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An Interview with Steve Evans

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee White

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

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Produced by:

The Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries, Director: Claytee D. White

Project Creators: Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm

Transcriber and Editor: Laurie Boetcher

Editor and Production Manager: Barbara Tabach

Interviewers: Suzanne Becker, Barbara Tabach, Claytee D. White

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This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized it was a special place that intersected themes of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gentrification. Patrick and Deborah learned that John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an enclave of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

The transcripts received minimal editing that included the elimination of fragments, false starts and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. These interviews have been catalogued and can be found as non-circulating documents in Special Collections at UNLV's Lied Library.

Deborah A. Boehm, Ph.D.
Fulbright-García Robles Scholar 2009-2010
Assistant Professor, Anthropology & Women's Studies

Patrick Jackson, Professor
John S. Park Oral History Project Manager

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

Interview with Steve Evans

June 15, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee White

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Preface

Steve Evans is a native of Henderson, Nevada; living there when it was little more than an industrial town. In this interview, Steve tells of his humble life in Henderson's Carver Park community to becoming the owner of a home formerly owned by a teenage mentor, Flora Dungan, who founded Focus, a youth counseling program where he worked.

Steve's penchant for architecture threads through this narrative. Among the stories he shares is of his efforts to recover information about his John S. Park home, which was built in 1964, designed by Kennard Design Group of California and considered the best example of mid-century modern architecture in Las Vegas.

In addition, Steve is an informed observer of a community in transition. He tells about the thriving commerce of Fremont Street shifting to Maryland Parkway, the beginning of the Arts District, the impact of events on the John S. Park Neighborhood sense of community, events such as the Stratosphere wanting to build a roller coaster as well as the movement to give John S. Park a historical designation.

Steve left Las Vegas for a few years to pursue his career in social justice and activism. He returned home and has been involved in community service, a City Planning Commissioner, Chair of the Downtown Design Review among other committees.

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Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

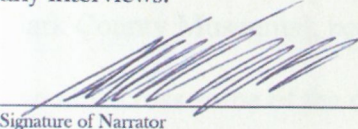


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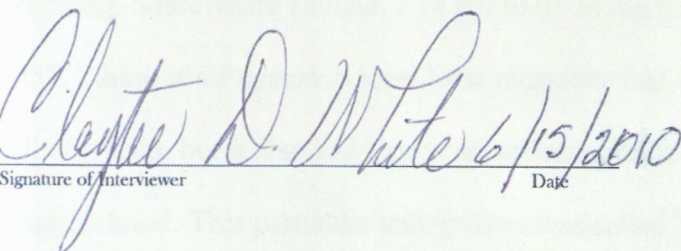
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Date

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This is Claytee White, and I am with Steve Evans. It is June 15, 2010. We're in his home in the Marycrest portion of the John S. Park community of Las Vegas. So how are you today, Steve?

Fine, thank you.

The reason that we call it John S. Park is only because our oral history project is called John S. Park and neighborhood, so we're doing the entire thing. So I'm so happy to be [here]. I love the homes here in Marycrest. These are beautiful.

From what I understand, there were a number of early families who developed the area. In fact this morning I talked with Mark Hall-Patton [historian, author, and director of Clark County Museums], because I was asking him about some of the street names, and I've run across some of the names like Cochran Street [named for contractor Lee W. Cochran]. Somewhere I found, I've got to try to dig it up, I was looking for it today, in 1955, I think it's *Pageant*, a local little magazine that they published annually, and it was full of gossip, but it also had lots of advertisements and they advertised this neighborhood. This particular subdivision was called Morningview Heights, and it advertised, "Stop by our sales office at Seventeenth [Street] and Oakey [Boulevard] and see our fully-improved city lots with 360-degree views of the mountains and the valley." These were all just lots. The home across the street, right across the street from here, was I believe the first house built on this street, long before the subdivision was developed. The woman who lived there, Sheila Murphy, died just a few years ago, about my age, she grew up in the home and she was telling me that the house next door was an artesian well

or a spring. She said [that] as a young girl, she used to play in the cattails and catch tadpoles. So it was a very rural kind of area. When they first developed the Griffith [United] Methodist Church at Seventeenth and Oakey, there was a controversy that it was built so far out of town, and you can't get much more inner-city than that now.

