thrilled by the stuff he could afford. He would be one of those people that would genuinely walk up to you and say, Ain't this cool? Isn't this great? And genuinely mean it and not a boastful way. He was just thrilled that he could live well and afford things for his mother and for himself. He just thought it was the coolest thing. And in that way he was childlike. He really was. But as far as being a host in his dressing room, he was extremely friendly and very pleasant and outgoing and had ordered items to drink and hors d'oeuvres. We were there after his performance I bet it was an hour and a half. And this was someone who had already done two shows.

Yes, with all the capes and all of that.

Yes, and all the stuff and the pianos and the candelabras and all of the stage acting that he did, because I mean he wasn't just a piano player. He really involved his audience in what he did. And it was after all that he was playing host to us.

So how did you become an interior designer and how did you decide to do that?

Well, I started in gaming. I worked for Sam Boyd at the Union Plaza soon after he opened it. I was an audit representative in the casino cage and I supervised the counting of the soft money. I was hired by Rita Taylor, who was his cage manager, who was a

And so I went over one day after work. He and I were not in the same industry. He worked for General Dynamics at the Test Site. The house was landscaped on the outside beautifully. The home was maintained beautifully. Inside it looked like no human had ever walked in there. It was carpeted and that was it. There were no drapes. There were sheets. There was no furniture. But there were all kinds of wonderful pieces of art that weren't hung on the walls. He had Miró. He had Picassos. But he had no furniture.

And I said, Well, Stan, where do you sit? He said, Well, I sit on the barstool at the breakfast bar in the kitchen. That's where I sit and that's where I eat. I said, "Okay, well, where do you sleep? "Well, come; I'll show you. I do have a bed," he remarked. And I'm thinking, well, that's great. God, what a deal for you; you have a bed. And I'm thinking, so you've got Picassos and Mirós and you've got Altech-Lansing speakers as tall as I am for your sound system—which back in those days 2,000 dollars for a speaker, just one speaker, in 1973, a lot of money but you don't have a couch? You don't have a dresser? How can you live like this?

He says, can you help me? And I said, , sure, but let me take you to see my house first; because you may not like the way it looks and you may not think I can help you: and I don't want to start a project only to find out that we have totally different ideas of what makes a home.

So I took him to my home. My mom had just gotten off from work; and she invited him to stay for dinner. When he came in, he just looked around. This was at the Chancellor Apartments. He said, "I can't believe this." It was a 1200-square-foot apartment, but it was beautiful. He said, "I can't believe this. This is more beautiful than my house." He said, "I can't believe I'm in an apartment. You close the door and you look out of these

windows on all the beautiful trees of Huntridge and you have this 10-by-25 foot balcony and it's got all this fabulous furniture on it, a swing with a canopy and a barbeque and a fountain. This is better than my backyard."

Well, his backyard wasn't landscaped at all. The front was beautiful; the back was nothing but dirt. He said, "Yes, you can so do my house. It will be wonderful."

And so I did his home. And I did it before his parents came. I had nine months and I did the whole house. His parents came and he said to me the first thing they said when they came was, Stan, we're so proud of you; we never knew you could do this. And he says I have to say I didn't tell them you did it. I said that's okay, you paid me; you don't have to tell them I did it. And that was how I got started.

Wonderful.

But I was doing these projects all the while I was working in hotels because I didn't believe that I could possibly make a good living doing just that at that time. I was making a good living in the casino business and I was getting all kinds of—I mean the insurance was fantastic. I ate in the coffee shops because I was considered an executive employee. We were allowed two meals a day. After work if you walked to one of the bars, it was comped automatically by anybody on the floor because you were in the cage and they saw you. Oh, my God, you couldn't buy a drink anywhere, not just in the old days downtown, but even in 1993 at the Riviera when there was no more Ed Torres.

