An Interview with Ruth Eppenger D'Hondt

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

August 25, 2011

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Black Picket Fences: An Oral History Project of Berkley Square,
A Middle Class Westside Community

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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Preface

Ruth D'Hondt was born and reared in Las Vegas, living on Jackson Street where her family owned Mattie's Café. Named for her mother, the restaurant provided not just great food but employment for Ruth and her five brothers and sisters. Jackson Street was the business thoroughfare of the historic black community, the Westside. In 1959, the family moved to Berkley Square, currently the second Las Vegas residential community listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

As a young woman, Ruth became inspired by the look and lifestyle of both San Francisco and Seattle where she lived for ten years. She appreciated the greenery, the ambiance, and the beauty that she found lacking in Las Vegas. When she returned in 1976, Berkley Square had matured and Ruth moved into a home on the same street where she played as a school girl. She secured employment among the first wave of black women who did not have to toil in the back-of-the-house of the hotel casino industry. Instead she served cocktails at the Marina, the Castaways, and then twenty-six years at Caesars Palace.

Today, Ruth volunteers as president of the Berkley Square Neighborhood Association and was instrumental in working with the city of Las Vegas to have the community declared an historic neighborhood.

This is Claytee White. I'm with Mrs. Ruth D'Hondt this morning in her home in Las Vegas. It is August 25th, 2011.

So how are you this morning?

Fine, thank you. How are you?

I'm great. Thank you.

So, Ruth, would you start please by giving me your entire name, your whole name, and spelling your middle and last?

Would I give you my entire name? Ruth Ann Eppenger, E-P-P-E-N-G-E-R, D'Hondt, D, apostrophe, capital H, O-N-D-T.

Thank you so much.

I want to start with your early life. Tell me where you grew up and what your parents did for a living.

I grew up right here in Las Vegas on Jackson Street. We had a restaurant. My mother owned the restaurant, actually. My dad was a laborer for the Test Site it was called at that time, but he also helped out in the restaurant. We all worked in the restaurant as we grew old enough to work there. We had the restaurant for about 26 years.

Tell me the name of the restaurant.

It was my mom's name, Mattie's Cafe.

What did you serve?

What we called it in that time was just home cooking. It was a very popular place. The entire family ate there. And all of our vendors that came to bring supplies from all over, they would stop and eat there as well. It was a popular place. As a matter of fact, what I remember now

of interest, once we started recruiting from UNLV ballplayers. They would come in. The coach would bring them over and they would buy a meal ticket so that they could be fed while they were getting their education. Apparently, it was some kind of a scholarship they were on because they were from out of town, young men, usually. I remember a couple of them.

Describe the restaurant for me.

Oh, it was very small and it had a counter with stools at the counter and booths. The kitchen was there in the back and that. But it was just like a cafe, old-type cafe. That's what it was.

Describe a couple of the meals for me, some of the most popular meals.

Well, the popular meals, of course, had to be the ones that—we'd have smothered steak. And the chicken and dressing was a staple for Sunday. You had to have that. And we had the baked ham. But they also did a lot of roast beef—I think they call it rump roast. They would have roast every day. You could have hot beef sandwiches with mashed potatoes or beef meal, beef with vegetables, candied yams, greens and cornbread. And, of course, you had tea. Iced tea and bottles of soft drinks. And we had lemonade and Kool-Aid. Most importantly, you had to have dessert. And that was the potato pie, banana pudding, pound cake. Every day you'd have to have some dessert with your meals. But we also served breakfast. It was open 24 hours for many years.

So where on Jackson was it located?

If I can remember the address, I would say about 400 Jackson Street. There's a vacant lot there now and there's a flat building right, the first building you see on Jackson at D. I would say that's about 400.

So this is the block just before—if I'm going east-west, this is the block just before— Jackson.

What is the name of the one casino that's left there?

Oh, it's not on the Town Tavern end. It's on the D Street end.

Oh, D Street. So it is well before Town—okay. I know where it is. Okay, good.

Yes. Yes. We also had a restaurant in the Town Tavern originally because when it opened my mom opened the restaurant there. And then she moved to her own location, a restaurant down to the east end of Jackson Street. Opened in '55.

So then her first restaurant was 1955?

I cannot remember the date, but she was at the location for all of 19'60. And I don't remember the date exactly because I was a little bit younger then and I didn't like working, so I wasn't too excited about the restaurant. But I had to work anyway.

So tell me how many children there are in the family and give me their names.

Six of us. It was three boys and three girls. My older sister's Maxine. My next sister is Hazel and myself. Then we have the three brothers—Benjamin, which we call BJ, and Billy and Jerry.

So everybody worked in the restaurant—

Oh, yes.

—during the years?

Everybody. That's the only place you could get work, really. So families normally would start their own business so that they could raise the children and have work to do.

Give me some examples of some of the other businesses that families started like that.

Mainly dry cleaners, restaurants, shoe repair, shoe shops, beauty salons, things that you could—manage a few employees, one or two—they call it small business now. But then it was just family business. Anything that you could manage by yourself, by the family alone,

and then hired extra people, but be sure that the family had work and children would be able to work while they're going through school. Just high school; college was not affordable for us at that time.

Describe Jackson Street for me as you were growing up here.

Okay. I'll start from D Street at Jackson. I remember a club was called then the Elks. Now I think it's a mosque there. But that's where the young people used to go for dances there at the Elks. Across the street was the Carver House or the Cove and Jackson Street Hotel a little bit later on. Then Mattie's Cafe was there—next door to the Jackson Hotel. Then there was a lady that was an accountant that had her office next door. These were storefront buildings; single story, very small shop-type. There were two barbershops within that block. Then we got down to the El Morocco. Further west would be Louisiana Club and the Town Tavern would be on that corner of D at F. I think that they intersected like that.

And there was a supermarket within four blocks of where we lived. My parents shopped there; you had to have fresh vegetables every day for the restaurant. They'd go get vegetables. They had to have fresh meat. They'd have to go to the—then it was called the butcher's and they would have fresh meat every day.

So where was the butcher located?

Main Street. I think it was called Great Western Meats. That was the name of it, Great Western Meats.

But you paid retail for your vegetables?

Yes. Yes, for all of it when you had the business. They would give her a rate, a little bit of a rate—but it was retail. And Anderson Dairy was the only dairy, but they would deliver. And the bakery, Holsum Bakery would bring bread, loafed bread and buns for hamburgers. And

we had the soft drinks. They'd bring that in the trucks. And all the vendors would eat in the restaurant as their time permitted.

And, of course, Larry's Sight and Sound. That was a record store, the only one.

That was on Jackson?

On D Street right off of Jackson, D Street. Now there's a little clothing store for men. But next door was Larry's Sight and Sound. And everybody'd go there for their music. And he kept the most current music there. Of course, we had what they called then was jukebox. So you'd have a jukebox so you could keep current music on.

So were there any other businesses in the area that you remember either on Jackson, D, or any of the other streets in that area?

The only other thing would be a little further north and that would be the auto repair shop and a gasoline—it was a service station, but it wasn't called that at the time. It was just a little place you could get gas and they could do light repairs. So I remember that. And mainly the churches.

Tell me about the churches.

Well, the church that my mom went to was Second Baptist, and that's the church that I now attend. It's been there 69 years. As I was a little girl, I used to play in the parking lot that was there. It was a tent. It was before the Hamburger Heaven. There were tents in that area.

What were the tents for?

To live in.

Do you mind telling me which year you were born?

Forty-two.

Okay. So you were born in 1942. So you remember some of the tents and shacks

because people were moving here so fast?

Not only moving here fast but even if you wanted a house, nobody would sell you lumber and nobody would sell you materials. You'd have to get from scrape or the laborers would work and they could bring any extra boards and things home to make a place to live on. It wasn't designed for families at all. And that's one of the reasons that I grieve at Berkley Square; because when it was built, it was built properly—for families. And now people seem to not understand the importance of owning and maintaining a home especially for families with children.

So before Berkley Square, which was built in the fifties—

Uh-huh. There were no single-family homes for working families in this area.

Okay. So tell me where your parents lived.

Jackson Street.

Okay. So were there houses on Jackson Street? Do you remember the house that you grew up in?

Oh, yes. My mom and dad built apartments there after we moved over here. But it was a shack, a shanty, and it had like a little shotgun—we called them shotgun houses—and it had enough space so there was a little house in the back. My brothers stayed in that and we were in the front part of it because they didn't allow boys and girls to sleep in the same room at that time. But it was in the same family unit; complex we call it now. But I remember that. That's the only place I remember living. The tent, I don't remember living there, but I know where it was because my auntie lived across the street where Victory Baptist Church is now. Eliza and Jimmy House were my aunt and uncle. They owned the property where Victory is. F Street side is now the parking lot. Yeah.

Where did you go to school?

Well, I went to Madison. But now, before I went to Madison, my parents took me back to Arkansas with them. I think I was there for two years. I don't recall it exactly, but for two years. And I didn't get to go to elementary school here, but I started from Madison. That's what my recollection was. I did not attend Westside school because I was in Arkansas at that time.

Where in Arkansas is the family from?

Fordyce. All of us from Fordyce, Arkansas.

So are you a member of the Fordyce Club?

I am not. My parents were. My elder brother Benjamin was. He was very active in that. He lived in Alaska, though. He's passed on now, but he was very active with the Fordyce Club.

And it's still active.

It's still active. As a matter of fact, I was a little bit younger and as I grew older I just wanted to live anywhere but Las Vegas. So every time I had an opportunity I would leave.

So where are some of the places that you lived?

Oh, my Lord. I've been to a lot of places. And living there, I can't say lived, but I've spent some time in a lot of places. Well, Miami; San Francisco; Seattle, Washington; Montreal, Canada. I need to think of it slowly because now I'm 70. But that was a long time ago.

So after Madison School where did you go?

Las Vegas High. And Las Vegas High School was located on Seventh and Carson or Sixth and Carson? Seventh and Carson I think it was because now Las Vegas High school has relocated way out.