We're at Maryland Parkway and Oakey, a major intersection [today]. Wow, that was too far out of town.

So tell me, where did you grow up?

I was born and raised in Henderson [Nevada]. My father [Claude (Blackie) Evans] and mother [Carolyn Evans] came here in the early Fifties from a farm or a rural area in Missouri and the Kansas area. My father had relatives out here. His aunt was married to a guy by the name of Vance Hunter, who was the nephew of Marion Hicks, who owned the Thunderbird Hotel, and he hired my father's uncle as the chief engineer, and they lived on the property in the back next to KENO radio in a little two-bedroom, weeping mortar house. They lived there for years. We would go there as young kids. My aunt would make ice cream every Sunday. I got to tool around the hotel, play around the pool, and run around through the desert. They had started building the Landmark [Hotel and Casino] and it sat empty for years, and then there was a racetrack out there, Thunderbird Downs.

So you remember the racetrack?

Yeah. It was mostly desert but I vaguely remember that. I remember mostly chasing lizards. There was no country club, there was no Hilton; it was just all desert.

So what did the adults say caused the racetrack to not make it?

I don't know. I'm not really sure. I just remember the hotel. I remember the boiler room being oppressively noisy. In those days, the air-conditioning systems and all of that were [noisy].

My father's uncle was fired. The day Marion Hicks died, that ended my father's uncle's career. He was the engineer there, but it was definitely an arrangement that was based on a family relationship.

What did your father do for a living?

My father was a steelworker at the titanium plants, and he became the president of the Steelworkers' Union [Local 4856] out there, and was very active in the politics of unions in Henderson, which was very much of an industrial town. I think there were about 18,000 people throughout the time that I grew up, with very little change in population. Very, very, very blue-collar. He went on to work for Mike O'Callaghan in his cabinet for the better part of the two terms that he was governor [of Nevada], and then for twenty-one years was the head of the state AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations]. He died three years ago [this coming October].

I was born in a housing complex called Carver Park. I think I lived at, I want to say, 3-D Lincoln. (I'll have to ask my mother.) It was the only area where the black folks were allowed to live in Henderson, and it was still segregated, but the playgrounds were not. There was a little store in the middle of it. (The concrete pads are still there. I went by not long ago.) It was very modest, very simple, very inexpensive. By today's standards it was actually quite well-laid-out.

So describe Carver Park to me.

Well, we lived in a couple of different apartments. It seems to me my mother told me we paid forty-two dollars a month for rent. Each long building was separated by a big swath of grass, and there were little parks, and then there was this little store in the middle. My sister and I (she's two years younger than I, so when I was four, she was two) would walk up to the store to get milk and bring it home for my mom. I was four years old; you wouldn't think of that today. Kids played.

I was a member of the Neon Museum board of trustees. I was Mayor [Oscar] Goodman's appointment on there for a few years. During the time I was there, I was the publicity chair. That's also the time that we conceived the idea of moving the La Concha [Motel], so I became familiar with [architect] Paul Revere Williams and had a number of conversations with his granddaughter, who wrote the definitive book on his biography. Somewhere buried in the back of the book (I was sleuthing around) it says that Paul Revere Williams built the BMI [Basic Magnesium, Incorporated] housing complex, but they identify it as Las Vegas, Nevada. Well, there was no BMI complex in Las Vegas. I'm of the belief, and I've mentioned it to a number of people, that I believe Paul Williams was the architect who designed Carver Park.

He did. He designed Carver Park. Yes. We found the evidence.

Did you? Good. Is that in the Henderson archives?

I'll have to find out where I found that information, but yes.

