

An Interview with Katherine Duncan
and Sarann Knight Preddy

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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

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Preface

This interview begins with Katherine Duncan describing her family background and migration out of Ratio, Arkansas to Boston, Massachusetts. Katherine describes her first impressions of Las Vegas, working at the MGM, receiving a paycheck as a result of the Consent Decree, and living in Windsor Park just east of the North Las Vegas Air Terminal.

Katherine's sister, Faye Duncan Daniels, was instrumental in urging her to take a job with the Nevada Motion Picture Services, and she shares several anecdotes and memories of her three years with that company. After that, she opened a travel agency at Rainbow and West Cliff, obtained a bachelor's degree at UNLV, tried some modeling, and eventually worked at the Riviera as paymaster.

Katherine shares all the details of teaming up with Sarann Preddy and Sam Armstrong to create a black cultural/history tour of Las Vegas. Sarann has memories and anecdotes of her involvement with the tours, buying the Moulin Rouge, and doing what she can to preserve that property.

Both women give their comments and opinions on everything from racism to desegregation in the schools to Mob influence and the power structure in Las Vegas. Many of their memories have to do with the Moulin Rouge, its past, present, and future. Their stories paint a vivid picture of black involvement in the history of Las Vegas.

This is Claytee White. And I'm with Katie Duncan in her home this morning here in Las Vegas. It is November 28th, 2004.

Is it true that you've given me permission to use this information for educational and research purposes?

Oh, definitely.

Okay. Give me your full name. And could you spell it for the transcriber, please?

It's Katherine Duncan, K-a-t-h-e-r-i-n-e, D-u-n-c-a-n.

So, Katherine, where were you born?

I was born in Ratio, Arkansas.

Where is that?

Well, they say it's not the end of the world, but you can certainly see it from there. Snow Lake is near the Mississippi River. And the population was between 70 and 700 people depending on the cotton season. It was the Peter's Plantation. It was an old slave plantation in Arkansas and still looks pretty much like it did back in the 1800s.

So what did your parents do there?

Well, they called it sharecropping. They worked the farms. They worked the farms, I'll say.

Now, when you left there, did they leave, as well?

Well, the way we got out of the South was interesting. It was 1969. There were some programs being advertised out of Boston, Massachusetts, for maids to work in these fancy homes in Boston, Massachusetts. So my older sisters, twins, went up to Boston and worked the maids program. They saved up their extra money and sent for my father, and he came up, got work and eventually sent for the rest of the family. So we migrated to Boston.

What kind of work did your father do in Boston?

He was fortunate enough to get on with General Electric. All the men in my family became General Electric employees. He kept the boilers running. He fed the boilers with fuel, with the coal. That was his job, to keep the plant going.

Give me your parents' name.

My father is Fred, F-r-e-d, Fred Duncan. My mother's Louise.

Okay. And how many brothers and sisters?

There are eleven of us.

Wow.

Well, there were eleven. There's nine left living now.

Okay. That's wonderful. I'm also from a big southern family.

Oh, yes. We're still a big southern family because with the grandchildren and the cousins, we're very close, a close-knit family.

So how many of you actually migrated to Boston?

We all did, the entire family. But the bus ride that I took was in the winter of 1969. It was me and my mother and the rest of the kids under me, which were -- let's see -- that would make it six other children under me. And I was next to the oldest on the bus ride. I can just remember being on that bus for what seemed like forever and traveling from Arkansas to Boston.

How far is where you are in Arkansas from Fordyce?

It was about a three-hour car ride. My father was from Fordyce -- well, actually, his mother was from Fordyce.

Okay. So how long did you stay in Boston?

From age 14 until 21. So seven years. Actually, I spent some time away going to college. I started going to college when I was there.

And where did you go?

At first, I was awarded a scholarship to Middlebury College in Vermont. And that became very foreign to me because I wasn't used to the cold. I mean Boston was cold. But Middlebury was not only cold, but I was one of the few black students in a university where most of the children there were white and on some kind of trust fund. So I was inner city. I couldn't keep up. So, socially, I didn't fit in well at Middlebury. So I went back to Boston State.

Now, what were the differences between the winters in Arkansas and those in Boston, Massachusetts?

Oh, in Arkansas I might have seen snow once or twice in my lifetime. And in Boston it was on the ground all the time. We got a lot of rain and storms in Arkansas, but you could predict them. You knew when the rainy season would be. But in Boston, the winters were just blustery

cold.

So at 21, how did you decide to leave there and why?

Oh, well, some of this we probably don't want to repeat. I had gotten as far as I could go in a relationship with an unproductive --

Okay. We all did that. Yes.

My son's father was married. And in order for me to go on with my life, I had to make a drastic change. I had a sister living out here by then -- two sisters, actually. One had married a Nellis Air Force man.

Is that the first one that came?

Actually, she didn't make the migration to Boston. She had married a serviceman and had moved west. That was my oldest sister, Faye. And then my sister Eva came out later and started working at the Mercury Test Site. So when I was looking for a place to get away from Boston, this was my first stop.

This was the getaway.

This was my getaway.

So when did you come to Las Vegas?

7/7/77. I had no idea as to the significance of those numbers until I looked back on my airline ticket stub months later. And I said, "Boy, I hit the jackpot when I arrived here."

That's great. That is wonderful.

And it didn't take me very long to find work because I had saved up. I had really planned for my departure from Boston. I had saved up. My sister took me in and, you know, I was able to buy a washer and dryer for her house because she didn't have one. I had diapers to do. And I went to work for the MGM Hotel.

So that was the old MGM?

The old MGM that used to be on Tropicana. No, no, it was not on Trop. The first MGM, which is where Bally's is now.

Bally's, that's correct.

Tell me what Las Vegas looked like in 1977.

I thought it was a paradise. I had come from very meager beginnings. And being in

Boston and living in the ghetto in Boston --

So were you in Roxbury?

In Roxbury, Massachusetts. I was in Roxbury at a time when the Boston police had gone on strike and the racial unrest was paramount. People were throwing rocks at each other. So coming to Las Vegas was a godsend. You know, they had big beautiful churches, especially black churches, wonderful churches. And the projects didn't look bad. So it was a paradise for me.

How did you go about getting a job at the MGM?

I signed on with an employment agency. That's what people said you do. You go to the employment agency. And when they get you a job, you have to pay 50 percent of your first month's earnings, but you were guaranteed to find good work. And that's what I did.

That's wonderful. Now, did you know anything at the time about anything called a Consent Decree?

No.

Did you find out about it later?

I got some money. They called me down to the human resources department at the MGM and said, "You're eligible for some money because of something that had happened." I didn't really understand that. I was young and all I know is I had a check coming, you know. They said it was because some women had been passed over in certain job categories.

By then, I was working in the personnel office in human resources, and they asked me, "Well, do you think you might want to be a showgirl or a stagehand?" I was like, "No. I'm happy where I am."

But I got the check anyway. So I don't know if that was a result of the Consent Decree or just what, but I got a paycheck.

I've never heard of the check before. This is good. This is news to me. So was it because you were African-American or because you were female?

I didn't really understand. All I know is there had been some dissension. Actually, the MGM had a special compliance officer. Her name was Dorothy. I'll never forget. She's the one that said, "I'm in here to make sure that they hire the right people and they do the right thing."

So now, tell me more about Dorothy. Do you know who she is today?

She, from what I understand at that time, was an EEOC compliance officer that the MGM had to pay because they had done something wrong in their hiring policies.

Wow. So now, tell me about your first job. What was the title?

Gosh, I don't know what my title was, but I know I did a lot of filing. So I called myself a file clerk. I was in a room that must have had 150 file cabinets in it. And the MGM at that time I believe had, oh, upwards -- probably 5,000 employees, I would say. And every time something happened to an employee, something had to go into their file. So I spent all day trying to figure where to put pieces of paper all day long. I would get baskets and baskets of paper to file away.

So pretty soon I started reading these papers. Then I knew who was calling in sick, who was going on vacation, and I started reading how much money people were making.