When I walked out of the cage, if I went to a bar, which maybe once a month somebody would come in from out of town and I would say, well, let's go have a drink. After they would say we'll go back to our hotel; and we'll change and then we'll go out to your house and we'll pick up your mom and maybe Bob will want to come and we'll go have dinner –

my relatives or his family, I couldn't buy a drink for I or my guests. I couldn't buy a meal whether it was in the Delmonico, which was extremely expensive or in the Italian restaurant. In none of the bars, nothing, I couldn't pay for anything. And a show? Oh, my God. Rudy Guerrero, the maître d' in the showroom—I got a booth, first tier. If I wanted to bring people in, guests, drinks all taken care of, no check even. Of course, I would tip very well.

Of course.

But the benefits were so great that I thought, wow, how do you get this in business for yourself? It was that way until I retired from gaming in '93 and we built our home on the west end of town and then I started going into design full time on my own in '96.

Now, did you take classes?

No. No. My first job was my parents' home when we moved back to Wisconsin. My parents were both working and they said to me what do you think about this or what do you think about that? I was seventeen. And they sort of wanted to bounce their ideas off someone. And I said, well, I think maybe it might look nice like this or like that. And my parents would say why don't you do your room; and we'll look at it? Until then we either had what we moved in with or nothing because they were looking to do it once right. So I spent a couple of months doing my room and my parents were just thrilled. I had a four-poster bed. I had beautiful draperies pulled back with tie-backs, hardwood floors with gorgeous Oriental throw rugs. My parents let me buy all this stuff because they said we want your room to be what you want. They walked in there. They go, God, we want to live like this. So they said would you do our master bedroom and the living room and then the kitchen and the rest of the house? I mean I even did the basement. So

my father had a recreation room down there, which is what you did back east. Everybody had what they called a Ratskeller, which was a recreation room downstairs where you could have neighbors and watch the game and that kind of stuff. I was 17 and from then on I didn't look back.

I had the nicest freshman dorm room at Cornell, but sophomore year we were off the charts. Freshman year Richard Fisher was my roommate. He was a music major. I was one of those people that brought all the things that made a room homey. And Richard brought all the cool sound equipment because he was a music major. So he had the stereo and the speakers and the television. I mean you name it, if it was electronic, Richard owned it. He was a French horn player. And I was the one that had, well, I've got the throw rugs and the bedspreads and the throw pillows and the blinds. We had a great dorm room. He loved to bring his girlfriend there – Christine Hewitt was her name. He loved to bring her there because; she said, "You guys have got the nicest dorm room on this entire campus. – and I've been in a few." And Richard says, "Well, what is that supposed to mean?" She said, "Oh, I meant the girls' dorm. Your room is nicer than the girls' dorm."

And then sophomore year I was lucky enough to room with Richard Johnson. His family lived near Cornell. And so they were like, oh, you know what you need for your room, you need a really cool roll-top desk and you need a bookcase. His parents were very, very, very donor-minded. They were like 'these are college kids; we have to give them stuff.' So they did. They gave us stuff. In fact, his father was very talented as a carpenter, even though he was pretty high in his business. He built a divider in our room that was not attached to anything, so we didn't get in trouble for having it; and it could be

dismantled. It divided the study area from the sleeping area so that if one of us studied late we would take the desk further back and we wouldn't keep the other one awake. We had a roll-top desk, which we used as a bar because we had regular desks to study at. We had this great room divider. We had a cocktail table that rotated so you could put little appetizers on it and turn it around. I mean we were college kids and it was like this was the dorm room from heaven. We lived on the fourth floor in a dormer, so we had a great view of the whole countryside. Richard and I roomed together sophomore year. In junior year we roomed together as well on the first floor; because we decided we were tired of climbing up four flights of stairs. I lived in that same room freshman year. So for me, I was climbing four flights of stairs for a couple of years now. There were no elevators; there never were. Four flights of stairs and five flights down to do your laundry, which was in the basement. So you stayed in shape. So we were on the first floor, which we only went one floor to our laundry, and the study hall and TV room and lobby were on the main floor. So it was like, well, this is great. Then the second half of our junior year we spent in Europe together on an academic semester abroad from Cornell. We studied in Europe. We both were German majors, so we studied in Germany. Then I traveled throughout Europe that summer, as did Richard.