Now it's on Bridger at—

No. Las Vegas High has moved out toward the mountain. They built another school and it's Las Vegas High School.

Okay. I see what you're saying.

But Las Vegas High, the original one was at Sixth and Carson, but it may be Seventh. But that was the name of the school.

Okay. But it was the middle of downtown?

Oh, yes. Las Vegas High—school colors were red and black.

How did you get back and forth to Las Vegas High School?

My mother drove me.

She had to drive back and forth every day?

Had to drive me, going and coming, every day until I was in the 11th grade. And then my elder brother allowed me to take his car.

How did the other black students from here on the Westside get back and forth to school?

I'm not really sure because there weren't that many black students when I went to school at Las Vegas High. Not much time to socialize; it was school, work and home. But very often some would take the bus or walk because you couldn't depend on (the bus). The bus was not on any schedule you could schedule time for. And all the buses didn't have routes that would include this area. It was just a bus—I don't know what the bus did, but it wasn't meant for work or going to school. You couldn't schedule anything with that bus. And it didn't go everywhere.

Then there was concern, you know, about girls walking by themselves—people were more concerned about their girls. And they would make certain that either somebody else

would take the girls or you would take them or family members would get together and take three or four. But we didn't have a lot of black students. As a matter of fact, I remember four young men that were black and they were from the same family and their family provided them transportation.

Where did the other black kids go?

I don't know that—there was only one high school at the time. Many did not complete high school. I have a brother Billy that did not complete high school.

Okay, and other kids, the same thing, you think?

I wouldn't say that as a matter of fact because I'm not really sure. But later on when Rancho High came on line, many went there. Now we're growing, here in west Las Vegas. And now we had a larger population of more mixed people—American Indians, Mexicans and others. Rancho High School was a place that many of them went to from this area because it was walking distance. Las Vegas High was a little bit further out, but that was the only high school then to go to.

Right. Tell me about your father's work.

Well, he was a laborer, but he worked at the Test Site and I guess did tunneling and whatever else they were supposed to do. He didn't talk an awful lot about it, but he was just a laborer he said. He'd just go to work.

So that means that he helped to dig some of those pits—

Oh, yes.

—where they placed the bombs.

And then he would tell us of some of the things that they would find, artifacts, American Indian artifacts they'd find. They weren't allowed to touch them or bring any out. But he said

you could find really many interesting things up there. And he would see other people find things and they would talk about it, but they weren't allowed to remove it.

Did they preserve them?

He didn't.

I mean did the officials?

Well, then they didn't have that much communication with the laborers. You know, they just did the work. And who knows what they knew and the value of what was being found and how to preserve it? That wasn't talked about.

How did your father go back and forth to the Test Site?

He drove. He always had a car and he would take two or three people with him there and bring back. So they would always sort of manage to provide transportation. Anybody that had a car that was reliable, if someone else got a job there, they would say I need a ride to get there and they would join in. Car pool is what we call it now. But they did that then all the time whether it was work, school, or church. Whoever had transportation provided it for anybody that needed transportation.

Did he go back and forth every day or did he sometimes stay out there?

Every day because he had the restaurant and he had six of us. And he did not believe in being gone with the children at home. The children all had to spend the days and nights at home. We could not spend nights someplace else other than home. So he had to be home and we knew daddy would be home. Even if it was late, he was coming home.

Did your brothers grow up to be the same kind of men?

Yes. Basically I would say so. My elder brother was more like my father in that he worked. He even moved to Alaska to work out on the Aleutian chain. That was kind of isolated area.

But he always worked and built things. My younger brother, whom I'm close with now, he was here and he worked in the hotels as a dealer. So he didn't do much laboring.

Is that the brother who lives next door?

Yeah.

Now, you know I have to interview him.. [Jerry Eppenger]

Yes.

Because we need to talk to some of the black men who were some of the early dealers. And they have some stories to talk about because they have a few people that—it was very interesting the way they talked of how they would set up a table in their home and try to train younger people so they could qualify to be dealers at table games.

But he had come along when things were a little bit different, not quite as difficult. But he worked in one hotel I think for 23 years, at the Dunes at the time it was.

And the Dunes has been gone for so long. We really want to talk to him. So not just about Berkley Square but about that as well.

Yes. And then he went into the military. He went into the Marines and then that.

Tell me when did your parents move from the Jackson Street location, the home?

My closest recollection is '59.

And where did they move?

To here, to Berkley Square.

So this is the house?

No. The house next door is the house, but my brother added on to it. But that's the house next door. This house was occupied by another family and I had bought this place to rent it out. I wasn't going to live here. But after I found out it was so difficult to find a place that would

rent to me. I had a daughter with me. And then I thought, well, maybe I could make this place livable.

Yes. Tell me about moving here in 1959. What was that like?

As best as I can recall because I was pretty young then: it was a three-bedroom house. It was adequate really. The play areas were the streets. We played most—it was different for girls then. Girls couldn't run up and down the streets and play outside too much. You had to stay pretty much in the yard.

Now, tell me why.

There was just a different culture for girls. Girls had to be protected. I don't know why they did it the way they did. But my brothers could go from this side of the town, the street, to all over town on their bicycle, until he got his motorcycle. But I didn't have that liberty.

Do you think it was necessary at that time to protect girls that way?

I think it was their ethics that thought that they needed to know where the girls were and not to leave them in places where you didn't know that the persons they were around would be concerned about them. It was just the way all what they call decent families would treat girls.

Okay, good. What about the backyard? You said the street was the playground.

Oh, yeah.

These backyards are so nice and big.

They're big, but it wasn't designed for like barbeques and that. No, no, no. They did that in the house in the kitchen. And the kids played ball, tag, and football and that in the street. There were no basketball hoops. But then it was just football and they played baseball. The street was for them.

Before I come back to Berkley Square, did any of your brothers play sports in high

school?

Jerry (Eppenger) did, the one that you'll talk to. He played football.

Now, coming back to Berkley Square: describe your earliest memories of what Berkley Square looked like.

I thought it looked nice. They were little houses, but it was well designed. Sturdy and an actual floor plan. I really appreciate Mr. Paul Williams [architect] because he had a heart for this area, for families I think, because you were close enough that you could keep an eye on each other, but you had space to grow to add to your family and that. And they had the little carports. Now, I remember the carports because most people now have closed them in and utilized the space differently. But the carport was interesting because my father got a new car and he told me to back the car up and I didn't close the door and my door pulled on that little post that was—I remember the carport. It didn't pull it down, but it did buckle, I remember that.

Did it damage the door of the car?

A little bit. But he was not one to make a fuss about anything.

Oh, that's great.

But it was just an interesting thing. There were no fences. The yards were not fenced. That's important to know. But the yards were divided so that each family had its own. And the fruitless mulberry trees were the most popular. That was nice because it made it feel soft. It made it feel like it was more livable. But they were from Arkansas. They were not starved as much as I was for greenery because they came out of green. From the South everything was green. But they came to this desert. And some people didn't bother to translate that from one—it was just dirt and dust.

So with the knowledge you have now, give me the boundaries of Berkley Square.

Leonard to Byrnes, D Street to H Street, with inner streets of E Street and G Street.

Approximately how many houses were built originally?

I'd say about 125.

So this was your playground in a way.

This was everything.

Okay. Do you remember walking through the neighborhood with other girls or with your family?

Oh, yes. I could walk from home up to the restaurant, approximately 2 ½ blocks. It was expected. And they didn't have to worry about anybody bothering because everybody knew whose family you belonged to and there were no people here that didn't know your family and it was a safe area. You could get in trouble, but you couldn't just walk out and they'd have to guard you because of people that were dangerous—it was not dangerous. That kind of thing didn't exist.

As a matter of fact, one man that had a car that he used to drive people around like a taxi because that was the only real means of transportation for some elderly people. That's why now when they talk about taxi drivers being out of work I have no compassion for them. We could call for a taxi today and not get one in this area. That's not new. It has been ongoing. They only want to service downtown, the Strip and the airport. So there were many men that people would get to know to call him as you would a taxi. You'd call him and he would drive you, like that. But they were never licensed. But they would do the service of a taxi because you couldn't count on the bus, on public transportation.

So tell me the difference between—and I'm going to use the terminology that's used—the

Westside and Berkley Square. Who moved from the Westside and moved into Berkley Square?

Well, the historic Westside that's called Westside, that was a mixture including schools, churches and commercial. Berkley Square was exclusive for families, for living families.

So if I'm a poor family, could I have expected to buy a house in Berkley Square?

Well, all the families were poor because the price was very low. The price was very reasonable. It's just for working people, they made it possible that you could buy. But what happened is that many that were a little better off would add on, depending on the size of the family and how it grew. But it was built for people that were hard working. I know that some people say that that was called the middle class, but they were working-class people.

I understand what you mean.

Yeah. It was working poor, but they were really hard-working.

So give me some examples of the occupations of people who purchased the property in Berkley Square.

Laborers, maids, cooks.

So Test Site workers?

Yeah, Test Site workers. And when I say laborers, not only the Test Site, they did the concrete, the pouring, the finishing. The sidewalks that are down here now were poured and laid by many people that were at that time.

Were they in unions?

No. They were just laborers. There was no labor union. They were laborers. And people would work all the time because there was much to be done. And they were only getting a small salary, but it was guaranteed because there was always something doing.

So the people doing that kind of work were employed by whom?

I don't remember the name of the construction companies or the ones that got the contracts. But they would just go and pick up a few people, say we got jobs today, and they would have people that they could rely on to find more people to come and fill the positions that they needed, pretty much like they say the laborers do today.

So would you say that a lot of families had both parents working?

Yes. Everybody worked, even the children. Work was what we did. And work was an honorable thing.

So doctors lived in the neighborhood?