Another thing I had to do was verify people's employment. Other companies would call to see who worked there and what jobs they did.

And pretty soon they started training me for other positions. They cross-trained me for unemployment defense. When people were laid off or were fired, they could go to the state and get money. And my job was to make sure they didn't get the money if they weren't entitled to it. So if you quit your job, you weren't supposed to be compensated because you had a job you could have kept.

So those are the types of things that I started training for until I went to work for the motion picture industry.

Oh, great. The motion picture industry in Las Vegas?

Yes.

How long were you at the MGM?

Oh, gosh, probably about a year and a half.

What kind of job skills did you see yourself gaining from that employment at MGM?

Well, it worked all my life. You know, I had already spent quite a bit of time in the cotton fields. So I knew how to get up in the morning and get myself to work. That was a requirement. I had worked at a very young age in Boston. I had been working for Dunkin' Donuts. Then I went to work for John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company, which helped me pay my college tuition.

So I had gained skills, especially in business machines. I could use what they called a computer, an old IBM keypunch machine. So I brought skills to my job already. But what I didn't know were labor laws. So I learned a lot of labor law and unemployment-type laws at MGM.

Tell me what the MGM was like. What did it look like? Did you see any of the entertainers?

Our offices were out in a trailer behind the MGM. As a matter of fact, the first day I went there for work, I went in the front door. They said, "Honey, if you're trying to find the employment office, get back in your car if you're driving and drive back around to the back." I said, "Okay, well, I'm used to going in back doors. Tell me where the job is."

So I worked in a trailer. Very seldom did I get a chance to go inside of the casino. But when I did, it was always exciting.

I didn't understand the casino industry. I didn't understand gambling at all. It looked like it was fun, but I really wasn't involved in the whole resort industry. I just worked for a company, and I was out in the trailer in a payroll office.

Did a lot of African-Americans that you knew at the time go out on the Strip for entertainment?

I lived with my sister Eva, and she was involved with a racial dispute with a nightclub. I didn't quite get involved in it. But she sued, if I remember, a club that wouldn't let her in. So I knew that there were problems going on with certain people, but --

Even in 1977?

You know, I didn't know if it was just my sister, you know, going out at night raising hell or if that was the climate because I wasn't into the club scene at the time. But I knew that there was stuff going on.

Where did you live when you first arrived?

Windsor Park.

Tell me what that area was like and the location.

It's a lot worse today. But at that time it was single-family homes, four and five-bedroom homes, all homeowners. It was segregated, but it was black people who owned homes. So it was a proud community.

Now, where is Windsor Park?

It's located just east of the North Las Vegas Air Terminal. I was very proud to live in Windsor Park. My sister owned a home and then she eventually bought the house next door to hers, which I bought from her. So we owned homes back-to-back in Windsor Park. So we were, you know, awfully mobile, I thought.

What did the Westside look like? I consider that to be Bonanza Street over to maybe Lake Mead, Rancho, and back to H Street. What was the area like?

It was mixed. When I say mixed, there were a lot of single-family homes, low-income homes, a lot of lower income homes. There were a lot of nightclubs. There was People's Choice. There seemed to be like maybe 20 nightclubs. And I remember the Moulin Rouge was open and that was the biggest one. It seems there were a lot of little stores sprinkled around. Nucleus Plaza had a business incubator. There was a black bus company. There were two black bus companies at the time, I remember.

There just seemed to be a lot going on. It was a bustling little black community, I thought, from where I came from. You know, I saw blacks as having more and doing more in Las Vegas than in Boston and I know (*they had*) more than (*in*) Arkansas.

That's wonderful.

Okay. So you were about to tell me about your next job, going into the movie industry. How did that happen and when?

Well, I have a sister Faye who was one of the managers of the Union Plaza Hotel.

Manager of the Union -- are you talking about Faye Duncan Daniels?

Yes, ma'am. Oh, you didn't know that was my sister? That's the family. Should I have mentioned her earlier? Then you wouldn't need all the introductions like who are you? Where did you come from?

Wow. This is a small world.

Now I've got to ask you, how do you know about my sister?

I've interviewed her.

Oh, okay. Okay.

Okay. Wow. This is wonderful.

That's great. She's supposed to be here today if I call her back.

Fantastic. Okay. So she was working at the Union Plaza. As soon as you said that, I said, this is too --

And she said that a coworker had a roommate that was looking for a bookkeeper. She called me up and said, "I know you're still in that low-end job" -- even though I thought I was doing well -- "at the MGM. Why don't you go to work for this lady as a bookkeeper?" I said, "Well, I'm not a bookkeeper." She said, "You are a bookkeeper." I said, "Well, but I'm not a bookkeeper." I said, "I know statistics. I've done financial statements for an insurance company. But I'm not a bookkeeper." She said, "Well, don't tell nobody (*sic*) you're not a bookkeeper. Just say you're there for the bookkeeping position." I said, "Okay, I can do that."

So I went to work for Nevada Motion Picture Services as the paymaster.

I've never heard of Nevada Motion Picture Services.

Nevada Motion Picture Services provided location siting, all the extra talent that you see in the background at the movies. And we got licenses and permits to -- filming companies outside of Los Angeles. So my job was to make sure everybody got paid.

That was a wonderful experience because I was one of the few people in the motion picture industry in Las Vegas. They had some quotas in the movie business, like if they had a hundred people on the set, then eight of them had to be black. So my job was to go out and find the black people. So that's how I really got my start in the community, out looking for black people who wanted to be in the motion picture industry.

As a matter of fact, there was one scene where -- it was called Get Shorty. And Shorty died in the film. Shorty was a -- midget I used to call them until I was schooled -- a little person. So I had to find a black midget to be one of the six pallbearers at the funeral. And if you think that wasn't an exciting time to go find a black midget in Las Vegas...

That's how I come to know the barbershops because I went into every barbershop in Las Vegas looking for a black midget.

So did we have barbershops on the Westside at the time?

Oh, yes. Yeah, Bookran Mack, Hair Unlimited, yeah.

So was that on Jackson Street or D Street?

No. They were on -- where they are now. They haven't moved.

Okay, good.

They still laugh at me today. "That's the lady that came in here looking for the black midget."

What was the atmosphere like on the Westside? Did you ever go out over there on the weekends for entertainment?

I'm trying to think. It seems to me I only started going to the Westside for entertainment in like the early 90s.

Did you have entertainment in your life in the beginning, in the late 70s, 80s?

Let me back up a little bit and tell you a little bit about my entertainment. For some reason -- and I have to blame Ricky Nelson -- I've generally dated white.

Okay. Now, why Ricky Nelson?

When I was like eight years old, he was on TV playing his guitar and he blinked those long eyelashes, and I fell in love with Ricky Nelson.

So you date -- okay. So tell me what that was like in Las Vegas.

For some reason, I was always attracted to white men. And it was a mutual attraction. So even when I was in Boston -- my oldest son, Derek, his father is Italian. I was always involved in the other community -- I call it the other community -- the whiter community.

I didn't seek out black clubs. I went wherever the entertainment was going on that I wanted to see. So I was always taken places -- and I was never excluded from any places that I know of.

Well, tell me about those places at that time and interracial dating here.

Here I was dating a guy by the name of Alan Diamond, who was a stagehand at the Tropicana Hotel. And the types of things that we did were mostly outdoor activities. We went skiing, boon dogging, shooting in the mountains. So we weren't nightclub kind of people. So I mean...

So you didn't face any of that?

If I did -- I mean I can remember going to some people's homes -- we were always going to home situations -- and there may have been a little tension. But I was with Alan. And if he took

me to these people's houses and they didn't like it, he cussed them out and whatever and we -- yeah, I mean I was always treated, I thought, special. And even today I still get along with his friends.

And, actually, in the 70s, it seemed as though it was a high time for black entertainers. I can remember driving down the Las Vegas Strip and every headliner on the Strip was a black entertainer.

What are some of the names you remember?

The Temptations, I know, were here. Gosh. It seems like Gladys Knight.

Probably Sammy Davis.