When he graduated from Cornell, he went back for what I call his fifth year to be a Fulbright Scholar in Vienna, Austria. Then for a while we sort of all thought Richard was going to be a professional student because after graduating from Cornell for four years and going for the fifth year as a Fulbright Scholar, which was a terrific honor. Richard decided he wanted to get his master's. Nowadays you'd have to have it. Back then it was like getting your Ph.D. So we all went, well, obviously he's going into

academia, which we all thought was where he was headed between the Fulbright and now a master's. So yeah, you do need a master's because if you're going to do more than teach high school, a bachelor's won't do; and this was in the mid-seventies. So he went on and got his master's in philosophy, which was one of those majors that you kind of scratched your head going, okay, if you don't teach philosophy, what are you going to use this for? But that was okay because we thought academia was where he was headed and so it made sense. He might be a philosophy professor at a college or university.

Well, when he finished that he decided he wanted to go to law school. So for the next three years after that he was in law school. So now—he's 23, 25—he's 28 going on 29 and he just got out of law school and because he has been a student, he hasn't worked a day in his life. We're all kind of going, "This is going to be a real shock for Richard when he actually has to work, if and when that ever happens." All of his friends in college are all just kind of going okay. We half expected after he got his law degree to go for a Ph.D. We all just so believe he's going to do that.

But Richard actually went to work as an attorney for the State of Iowa as a legislative aide – which was great with his law degree and it was great with philosophy. I mean it was the perfect job. He went to work in Iowa where his family was originally from. He had gone back to Iowa and got a job as a legislative aide at the Iowa State House in Des Moines. Met his wife there, married there. [Now he is the lead attorney for the Iowa State Legislature.] That was his life afterwards. But we did sort of think that Richard was going to spend his life as a student. It was a real, real possibility this was going to happen.

That's funny. Wonderful. So to end it I want you to tell one more story. Early on you mentioned relatives, Werners, I believe, who moved to Hawthorne.

Oh, yes.

How did that happen?

Well, my uncle, Elmer Werner, right there holding the large fish from Pyramid Lake—

In Nevada?

In Nevada. That's my Uncle Elmer right there in my dining room. Was in the service. He was in the—I want to get the right war—he was in World War II because he was four years younger than my mother. So that meant he was born in 1921. So he was in World War II. The reason I'm saying that is because my youngest uncle was born eight years after Uncle Elmer, which put him in the Korean War and I didn't want to get confused because that makes a big difference. So he ended up in the Army and he was a lieutenant colonel when he separated from the service. There was an opening for I guess what would be at that time third in command of the ammunition depot in Babbitt, Nevada. He didn't really want to live in Sheboygan, Wisconsin anymore. It was kind of like how do you keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris? Now, I think about that and then I think about living in Babbitt, Nevada. I mean Babbitt, Nevada makes Sheboygan, Wisconsin look like a metropolis. That's like comparing New York and Hooterville. But he wanted to remain working for the federal government. He saw his future as a lifetime employee of the federal government. He would retire as an after-service employee.

So he was there and he met, during a trip to New York, a woman by the name of Dorothy and she became my aunt. Now, Dorothy was the wife of a Greek chef in New York City and he was not a very nice man; but she did have two daughters, Mary and Theresa, with

him. They met and sort of became friends and corresponded and fell in love. Ultimately she left her husband, with her two daughters. My uncle married her and adopted the girls; and they lived in Hawthorne, Nevada. He worked in Babbitt, Nevada and eventually became the chief officer at the ammunition depot in Babbitt, Nevada and had a very high security clearance.