I told [author] Dorothy Wright and I mentioned it and the light bulb just kind of went on. It's one of those things where it's misidentified, I think.

That's exactly right, Carver Park, and he did the other black area that is the sister area to John S. Park. It's also now on the National Register of Historic Places. So, this is wonderful.

Anyway, Carver Park was my [home]. Everybody was kind of poor but nobody really knew it.

So this was in the Fifties.

I was born in '54.

Do you remember black families still living in Carver Park?

When I was there? Sure, sure. We played. I mean it was no [big deal]. You know, that's an interesting concept because kids, you know, you don't learn prejudice. I mean you learn prejudice; you aren't really born with it. Kids are kids. You like to play. When I think back on it, it was an interesting time because, I don't know, I think that's what makes a community, where they're not homogenous but where people [are mixed together].

Which brings me back to this neighborhood: one of the things I talked about in a neighborhood newsletter that I put out from time to time is the unique economic diversity of an area like this. I was thinking about the homes on Chapman Street, two streets up, and this street is another example. You'll have a 1,800 [or] 1,500-square-foot home that perhaps was occupied in the Fifties or Sixties by a maintenance worker in one of the casinos, and right next door you'll have the owner of the casino, or like Dr. [Leon] Steinberg, who was one of the pioneer radiology people (Steinberg Diagnostics). I want to say that home is 5,800 square feet. It's three levels with a tennis court, a pool, and a beautiful home with dumbwaiters and maids' quarters. But those children likely played

with the children next door, at complete opposite ends of the economic spectrum. And I think that's what makes neighborhoods. That's what makes community. The common denominators are safety, your street, your yard, your friends, your people, versus a lot of the enclaves of gated communities. I call them the Gucci suburbs or the Gucci neighborhoods. I mean some of them are very, very well-laid-out. But we develop cities or suburbs in such a way, I think, where you don't have the opportunity to meet your neighbors.

So what drew you to this area?

It's what I knew when I moved back here. I had moved away for a number of years. It was centrally located. When I was a teenager and when I would spend my time here in this very room, everything around here was new. This was pretty much the center of town. The Boulevard Mall was relatively new. Sunrise Hospital was relatively new. Maryland Parkway was [new]. The Commercial Center was a thriving economic area. There were doctors' offices in all the little cul-de-sacs. The Sahara Hotel [and Casino] was at the north end of the Strip. An incredibly vibrant area. I used to have what I called the fifteen-minute rule: I can get to anywhere I need to be within fifteen minutes.

Wow! No more.

Well, you know, I try to stick by that as best I can because other than visiting my mother in Henderson, I don't have a lot of reason other than for business to go to the furthest reaches of the valley. It's just what I know.

Good. So tell me about this particular house. Who owned it before you lived here?

Flora Dungan built it in 1964. Flora was an accountant by trade. She ran for, it was then called the City Commission, and she served, I believe, two terms in the state legislature.

She was a pistol. She was also way ahead of her time: an environmentalist, a woman who worked in a man's world and yet had some very strong opinions about women and equality. I have a copy of an old speech she wrote at one of her campaign stops. She said something to the effect that her father forgot to tell her along the way that girls couldn't have the same opportunity as boys. So she kind of lived that. An incredibly gifted, brilliant woman who was remarkable in her ability with math and numbers. She was the accountant for, I believe, the Fremont Hotel [and Casino]. I talked to [casino owner] Jackie Gaughan about her at one point. I think at some point she did his books. She helped start businesses all throughout the community: Freed's Bakery. I had long conversations with Mr. [Milton] and Mrs. [Esther] Freed and they credit Flora for making their business successful. She was a remarkable, remarkable woman.