I don't know if Sammy Davis -- probably. I mean I can't say. I'm just thinking of the ones that I readily recognize. You know, Sammy Davis was a little bit before my time.

Okay. I'll let you have that one. That's right. You are a little younger.

Okay. So you were asking about --

Tell me about the schools for your children -- your son at that time. Tell me about the schools here.

We lived in Windsor Park. I didn't really understand Las Vegas's system for desegregation, but it seemed to work because in Boston there was straight out bussing. Here in our community, they had made all the schools sixth grade centers, all the elementary schools were sixth grade centers. And my son was in elementary school.

So the first six years that he went to school, he took -- wait a minute -- he took a bus from home out to a white school. Now, I'm going back 25 years now. I can't remember the name of his school. But it wasn't until the sixth grade that he was able to go to school right near the house. So he walked to school for the first time when he got into the sixth grade.

That's when I started having a bigger part in his education. I didn't involve myself much in the first five years of his school life except for homework and that. But in the sixth grade, I found myself in the science class and going to the music recitals and belonging to the PTA and all of that because it was right down the street.

Now, were you here during the time when schools were integrated, when they went through a process of integration?

It must have already been done when I got here because all the white children in the city came into the black community where we lived.

For the sixth grade?

For the first five years. And then it was only at the sixth grade -- well, how did that work? It was a sixth grade -- it had kindergarten and sixth grade. So all the white kids came there for the sixth grade -- that's what it was -- came into our community for the sixth grade. So for the first five years, he had to go to an all-white school outside the community. It seemed to work.

How long were you working for the movie industry at that position?

Oh, gosh, it was about three years.

What kind of people did you get to meet working in that industry? And what was your job like? It sounds like you were outside a lot.

Well, I was back and forth. I had to go to the Desert Inn Hotel every morning and pick up paperwork because that's where Aaron Spellings' offices were located. So I had to go to the offices, pick up paperwork, and then go to our office and calculate the payroll.

What happened was they hired people that had to be paid everyday. So whatever they did on Monday, I had to pay on Tuesday. So I would get up in the morning and go to the Desert Inn Hotel and then go to my office, calculate payroll -- we got the payroll usually done by lunchtime -- and then we would go and do the casting for the next day.

So I had to read the script for the upcoming episode. I had to kind of think about how many extra people they were going to need, visualize the type of people that we had to hire, go through our casting to see who we're going to call to work the next day. It was fun.

It took about eight to ten days to shoot a one-hour episode of -- it was an hour a week. And at the end of those eight to ten days, there'd always be a big cast party because they would have a special guest star every episode.

So what show was this?

This was called *Vegas*. Remember *Vegas* with Robert Urich?

Yes, yes.

So we would have the cast parties. We'd be up in the penthouses of some hotel partying with the movie stars. So it was wonderful. And then --

Did you have a slate of extras that you used all the time?

Yes, we did. And then the word got out that they were hiring people. So then the union started getting involved. We had to make sure the people, you know, got affiliated with the union. If they weren't, we showed them how to get their union affiliation.

Which union was this?

It was called the Screen Extras Guild. And then there was also the Screen Actors' Guild, which was for people with speaking parts. We didn't have a whole lot of speaking parts. My hairdresser did get a chance to scream once. And she still...

That's great.

So *Vegas* was our longest running show, but we also did some full features like The Electric Horseman with Robert Redford. Gosh, it's hard to remember back now. It'll come to me. We did some beer commercials. We kept busy.

Oh, that's wonderful.

So it was exciting.

Does it still go on here now?

To an extent. What happened (*was that*) the lady who owned the company I worked for ran into some difficulty with monopolizing the motion picture industry, they called it. So because there weren't enough of us -- for some reason, she got pushed out of the business, political, because from what I understand there was a sheriff and a judge and FBI agent whose wives wanted to be in the same business. So she kind of got pushed out of it.

Tell me about your activism in the black community.

I didn't become active until I bought and opened up a travel agency at Rainbow and West Cliff. So we're talking about the early 90s now.

Oh, the early 90s, okay.

I had a quest to go to Africa. In my heart and in my mind, I knew I had to get to Africa.

And your sister had already been.

Not yet.

Oh, not yet. Okay.

Not yet. I don't know if it was because of my dating relationships or my lifestyle, but I still

felt a sense that I was missing something. And I didn't know exactly what it was, but I knew I hadn't gotten a grip on who I was. And I thought going back to Africa and reconnecting with my ancestors would do it for me.

So by now, I'm dating a general surgeon who lives in San Diego. And he loved to travel. So that's what caused me to buy the travel agency because we were traveling so much he thought he could use a good tax write-off. If we went into partnerships in this travel agency, then he could get the tax write-off, we could travel free and...

So, anyway, I got into this travel agency and realized I had to work. It was the hardest work I had ever done because you had to open the store, empty the trash and clean the store. You had to make sure the staff was there if somebody didn't come to work. So I had bought myself a full-time job that I was responsible for. It kind of put a damper on my relationship because we're supposed to be traveling the world and not having me tied to this business.

But, anyway, I did manage to take some familiarization trips. So I called Faye. I said, "Guess what, Faye? For \$399 we can go nonstop from New York to Senegal, seven nights hotel and three meals a day." She said, "When do we leave?"

Smart lady.

So we went to Senegal. Getting off the plane -- well, first of all, getting on the plane in New York was an experience because the pilot was black, all the --

Okay. You were flying which airline?

"Air Freak." And the people getting on the plane had their suitcases tied up with twine. It was some of everything. I said, "I don't know where we're going." But we got on this airplane and I said, "Faye, it's not too late to turn around." She said, "Oh, no, we're going." We got on.

So that was the first time I had been in a setting where everyone was black, speaking French. So we got to Senegal. Gosh, we had a great old time.

I expected the African people to be there just waiting with their arms out welcoming me, their lost relative. They didn't even know there had been slavery in American. I thought, Oh, you all don't even know what happened. And found out that we were better off in Las Vegas than the people we became associated with there.

Yes. Yes.

That's when I really knew that I should be thankful.

Every day that I was on African soil, I thanked God. I said, "Thank you, Father, that my family" --

(End side 1, tape 1.)

You know that song "Proud to Be an American"?

Yes.

Yes, yes. That's how I felt coming back. Going over, I had a sense that America owed me something and I had been treated poorly as a slave in America. I came back thinking my ancestors did me a real favor by enduring what they did and getting me to where -- and I found blacks in Las Vegas to be the most influential -- maybe not so much influential -- but had the highest end of living of any blacks in the world.

Oh, explain that to me. Who did you see? Give me some examples.

In Vegas.

I know. Give me a few examples of what you mean.

My sister owning a home in Windsor Park, for example, in Las Vegas with money to spend. We were spending money, discretionary money. We weren't pinching pennies. If we felt like buying some shoes or a dress and our house notes were paid -- you know, we weren't struggling. In Boston there was a struggle. It was always a struggle.

So I see what you mean, the difference.

Did you purchase your travel agency after you left the motion picture job? Oh, okay.

So how long did you own the travel agency?

Gosh, I still own it.

Oh, good. Wonderful.

I'm not active, but I still own it. I never sold it. There was a period when I left the motion picture industry -- I told you now I'm dating a general surgeon -- and didn't have a lot to do, so I went back to the university and finished my degree.

Fantastic. Did you go to UNLV?

Yeah.

What is your degree in?

I have a bachelors of science in business administration.

Wonderful.

With a major in management.

That's a good idea because you seem to be business-oriented at this point.

Well, by then I had started working in the hotel industry.

So after running the business for a while yourself --

No. This is before I bought the travel agency. There was a period where I became unemployed as a result of the motion picture industry. So I tried a little bit of modeling.

Oh, fantastic. How tall are you?

Five-eleven.

So what happened with that?

I got a job in a bunny suit handing out Easter candy in a shopping center. That's modeling.

How could they believe that your beauty and your attractiveness could go to something like that?

They needed a bunny.

Okay. Did you have any other jobs, though, that you really enjoyed?