My aunt was extremely active in the Democratic Party – extremely active. I can remember them coming and staying at our house on Gipsy Avenue and Alta Drive when they would come down for political events in Las Vegas. She worked with a woman here that lived on Rancho Drive. Her name was Dorothy Dorothy. Her first name was Dorothy and her husband's last name was Dorothy. They had a home on a corner lot on Rancho Drive and one of the streets that went west off—Rancho, when you cross Oakey towards Charleston. On the west side of Rancho there were a blot of beautiful houses that were mid-fifties, mid-century homes. It's still there; it's been horribly cared for. But it's on the corner sitting at an angle and was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dorothy and her name was Dorothy Dorothy, which was interesting. And my aunt's name was Dorothy. So there were a lot of Dorothys going around!

I can remember going to their home with my aunt in the car and going inside and picking up all of the voting paraphernalia so that my aunt could go with my mother and open up voting polls in Las Vegas at the schools so that the residents could vote. At Red Rock Elementary where I went my mother was a poll worker there. That was the only time she ever worked when I was growing up, was for something like that, at the poll for voters. At Rose Warren Elementary, the same thing. I don't think Gibson Junior High became a

polling place, but it might have. But she did it until she went to work out of the home when I was fifteen and that was at the Boulevard Mall.

When she went to work there, there was nothing but Sears and desert and the Broadway. Behind Sears there was the Paradise Palms home development and golf club that was on DI, which is now the National Golf Club, but it used to be called Paradise Palms. That community was built in the early to mid-sixties and the architecture is very much so, very Jetsons. When my mother went to apply for a job at the Broadway, which is now Macy's, it was the other anchor store at what would then be the south end of the mall that was being developed by—oh, God, what was his name? He was a mob-connected developer in Las Vegas. I'm trying to remember who he was. His office was eventually in Sunrise City in that round building that's right on Maryland Parkway. It's only two stories high. Paradise Development Company was his business. He owned all the property where the Boulevard Mall was and all the property that became Paradise Palms. His name will come to me – Moe Dalitz. Yes, Moe Dalitz.

But anyway, when my mother went to apply for that job at the Broadway, she applied for it in a trailer because there was no building. Then when there was a building they called her; and she went in for a real interview in a real building, which wasn't open as yet. There was Sears at the DI end and there was the Broadway at the Twain end. And ne'er the "twain" shall meet for a long time, until they eventually built the Boulevard Mall; and they connected what they called the two anchor stores. And they wouldn't do that until they had a third one, which was JCPenney. That allowed them to do the kind of atrium they wanted, which had fountains and all those things. In fact, Marvin Strusser was a store that was in that mall and it was the store that provided all of the things that I picked

out for our first home in Green Valley because Marvin and Sheila Strusser were dear friends of mine. When they kept that shop and they opened one on Circle Park, Strussers on Circle Park in Huntridge. It's a vacant lot now; because it eventually burned down after they sold it to someone else. It was a great clapboard style house. There was a period when businesses were taking over homes. It was almost like you'd find in college towns. They were looking to give that feeling to these businesses. So they opened that one on Circle Park.

But I can remember my mother working at the Boulevard Mall and she sold fine jewelry and sterling silver. She sold one of the Kim Sisters her wedding rings and she sold her and another Kim Sister their sterling silver pattern for their trousseau, not that anybody uses that word anymore; but they still did then, especially Asian women. They wanted to be so American; but they still held onto also the fact that that was part of their culture. A woman came with things; she joined the marriage with possessions of her own. She would have maybe dishes or silverware or fine linens. It was part of what would have been her hope chest. In Asian society—they were a little bit behind the curve. So they still subscribed to those things, which were still a part of the fifties, but really weren't part of the sixties or seventies much anymore. But that was still what they did. The Kim Sisters appeared all over Las Vegas—at the Stardust on the Strip; they appeared downtown at the Fremont. They were big in Las Vegas during the growth of the city and they were followed by in the seventies the (Dayhan) Sisters. They appeared in the Plaza lounge at the Union Plaza, not the one that was near the showroom but the one that was near the casino cage, which has since been taken out. They were real big and drew a lot of people. And in that lounge Johnny Cash appeared in Las Vegas, after having appeared

at The Mint way back in the sixties and then having been railroaded out of town because of all of the drinking and drugs. Back in those days when you got involved with drugs, my God, it wasn't like nowadays where district attorneys are buying rock cocaine. It was back when marijuana was "reefer madness" and "the drug that dare not speak its name." Johnny Cash was railroaded out of town for drugs. He first appeared on the stage at The Mint in the Merry Mint Theater. Only when he reformed his image did Sam Boyd hire him again at the Union Plaza; and he made a comeback in the lounge; and then became one of the biggest entertainers around. But, oh, my gosh, back in those days...