She sued the state when she was serving in the legislature. The majority of the power in the state legislature was in the cow counties, the rural counties, because they had more representation, and it wasn't based on population, contrary to the Supreme Court decision in one man, one vote. So Flora brought it to everyone's attention and they said, But that's not the way we do it here in Nevada, Flora. And she said, Well, then I'll see you in court. She and I believe [Doctor] Clare Woodbury sued the state. I believe it went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in their favor and forever changed the political makeup in the State of Nevada. Flora's argument was that Clark County was growing and had the majority of the population, but not equal representation: one man, one vote. So, as a result, the Assembly and the Senate in the state legislature now has a proportionate number of representatives from Southern Nevada. That was Flora. She did remarkable things.

So tell me how you learned about this house even early on in your life.

Well, one of the things that Flora was concerned about was drug addiction and kids. An organization called Synanon in Southern California came to her attention (I think she was in the legislature) and she began researching what treatment options exist for drug addicts. Kids were really her priority. Kids were getting in trouble in those days. So Flora went to Synanon and helped them set up their books, and, some say, credited them with becoming self-sufficient. (She ended up marrying one of the guys who lived there and they lived here in this home. She had a string of husbands.) She was really the inspiration behind a youth group called Focus. The board of directors, which were all friends of Flora's, were [politician] Myrna Williams, who was a close friend of Flora's forever; Jean Weinberger, whose husband was the president of Caesars Palace [Hotel and Casino] at the time; J.K. Houssels, the president of the Tropicana [Hotel and Casino]; there was a police chief. Many of the politicians who later went on to prominence, Flora tapped them all to be on either the board of advisors or the board of directors. Edith Katz was the secretary, I believe. Edith raised money. We met right here in this living room. We would meet in Marvin Sedway's office over by Circle Park. There was always kids here: kids in trouble, her clients' kids, whomever. This is was like open-house most of the time. I got involved with it when I was fifteen.

I was always enamored by the house. When she built it, she was married to a guy by the name of Ed Onken, who was a reporter for I believe the *Las Vegas Sun*. His daughter had married an architect. He lived in Southern California and worked with some real powerhouses in the Mid-Century [Modern] architectural world, one of which was Richard Neutra and Neutra's son Dion, and also a great architect who was friends with

Paul Revere Williams; [Robert A.] Kennard was his name. How I discovered all this: Flora died in 1973, and the house went through a number of different owners in subsequent years. I was always asking George Brookman (who was the contractor), Who was the architect? And he kept saying, Oh, I don't know. I forget. I got it somewhere. It's on the tip of my tongue. And I could never get him to dig up the paperwork or anything. So finally I went to Special Collections at the University [of Nevada, Las Vegas, UNLV] and I was going through Flora's stuff. Early on, I went to Special Collections and asked to see some of the Flora memorabilia, and the person I spoke with didn't know anything about it. So I ended up talking with friends of Flora's and her last husband, who said, Oh, well, most of her paperwork was boxed up and taken over to the university. But it had never been catalogued. I think it was lost somewhere. They dug it out and it had never been gone through. So I went over there a number of days and would just go through it, and I found a canceled check to an architectural firm in Los Angeles [California]. Then I went on the microfiche and I found Kennard Design Group. I called them in Los Angeles and found the daughter of Mr. Kennard who runs the firm. Another remarkable story: they were early African-American architects in the Southern California area, and Mr. Kennard was pretty phenomenal in what he did. His daughter Gail [Kennard] runs the firm, and his other son [William E. Kennard], at the time I believe it was President [Bill] Clinton named him as the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission [FCC]. If you do a Google™ search, some of the stuff that Kennard did was remarkable. A great firm.

Anyway, I asked about who would've built the home, and they said, Well, that might've been the gentleman. Anyway, they sent me his résumé and he's living in an

assisted-living facility, and I called him and we spoke and he said, Oh, I remember building that home. He said it was his only residential commission. He would fly into town and Flora would meet him at the airport. They used, I believe, a lot of the Richard Neutra designs, as well as things that Flora had seen in magazines.

The house itself was remarkable for its day because it's built and designed to maximize energy. There's very little direct sun, even though there's lots of windows. The cantilevered overhangs keep the direct sun from coming in. There's not a single window on that side of the building, so the direct afternoon sun is reflected. This was 1964. You got the little narrow strip of windows along there, throughout all the bedrooms on the south side that give you maximum light, and privacy at the same time, without generating heat.