Yeah, I traded off my bunny job to a girlfriend because Toshiba needed someone to work the conventions. I had two jobs on the same day, so I talked my girlfriend into being the bunny for the six dollars an hour, and I took that 60-dollar an hour job with Toshiba. I was subletting by then.

So tell me about that job. She fell for it.

Oh, yes. And for Toshiba all I had to do was stand inside the convention. It was really kind of -- they handed me a little round screwdriver. I'm supposed to hand it out to the men and say, "Mister, would you like a screw -- driver?"

How did they dress you?

Slinky. Slinky white gown and just -- I was on the verge of prostitution and didn't even know it. At the end of the night from the convention, they would have these big parties up in the suites. And now you're supposed to go up there and serve the food. And then this one big Japanese man asked me to come in and walk his back. That's when I said, "I don't walk no (*sic*)

backs." Had I known then what I know now, I would have been walking his back.

What size were you at that time?

I was probably a size eight. But I've always been five-eleven. So I was skinny as a rail.

So any other modeling jobs that you find memorable?

That was the most memorable. It was more so convention work than it was -- you know, you're passing out pens or pamphlets, nothing exciting.

Then I took a job in a real estate company -- it was a part-time thing -- figuring out culinary and maintenance CAM charges. I did that for one summer, then finally went into the Teamsters Union and started working at the Riviera Hotel as a payroll officer. I went to the payroll office.

For the Teamsters?

No. I take that back. I went into the payroll office first, and then I joined the Teamsters Union and transferred to the front office.

Let me tell you. When I worked in the payroll office at the Riviera, I was experienced as a paymaster. Remember, I had done it for the motion picture industry. So it was easy for me to get a job as paymaster. I didn't realize at the time that it was the first time a black woman had ever worked on the second floor at the Riviera Hotel. I had no clue.

And the second floor must be the administration?

The administration building. This is when I think I met my first outright racism. I would come to work. You know, I tried to dress in my little clothes and put on my little heels and go to work. And the girls in the office were all kind of catty, I guess. And, you know, you try to make friend with them. But they were all -- I didn't have a good social relationship up there.

So then the comptroller had recently changed. Well, he changed while I was there because I remember I had an awful time with my supervisor. She would always, like, put restrictions on me that I couldn't understand. Somebody would come and ask me to fill out a piece of paper for them, and I'd go, "Oh, sure, I'll get that done." She would say, "No, you can't do that till Friday." I go, "Oh, okay."

Or they were doing a manual thing with the bellmen's gratuities. And I said, "I can write a little program that will speed this up." So I wrote a little computer program that would split the

bellmen's tips. I said, "Let's try this." Oh, they were furious because I -- I said, "Well, this will work." I said, "You all are taking all week to do something that we can do in an hour and save this time." They said, "Well, you're going to lose your job if you write that." I said, "Well, how am I going to lose my job? I've got plenty of work."

So, anyway, I did get my program implemented, and that caused a lot of dissension in the office.

But then the comptroller used to come over now and talk to me. That's before I had gone to Africa. He was the one that convinced me that I should go. And he brought me a book to read. I don't remember the name of it. It was about Johannesburg. He said, "You need to read it," because he was trying to let me know how to deal with racism in the office.

Yes, because you had not been exposed to it at this level.

Not at that level, no. So I knew I wasn't going to get anywhere in that office. But that's where I met one of my best, best girlfriends today because she was the one that came up with the paperwork for me to fill out. She had been laid off and she had two boys. She needed to get the paper filled out so she could get some kind of assistance to feed her kids. So I thought it would behoove me to fill out the piece of paper right away and get it back to the employee so she could go get her help. And that's when my supervisor said, "No way. She has to come back and pick it up on Friday." And this girl started crying right in front of me. "How am I going to get money to feed my kids?"

So after she left the office, I went back to my supervisor and I said, "Why do we do that? Why do we have to make her wait until Friday?" She said, "Well, she can't just walk in here and expect us to drop what we're doing and fill out that paperwork for her." I said, "Oh, okay."

So I went down to the bell desk later on and I said, "You need to go up there and fight her." I said, "You need to go back up there and fight her and then go over her head if she doesn't do that paperwork because we're not that busy that we can't do your paperwork."

So here it is 30 years later and we still laugh about that.

That's great. That is wonderful.

Her name was Linda Aiken and she's now in Alaska. We ended up becoming friends. Her boys would take my son skiing. As a matter of fact, her son is a police officer now. All through

the years, we've always been really, really tight friends.

Good. Where is your oldest son now?

He's going to be over here later on today. He lives right here in Las Vegas.

Oh, great. So he lives here in Las Vegas. What kind of work does he do?

He is a sales representative for a company called Nevada Sales and they do lighting.

Good. Lighting -- that's a great job in this city.

Every time a light bulb goes out, he makes a nickel.

Well, he has a lot of nickels in this town.

As a matter of fact, that's his big red truck out there I'm driving because I had to move some stuff. Yeah, he's doing well.

Now, tell me about any volunteer work you did that was associated with the Westside community.

Well, after I got back from Africa, I thought that Las Vegas had so much in common with Africa as far as the -- I finally understood why we eat black-eyed peas and why we eat the food we eat and how we cook our fish. And I saw so much rich African culture right here in Las Vegas, even as far as the dancing, mating rituals, and I was just so excited --

Tell me about the mating rituals.

Go to The Post Sunday night and watch the men and women dance together. It's the same. They're doing the Senegal. Exactly the same.

Okay, good.

And they've never even seen it. They're doing the same steps. And I know none of those people are watching any TV. They're not picking it up on TV.

That's right. You are so right. Yes.

• Okay. So now I own the travel agency. I've gone to Africa. I'm leaning more towards the west Las Vegas community because I'm excited about it. My office manager was German, blond hair, blue eyes. I had invited her over to my house one day. I lived on Lake Mead and when I told her that I lived on Lake Mead, she automatically thought it was West Lake Mead. So she got lost on the Westside trying to find my house because she didn't know I lived...

So when she finally got to me, she said, "I went into an area of town that I've never been

into before. I thought I was in Africa. And everybody was looking at me like what the hell is she doing over here?" I said, "Well, did anybody treat you badly?" She goes, "No. They were just looking at me, and they're so surprised that I'm in this neighborhood." I said, "Well, you know what? What did you think about the neighborhood?" She said, "It's exciting. It's wonderful over there." She said, "I felt like I'm driving down an avenue in Africa."

I said, "That's it. We're going to do a black heritage tour of Las Vegas." So that's what I started out of my travel agency, a black cultural tour of Las Vegas.

What did it include?

The history of black people in Las Vegas. We would pick the groups up from their hotels. We would tell them about how Nevada became a state, how it went through the mining era, through the trappers and brought them right up through the gold mines and talked about black people's involvement in all of those different industries, right up to the entertainment history. And the highlight of the tour was the Moulin Rouge. Then we took them to a soul food lunch and we got them back to their hotel.

Where did they have lunch?

It depended on whether or not Sarann had any food that day. I went to the Orleans, Talulah II's, I went to the Texas buffet. It just depended on the size of the group and how much time they had.

That is exciting. How long did those tours go on?

Well it started out gangbusters, but my problem was I didn't have transportation. I always had to find transportation. That was my biggest cost because I was not licensed to carry people for hire as a travel agent. So I could just hire the tour guide, put the whole package together, and I'd have to hire a bus. It was either Gray Line, Ray & Ross, or that other bus company I was telling you about that burned up during the Rodney King riots.

So finally Sarann Knight Preddy and Sam Armstrong and I got together and decided to do a joint venture because he had transportation, Sarann had the hotel/casino, and I had the tour. I insisted that had the tour had to be a guided tour because that was what made the tour a tour, the knowledgeable guide.

It got to the point where it wasn't cost effective to run the tour every day the way Sam

Armstrong envisioned it. But he was going to run that tour every day. Sometimes there would be 2 people on the bus; sometimes there would be 22 people on the bus. So Sarann didn't know whether to cook for 2 people or for 20 people.