Las Vegas being totally segregated because the United States was segregated—so this is not new—everything was based on race and income. Base primarily was race. If you were African-American at the time or black, what we call now, but then you would live in the black neighborhood. Professional people. We had entertainers because they would come for an engagement and they'd have to have a place to stay. Hotels and motels weren't available. So they would have a house that they would rent, as a house across over here was rented by them, by some entertainers.

Which house?

On the corner.

Okay. It was rented—do you know—

I think the Treniers.

Okay. So the Treniers lived there often.

Often, okay? And Jarmilla's father, Dr. McMillan, lived around the corner. Dr. West lived next door. He was a medical doctor. So we had the medical doctor and we had one dentist

and the entertainers. And the others were professional people, but they were teachers or school principals, seamstresses. My mom and father were not educated beyond the sixth grade, but they were business owners because they had a large family. So they were restaurateurs.

So tell me what you did when you finished high school.

When I finished high school, my education was so poor that there's no way that I could have qualified for college because I wouldn't have known how to get into college. I was not aware of how to register or what I would do. When I went to Las Vegas High School it was because the school was available. My parents said I had to go to school. While I was in high school, nobody took an interest in my education, nobody.

So there were no guidance counselors?

None. And they were hoping that you would not show up—nobody was mean to me; they were indifferent to me. But because of my parents and their desire for me to do the right thing, I was there every day, on time, but I was not required to participate. So when I got out of high school, I didn't know anything. I didn't realize how little I knew until I found out that I didn't know how to qualify to move forward.

But then I had a high school diploma and I was apparently not too slow. I was kind of bright because of being around people that were—we had a lot of people coming through the town that would help you read and, you know, discuss world events and so forth. Then I found out that I needed to do something else to get a job. And at that time it was go to secretarial school. Go to secretarial school. And at the time I recall we had one here called Dana McKay's. Going to secretarial school for a person like me, without really being qualified for a secretarial job, I could get a job as a receptionist. But I went two years to that

and that was to give me office experience, so I would know how to take shorthand and how to type and how to have office protocol, understand a few things about that. When I finished with that, I had several jobs as receptionist.

So did you enjoy that part of the education?

Well, I enjoyed knowing that there was more for me to learn. I was very distraught when I found out how little I knew, though. And the job that I thought I would get because I completed that course. Everything I did. I completed it. But it helped me know how little I knew. And people were getting secretarial jobs because they had gone to university. I mean they were trained in shorthand, English grammar, typing. They had a standard shorthand, not just taking notes. And we didn't get that standard there. There were different types of shorthand,. So you had to be able to transcribe other notes, as well as—so I didn't have that. But I could go work for a an individual person needing little skills, take shorthand in my own way, and translate it. But could somebody else do it? I don't think so. So that's what I did. Then I realized that I needed to type better. So I went and took typing classes.

And after I did that then I just got very discouraged. I thought there's very little for me to do. And how am I going to make a living when there's nothing that I know how to do? And I am not working in a restaurant all my life. So then I got very anxious and started moving. Every time I had an opportunity to leave, I left.

As a matter of fact, when I graduated high school, for my graduation gift, Mattie Smith, my auntie, asked "where would you like to go?" So I told her I didn't know because I hadn't traveled. So she says, well, I have a cousin—her name was Elnore—in San Francisco, so we'll go there. And I went to San Francisco. San Francisco, I thought I had died.

And gone to heaven?

Yes.

Oh, my. Why?

Our cousin that had a house—it was a small house—she had a garden. She had a flower garden in front and a vegetable garden in the back. Her husband was a policeman, but she was a homemaker. And the little house on the hill was just adorable. And I thought that's what's missing. But see, my older brothers and sisters didn't have that hunger because they grew up in Arkansas and they knew what it was to have people work in the garden and have flowers and all that. But in Vegas, they didn't do the same thing. So it was sorely missing life of any kind. We had dirt to walk on, glass to walk on. And hot, hot sun to walk under.

So you didn't have grass in the front yard.

No. There was no grass.

Oh, that's what you mean by no green at all.

Cottonwood trees. And you could walk and you'd see the—we called it the heat waves. You could see the waves. And I was allergic to the sun, and nobody knew that. It was so hot and so dry. It was just—I had never imagined such a thing.

Anyway, San Francisco was my first eye-opener. And then, as a matter of fact, I lived the longest away from home in Seattle and that reminded me a great deal of San Francisco in the way that people had small homes, not everybody, but working people I call, small homes, well kept. They kept them painted. They kept them clean. That wasn't the case here. It was still shanties.

But even in Berkley Square?

Oh, they were not all well-kept, no, just like they're not now. Some people would have the home and they'd just have a house. I mean they'd just have the property. Before that there

was no place to have.

Okay. So Freeman Street, is this unusual for Berkley Square? It's so beautiful. Almost all the homes have these beautiful front yards.

I think it's starting to look more like it was designed to look. I think it could look better. But we had people here—as a matter of fact, on the corner, that lady used to come out and sweep the sidewalk and wash her sidewalk when we were young. And they'd laugh at her. Kids would laugh at her. She swept her sidewalk and she swept around her property, and they would laugh at her, thought that was funny.

Because they didn't know.

They didn't know. But she apparently knew. And I thought it was wonderful. And then I saw that other people in other countries sweep the sidewalks all the time and wash it down. And I thought to myself, well, that's what's needed. So I thought I'll do what I see needs to be done; it's what's needed.

So how long were you in San Francisco for that graduation trip?

I think we were there for two weeks.

Okay. So you came back to Las Vegas.

Came back to Las Vegas and, oh, I was inspired. I saw something nice and I thought it was pretty and you could understand it was just a different—I needed to see something different.

So what did that inspire you to do?

To find out how to get it, how to acquire something that I thought—I always thought about that looked livable, that was alive, something that lived. So that's what I thought. Even when I was living with my parents there, every time I'd go and come back, I'd always want to redecorate the house. I'd always want to do this. They said, well, she's going to decorate the

house. Well, I wasn't really a decorator. But it's just like things weren't fixed right. You know, when you go in you can tell when there's order?

And there were very few places that I went in that had order. Nobody could be nicer than all of these people. They were super nice. But you'd go in and you could sit on the couch. It could fall down. It'd get ragged. They'd put it out in the front yard. You could still sit on it. Come on in. Come on in. It just wasn't right.

So now, but tell me about the houses of the schoolteachers, the principals, the doctor that lived here.

They looked nicer. They were nicer. No, I didn't see grass. I saw more different trees. They'd plant a tree or two and, now, they'd put some rocks out in front like that. And their driveways, they didn't have it all dirtied up with car oil and repairs. The professional people had a different look about their homes.

And that's the look that you liked?

It's the only one that made sense to me, you know, that you're supposed to have some order. And it seemed to have had that. And even those could have looked better once I found out that you don't have to have a big house to have a livable home. And then I thought, well, people just don't care. But it wasn't required apparently. I mean it wasn't expected. You know what it seemed to me? That people had a notion a house is just where you go when you can't go anyplace else, when you go home to eat or sleep. That's what it looked like.

Because most people worked two jobs. And the kids would work and go to school, and when they got home they wanted to go out and play. The only people that I had seen working would be my dad and the men that would work with him. They would work around the house and all around. The people would come and get them. Would you come and fix

this for me? Come and do that for me? They worked all the time. And the women cooked all the time for all the kids in the family. Some sewed. That's all I saw.

So once you were inspired, what happened with your life? You went to the secretarial school.

Well, that was later on. I had my daughter. I was right out of high school. I was 17. For about six years I just kind of worked. I worked at the First National Bank. I started working as a receptionist mainly. I worked at the bank as a new accounts person, which was menial, menial, very low salary and no benefits. But they were jobs that I was learning about money and seeing how things functioned.

The only job I got fired from was Channel 8. And I forgot what year that was. But it was because then they didn't like to have black girls out front, though I didn't know that, and I was a receptionist. So they had this convention and apparently Howard Hughes came and saw (me) and they got rid of me; something like that. But I didn't know about all those things.

But for the most part, I never got fired because you were always supposed to keep what you had. And if you figured that, oh, things weren't going too well, just do your best. That's what they would tell you. It'll work out; just do your best. So that was my mind-set, to do my best.

Then I worked at a jewelry store. What was his name? Minden Jewelers. I didn't work there very long because they required me to wear suits and I didn't have enough money to buy the attire they wanted me to wear and they didn't furnish a uniform. And I worked at an insurance company as a receptionist, Bank Insurance. Where else? Then I think at this time my daughter was about six years old and then I got married. Oh, I worked at the Culinary Union, also. I worked there in the—where you take the dues and that—cashier area.

They had two cashiers, not just one, with the business agents and that. So I did that for a while. That's where I actually met my husband. When I got married he was driving a taxi at the time here.

So what is your husband's name?

Well, that was my husband then. I don't have him anymore.

Okay. I got your brothers' and sisters' names, but I didn't get your parents' names.

Mattie Eppenger and Billy Eppenger.

So you got married the first time. He was a (cab) driver.

Well, he was a lot of things. He worked at a lot of things, but at that time he was driving a taxi and that's how I met him at the union, when I was working there. So we got married and we moved to Seattle. That's where I stayed—in Seattle—for ten years. That's where my daughter went to elementary school grades.

So tell me what Seattle was like compared to Las Vegas.

It was like San Francisco. It was no comparison. It was beautiful. I found that people were very education-oriented, family-oriented, community-minded. It was just like what it should be, I thought.

But you didn't see the same attitude here?

No, no, no, no. Here I didn't see any attitude. I didn't see anything worth duplicating. That was what I saw.

Yes, that was what you saw. Okay.

What did you do in Seattle?

Well, I worked for—my husband had a small business. As a matter of fact, it was a dating service. He did that for a long time. And he was a land salesman. He sold land. I had two

jobs there: Blue Cross Blue Shield processing claims and at First National Bank as a new accounts person again.

So how did you get back to Berkley Square?