Wow! This is amazing. I love the windows.

Well, it's pretty much original. I tell people that I was fortunate that I didn't have the money to remodel.

That's right, yes. And the fireplace, in the middle of the floor almost.

Well, the contractor George Brookman was telling me the story, when he built it, that's all solid concrete, and he said that they had to pour it a number of times but it's in there to stay. It kind of floats there.

So what else do you like about the house?

I like everything. I actually think, and others have told me too, I'm a bit of a Mid-Century [Modern] architect aficionado. One of the things that I do for fun is go on architectural tours, primarily Mid-Century [Modern]. A lot of Southern California buildings were built by some of the most remarkable architects of our century. A number of them have told

me that this is probably the best example in all of Las Vegas of the clean lines of the era and of this particular style of building it. I remember as a teenager thinking it was like a spaceship, because it was new. I grew up in little tiny houses, and this to me seemed huge.

When you became a part of the group [Focus] that she [Flora Dungan] formed, were you still living in Henderson?

I was. I was.

How did you get back and forth?

Oh, people would pick me up or I would hitch a ride with somebody. When I was probably fifteen-and-a-half, I had my learner's permit, and I would usually abscond with one of my parents' cars. And we would carpool. I'd come in pretty much every day.

Ultimately we rented a little house on East Sahara [Avenue] and that became our drop-in center. And then later, through some charitable donations and fundraising and all that, in 1972 we bought a two-and-a-half-acre ranch estate behind what is now UMC [University Medical Center], on Goldring [Avenue]. It had been owned by a prominent physician here in town. I'm guessing it was 9,000 square feet or something. It was an incredibly beautiful old ranch house on beautiful ground that had mesquite and roses and Italian cypress and cottonwood. It had woodsheds and barnyards and guest quarters and a beautiful kidney-shaped pool with a cabana.

When you say "we" purchased it, who is "we"?

We the organization. It was called Focus. It was a nonprofit group. There were a number of us. We received I believe it was the first national federally-funded grant for a runaway center. I remember Senator Birch Bayh helped to secure the funding and I think then-

Governor O'Callaghan probably had something to do with it. I think it was like a hundred thousand dollars. In 1972, that was a lot of money.

We had a staff of I think five full-time counselors, and I was the youngest; they didn't realize that I was really only seventeen at the time. I had graduated at a young age and pretty much had been volunteering. So I along with, I think, five others were full-time counselors for a runaway center. Kids would get picked up for, they call them kid crimes: runaway, truancy, unmanageable, things like that, things that wouldn't be a crime if you were an adult. We had a remarkable arrangement with Metro [Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, LVMPD] and with the Juvenile Court where, when a kid was picked up, and they were taken to Juvenile Court, they would call us. The counselor on duty or one of the volunteers would go down to Juvenile Court and sign them out, and we'd bring them over to the runaway house. I'd bring the kids over and I'd say, Listen, we have only a couple of rules: there's no physical violence, no drugs or alcohol in you or on you, and we ask that you try to pull your life together and we're here to help you if you choose, and if not, the doors are open, there's no locks, please be safe, make a peanut butter sandwich, and go in peace. We had thousands of kids come through there and only a couple ever wandered off. It was a lot of peer-group influences. We had a professional counseling staff but really the people who probably made the most difference were the other kids, many of whom had had their own troubles. Sometimes it was minor, you know: I didn't get a stereo for Christmas, so I ran away. Other times it was heinous. It was heartbreaking. They were some of the most insane, troubling kinds of things that you'd ever want to see a kid go through. We helped a lot of kids navigate that incredibly turbulent time. That was Flora's inspiration. It was a wonderful program.