You are amazing. Your memory is just amazing. Once we transcribe this and—

And there's one or two other things that I wasn't sure of or my memory was lacking on, also.

My transcriber is going to love this. So once she transcribes it and we give you a copy to read over, you will be able to put that name in.

And I also have so many friends who were here that are a part of Las Vegas who were part of this era.

But with your memory?

I can call a couple people up and say who was this one? Who was that one? For example, my dear friend here at Turnberry, Elizabeth Ackerman, who was Don Ackerman's previous wife, she was the entertainment director at the Sands hotel in the sixties.

Entertainment director?

Publicity director. Pardon me. Publicity director, not entertainment director. I misspoke. The entertainment director was somebody else and that name will come to me because I

was at the Sands during that period—I mean after that period. But there was somebody that was—Jack Entratter.

Yes, was the entertainment director.

Entertainment director at the Sands. That's who it was. He was from like mid-fifties to mid-sixties I think and then I believe he passed away. And then it was I want to say a gentleman with an Italian name.

Heavy accent?

Yes.

I know whom you're talking about. He was in the newspaper not very long ago.

Yes. Antonio Morelli.

That's it, yes. Your memory is just fabulous.

In fact, I visited the home that they preserved of his in downtown Las Vegas, the original Morelli home is on the corner of Clark and Ninth.

The Junior League.

Yes, that's on that corner.

Yes. So my very last question—I know that you have someplace to go—so my very last question. When you were at the Sands in the early seventies, it was at a time in Las Vegas history that African Americans were beginning to have other jobs other than those in the back of the house.

Oh, yes.

Do you remember any African Americans at the Sands hotel at that time? In visible kinds of jobs.

Yes, but they were all what I would consider to be entry-level positions—casino porters, bar porters. But the bar porters would then, because they were Culinary Union members, become relief bartenders and then they would become regular bartenders. So that by the time I started downtown at the Union Plaza in '73—and downtown was far more open to hiring African Americans in other than entry-level positions than the Strip was, you would have bosses who were African American. Downtown led the charge on employment equality in Southern Nevada, unequivocally. And I can say that because I was an employee at a Strip hotel in '71 and '72 and an employee in downtown Las Vegas in '73 and in North Las Vegas in '74 and back on the Strip in '75. And by the time I got back on the Strip in '75 and I was in the cage, I was handing out bar banks to black bartenders. I was being shown to my seat in the restaurant by black hostesses. I was being served by black food servers. I'd look in the kitchen—it was not closed because the Riviera's kitchen was open way before Wolfgang Puck did that in what you would call our coffee shop – you would see black faces. But for Torres it wasn't called that. It was called the Cafe Noir, which was the "cafe black, cafe evening." Mr. Torres said once you can't have a restaurant called Cafe Noir without a few "Noirs."

And he had black hostesses, black food servers, black cooks that you could see, black bartenders, black dealers. When they moved from service positions to customer-interaction positions, almost customer-care positions, that was a game changer for Las Vegas.

Why do you say that?

Because now you didn't feel like society was as clearly two-tiered as it was before. Before, when they were doing the job of a porter or a maid or a kitchen porter or a bar

back—oh, my goodness, that was even public—you didn't really feel that there was much of a sense of community or integration going on. Once they became hostesses, bartenders, inspectresses, dealers, those positions, visible positions; then it was a game changer; because it opened the door that had heretofore only been opened at the back of the casino so that Dorothy Dandridge could come into the Sands through the kitchen and appear there or at the Moulin Rouge in really what is North Las Vegas—I never understood that—they called it West Las Vegas.