I got a divorce after ten years of marriage and moved back to Las Vegas. When I came home, I moved back with my parents because I did not enough money to move my daughter and myself anyplace else. That's when I was there for a couple of years and just didn't know what I was going to do. So then I started looking for a job. I didn't think I'd ever want to work in a hotel. It just wasn't appealing to me.

So before you tell me about the job, how did Berkley Square differ when you came back from what it was before you left?

It seemed to differ inasmuch that it was—what shall I say? It looked a little better from the outside, but I don't think the mentality was different. I think it was a small town mentality and just having a house. I don't recall anybody referring to where they live—you could ask people today and they'll say I live 915 there. They don't say it's my home. I live there. And I didn't hear people refer to their house. They say, well, that's our house over there. They didn't refer to it as home. So when I came back it was a little different. People were referring to it as home and it started to feel more like home. But as people grew I see that they were moving away. The younger people were moving away. Perhaps feeling as I had felt as a young person.

And what did you attribute that—moving away from Las Vegas or moving away from Berkley Square?

As far as I know, moving away from Las Vegas and from this site. Just wasn't enough to keep you interested. It just wasn't anything there to draw you, nothing. The only thing available at

the time was either working at the hotels. And everybody wasn't hired for that. But once in a while, you know, some were working as maids and some would get hired as maybe a cocktail waitress or a food waitress or some were cashiers, something like that.

So which year did you come back after you left Seattle?

Seventy-six.

So 1976. So this is after Ruby Duncan's welfare rights movement—

Oh, yes.

—and all of that. Do you remember any of those welfare rights, civil rights activities that went on here?

No. I was not involved in any of that.

So in 1976, what kind of work did you find?

That was it. The only thing I remember is when I would go for an interview. I was always going for interviews, going for interviews it seemed. And finally I went—what was it called? There was a new hotel being built called The Marina. They sent out a call to come and interview. Well, I wasn't going to qualify because I didn't know how to do that cocktail waitress. I didn't look right. My legs were too skinny and I didn't have big boobs. I wasn't going to go do any of that. So I went to see about—no. This is true because you know. Now, if you had skinny legs, everybody would tell you that you had skinny legs; nobody wants to see your skinny legs. You're too flat-chested. They wanted to have all the artificial. So I didn't think I'd qualify for that. But I went for a secretarial job. And there was a German man there, and he said do you know how to serve drinks? And I said not really. He says, well, tell me what's in a screwdriver. And I said vodka. He says you'll do; you can do it. He says go home and put on those short things, because you have to go in shorts, and come back for an

interview. I said to my mom that's not going to work because if I put on shorts I know I'm not going to get the interview. Anyway, he hired me.

So now, this was at The Marina?

At the Marina Hotel and Casino. He hired me at The Marina. And every time he would go out of town, they'd fire me. But when he'd come back, he'd call me back to work.

Who would fire you?

The beverage person.

But this person was the owner who would hire you. So how did they explain that firing and hiring?

They didn't explain it. They didn't have to explain anything to you then.

But did you realize what was happening?

No. I was surprised I got hired to begin with because I knew I didn't look like those other women.

So what kind of money were you earning in '76?

Now, I can't really remember. But I can tell you one thing for sure. I was hooked because the money you got, you could live on it. I got money every day. Now, here that didn't come close to what I was doing working for a whole week for $400 a month and no cash in between. I had food. They would give you food. You could eat. You could have your lunch there. You'd have your uniform. It was maintained by the hotel. And you'd look like you were dressed for the part. And every day you could come home with the money. Well, I had a child—

Because you were getting tips.

Yes.

Do you remember what kind of tips you were earning, how much?

I can't say for sure. But even I think if I made $25 or $30 a day or $50 or $100 sometimes, it was just that you had flowing cash. With a child in school, I needed money all the time.

Where was The Marina located?

It seems to me now that it was north of the Tropicana hotel. In there? Someplace in there? It's been gone for so long. Then I think the Aladdin was down further. But it was south, closer to this end of the Strip.

Do you remember your immediate neighbors growing up here in Berkley Square?

Oh, yes.

Who were some of the neighbors, and do you still know them today?

Well, they passed on, though. But, yeah, because I know the family that lived in this house before I got it, but they're all passed on now. And across the street I knew. I mean we knew everybody. The one next door on this side of me, the Alstons, her mother lived there. Now it's her daughter, second generation. Her father has passed on. He was a veteran of World War II and Korea.

Do you see that in many homes; that it's generational?

Yes.

Do you remember Bonanza Village?

At the time I saw it, but it didn't mean anything to us because it was all white. And it was an area where it was mainly, you know, just horses. It didn't look nice to me either, because it was mainly rural and they wanted to keep it rural.

Do you remember as it changed from white to black?

If I can remember the date. But I had a girlfriend and her mother that lived there. I would say

that happened around the 1980s. I'm not sure exactly. Somewhere in there. Yeah. Because as Las Vegas grew and people could get a proper home—you know, it's something if you could go and somebody's building homes and you see they've got a kitchen and living room and dining room and they got bedrooms and bath. You know, you want to move up. And people were accustomed to moving up into those newer areas that were better developed because when we first came there was no better-developed area, just places to live.

Do you remember the John S. Park area?

No. No. I didn't get out of my boundaries too much.

Okay. As a family, when you would sit around and your brothers started getting jobs and all of that, what kinds of discussions did you hold about racial relations in this city?

None.

You guys didn't talk about it?

None. None. No, we didn't sit around. We worked.

Oh, okay. Sunday afternoons?

No. You don't sit around. You cook and eat. What I recall is with my family and with my mom owning the restaurant and there was a mixed clientele that would eat in the restaurant, they never wanted you to spend a lot of time thinking about race relations. What they wanted you to think about was doing the best that you could do. They didn't want you to sit around saying, well, you know, this person don't like me; that don't work. So what? You have got to be ready to move on. They just didn't sit—and they never talked about hating people or who hated us. That didn't bother them at all.

Wow. Good.

They would caution you that you have to watch a person, get to know their character. You

had to do all that. But they didn't, no. It amazes me now people spend so much time talking about race.

Did anyone in your family—older brothers, anyone—go to any of the Westside clubs?

Well, Jerry probably did. I know he did because they had those players club where they thought they were players. They'd have membership clubs. Oh, yeah.

The Key Club.

All kinds of stuff. I don't know if it was Key Club or a private club. But anyway, they had that kind of stuff.

Okay. But you didn't go to those?

No.

What kinds of organizations did you become a part of either before or after Seattle?

None. I had my daughter and I worked. What I mainly wanted to do was to get a place for us to live because after I came back I didn't have a husband, didn't have a job. So I had a lot of finding out what to do, finding out things that I had learned to and I had worked at. Now I had to figure out how I could put that together.

Okay. So now that you're working, you got a job at The Marina.

Well, that lasted. Then I left The Marina and went to the Castaways Hotel and Casino. In Castaways I didn't work full-time, but they would call me as an extra.

What kind of work was it at the Castaways?

Cocktails, same as The Marina. But then I went to Caesars Palace Hotel and Casino. That was about two years after—a year after that. I don't know how I got the job. I can't remember.

Did you know any of the black people who had gotten jobs at Caesars at the beginning

like Dee Dee Cotton or—

Yes. I knew Dee Dee. I knew Peggy Walker. I worked with Peggy.

Those were the first two black cocktail waitresses there.

Yes. You see, now, I didn't work with them because they were I don't know how many years ahead of me working there. I came along—much later.

At least ten.

Yeah. I came along after, but they were still there. But when we came along, then it was more open for different people to come in.

Yes. So tell me what working at Caesars was like.

It was excellent. And I'll tell you why it was excellent. You were furnished uniforms. You were furnished somebody to take care of the uniforms. You were furnished hairpieces, somebody to take care of the hairpieces. And there was a standard headdress. Everybody had to have the same standard. And, of course, I liked the idea of getting money every day. But then it was union organized labor and I realized the value of being a union member.

Tell me the difference in The Marina without a union and Caesars Palace with a union.

They could fire you anytime they want without cause, you see. That's how they could let you go and nobody just don't see and don't ask. But anybody could fire you and they don't have to ask you what you did. But once you became union it was different. And then you had to have cause and at least you have an arbitrator. You have somebody else to talk to and find out who did this and why and all that. Without organized labor, unions, poor working class people would be in trouble. That made a difference. That gave me a security I had never had on a job. That I had never had on a job. Then I knew that if I'd do what I was taught, do my work, mind my business, I should be able to take care of my daughter, right? And I did. That made

all the difference. But if you have no representation as a worker, you will be crushed. Fairness, wealth, and power do not trickle down. I found that the rich got richer and the poor got poorer.

How did you get back and forth to Caesars Palace?

I had a car.

Give me a typical day at Caesars Palace, the environment, the customers. Put me in that environment.

Well, I worked in the baccarat pit and that was different. Because I tell you, what I think happens is that I was exposed to an international clientele, but it was not just an international clientele that was condescending. Like I saw that change later on. Many people came into the United States from other countries later on and they didn't care about Americans or people. It was different. But when I was working, people were respectful. They were kind. They were considerate. So I was in there at the best of times. People were really very respectful. And I mean that they would not try to do things to make you lose your job or require you to do things that you didn't want to do. None of that was there at that time. You know, people started backstabbing and selling people out for a job. Once more people came from other places—and declared it a right-to-work state.

Oh, I see what you mean.

—oh, it was awful.

Okay. So tell me what it was like in the good old days.

It was good. If you had your job, you could keep your job. Now, you could request time off if you needed it. None of these things were held against you. As long as you did your job and did an excellent job, you'd have a good job, guaranteed. As a union member active in your

union concerns for the workers.

So what were the hours like?

I only worked eight hours.

And describe the uniforms.

They were—what shall I call them? I guess they were goddess uniforms, something like that, but short with pleats. But at the time they were not over your panty line. But now they do all kinds of stuff. I think it was tastefully done, yeah, because it covered one shoulder, but yet you could see cleavage, but it wasn't just for that.