I went by a few years ago. It disbanded decades ago, but there was a nonprofit group that was running out of there. I believe it was [entrepreneur and philanthropist] Milton Schwartz that ended up buying the property. Later on, somebody was renting it, but with the agreement that no money would be put into it. I think they were really interested in the land. It finally got torn down. A few years ago I went out in the rubble and I picked up a piece of the flagstone that came from the dining room floor. It had a full bar that I think came out of Virginia City [Nevada] and big walk-in fireplaces and pantries. It was just a remarkable, remarkable place.

So now, did you ever go to school in that area?

No. I went to Basic High School, and then as a senior I went to Vo-Tech [Southern Nevada Vocational-Technical High School] with a bunch of friends of mine and studied telecommunications. I also went there in part because it was more of a college atmosphere, and I could smoke cigarettes. [Laughter] I believe Bob [Robert] Stoldal was running the Channel 10 television station which was on the campus then, and we would go down to the station which was on the campus and I'd hang out in the master control and see what the television guys were doing. Interestingly enough, the registrar of students was an old family friend of my parents who also was very much of an activist in the community. Her name was Jo Schreck. Her son is Frank Schreck, a prominent attorney here in town. Frank Schreck worked for, I believe it was called PPPT, Poor People Pulling Together. He was also the attorney I believe for Focus and for Flora. A young kid that was involved with all the things of the day.

His mother Jo, the registrar of students, I heard on I believe it was the PA [public address] system, Will Steven Evans please report to the registrar's office? So I went and there was Jo Schreck and she said, Stevie, you've heard what's happened, haven't you?

I said, No, what happened?

She said, [President Richard M.] Nixon and [Secretary of State Henry] Kissinger are mining the harbor in Cambodia.

And I said, Oh, my God! (Like I know what that means. But I was fairly astute, so I knew it was significant.)

She goes, I'm giving you a pass to get out of class. You need to go rally the kids. We're going to march down the Strip tonight.

And I said, You've got it. I'm there.

So, [there we were], marshals, armbands, up and down the Strip [singing] All we are saying. It was quite the thing. I think back on that, that she was passionate enough to [do this]. She knew that I could rally the kids and we'd get several hundred kids out.

Did you stop traffic on the Strip?

Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. There were a number of various actions. There was a welfare rights march at one point. But this was like a candlelight vigil. It was quite something. If you recall the late Sixties and the early Seventies, your friends were going off to a foreign land, some not to return. There was I think the first time that I ever recall a distrust of government and a very unpopular war. Young people I think for the first time challenged the status quo. I think what brought it home was the fact that you might only be just a kid, but suddenly war makes you an adult. In Circle Park, which is the heart of this neighborhood, was where everyone would hang out, I remember there was always

someone strumming a guitar and everyone was barefoot. There actually was some trouble where I believe the police set up a surveillance because they saw some kids smoking pot and rolling around in the grass. It was on all of the news stations, it was a big deal about Circle Park being a haven for hippies and all sorts of antisocial behavior, and I'm thinking, Wow, some things really never change.

But Circle Park has been through so much. So tell me about the most recent news items that we heard about Circle Park, within the last couple of years. When did you move back into this neighborhood to actually buy the house?

Seventeen years ago, so it would've been 1993. I had moved away and gone to New York to school.

A number of years ago, people that I know were on the design committee [for Circle Park] and I actually had a fair degree, a lot of behind-the-scenes input on how it was going to be redesigned. The county I believe matched the city's money and it really is a showpiece. It's a neighborhood community park. When it was first built, it was never intended to be in the middle of a major thoroughfare. Maryland Parkway was a very narrow street. It wasn't a collector and it wasn't designed to convey large amounts of traffic. It wasn't until I believe [developer] Irwin Molasky and others developed the Maryland Parkway corridor that it became a major thoroughfare and it got widened over the years.

That's when the trees were taken out.