So they out-voted me, two to one, and decided to teach the bus drivers how to do the tour. So it weakened it. And then there were times that we would get a call the day of the tour and they'd say, "We've got eight people coming today on the tour." So I would have to rush over to the Rouge and try to make sure the cook was cooking some food that day. So we could hardly plan for the tour. I was going to get to the point where, well, tour people are doing it, but wearing out your carpet.

[Editor's note: Italics indicate comments by Sarann Preddy] And what about the one tour we had where one man was on the bus, and guess what he was looking for? Some greens. We didn't have no (sic) greens. They took him down to Louis Collins. He wanted some greens. He could hardly walk. He was old.

That was at a time, remember, when we all went in together, the clubs on the black side, and we hired buses. We put some money up and we got buses to pick these people up. And that's the time I'm talking about that one person got on the bus.

It's very hard to do something like that. The only way you can -- I was discussing it with Diane this morning -- the only way you can do something like that with the people that want to come is that they have to pay in advance.

You have to do a custom-designed tour for inbound groups.

That's fine. But I'm talking about how you get the money.

Oh, oh.

You've got to pay up front.

I know exactly how you get the money.

Because I've been on many tours with the sorority when we'd have our bulette, then we'd go on an extensive tour. Two months before that time -- or six months -- they'd write you a letter. If you wanted to go --

I do it just like Carnival Cruise Lines.

Yeah. That's what I told them.

Exactly the way Carnival Cruise Lines does is what -- I adopted their policy. It has to be paid 70 days in advance --

In full.

-- in full.

Absolutely.

And your refund is predicated on how close to the tour you cancelled. And 30 days out is no refund. You know, so I used Carnival Cruise, their expertise. I said, "Why should I reinvent this? Carnival's been doing it for years."

That's what we did.

So once I started doing custom-made groups, one afternoon I made \$5,000. It was so much money it scared me.

How did that happen and what kind of group was that?

It was a group. They were a bunch of black people. I don't know where they came in from. But I ended up taking them to --

It really don't matter where they come from, just --

I wound up taking them to Frank Hawkins' place that day, and I invited people in the community to come and be in it because there were five busloads of them. There were five busloads at like 50, \$60 apiece. And I had Ashley cook the food at Frank Hawkins' place.

Now, what was Frank Hawkins' place?

A bar.

It was called Club 30 something.

Just a regular bar.

And I had five tour guides. So I had David Washington doing it, my sister Eva, myself -- I don't know who the other tour guides were. But I know we had five busloads of people. I was, like, sitting there with all this money at the end of the day. I said, "That was too easy. That was way too easy."

No. That's the way it's supposed to be.

That's the way life is supposed to be.

Absolutely, because you can't have something and say, "We'll pay you when you get there."

Oh, no.

No. It had all been paid. The only thing is now once they get here, you have to make sure you can provide the service. And I didn't know whether Ashley was going to pull it off because she had to go buy the fish, you know...

Well, she was a caterer so she always pulls it off.

She pulled it off. She did us a great job.

That's her business.

So would you do that again?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But this time we're going to do it more as a Moulin Rouge tour. It may be -- no. Let me put it back. It's going to be -- well, let me start right at the beginning.

We've decided that the best way to market this community is not as the old Westside but as uptown Las Vegas. Now you've been on the Strip and you've been downtown, now you're coming uptown. So in uptown Las Vegas, we're going to show you the Pioneers Trail, historic Moulin Rouge, the old Westside. But you're coming uptown. As a matter of fact, the signs just went up, "Uptown Las Vegas Visitors Information Center," next door to the --

The signs are where?

Next to the Moulin Rouge Museum and Cultural Center. So we have a facility that we're going to do these activities out of. And guess what? Don Walker said he's going to do ghost town tours out of it because there's no one place in Las Vegas where you can go and buy a ghost town tour. People love to go to ghost towns and he has the tour. So that's going to be another hook that no other visitor center has.

The Uptown Las Vegas Visitors Information Center. And the purpose of this center is twofold. There are a lot of black people born in west Las Vegas who never get an opportunity to go to the Strip. They were born or were raised during a time when they weren't allowed on the Strip, and they still have that mentality of I don't belong out there. So I have young people who have never been to Mount Charleston or Red Rock or to Ethel M's Chocolate Factory or Tule Springs. They have no clue that there are these exciting, wonderful -- like Lake Mead, they have not even been to Lake Mead.

So we have to teach the young people in our community to become ambassadors, to get out

of west Las Vegas and go see what's in the community. Then when tourists come into our visitors' information center, they can tell those tours how wonderful Mount Charleston is or go on a Lake Mead cruise. We're going to use the teenagers as ambassadors of uptown. The center is located at the Moulin Rouge at the Spaghetti Bowl. We can catch visitors from California, you know, Reno, Arizona, Salt Lake and Los Angeles dropping down into our center to get information on tours and shows and whatever's going on in Las Vegas.

At the same time, we'll have the Moulin Rouge Museum situated next door. This museum is set up to capture the role that the performing artists and sports and civil rights leaders played in making Las Vegas great. We'll be able to teach people the history of blacks, the black involvement in this state, so we're excited about it.

Amazing. Is that museum already set up?

We just got the facility.

Sarann, I got the \$800 to pay the first month's rent in my purse. So we're \$200 short. And we don't have any lights yet. But Washington Mutual is doing a site visit Monday. Are you going to be available to talk to them? I don't know what time they're coming.

We have a grant proposal in for \$15,000. They called us to see if we would apply to them for the grant.

Oh, so this sounds good.

It sounds great to me. And they're coming in to see the facility on Monday.

Why do you think they would call you?

Because of one of our board members. We just attracted Charlene Peterson to our board and she's with the Fannie Mae Corporation and Fannie Mae provides monies to banks.

Now, you just said something about your board. Tell me about that.

Well, the board of directors of the Moulin Rouge Museum is right now evolving. It's set up to help stimulate the development of the Moulin Rouge. That's what the Moulin Rouge Museum was all about, to help whoever owned the property in any way that we could because we wanted to preserve the black history at the Moulin Rouge. So whatever systems the owners needed, we were able to offer them, even if it was just introducing them to the right people in different political avenues.

When Sarann owned the Moulin Rouge, a group of ladies got together and we called ourselves the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association. And we thought we were helping, you know, in a lot of ways, but a lot of times we got in the way and tried to do stuff that wasn't necessarily good business. But we were still there to assist in whatever way we could. We were able to attract certain grants to the property. The Nevada Humanities Committee granted us \$10,000 to do a brochure that portrayed the Moulin Rouge as it was when Sarann owned it. So those were the kinds of activities we did during that period.

We also tried to have some African activities, such as one New Year's Eve when we had "Chitlin's on the Glass."

How did that go over?

Fabulous. People are still talking about it.

Did you make any money?

No. We went in the hole. People thought we were stealing the money because Edie Jasmin was chair of that, and, of course, she liked to do everything so elegantly. "Chitlin's on the Glass." We had to go out and buy the dome-covered things like they used to use years ago for butter. Those things were like maybe two or three dollars apiece. And, of course, we had planned for, like, 500 people. And then we had the table cloths, silver lamé tablecloths made to fit over the black tablecloths. That cost a lot of money because we went and bought several bolts of material and had somebody make them.

Then we had to get chitlins together for that many people. We had to pay the lady ten dollars a bucket to clean the chitlins. And we paid ten dollars a bucket for the chitlins. By the time we finished that, we owed more money than we made.

But, boy, did we have a good time.

And, you know, I ran into the guy last night. I don't know if you remember. We had something there. And the guy from Showboat at that time, black kid that was a chef down there, he made something like Cornish hens. I can't remember exactly what we had. But I hadn't seen him and I often wondered what happened to him. He catered the Elks last night and he looked so much younger than he used to look. That's his business now is catering. I said, "I wish I had known about you." But, of course, he's catering on the high end. But he catered us all --

Did he cook that chicken that night, the Cornish hens that night?