It was a beautiful uniform. I loved it.

I thought it was tastefully done.

Yes. Do you have a picture of yourself in the uniform?

I'd have to look. I'd have to see.

Would you? We'd love to have a copy for the book.

That's one I'll look for.

Please.

Okay, fine. You know, I should have one because later on the young lady that I worked with, she used to take pictures at Christmastime. And in our dressing room she would stick them in the ceiling, make like paper icicles—not icicles, snowflakes. She would put red on the back and put the white over it with your photograph on it and hang it in the ceiling. That was our decoration. It was very pretty.

What were the dressing rooms like?

The dressing rooms were like—we had a restroom. We had a personal locker. We had a couch that we could have a sleep or rest on at break time. Or watch TV or listen to the radio.

We had the dressing ladies. We called them "goddess mothers." That's what we called them.

So did you put on your makeup there?

You could. You could put it on home. But I'd put it on at home and then I would go there and freshen up so that I wouldn't have to take—

Any special makeup that you had to use or any special way of applying makeup for Caesars?

No. Whatever I did, it was okay. Nobody ever said you had to have—but the hairpiece and the uniforms were managed by the goddess mothers.

Tell me how the hair was done.

Well, it was a special designed headpiece. I don't really know how it was done because we didn't have to do it. I mean you'd pin it on.

And what was it?

It was hair, real hair, human hair.

I mean it was a ponytail? What—

It was a braid around a comb and a ponytail. Actually, it was a two-piece thing, but it looked like one. But you could separate the ponytail out. And they never let you wear a ponytail that started to fray. You'd get a new one. You never wore a wig that started to fray. You'd get a new one. You didn't have to say it. The goddess mothers would say we had to get you a new uniform. And if the gold started to come off, they took care of that part.

Good. What kind of shoes?

Well now, that was my responsibility. They were gold. They had to be gold. And because you had to walk so much, I had to have leather. You could have them as high as you want, but you couldn't wear flats.

What was the minimum height of the heel?

Well, usually three-inch, like that, more like. That was important for me that I change my shoes twice a day and that I wore support hose because an older lady told me that. She says you need to protect your legs because you'll have varicose veins and all that and make sure you buy good shoes. Leather. Proper fit. Right size for your feet.

Did you attend union meetings?

Oh, yes.

Tell me about those, how they were done. And was there a representative in Caesars from the union?

Yes. You had your assigned union representative; well, they called them shop stewards. But you had your representative. And then the issues would come out. You'd go to the meeting. And if there was something that needed to be talked about or something that needed to be worked out collectively as far as the union was concerned, you had your representative that would come out and observe to see what they could see and then they would bring it to management. Then if it was something that they needed to work out, it could be worked out. But I was so pleased to know that I had this representation.

I tried to stay out of trouble and stay out of the limelight. So I paid my dues. I kept my union books up to date and attended the union meetings.

What is a union book?

I may be able to find one of my union books—I probably threw it away. But it's like a little—it's one-fourth the size of a passport. Within it you put stamps on it for each month you pay your dues. You get a stamp for each month. And I would pay my dues for a year because that way I didn't want my dues to be late so I'd have to pay extra. You have a union book from the

union. They would come and look. Some people wouldn't belong and they'd say I belong to it. You'd have to have your stamps to show that you are a member. The stamps would show you how many months you paid and what month you owe.

Thank you for that. No one has ever said anything to me about the union book before.

Oh, yeah. You have to have a union book.

Do you remember who any of the union representatives were at the time you were working?

Michael Pisanello.

Any black women?

Oh, no. No. No black women as stewards.

Do you remember Sarah Hughes or Hattie Canty or any of those people?

Not at that time. When were they there? See, I'm talking about—there was no black women in the union, no union representation because there wasn't that many black people to be represented.

Wow. So even at this time did we have a lot of maids?

Now, that might be different. That might be different because that was a different union.

So you were not part of the Culinary Union?

Yes, part of the Culinary. I even worked at the Culinary Union. But the maids had a different area and they had different concerns.

I see. So you had a different representative than the maids in the same location?

Different representation. Yes. Culinary was all about the hotel servicing. But then they had one area for cocktail waitresses. Dealers weren't part of the union either.

That's correct.

But the maids were part of the union, but they were not represented by the same stewards.

So there was a different segment, a different department?

Yeah. Different categories were represented by different—

Was Al Bramlet still running the union when you were working at Caesars?

For a short while. He was there when I was working in the union. Ben Schmoutey and Jeff McColl.

What's her name, the young lady, his wife? No, she didn't marry him. I can't remember her name. She, I think, worked for the city for a while. What's her name? Very nice lady. I can't remember that. It seems like so long ago.

But that's great. I really appreciate the memories that you have.

Do you remember any political issues that you were ever involved in or that people here in Berkley Square got involved in, in any way?

I can't say that I do. No, no. There were a few things in historic West Las Vegas they were concerned with like credit unions. But that didn't really involve Berkley Square because it was mainly concerning residential situations and people handled their own things rather than as a whole.

So do you remember that credit union?

Oh, yes. I was a member when it first opened. Westside Credit Union?

Yes.

Yes. I was also a member of the credit union with my father, which was Test Site. You had to be a family member to be part of the credit union. That was the only way I could get a car because I was a member of the credit union. Then I would qualify and they would let you have money.

Second Baptist Church, the School of Evangelism on January 5, 2000. [L-R: Annette (family friend), Erika (Ruth's daughter), Ruth, Mattie and William Eppenger (Ruth's parents).]

1991 Eppenger Family photo

L-R seated: Hazel, Willie Maxine, Mattie Ruth (mother), Ruth. Standing: Billy, William (father), Jerry, and BJ (Benjamin).

So where was that credit union located that the Test Site workers were a part of?

Now, I can't say this is the original location. But from what I recall it was Sahara and—what's that cross street? It was West Sahara. I'd say about maybe three blocks south of Palace Station on the right side there was the credit union there. I don't think anything is in that building now, with the red stone top and white stucco building. It was inside. I can't remember what the cross street was without credit unions. Banks could not loan money to black people to buy a house or car.

But before we get to the freeway today?

Well, if you're coming east before you get to Palace Station, it will be on the left side. But if you're coming out Rancho and you make a right turn at Sahara, it will be on the right side. It's a single-story building there.

That was the only way you could really get money, borrow money because the banks wouldn't loan you money, a single mother making a small amount of money. So they said if you join a credit union, then you could save a little bit. They'd even let you save money like your Christmas club. You could save enough that you'd have an account and then you could start to put a little bit aside so that you could show that you've been a member for a while. That's the way we did it.

Was there any way of getting money through the union, through the labor union?

None that I know of. No. None that I know of. There was no union credit union, no.

What do you see as the future of Berkley Square?

Oh, my Lord. I think the Berkley Square future is about as tentative as America's future. And it's troubling because there are too few people that really understand the value of ownership, the value of maintenance, the value of family. It doesn't matter about size and cost. But you

have to take care of whatever it is, wherever it is. And I can see now that so many people are in trouble financially that the assistance that's being given is crippling over time. What happens is once you give people something; this is the way they expect to get it. And things you do to help, it becomes apparent that people are making a lifestyle out of that help.

Give me an example of what you mean.

Section 8. Berkley Square must have I don't know how many homes in here now that have become Section 8.

No?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The banks own them or people get them and they—

Okay. Because families have lost them?

Oh, yes. Yes. The young men, grandparents leave it and they borrow $3,000. They can't pay it back. And then they get the house and they just abandon it. If they can't turn it into a drug house, which means people come in and they get to use it for that purpose, then you see Section 8. And that is the worst thing I've ever seen in my life. And it shouldn't be because the intent is beautiful and needed. Help women with children to have a place to live and grow as a family—and these houses are designed for families. But they'll put these plastic toys in their front yard and won't clean it, won't sweep it. And if you're not careful, they'll start throwing bottles in the street that get broken.

I even go around and sweep up broken glass because I don't want it to accumulate. And I know it will. We've got those beautiful trees and my heart is to see them grow. And if we can get through one year, maybe—

Tell me about the trees.

Oh, they're such a beautiful addition.

Tell me the process. What happened?

Well, as a matter of fact, the Forestry Department apparently had some trees and they had found that to kind of retrofit the older neighborhoods, to bring them up to some kind of standard—because new neighborhoods now come with a design and we didn't have a design plan that would include it. So we were chosen after we got on the National Register as to what we could do to enhance the neighborhood. And we thought we could improve the sidewalks. We thought we could replace some of them. We could put pedestrian walk—what do you call them?

Walkways.

Yes. And after we saw that some of the bicycle paths were put in, it just started to fall in place. These are things that will enhance and make the neighborhood a neighborhood where people could walk. The trees came onboard last as something that we could use to soften the neighborhood.

And how long ago?

I'd have to look up the date exactly.

But it's only been like three months ago or two months ago.

Oh, yeah. Within this year. We'll say 2011 we started out. They said, well, we'll look at it. If we have any, we'll contact you and see if you can get some volunteers. And our council people were so beautiful that they arranged and got us help and they planted the trees. We had a wonderful celebration. Over a hundred people volunteered to plant. It was exciting. But it's work. It's good work. It should be done. The idea for me would be for neighbors to come out and water their trees and fellowship a little bit, get to say good morning, and pick up the broken glass and bottles. But we don't have that at every home.

Do you have a neighborhood association in Berkley Square?

Yes.

Tell me about the neighborhood association.

Well, I'm so-called a contact for the Berkley Square Neighborhood Association. Agnes Marshall has been a tremendous help to me because she volunteers and we go and find out what we need to do. We listen to what's being done everywhere.

You go where to find out?

To the meetings, whenever we get a notification there's a neighborhood meeting. Sometimes within the year we plan so many meetings for our neighborhoods.

Okay. And you go where for the meetings to be trained?

Well, there's no training.

No. But did you say that—

They have meetings within the city for the councilmen, the city council. Each ward tries to stay in touch with its community through its association. And that's the way that we keep in touch with our representatives.