They called it the Westside.

Westside. And to my mind whoever thought that was the Westside was geographically challenged because I lived in Charleston Heights and that was the west side.

Okay, this became the Westside when the railroad first came through here in 1905 and J.T. McWilliams developed that little area west of the tracks. The owners of the railroads wanted downtown to be east of the tracks. So they called it the Eastside and the Westside. So that's how it started.

Well, thank you for sharing that with me; because I never figured that out. I thought to myself what are these people talking about? This ain't west. Boy, if I drove around town like this, I'd be perpetually lost.

So that's how it happened.

Well, that explains it to me. But you have to understand looking at it from being a teenager on, I always wondered how did it ever get referred to as the Westside? That ain't remotely west. But, oh, that makes sense now.

Yes. From the beginning.

Well, that's even before my time. Okay, that makes sense. But then you got to really see that Las Vegas had shed its small-town trappings and was going to be a city that would be a serious contender.

Are you a genius?

I don't know. Why would you ask me that question?

You're probably one of the smartest people I've talked to in a long time.

Really?

I talk to a lot of people.

Well, I couldn't remember that one developer's name, which is driving me absolutely crazy.

It's not just remembering a name. It's how you say things. It's how you couch your statements. It's just the way you approach—

Well, I've always loved learning and I've always felt that it was very important. And I still am an avid reader. I feel that education is a lifelong pursuit of knowledge; and if you ever think you know everything that's the first sign you don't know anything. And that's a real shame; because some people get so involved in their job that they put blinders on and all they see is what they need to see to do what they do. So if they're an accountant, that's all they do. If they're a lawyer, that's all they do.

Yes. And sometimes we do get bogged down in it and we forget.

And to me the definition of a renaissance man is somebody who is totally educated. I mean I was chairman of the male dance department at Cornell. I danced here on the Strip. I danced on stage with Diana Ross at Caesars Palace.

How did we miss that? What do you mean? How could you dance?

I did.

What happened?

Well, that was a second, extra job I needed. That was that aptitude of wanting to go in early to school. I was making 25 dollars a day in the cage at the Union Plaza. Well, it wasn't bad, but that certainly wasn't good money. So I also got a job as dancer.

How did you learn to dance? Where along the way?

My mother taught me. My mother taught me to dance when I was eleven years old was the first time. That was her avocation. And I told my mother that I want to go to a dance at school. I was a sixth grader and that was the first year that they actually had dances. And my mother said, "That's nice, can you dance?" And I said no. She said, "If you want to go to a dance, don't you think you should know how to dance?" And I said, "Well, it probably would be a good idea." And so she said, "Then we're going to learn how to dance." She put on Chubby Checker and she put on Dion and she put on Johnny Cash and she put on the Everly Brothers and the Righteous—well, no, I think that was even before the Righteous Brothers. The ones I've mentioned so far I know are true. And she said now we have to come in the kitchen and the stereo was in the dining room because we have to be on a floor that isn't carpeted so that you can learn to move, because you're not going to be dancing on carpet when you go to the dance at school. You're going to be in the multipurpose room. And being that I'm involved in your school I know that's got, (well, back in those days) an asbestos tile floor. And so you need to know how to dance. She put music on and she said, "Show me what you can do." I'm sure I looked like Bambi did in the movie when he was on ice. And my mother sort of watched; and I'm sure she tried really hard not to laugh—and she didn't. But when the

music stopped she said, "Okay, you're very energetic and that's good. But you also need to kind of channel your energy so that it looks like you have an idea of what you're doing; and you have to have yourself under control; because someone could think maybe that you were." She called it "experiencing the Saint Vitus Dance." And I didn't know what that was. And she said, "That's what somebody does when they're crazy and can't control their muscles, and you don't want to look like that. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to stand behind you and I'm going to press on the hip of your body that's supposed to move and we're just going to go up and down and left and right, back and forth for a few songs until I feel that you are anticipating my touch and that will mean that you're feeling the beat or the rhythm of the music. And once you do that we can then start. But until you feel the music in your body, you will never be able to dance."