At the time we had Cornish hens. No, no, not with the chitlins. Did we have Cornish when with the chitlins?

We had Cornish hen because you had a choice, either the chitlins or Cornish hen.

Oh, okay. Well, that might have been the time he cooked from the Showboat. And they gave the food to us. He cooked for us at the Showboat. He made arrangements then to give us the food that he had prepared, which made it really nice. But I thought that was a different affair.

It could have been.

We had so many affairs going on during that time until -- if we had stuck with the West Las Vegas Pioneers History that we were doing, then we would have been way out there. But every time something came up, we'd change it and do something else. Like we'd put on something like that, "Chitlins on the Glass." Then we put on the "Women Making a Difference." We always had something different going.

But the first time we did something with the West Las Vegas Pioneers we got all kinds of plaques from the city and from the county and the state. And they just built it up. They thought this was a great thing. But we kept inching out and doing some other things.

We just could never get the right amount of money to put in the Moulin Rouge to make it more elegant. And, of course, my partners -- James especially -- he didn't want to deal with half-ass stuff, you know. He wanted everything to literally be --

Elegant.

-- elegant so he could compete with the Strip. The roof was leaking. I remember one time we had a big party and then the roof was leaking and everybody was scrambling. They wanted to go home because what kind of joint is it and the roof's leaking? But it was leaking in the Caesars Palace. They didn't say nothing (sic) about that.

But all the hotels -- because this is a dry climate. And when it rained twice a year, everything dries out and then it leaked. They were putting buckets and everything in Caesars Palace. But due to the fact that we were on the Westside, that was a sin.

Everybody wants to hold us to the same standard as --

Or higher.

Or higher.

Higher.

And I don't find it necessary because people come here because we're different, not necessarily the black people, but the white community comes here because it's not Caesars Palace.

But you know what? We were having more trouble out of local people than we were people from out of town.

Right. Exactly.

All the people from out of town thought this was so great. Did you do all this by yourself? How did you get a license? This is just great. In Las Vegas? Black people owning something like this...

Right. And coming from Arkansas, you were a godsend.

Right. But the people who lived here criticize. Oh, them, you know, whatever, is up there and they're trying to be this, that and the other. And the place leaking and they don't have any money to fix this.

Now, Dee Dee did a lot of work around there. Remember when you all painted and washed and did everything to the place and really cleaned it up?

I threw a beer party one Sunday and we painted the front of the building.

Tell me about the new Moulin Rouge that's on the drawing board right now.

It's going to be fabulous. What hurt was the fire because just before the fire -- well, let me tell you about the gentleman -- the corporation. They call themselves the Moulin Rouge Development Corporation. And it's three black men out of Los Angeles. One of them is Dale Scott. And Dale has been involved in gaming. He reconditioned slot machines. He has a gaming license for that and he sells them mostly overseas in Japan.

The other gentleman is Rod Bickerstaff who is an attorney. Rod is related to Coach Bickerstaff. Now, I don't know enough about sports to tell you what coach, but anybody who knows basketball knows his name. And he knows a lot of sports figures and a lot of entertainers because he represents them.

And then there's Chauncey Moore. Chauncey is out of the Indian gaming arena in San Diego. And he was 14 years head of the bingo for Sycuan Resorts. So he has a lot of experience

in bringing in a diverse market because he would do a different kind of bingo here than what they normally have in Las Vegas to make it competitive with the rest of the city.

So those three had some investors and they came in and they put money down on the property and signed all the papers and did all the negotiations. This was like in December. And it was supposed to close --

Of 2000?

It'll be two years this December that they have been negotiating.

So 2002?

Um-h'm, to buy the property. Because the first year, in May, the place burned. And they had to go back because their lender wouldn't loan on the property after the fire. So now they had to go back and try to get new financing on a property that didn't have a casino anymore.

To step back just a little bit, CBC Financial Corporation owned the property. And in between the time Sarann owned it and CBC Financial Corporation owned it, CBC Financial bought the Moulin Rouge and then they bought all of the surrounding property. They bought Tree Line Park, Desert Breeze and what used to be the Mo-Mart.

And those are apartment buildings?

Yes, and condominiums. It's a 15-acre property now after being a 5-acre property. And so the new owners have now managed to close escrow on just the first part, which is the hotel/casino. And now they're supposed to finish by February 5th on the rest of the property. So everything's kind of placed on hold.

But they are already in management. They have taken over the management of the property. We're in transition because I'm still overseeing the management, even though they are paying them. It's kind of an unusual setup because I represent the museum; I don't represent either the seller or the buyer. The seller's paying me my paycheck, the buyer's telling me what to do, and I'm working for the museum.

She won't turn that museum loose.

I can't.

But you're there to see all of this happen?

To make sure -- uh-huh. Yeah, because there won't be a Moulin Rouge Museum unless the

Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino is successful.

That's right.

So one hand has to wash the other.

How did you get involved in the Moulin Rouge Museum? And tell me about the preservation society.

Okay. Well, the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association grew up -- it didn't grow out of the African-American Cultural Society. I was with the African-American Cultural Society.

Tell me what that is.

Okay. This was a group that we started back in -- oh, gosh -- the early 80s. Was it the early 80s? I don't know exactly when the cultural society started.

I was never connected with that. So I don't know anything about the history.

We were doing activities that introduced people to the African-American community. Like, I had a girlfriend whose husband was from Antigua and she loved to cook African food. So we would go out into the parks and get involved with the festivals out there. So the Hawaiians had a booth. The Italians had a booth. And there were never even black people in the park. So we decided we were going to have a society and we were going to go out there and cook some African food. So we had to first figure out what was African food. Well --

(End side 2, tape 1.)

So we would go out and do festivals. And we would always only make enough money just to cover expenses. All that hard work, out there rolling the flour, frying the bread, we would work all day and come out owing the facility \$20 still. So, finally, one day they said, "There's a reggae concert out at Boyd Stadium and the African-American Cultural Society can have the beer concession. Budweiser's donating the beer." And they called us. All we had to do was go out there and pump beer. And we made \$3,000 in one night. So we knew we were onto something then. Hook up with Budweiser and get with the reggae people. We didn't know that they were only going to let us do that one time. And then we drank so much beer, I don't think they wanted us back. I had more fun than anybody that night.

So then we heard about what was happening with the Moulin Rouge. It seems as though the Moulin Rouge was always in the newspaper and they were struggling to get going and we

didn't really understand what was happening at the Moulin Rouge. So I was asked to contact the owner to see if we could investigate the Moulin Rouge being on the National Register of Historical Places because my research said that there was enough activity that had gone on there that deserved being told and that it deserved protection.

Part of the organization said, yes, we want to help the Moulin Rouge; part of the organization said no. So we splintered. At that time the papers had the Moulin Rouge being associated with illegal drug activity. And the African-American Cultural Society, some said, "We don't want to be associated with nobody into drugs." I said, "Well, it deserves to be on the National Register of Historical Places as a historic site." I said, "I'm going to go find out." So I went down and met with Sarann and I started going to city council meetings and listening.

Did you know Sarann before?

No, not at all. And I felt that they were treating these people -- I call them these people -- so shabbily.

Give me some examples of what you mean.

Okay. We're at a city council meeting and the room is full of black people. And it seemed like the whole city council was all white. Maybe there was one black council person on at the time. Was Frank Hawkins on the council then? I don't remember.

I don't remember if he was on that particular time. But he was on there. That's how I met you, through that.

Well, I thought I met you --

When you were giving a tour and you were talking to them about the tour and they said, "How can you have a tour without including the Moulin Rouge?" You said, "Moulin Rouge, what is that?"

Well, I knew about you, but I had never met you. I mean I knew it was a famous black nightclub, but I had never really been inside to see what was going on there. All I knew is that it was the first integrated hotel and casino. That's all I knew about it.