Great. And then you plan meetings right here in the neighborhood.

Yes.

How is that done? Where do you hold them? Who attends?

We try to get everybody to attend. The idea is to send out some correspondence, tell them that we're meeting and what we hope to accomplish with the meeting. We hold it usually at the West Las Vegas Library. We've had some over at Stella Lake in that city building. We've had a few down at Kit Carson. When we first organized it, in my home we had a few meetings. But that wasn't too good because people didn't want to open their homes for

meetings. So I thought it would be better to have it at a place more neutral. That's more difficult because you have to have an appointment arranged and all that. But for me the best would be if we had meetings in our own homes in the neighborhood. But that's something that as we're getting older it's not as easy to arrange.

I think the trees are just a beautiful addition. And you can see the possibilities. I thought once everybody could see the possibilities they would say I'm going to take care of my tree. But everybody that's in a house now is not the one that owns the house. So the neighborhood is transitioning quickly.

How many houses do you think that are owner occupied now?

Too small for me to tell you. Too small for me to tell you. I think what happens is—and, as a matter of fact, if you drove around from Leonard, Freeman, Wyatt, Byrnes, you could see how it's changing. Now, it can change back.

This is a beautiful little thing I had the other day. A young lady that's living—she's in Section 8 with her son. Now, she's ideal. She walks him to school, right back here to Agassi. They're within walking distance. Then she walks to her job. And he's so mannerable (sic). That's what it's for.

A young lady that's moved back in her family's home on Leonard—I can't remember her name. But she walks her dog over here. Her family owned that home. She had moved all over the valley. And I guess the home was abandoned. She moved back into the home. It's just nice to see that. I've seen about four young women.

And another one on the corner of G Street, her family owned the home. It was left to some of the brothers and other family. They beat that house to the ground. She came back and had a guy come in and remodel her house. She said she hasn't done anything on the

outside because she ran out of money. But she opened her door. It was just her little dollhouse. You should see this one next door inside. He does most of the work himself. Now, that makes you feel so encouraged. That's a younger generation, too.

Yes.

But now we've come upon the hard economy. So I don't know where that will leave them. But they have the idea of what it should be like and how to maintain.

Good. I'm happy to hear those kinds of stories.

Yeah. It kind of encourages you to see that. But now it's harder because you don't have work. And these are working people.

Yes. After working at Caesars Palace—did you retire from Caesars Palace?

Yes.

So you worked there until retirement age.

Twenty-five years. Early retirement. I retired at 55.

Still, 25 years.

Oh, yeah. But that was before. You could retire early. But now you have to do it later I think.

Yes. Oh, that was wonderful.

It was.

So did you work cocktails the entire time?

The entire time. And that was the problem for me. That was the only reason that I felt the need to retire because the problem for me was that as you're getting older some jobs have a timetable built into them. And I was never able to get in my mind what I would do after this because I was close to retirement age. But what would I go and look to do because serving

drinks what kind of qualification are you going to have? And as far as working in offices and banks, I can't go back to that because I'm already too old for that. So I was looking forward to just transitioning out of it. That's how I got to that. As a matter of fact, it was so strange to me because I didn't know how I was going to get out.

Well, as I sit here looking at you—and you just look so fabulous—for you to say I'm too old to do this or too old to do anything you want to do is just puzzling to me because you look so wonderful.

Thank you so much. But you know what? Remember how I came through all this, knowing that I knew very little and then I was blessed to move here and blessed to move there. And I always thought you'd have to know what your next phase is. I couldn't see a next phase because it was like then if you were an airline stewardess, what was your next phase? You're not going to be a pilot. What then? And then you could maybe go work with something. But if you're in your 50s, you don't apply for cocktail waitress. So you keep yourself doing that, but you're knowing the clock is ticking. So you've got to come out.

Now, the only thing that was available to me was to start my own business. And I did not want to do that because I figured it would take all the money that you've used in taking a chance. And it was a rotten climate then. You know, people would rob you or they'd think it was funny to burn your place down or whatever. You know how people were from those small businesses. They had no respect for your hard work and your effort, none. And at the time we didn't have a good police presence here because it was just an area that was kind of neglected. But that's not the case today. But I still wouldn't want to be in business now. I would rather just retire, not have to have big needs, and just maintain what it is.

When you look at Jackson Street now, where your parents had this thriving business for

years and the whole street was thriving, when you look at it now and it's vacant lots, how does that—I mean when I look at that whole neighborhood there, what is the future of that area? What do you think? How do you feel when you compare it?

I don't think it's going to survive as it is. Now, the churches are starting to remodel, a little clean-up, you know, the facades. That's a good thing if they start to expand in a way that could improve foot traffic. I think the apartment complex behind Buy Low supermarket, Sarann Knight's apartments would improve foot traffic.

But now we have a generation of people that only know prison and drugs that are on the streets, on our streets. Everybody else avoids those streets. So it seems to me that we're going to have to wait completely until the next generation. Now, maybe we'll get a contractor that will come in and bulldoze everything down and say I'll pull up this and this and this if I can take this. Maybe that'll happen.

Do you think people will sell properties to someone who wants to come in and do that?

I think they could pick it up for free now, many places. I really don't think the people that care are there to still care. Most people that I know today or even know of, you know what they think their problem in life is? Money. They just think they need more money. They don't have a clue about money. They don't know how to manage money. They don't know what money is for. They just say if I had money. You could tell people if I had a hundred thousand dollars, if I had a million dollars, what would you do? And when they get through talking about it, that's not money they want. It's just weird.

And I think value has to come back. I can see it in these—I hope some of these young people that's going to these beautiful academies and all that will do something over here because they've got some beautiful young people now. And they're getting good educations

and all that. Oh, my Lord, yes. But maybe they're not going to find this attractive. I don't know. But they have to find it attractive because it's theirs. They need a plan. The desire to fulfill the plan integrity of heart and purpose. Anything is possible for them.

We cannot put the Town Tavern back because the people that kept it going are no longer frequenting those places. And all you have are street people and they'll come in there and shoot everybody in there just for $20. But the Old Town Tavern does not have to be put back as it was. It can be by design made better.

So do you see the major downfall of what could have been possible the drug culture?

A passing era? A lost generation? Yeah. I don't think that they have a clue of what's possible. I don't think they care what's possible because they only think that all they need is money. You have to have people with real value to care about where they live and where they work and play. A sense of community is what we're talking about. And you have to care about families. Now, if you came out of family and you don't know who your mother was or your father was and your grandmother's on drugs, what do you know?

Tell me what the value of this area being on the National Registry of Historic Places, what did that do? What does that mean?

It means a lot more to people than I thought it meant, but not as much as it needs to mean to the point that they know that maintenance is required. And it is not about any one individual; it's for the whole community. If you could just get a sense of community back. Now, I think they see it. And people say things to me, oh, you're just our angel; you just work all the time. And they think that's really nice. I say but you could join me. But the young women that are back are working very hard to maintain their children and their family. So they don't have free time. But, you know, they don't have to because they can connect now with the

community. You can connect by cell phone. You don't have to be there to connect and show you're interested. I could give an assignment and then never talk to them face to face. Or they can be a part of the neighborhood watch and part of the future development.

But then you have to already buy into the community before you go all that way. I wish I knew how to connect it. I only know how to connect the old folk, like we have the same understanding. I don't know how to connect younger people into it because all I see the men doing is trying to find out how they can get a house that they can set it up for drugs. So they rent it to the guys from California and they come in and drop off a load. They get girls to walk in. They manage the house. Both those houses on the corner are doing that. Moved right across the street from each other.

So are we talking about on this corner, Berkley Square?

Uh-huh. That red brick house. That's all they think about. And you can come by there at night and all young people, young men, young men.

And how old are we talking?

I would say 19 to 30. (Our churches are beginning to focus on this age group to determine an effective plan to bring us all together, young and old, male and female.)

Hoards of them. They run in packs like animals. But you see those cars turning around down there all day and all night. Folk like you and me be running up in there and coming out.

Buying drugs.

All day long. They're not going to church. They're not going to the banks. They're not going to the supermarket. They're going to the drug house. That's where all the money is going.

But that's just my opinion about that because there was a time when you thought a

community, they wouldn't set up a place like that. But they come from California and they see all these vacant houses. The guy will give them enough money and drugs to set these places up with. Did you see the bust they just got up in Mount Charleston? It's everywhere, but this area is already fragile.

No, I didn't see the one in Mount Charleston. I heard about another one yesterday or the day before.

Mount Charleston. They didn't get anybody. They were flying overhead and they saw this big pot farm on Mount Charleston. (By apathy we're losing democracy, community, family, honest workers, churches.)

Okay. Wow.

I mean it's not just poor black people.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, it can't be because it takes money to bring drugs from Mexico and South America.

And the more money people have, the less they care about community. You ever notice that? Today. It's all about the money. Even rich people care less about community. It's all about them and money.

Is it our community or is it all communities?

It's America. It's America. It's all America. And I think it was based in the capitalistic society and it implodes because people started to think that money is god. It is not god.

So what happens, then, when we go to Green Valley, to some parts of Summerlin, to some parts of the upper northwest? The neighborhoods are beautiful.

Well, because you have people with education. That means they can get a job that pays more. They pay an association. The association hires people to—that's why the associations are

ripping them off because they won't do anything themselves. So they charge them whatever they want and say, well, we have to get that fee to keep the neighborhood clean. And this is true because people will not come outside to pick up a piece of paper. And the more money they have, the more entitled they are that they don't have to pick up. My gardener, my cook, my this, my that. Now nobody has any money, okay? Who's cooking now? Who's cleaning up now? Beautiful homes, you see the pool is green. Who would let a pool go green in a 400,000-dollar home? It's that mind-set that's got you. It started off with poor people, but it has moved all the way up, to greed and money and selfishness. Oh, I just pray that we don't implode while we are in our stupor—we'll have to turn around because I pray we turn around because we have too much to lose.