I took music in grade school. I took violin for two years. I was terrible. After two years I could play "Baa Baa, Black Sheep." And my father said no more lessons. I can't stand it. You're driving me out of my own house. I gave you two years and all you can play is "Baa Baa, Black Sheep?" This is not for you. That was second and third grade. So in fourth grade I took up the flute. Oh, that went way better. I actually got to play well enough that I played in the Helldorado Parade and marched with my fourth grade class, those of us who played instruments. Some played a guitar and some played a clarinet and I played flute. I actually could play a couple of songs that I expressly learned so I wouldn't make a fool of myself in the parade. By the end of fifth grade the flute was over. Then I really didn't take any more music until college when I took piano and organ. I took piano and organ for almost three years and I got to be okay because I could read music and that helped a lot. But I knew my future was not in music performance. I had a

good voice. I could read music. I could sing; but I couldn't play instruments. I could dance. In fact, I was the student head of the male dance department at Cornell. I performed in all the orchesis shows. I went on the road with their dance department and performed at other schools. I did choreography. I learned Labanotation. I did all of the things that you needed to do.

And so when I wasn't making any money I thought wouldn't it be cool to take something that I learned to do, that I love to do, that I was good at and maybe make some money. So I went and asked—those were back in the days when you could actually go ask who's in charge of entertainment. And I went to the office of the entertainment director, Donn Arden, for Halleluiah Hollywood. And I said I'm a pretty good dancer and maybe I could fill in for people when they were on vacation or got sick or something. I said I'm not looking to have a career; and I don't want to have this be my life; and I don't want to be a burned out dancer at forty, no offense. But if I can maybe just play around a little, if you think I'm good enough, I would do that. And so I did and I was good enough to fill in; and I worked part-time, sometimes one day a week, sometimes only two days or three days a month. It just depended on when I could and when it was available.

So did you know Rich Rizzo?

Yes.

Or Winston?

No, I didn't know a Winston, but I knew a Rich Rizzo, yes.

So this past weekend, I don't know if you remember that there was a black line of dancers that danced in Halleluiah Hollywood. It was the first time there was a line of black dancers on the Strip.

Yes, yes, yes, I do remember that. Yes. And they were doing like Hollywood thirties Busby Berkeley numbers. Yes, I remember that.

Some Gershwin number.

Yes.

They just had a reunion this past weekend.

Oh, my goodness.

And I just saw Rich Rizzo, just met him. And the line of black dancers had a reunion. So it's amazing that you would bring that up.

Well, that was another thing that I did. And then, of course, when you do that you get to know a few dancers. Some of them go to other jobs because a lot of times you can't make a living dancing only in one place or only in one show. It also depends on what you do. I mean if you're lucky enough to be in a revue that runs and runs and runs, like Halleluiah Hollywood or the Follies or something like that, yes, you can. But if you end up being somebody that they call up and they say, "We got Joey Heatherton coming to the Sahara and we need back-up dancers." Well, there was a time when I did that and was a Sahara Boy. They had Sahara Girls and Sahara Boys and we backed up people on stage at the Sahara and I did that. Gordon and Sheila MacRae, Joey Heatherton. Who else? Those are the only ones I can remember at the Sahara. Also Diana Ross at Caesars Palace. And then the work at Halleluiah Hollywood. I think that was pretty much it. It wasn't anything that I was looking to do all the time, but it was fun and I did it for like three years. It was like, okay, I like this, but I don't think I can do this for a living or really want to. But it was a good opportunity to just get to see more of Las Vegas, meet more people and be out. You're young and it's like, whoa, this is really fun.

This is amazing. I love it. Thank you so very much.

You're welcome.

[End of recorded interview]

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