Yes. All of the shopping was down on Fremont Street. There was no Boulevard Mall; there were no malls. When you went to do your back-to-school shopping, you went down to Fremont Street. There was JCPenney, which is now Emergency Arts and the Beat, a

little coffeehouse, across from the El Cortez. There was Ronzone's, which was a family-run department store, which later became Diamond's, I'm not sure, but it was very upscale. Harris & Frank [men's clothing], Mr. B's Bag, I think Fanny's Dress Shop was down there, and the Melody Lane coffee shop and Orange Julius and a great place for kids to hang out on the corner, I want to say it was Trader Joe's or Trader Bill's. And the bus came next door and there was a little arcade next to that. All the kids hung out either there or before they built the Union Plaza [Hotel and Casino] there was the Union Pacific train station park out front.

Fremont Street was teeming with people, all of your attorneys and your law offices and your courts. If you went to pay the power bill or the electric or your phone, it was all down there. During the day it was just jammed with people. That's where all the commerce took place. These were really quiet little suburban enclaves.

Back to Circle Park: it has great possibilities. I think the issue now is how to make it safe. Most people want to see it opened. I know there's a proposal right now, they're looking at some sort of a veterans' memorial at one end, which I believe is privately funded and I hear they raised a substantial amount of money for that, and there's been talk about taking the bathrooms [out], which I thought was a mistake to put them in. Apparently half of the people wanted them [and] half didn't. Unfortunately it became a haven for mischief. If you're homeless, there's really nowhere to wash up and so it became an opportunity for someone who's homeless to wash up. Anyway, there's talk about making part of that building like a marshal's substation or having some [security] presence there, which would hopefully deter some of the crime.

Being homeless isn't a crime. Unfortunately, you also have a lot of people on [drugs], crackheads, some of whom may be homeless and some who throw the cloak of homelessness around them to justify [their activities]. Unfortunately there's a lot of mentally-ill people. In my opinion, as a state, as a community, as a nation, we don't put any money into the front end of the resources in dealing with mental health issues, but we pay for it at the back end.

When I lived in Washington, D.C. (I was there for ten years), I was thrust in the middle of a whole issue of homelessness. The federal government had decided to close most of the nation's federally-funded mental facilities. I remember at the time, there was a bipartisan move in Congress. I think the liberals were reacting to the one-flew-over-the-cuckoo's-nest [syndrome] to mental health facilities, insane asylums that were restrictive and not well run, where they just medicate people and anesthetize them and give them Thorazine or whatever and they walk around like zombies. The other side of the deal was I think conservatives believed it was a lot cheaper to put people out on the street and provide community-based counseling and halfway houses and community treatment. Unfortunately, the treatment never came, the funding never came, and what did occur didn't work. And as a result, every community in this country has streets teeming with mentally-ill people. If you're eligible for Social Security disability, the first requirement is you have to have an address. Well, if you're homeless, that's difficult. And then secondly, you navigate the labyrinth of paperwork and when they say, What's your name? and you say, Mary Magdalene, that doesn't fly real well for a check. So, they're big issues that are not going to be solved over the debate at Circle Park.

Did the Circle Park events like you're talking about, the homelessness, the crime, did it spill over into the surrounding communities?

I hear so. I know that in the seventeen years I have lived here, and in the many years that I spent here as a kid, I never once saw anybody with a shopping cart on any of these streets.

I think what's happened is: the homelessness issue has certainly gotten more pronounced. It's more visible. How much of it is drug addiction, how much of it is mental health, I really don't know. But, in the old days where someone was considered a hobo, and they lived out by the railroad tracks, perhaps relatively benign, you don't see a lot of that anymore. But, for whatever reasons, those populations have kind of moved into residential neighborhoods, and it does create a lot of grief. If you want to go to the park with your kids and you want them to play on the playground equipment and maybe have a little picnic, and there's dozens of scary-looking people. I mean, regardless of how big your heart is, you're concerned about your kids and their safety, and especially if there are mentally-ill people. So I don't know. Those are things there are no real good, clear answers to.

I was telling you about Maryland Parkway: the trees grew up into a tunnel, and it was almost dark. We used to say, Mom, let's go down the tunnel street, let's go down the tunnel street. [Laughter] The canopy grew together, and in the middle of August it would be dark in there and very cool. I think, boy, what a shame that we [cut those trees down]. It was a beautiful [place].