Well, when I got involved in it, it was when you must have been up for some kind of licensing or they were trying to scold you for something because I remember Bob Nolan kept them from showing videotape. They had sat across the street and videotaped the Moulin Rouge

for hours and hours and hours. Then they had edited it down and they were going to show the edited version in the city hall meeting. And Bob Nolan said, "Unless you're going to show the whole 24 hours, you can't show any of it." And I remember that's what saved the day for whatever it was you were trying to do. And I don't know the details. But you were able to go on and get some kind of license after that, I think. See how sketchy my brain is.

But it was during the time that I had the travel agency and I had started doing the black heritage tour. I remember my first tour. Oh, I hired a bus and I had all the dignitaries. I had the convention authority people and the mayor from Henderson and Boulder City and I had the Urban Chamber, the NAACP. I took all these people on my first black heritage tour.

The Nevada Black Chamber.

Nevada Black Chamber.

Uh-huh. Wasn't no (sic) urban at that time.

Sure wasn't.

Then we all went back to a New Orleans restaurant and sat down and I asked him to critique the tour. And they said, "Oh, the food was wonderful. The history was good. The only thing you left out was you should've stopped and taken us inside the Moulin Rouge." And I said, "Well, why should we have gone inside there?" They said, "You need to go back and do your research. Find out why we should have gone inside the Moulin Rouge." I said, "Okay."

So that must have been when I called you up to meet with you because of all that was going on at the time. And I remember we sat up in the office up there and she showed me some pictures. As a matter of fact, I got a surprise for you today.

These are the first ones I've gotten since the fire. And your job is going to be to identify the pictures. Now, I'll let you open them up anyway you want to.

[She's handing Sarann Preddy a group of photographs from the Moulin Rouge.]

Well, I remember some of them at the time that this happened. But some of them with their backs turned -- I think this was like a fashion show that they had.

You know, I think during the Moulin Rouge days, they just weren't ready for blacks to move up. And one of the guys that was on the board that I had known for a long time told me that. I asked him why it was so hard for me to get a license at the Moulin Rouge and right down the

street six blocks I had a full gaming license, People's Choice? So if anything was wrong with me, I wouldn't have that license.

But the community said all this other stuff like a drug place and that type of thing. So there were no drugs being distributed inside the building that I was connected with. But, you know, I don't know where you can go right now that there's not some drugs that come in if it's Caesars Palace, Bellagio or wherever.

But he told me, "Sarann, whenever you're moving up, you're always going to have more of a hassle." And what he meant was now you're getting too big and a large operation too close to downtown. And he said that this is going to be a lot harder for you to get a license. But James said when we moved up there, "You're going to have a hard time getting a license." But he could see -- his foresight was better than mine. I got a license down here, so what's wrong with me having one here?

People don't understand about a gaming license. You can have a gaming license right here and you get ready to put one next door, you have to go through the same thing. And they may let you have it here and not let you have it there. That's why they have Paris Hotel and the Bally, I believe, involved -- you know, they're connected together so they didn't have to apply for another license. So you walk right out and you don't know where the building separates.

So that's why they did that. So the gaming license was just another extension, but they just gave it a different name. You know, this is the part that goes with Bally and this is Paris or whatever it is that they named it.

So due to the fact that people -- black people, too -- were saying all these same things and whispering to other people and by going through the board and all these things, they had two things that were going us against with people doing a lot of talking. As far as me being investigated, that came out in flying colors because during that time there wasn't anybody investigated but me and my husband. My husband wasn't on the license.

Wynn was investigated and he got on the license. But Caesar's Palace wouldn't let him be on the license.

Why?

Because he worked for Caesar's Palace. And they thought if he had a license of his own,

he could draw their customers. He would never have done that because the Rouge couldn't equal Caesar's Palace, but that was their policy. You can't be on no gaming license and work for us. Now, you can quit and go on over there. He couldn't do that.

He wouldn't have quit his job, though.

Yeah. Because he was making a hundred thousand dollars a year. Will had been there for years. So he --

He was a dealer at Caesar's?

No. He was in charge of the baccarat.

So, anyway, then James came in. He was making probably close to a hundred thousand dollars a year, and he was working out there. I talked him into quitting his job and coming over, and after he came over, I think he was there like four or five years after I left. They were all trying to help me, but he came and got directly involved. And then he got so down because he didn't have any money and the place wasn't making enough money to where we could live off of it.

And I guess I shouldn't have left. If I had known what I know now, I could have saved doing what I should have been doing. But --

What do you mean by that?

Well, I believe that I could have made a deal with Bart because Bart had been up there and talked to me two or three times before he bought the place.

Now, who's Bart?

The one that owns it now.

CBC Financial.

Yeah. But I did not know how to do that. And I think my only other hindrance would have been James because he knows a lot about gaming and his thing was a lot different from mine. And I could've bartered with John Edmund. I already was qualified for the license. I already had it. So if I could have gotten somebody to come in with some money...

So then we dealt with the Pequot Indians. They made three trips down here. When they came down here the third time and the powers that be at city hall -- absolutely no dealing with them. And they had the money.

No Indian gaming.

They had more money --

And the people are from Connecticut?

Foxwoods, uh-huh. And Steve Wynn didn't want them here because he figured that they would overshadow him just like --

The Gaming Control Board would not allow Indian gaming in Nevada yet. As a matter of fact, Chauncey had to be scrutinized before they bought the Moulin Rouge and went to Jeff Silver, who used to be head of the Gaming Commission, and asked him --

He was my attorney, too.

-- would Chauncey Moore have a problem having worked for Indian gaming, even though he doesn't work for them now, would he have a problem as one of the owners of Moulin Rouge? And they had to go back and research whether or not his Indian casino had a contract with the federal government while he worked for them.

Jeff felt that he could argue for Chauncey to get a license, even though he worked for Sycuan during the time when Sycuan didn't have a contract with the United States government.

So it's serious. They don't want Indian gaming in town.

I think it's a lot more lax now than it used to be because of the time that Steve Wynn and a couple of others were really running the state of Nevada. But now it's gotten to be not so much complicated like it was during that time. They just didn't want --

Do you know of any Indian gaming here? There's none here.

No, no, no, I wasn't talking about the Indian gaming.

Oh, all right.

So who do you think runs -- well, to me Las Vegas is the power center of this state.

Who runs it now?

Las Vegas gaming people.

Um-h'm. Sheldon Adelson. Steve Wynn.

And you know the bad part about it now is that -- a long time ago it was much better when they talk about the Mob being here. Now it's going to be like six people own all the hotels in Las Vegas, and they're going to have the monopoly on everything. So what they say is going to go because they're the ones that furnish the money for all these politicians to run.

And that makes it really bad because if you mess up with one hotel and they own five others, you're not going to get no (sic) job there. So they're all buddies and they tell them over there you're a bad risk because that happened already years ago with one of my sons.

He went to the Tropicana. And the Tropicana had a whole shift of people working. Now, he's the only black. So he wasn't moving nothing (sic) himself, but he was involved because he was on that shift. They were taking all of the money on that shift. They fired the whole crew, the whole shift, and he got fired, too. So that kept him from getting a job in gaming because he was with these people who were taking all the money and they were white people.

When you say, "taking all the money," what do you mean?

Well, they were skimming it. That means taking the money off the gaming.

Okay. Now, is this -- are we talking about Mob days?

Well, no, it wasn't really Mob days. It might have been just when the -- what do you call it? -- what it is now, run by corporations -- came in. It could have been when they were there.

I think it was a touch of the Mob because I remember one of the guys that was involved with taking the money, he left and came to the Westside and opened up The Cove. And I know that they took him around by the lake and beat him up and broke his fingers and said, "Now, go back and deal some more and give us some more money." So I think it was right at the end of the Mob days.

So that guy was the big-time man, big boss out there. But after that happened, he was blackballed from the Strip. He couldn't deal. So he came on the Westside. He was managing a couple of places over there, but that wasn't big enough for him. And he stayed over there for a while and then he finally left.

So the people on the Strip play a big part in what's happening. You can believe that.

Tell me what happened to Moulin Rouge back in 1955 when it opened in May and closed in November. And that was in its heyday.

I think we've discussed that a lot of times, you and I and many others. And I think no one has the actual facts of what happened.