Yes. And a community like this, with such promise.

Oh, my Lord. And where you can live in it. You can have a house you can pay for. You know that's not easy. And when you look at the entire world, how many places around the world people with our low education and our low income can live in a house that you can pay for, with yards, on a street that's paved. Like in Miami in Liberty City where they dump garbage on the sidewalk and they come by with a front-end loader to pick it up. And they tell me about going to Haiti and Bahamas. What are you talking about? I've been there. It's garbage. What you have is far better. I'm not impressed with these places. Go look for yourself. I say why should I leave home to go live in a third world country? Are you crazy?

So if you could write a book about your life, what would you call it?

Oh, I don't know. I think it's been written. " Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now."

Fantastic.

I think it's been written. I really do because, you know, hopefully you grow. And if you grow

you need to share what you've learned. And it's so basic. That's what I like about it. It's so basic anybody can do it. You don't have to have money to pick up trash off your street.

That's all I can figure. There are a lot of things that can be done, but what would you do? What would you do?

Wonderful. Thank you so much.

You're welcome.

...So when I turned the recorder off a few seconds ago, you had some other statements about education and it flowed into some other things. Tell me about that.

I've learned that the limit of my education really was a thing that I had to get busy on myself. I couldn't blame someone else for what I didn't know. But thanks be to God that knowledge is available to us in this country. You can train and learn anything you want here because we have access.

My concern is the desire of younger people to get your children in a better school in a better neighborhood somehow skips over the fact that you need education. And you can get some of that at home. And it would include knowing how to participate in your government because we have a democracy. We hear words bantered about now talking about a social democracy, a liberal democracy. Democracy is what we need. That's where everybody has access to their government. And government is by the people, for the people, and of the people. We need to hold to that. We don't need to let that slip away. But if you don't know how to get your councilmen in, you don't know who your councilman is, you don't know who your commissioners are, you don't know who the mayor is, you don't know who the senators are, the assemblymen, the congressmen, how can you be concerned about the president? These are things and privileges that we have as Americans. We better look closely because

what you don't look after will slip away. It's a sad thing to let the best of life slip away from you. Teach and encourage participation in all life's endeavors.

Now, I believe that my spirituality informs me that I have a responsibility. I have a responsibility to God because He is my creator. I have a responsibility to my country because that's where I live. My responsibility to my community and to my family. But if I'm no good to myself, I wash all those others out. And I am afraid that we don't talk about it enough.

We need to have children participating in governments right now in school. Look at the countries around us. Libya, not knowing how to form a government when the dictator falls. What do you do when your leaders fall? How do you start over if you've never started? So we need to pay attention.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

Session 2:

This is Claytee White. It is July 9th, 2012. I am with Ruth D'Hondt in her home this morning here in Las Vegas.

Ruth, how are you this morning?

Wonderful. Thank you for asking. How are you? You look so beautiful.

Oh, my goodness. Thank you.

Ruth, just for the record could you spell your last name for me again?

It's D-H-O-N-D-T. But I use my maiden name also, which makes it Eppenger D'Hondt, and that's E-P-P-E-N-G-E-R and then D'Hondt, D, apostrophe, H-O-N-D-T.

Thank you so much. As you know, this is our second visit. And I'm here because not only didn't I get any video footage of you—and you're just so beautiful I have to have some video footage. So I want to talk a little about the early years. There are a couple of questions I didn't ask. And one of the main things I want to ask you is—your family is originally from Fordyce.

Yes. Fordyce, Arkansas.

Tell me about Jimmy Gay.

From what I recall my father knew him very well. They were all from Fordyce. And he was a very well-respected man in the hotel industry here in Las Vegas at the time. Tthat was in the early fifties, but he knew him before that. And he had a family and it was working in the hotels. He would help people get jobs, get work, wherever there was a need and he felt that you could do the work. So he helped a lot of people from Arkansas that he knew their families. And the families always tried to help one another, especially that next generation coming on, to get connected with the job force here.

Fabulous. Thank you so much. Did you also know that Jimmy Gay was a mortician?

Yes, yes. I know he was a mortician. I believe he was about the first mortician in this area, West Las Vegas. And I think at the time he was working with Palms because Palms was one of our first cemetery/mortuary forms or foundations or whatever you call it. And I believe he worked for quite a long time before I think he moved to the Desert Inn to work in the hotel industry. But he was a mortician first. He could do many things. He was a very smart man and very down to earth you might say. He got along very well with people.

The Sands.

The Sands hotel is where he worked. I recall when his daughter got married and the gifts that were given to her and to him in his honor. It was just tremendous. And, of course, that park on D Street is named for him. But they've taken it over now for a homeless park and it's shameful. The city can do nothing about the homeless population. They moved from Bonanza to that park and that's where there are, on the ground. No children or families can use it now. It's been taken over by the homeless.

So, since when?

The last six months. It's shameful. And you have to drive through that in order to get to this historic neighborhood when you're coming from east to west on Owens.

One of the other things that you said during our interview is we talked about education in the black community and you said something about a lot of blacks not being able to go to college at that time. Why did blacks feel that college was out of reach for them, middle-class blacks like your family?

Well, it wasn't just out of reach; it was out of the question, in this area. The families from which my family came out of, they came as laborers and as day workers and they would do

anything to help the children better themselves, but the school system was not really geared towards guiding you into college. My personal experience was they would tell you, *You need to take these classes rather than those because you won't have any use for that*, or they would not help you. As a matter of fact, I was interested in the theatrical end of it and at that time they couldn't even help you with makeup because they didn't know anything about the kind of makeup that you had. They didn't know how to get the costumes to fit you.

There were many things that discouraged you in Las Vegas. This is not true in the South at the time because professors were black in the South and they would help families guide you into the black colleges and schools at that time. But here it was not so. It was mainly set up so that you could work as a day worker, [in a] restaurant, and I worked at a bank, or insurance companies, things like that, or just reception, that kind of work. But there were very few that would get into college. And they got into college maybe because of their families. They knew exactly what they needed to do and the people that they needed to talk to in order to help them get accepted through the universities.

Thank you for clarifying that. So your family moved here to Berkley Square in 1959.

Right.

You at that point were almost out of high school.

Yes.

Do you remember which year you left Las Vegas?

My first year to stay away for a while?

Yes, to stay.

Because after '59, I left every opportunity that I got. But when I left, I was married and I moved from here to Seattle, Washington, and that was in '65, '65 or '67. I think it was '65.

And I lived there for ten years, in Seattle.

So you didn't come back until the later seventies.

Until late seventies. I believe it was '75 when I came back.

Okay, great. I wanted to get those years correct. When you came back to Las Vegas, you worked first at the Marina.

The Marina hotel, yes.

And then you worked at the Castaways.

Yes.

I asked you a lot about the Marina because you told me all about how you first got that first job and the person who employed you there, and I thank you for that. I did not ask enough questions about the Castaways. Tell me about working at the Castaways and what happened and how you left the Castaways.

The Castaways was a smaller hotel, of course. It apparently was well run, but it was smaller. And at that time, after I had worked at the Marina, I had talked with some people that knew other people. So when I had gone to the union to find jobs, they were able to send you out on—we'll call it a temporary basis or if you would just work part-time or something, they would help fill in with certain areas. I was able to work there where a lady was on her time for vacation I believe it was and I worked her vacation time. And then I was able to work vacation periods for different girls. So I managed to be there for a few months before I had to go and look for other work.

Now, there was a person who saw you working there and didn't like it?

That was at the KLAS. That was at the television station when I was working as a receptionist.

Was that after the Castaways?

Oh, yes.

Okay, good. So tell me about working at that television station.

Channel 8 was the station, which was the only one that we had, and I had gotten a job to work there as a receptionist and it was a simple job. But I had also gone to Dana McKay's to do clerical work and that. So they hired me and I had gotten my first review and it was good. But the next day I went to work and they said, well, we won't be able to use you anymore.

The only thing happened different between the time I was hired and the time that I was let go was that there was a convention held here in Las Vegas and there were many people from broadcasting that went through that station. I didn't realize who was who or how big that could have been. So apparently I was in the wrong place because my job was to be out front meeting people, directing people. And then I learned that it was Mr. Hughes, Howard Hughes that owned that station. He was not favorable to having me there at that high profile position I'll call it, low responsibility, but high profile. That's the way that I learned far later that this is how that worked. I had no idea who he was or any of them that came through the station.

Did you learn later on who he was?

Oh, yes, as I grew into the hotel industry and knew people that knew him and being a recluse and all. The only thing that I knew about him that was good was that he was instrumental, if not the only one, that required the government to find another way of testing bombs rather than on the top of the ground, which we had to endure and many people have cancer because of that, and he made them stop. That's the only thing he did that was good and that was a good thing. But he wasn't crazy about black people or African-American people or any people I suppose. But at that time I learned who he was and he was a recluse.

And now, once you came back and you are working those kinds of jobs that you just told me about, you also told me about your career at Caesars Palace, and I really appreciated that. That was the longest place where you worked and you told me all about the uniforms and being backstage and the makeup and everything. So I really, really appreciate that. You were living here in Berkley Square.

Most of that time. Now, I lived also—La Fonda Apartments were closer to the Strip and I lived there. I was in a two-bedroom apartment I'd say about two blocks from Caesars then. I moved to Berkley Square because I had bought this little property. I had thought that I would be able to rent it, to clean it up and help; because of my daughter we had to have extra money. But at that time I couldn't find a place decent enough for us to live in, in an apartment. So I thought if I have to fix the place up here, I may as well make it livable for us.

And livable you made it. It is beautiful.

Oh, thank you. Thank you.

I'm going to have to take the camera and just go out into your backyard just so I can show everyone how beautiful your backyard is.

Well, I'm just grateful that I had enough insight to know that if you can find a place that you can afford, that's the best thing that you could ever do with a family. You can always improve. But if you go for something that stretches you beyond your financial means, it costs you more than you're able to pay. It's just by the grace of God that I didn't get into that because at the time everybody thought more was better and moving across town was a big thing. My passion wasn't just to move across town. My passion was to move in a place that was desirable. And at that time we didn't have many desirable places in this area, apartments, houses, or anything.

But your family had moved into Berkley Square in the late 1950s.

Yes.

Why didn't you feel that you wanted to move back into Berkley Square when you got back from Seattle?

Now, Berkley Square had not changed very much when I moved back.

Tell me what that means.

Well, it means developing the properties and common spaces around, parks and walking, and all of this was not in place the way that it should have been. And after living in a city and you find out what makes a city, then I found out what makes life livable as a community. We didn't have the communities like we do now. Oh, we have tremendous parks now and walking areas and even sidewalks and good lighting. That was not the case then.

So tell me how and when you became the president of this neighborhood association.

That was purely by trying to find a better way of maintaining a property that I thought was worthy of being maintained. And then when I found that if I go to the city and complain that cars were left in the driveway, carports is what they were, left there forever when people moved and spider webs would be under and you knew nobody lived there and homes were just abandoned, cars were abandoned and you thought, well, if I go to the city, maybe they could help us clean up these abandoned properties and that's when we started, I found out then that the city had grants that they could help you clean up, do certain things with. So we talked to a few neighbors. Most of them are gone now, dead. But we agreed that we will do what we can to clean it up, to make it look like a community again. We were not looking to be big or fancy, but we wanted it to be clean, we wanted it to be appropriate to make it a proper living environment because it had the bones. People were just leaving; that's all.

So you became the president of the association.

Yes.

Tell me how that evolved into learning about putting this on the various registers, national registers, local registers.

Once I went to the city and started getting familiar with my officials and that, then there were different groups and different organizations that you would encounter on a national level or I even talked about the grants, again. And then we met Courtney Mooney, who was with the Historic Society, and she was extremely helpful. She volunteered to come into the area and we walked through Berkley Square together. It was not nice. I don't know whether she knew that I didn't know it was not nice. But I told her that I was hoping that it would become what it should be. And she said, o*h, well, we can go and look*, and she walked with me. She had a passion for restoring or preserving neighborhoods. And we needed restoring and then we needed to be preserved. So she'd give ideas. And then whenever information came out that would be helpful, she would send it or e-mail it or call me on the phone. It was just like people were really willing to help us, give us directions.

So then when it came time—this was about I guess five years after we had organized as a neighborhood association—I think there was some communication with her that talked about neighborhoods becoming national and what types of qualifications you would need to be on the National Register. There are two qualifications, two different types I think is what you would call. One is if you're looking for the facade to be never changed and the other one is if you just have historic value. So we couldn't go with the facade being changed because everybody has done everything to the houses here, but we could go on the historic value, meaning that the families and the purpose in which the neighborhood was originally

acknowledged. And I thought that was worth keeping.

And at that time probably 15 or 20 neighbors were very old, but they were still here and they had terrific memories of the things that we were talking about and how they remembered how it was in the beginning. They came from the generation before me even and were still living here. So we were very happy about that. And we met and talked on a daily basis. They were very, very instrumental. And the city was very helpful, especially through Councilman Lawrence Weekly when he was in office. You could call them and you could have access to your representatives. When Councilman Ricki Barlow got in, he was still very helpful in listening and helping whenever we needed help directing us as to what we could do next. And then, far later, we got young men from a fraternity, the Omega.

Omega Psi Phi?

That's the young men. And they said we are looking for something that we can do to contribute to the community. So we met. We liked each other. They said, well, we'll help you keep the peripheral cleaned up, and they did. Because the city before that used Rapid Response come out and clean up these vacant lots. They would come in to do that. But it was not being maintained because they were vacant and abandoned properties and owners were not coming forth to maintain it.

So we had a couple of people, me as one, would go and pick up trash. The main thing was to keep the broken bottles from the streets. That was my desire. I had a small desire. If I can just keep the broken bottles from the streets, that would be a good thing. People would drive by and just throw their bottles out on the ground. And then kids would throw rocks and break bottles. Vacant lots would be [covered with] glass. You could look at the sun through glass. And I thought if we can just pick this up because this is crazy. There is no sense in

having glass everywhere.

And at that time I think the rules changed as to whether or not they were going to use plastic or glass. So the plastic bottles helped. And then we got help with another change; they were able to recycle the cans. So they didn't leave them on the streets anymore. People would pick them up and turn them in for money. But before that nobody wanted that and that was just left on the streets. It's amazing.

That's wonderful. Do you remember the years that some of this started, when you first started picking up things and cleaning up and getting with those 15 or 20 neighbors that were still around?

I'd say in 2001.

Okay, very good.

About there because I know we were acknowledged through the city and all that. But we didn't really know that we had so much available to us. And then we had to have people that were willing to at least stay in touch with the officials. Now, I became president because they said I was. But what my original title was to be the person that would avail myself so whatever needs to be done, you can call and I'll get this information to the neighborhood. That's how it started.

But when you register with the state, you have to have officers. Then we realized we needed to organize better.

Well, I think they did a great job in selecting a president.

I'm looking for younger women now to come in. We have two or three that have moved into the neighborhood. But it's difficult because being a mother, working full-time, trying just to keep up with the children's extracurricular activities; it's just more difficult for them. I realize

that it's more than they would bargain for. But I think because of the age in which we have communication, they can keep in touch without having in-home meetings. They can keep in touch by the phone. But you've got to get them interested enough to use what they have. And that's my desire now is to find one that will say I am willing to do what I can.

And do you have a lot of prospects here in the neighborhood right now?

I wouldn't say a lot, but there are two or three young women that I have spoken to that I think would be great, yes.

Wonderful. Are they owners or renters?

Two are owners and one is through Section 8, but she maintains her property and her son beautifully. She walks him to school and she walks to work all in this neighborhood. That's all you have to want is somebody that takes some pride in where they live. Whether they own it or rent it, it's just good to see that you maintain your home and your children and you're concerned about everything.

And the last thing I want to talk about is Second Baptist Church. We did not go into as much detail as I would like about spirituality and the spiritual role of the church in the community. You're a member of Second Baptist, one of the oldest churches in the Westside community. Can you tell me what you see as the role of pastors and the church leadership in a community like this?

My understanding has always been that the pastors were leaders, respected leaders, because they were spiritual leaders and guides also that would help with elderly, the children, the unemployed, always willing to bring the entire community together. Spirituality is a strong glue for African-American families and it does permeate the entire life, the entire family. Whether it is a cohesive family or not, the spirituality directs you to that cohesiveness and you

understand your purpose in which you are born. You are created to help those that need help and you're also created to help your community, as well as your family, and your church and your government, which we have to become much more involved in talking to younger people about. At that time everybody knew that they had to be involved, but now people think that everything is set. But we've lost so much ground because people don't understand the power and purpose of family. And that's God. And I think the pastors played a tremendous part in that leadership role. It's changing now. But my heart tells me that it has to go back to that. There's no other way for it to operate. You can't work family in a community, in a church, with the proper groups in place without God. You just won't know how to deal because people with money will take over everything and we won't all have money. So you've got to have something else that guides you.

So then, that is the role of the church leadership. So what is the role of the person here in the community who's attending church every Sunday? How do I show my spirituality here in the community? What am I supposed to be doing?

You're supposed to adhere to the rules of the church, and that is to be eyes and ears of the community and for the children and for the elderly and for those that are poor--those that are in need. I'm not just talking about homeless because the homeless have a tremendous need, but there is also elderly, there are also the infirmed; there's also children and widows. And the Christian faith teaches you about those, the least event in society. And that's what our role is and that's what makes the church so powerful because the church is about relationships. It is not about getting involved with a group to be somebody. As a child of God you are somebody and you have to step up to your purpose, and that is be what you're called to be, eyes and ears for those that need help, those that don't know what to do, because if you don't study the word

of God, how do you know what is right and what's wrong? You often think you know because you go by what you feel. But your feelings change and you have to be held with a stronger foundation than just feelings.

Now, here in the black community we have Methodists, we have Baptists, we have Catholic, we have Church of God and Christ, Pentecostal, probably others that I'm missing, we have the Nation of Islam and some others. How can we all work together to do some of the things that you just talked about?

Well, faith-based groups have always tried to get together. But, you see, there's such a difference. The main difference now is people are looking for a place to belong that makes them somebody. But that's not what Christ teaches. You are somebody with Him. So you have to do what He called you to do and then you become the light that draws people to Him. But when they are looking for someplace to belong, they're always looking for a religion that everybody is looking up to. Well, with Christ it's not religion. With Christ it's relationship. And your responsibilities and your marching orders come from Him. And it is not about who you can outshoot or outgun or outtalk; it's just love, compassion. It's all about love and forgiving. Those are two things that are God's and you can't just talk about them. You have to be able to forgive those that do things to you. And that means you have to let it go. You have to move on in life. If you spend all your time trying to show people that if you did this, I can do that, that's revenge and that prevents you from moving forward.

So Christianity helps us in so many ways. I wish we would all understand how much it helps us. It's not all about saying that I'm a Christian because if you are, you don't have to tell anybody. It often shows because you're concerned about your neighbor, you're concerned about the community, and you're concerned if children go in the store and steal things and run.

You don't let them bring these things home. You didn't have any money. You have to take it back and find out what they've done. So you have to be responsible with your own family and with your neighbors. And all that's just part of what we do.

I really appreciate this so much. I am so glad I came back to get this video footage. It is wonderful. And my very last question is a question that I asked you before and I want to hear it on the videotape as well. So right now if we were to write the book of your life, what would you name it?

The book of my life…I can't really think of what I would say in the book of my life. I've lived my life. It's what I've lived. It's who I am. It's what I am. I can't say well done because it's not over yet. So the book of my life…hmm...*My Faith, My Family, My Friends*.

Wonderful. Thank you so very much.