I'll tell you my interpretation of it.

I want to hear both.

What happened during that time, as far as I know because I knew some people who worked there. Jimmy Gay was a good friend of mine. Jimmy Gay was the only black person that was working on the inside. And that's where you get all of the information. He said it took them two weeks to get all the money out of the hotel when it closed because the Dunes Hotel had just been built, and they were taking all the business to the Moulin Rouge. So they made a deal with them to close it down and they came in with them.

Now, I know a white lady who had invested \$45,000 in the hotel. They didn't spend much money building that hotel. I think it was less than \$5,000. I have the papers on it when they first opened.

Less than 500 --

Five million when they first built it. But she had put some money in there. And she told me that's what happened. Because when the other ones that had the biggest money in there, they let them come in with the Dunes. But she lost her money because they didn't let her come in. And they just walked off and closed it up and nobody knew nothing(sic). It was packed the night before.

And how Mr. Fry got involved, his daily had loaned them some money. When they closed, it went into bankruptcy. So for him to save his money he picked up the bankruptcy and he took it out of bankruptcy and invested his money in it. You know, they tried to get rid of the Moulin Rouge for \$500,000 and couldn't get nobody (sic) to buy it because Bob Bailey had put a group together. And they thought, ah, it's raggedy and it's rundown and they ain't (sic) paying that much. So when I went up there, they said Mr. Fry is not going to sell you that place.

Okay. So we're talking about between 1955 and 19 -- when did you buy it?

'85.

So we're talking about --

All those years in there.

We're talking about 30 years. What happened during that 30-year period?

Was it 30 or 20?

'65, '75, '85 -- 30 years.

Okay. What happened during that time, Mr. Fry, the old man who owned it, was a nicer

man than his son because his son was young and cocky. I never will forget we had a meeting in there, the Democrat women had a meeting and we talked with -- I know the guy well. I can't think of his name. He was the manager. So we came up and rented a place from him to have a meeting and everything was fine.

So as we finished the meeting, Mrs. Johnson and I went right outside the door. They had some lounges out there. We were sitting out there on the lounge and Mr. Fry walks in. He was a young man, you know, real young and spry and cocky, hated black people. So he walked in. I don't think he saw us, but he saw the manager. And he told her, "What the F you got all these niggers up in this place for?"

Oh, the man was scrambling because he really didn't want him to do that in front of us. So Mrs. Johnson said, "What did he say?" She was one of those fiery women, you know.

Are you talking about Lubertha?

Yeah. And I was very young at that time. So I'm following her, so to speak. So she raised up and cursed him out, and then he left and ducked in the office. And he didn't ever come out anymore.

And the next morning, we called national TV. We picketed the place for two days. Now, I wish I could get my hands on some of that.

I do, too.

It ought to be somewhere in the paper, but you kind of have to know the dates. I might can go back and research it. We picketed that place for two days, the Moulin Rouge.

So after that, that was the reason why that they said that Mr. Fry would not sell the place to me. So he had rented it out to several people who would rent out the lounge part and just have a lounge in there. And then a couple of people opened up the showroom. But it was never opened up, everything, until we went there.

So that was the 30-year period in between.

And then during that time, he tried to run it himself. Well, what he did was the bar was open and black people used to go in and they would go up there. And if you went in and bought a coke, they might say five dollars for the coke.

So somebody went to board. You can't do that. And then they caught him also -- he had

somebody doing something to the lights where he didn't have no light bill. Oh, he was trying everything. He had them fix the electric where there wasn't no light bill coming. So they got on him about that. And then he was renting the rooms for more than he was supposed to be renting them for. And they were calling him all kind of names.

After I went there to get the license, at first they told me you can't get no (sic) license with Mr. Fry. He's got to go. So then that's when we got the money to pay down on the place to be in our name. And they said, "But we want Mr. Fry to come up and testify." And Mr. Fry wouldn't do it. He said, "The hell with them. I'm not going up there. I don't want nothing (sic). I don't want no (sic) license." Oh, he was very indignant.

So one day we were going up for the license and Mr. Fry showed up. I didn't even know he was coming. When I walked in, he was there. So when I walked in and saw him, I went over and spoke to him. And he jumped up and hugged me. And he sat down and everybody was whispering. They came and asked me, "Who is that man?" And I said, "That's Leo Fry."

Oh, they were trembling and going on. Now, they done begged him to come and talk bad about him. So, finally, they asked him to testify and he got up on the stand. And they were so afraid of him, they asked him a few questions and he looked them in the eye and answered it. They said, "Did you ever run a house of prostitution in Los Angeles?" He said, "No, but my daddy did." They said, "Did you ever steal anything?" He said, "Yeah, when I was 17 years old. A friend of mine, we were in college" -- and wherever he came from -- "and we had some silver" -- gold, gold. And he said, "We took that, but nothing ever happened about it."

So then pretty soon they were whispering to each other. What can we ask him again? So they couldn't find nothing (sic) to ask. "Okay, well, you're excused."

Now, they were going to tear him up when he came. But that's all they asked him and let him go. Now, they had him right where they had been wanting him to come to the board meeting, but that's all they did because they were just bluffing, trying to bluff. And he just out of the clear blue sky decided to come up there.

But back up: when I was running People's Choice, I had a full gaming license down there. And I got a bug that I wanted to open up the Moulin Rouge because they had been opening it up here and there and here and there. And so I said, "I'm going to go up and talk to him." And I

went up there and started talking to him about the place.

After that time he had been through so much, I guess, he had a changed heart about a lot of things. People were talking really bad about it. So we sat down and talked about it and made a deal for me to lease the place with an option to buy. And I didn't have to have that much money. I remember I think I had to have \$50,000 or something during that time.

After I was there, well, then he cooperated very well with me because he had several little parties there, like Christmas parties for all the employees and stuff. And he tried his best not to get us to close up. But James was desperate and going to close. He said, "You can stay here and starve to death, but I am going." Because by that time --

And now you're talking about which year approximately?

'97, I think it was. And he had an offer back now -- because he had always worked on the Strip -- and he had an offer to come to -- what's the dome top?

Luxor.

Luxor. And he worked there for a couple of years. And then they built the Mandalay Bay and he went over there. So now he's making a hundred thousand dollars a year. He would have been starving to death back over there trying to get this thing going.

And everything we would do, somebody would throw something in it. Like when the Indians came, they really came seriously to invest some money. But the woman was the mayor then, Jan Jones. She wouldn't talk to anybody because she and Steve Wynn were like this. So whatever he told her not to do, that's what she wasn't going to do.

So they said they couldn't invest any money. And they don't have a good relationship with the powers that be. And they left.

And the same thing happened with John. John brought the man here that had the money. But when he came, they had a meeting that morning. And she called her little liaison, black person that was working for her, and told her to tell her husband to go and tell John not to come to the meeting. Now, it was his project. He booked the meeting. The man came from San Francisco or wherever he came from. He's the one that had the money. And they said John couldn't come to the meeting.

John Edmund?

John Edmund.

And he stayed away?

Well, he stayed away because they told him don't come.

See, I wouldn't have stayed away.

Yes, you would've. They wouldn't let you in. But it didn't do no (sic) good anyway because they didn't talk to him. They said Jan Jones was sitting there with her feet up on a desk. So, finally, he said he sat there for about 15 or 20 minutes before she said anything to him. And, finally, when she did it was very arrogant. And he came back and tore up the check and told John don't ever call him about doing nothing (sic) in Las Vegas because these people were too prejudiced for him.

Well, let me (*tell you what*) happened with the Moulin Rouge Development Corporation since they've been here. They went to another company for financing after the fire. You know, you have to go through all the reappraisals, all the studies all over again after the fire. So this company agreed to loan them the money. And they're getting ready to come in for their site visit. So they called up ready to do their due diligence. They call Metro to find out the climate that the Moulin Rouge was in. And whoever they talked to -- the Metro officer -- said that the Moulin Rouge was not safe for a white woman walking.

(End side 1, tape 2.)