In some of the books, there are pictures of privately-run swimming pools somewhere around the Circle Park area and I've always been trying to find out where those existed.

I'm not familiar with those either. I like your talking about the stores downtown. Since Fremont Street East is so close to this neighborhood, how do you see what the mayor [Oscar Goodman] is trying to do for Fremont Street East? Do you think it will bring more people back to this area?

You mean like the entertainment corridor? You know what? Oscar will I think go down in history as the mayor and the man who, more than anybody, championed the possibilities of a vibrant downtown. Since the time he's been elected, I have absolutely loved his focus on downtown.

I did a speech a few months ago and I was trying to put together some thoughts, and I was standing on I think it was the twenty-something floor of the Newport Lofts where a friend of mine has an apartment, and I'm looking out over the skyline and I'm looking at everything down below, and it occurred to me that none of this, absolutely none of it existed ten years ago. Now, like everyone, we're stuck in this crazy economy and Las Vegas became ground zero, I think, to a degree. We grew like on steroids. But we will recover. The infrastructure and the bones of an incredible downtown are there. You look around and some of it isn't yet open and some of it isn't fully utilized or realized, but we have the Larry Ruvo Center for Brain Health and we have The Smith Center [for the performing arts]. We have the World Market [Center]. We have the [Las Vegas] Premium Outlets. We have Newport [Lofts] [and] Soho [Lofts]. We have the mob museum [Las Vegas Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement] coming online.

We have the Neon Museum. We have the most incredibly beautiful federal building downtown. I was a major pioneer of the Arts District.

Good. Talk about First Fridays as you talk about the Arts District.

Well, you know, I sit on the Planning Commission for the City of Las Vegas. I have for nine years. I've seen lots of commissioners come and go. When the idea of an arts district was first formed, there were a handful of people—Wes Miles, Jack Solomon, Cindy Funkhouser, a few others—who really believed in the idea. It took a while for it to catch on. Oscar got it. Oscar got it. And, in my mind, having lived in Washington and New York and Reno and Lake Tahoe [Nevada] and other areas, I saw what happens when you have a vibrant arts district. It is the catalyst for everything. It's like a phoenix rising from the ashes. It often is inspired by, started by, nurtured by artists, people of creativity. So I was an early and vocal advocate of an arts district. I sat on the committee where we had the branding of the 18B, which is the moniker for [the Arts District]; eighteen blocks is what it stands for. And, when you look at the [Brett] Wesley Gallery down at Casino Center [Boulevard] and Charleston [Boulevard], remarkable. I mean this guy came from Southern California, he put his money where his mouth is, [and] he built a several-million-dollar world-class gallery. And others will follow. They will come.

So, when you have the rooftops, when people start buying and living or renting in these places, they're going to want to go to the delicatessen, they're going to want to go to a movie, they're going to want to walk, and suddenly you have a core of a city. And it will happen. It can't happen soon enough for me, but it will happen.

When you ask about Fremont Street, we created the entertainment district, and it's still in its infancy but the Downtown Cocktail Room, Michael Cornthwaite is a pioneer.

His wife Jennifer Cornthwaite started the Emergency Arts one block down in what used to be the old JCPenney building. It's little spaces with all of these artists and artisans and people of creativity, and it's a little coffeehouse too. If you go down at lunch, you'll see all of these people blogging away over there. It's a real sense of community. Within that block is Don't Tell Mama, the Griffin [cocktail lounge], [and] the Beauty Bar. There are proposals for two or three more.

When you go into the Golden Nugget [Hotel and Casino], what they've done with the expansion, there's a little club in there called the Rush Lounge. I would never have known it. A friend of mine who's a downtown denizen said, You got to come and see this place. It's not much bigger than this room. It's a circular bar in the middle. The demographic was from the twenties to the seventies. Everybody dancing to the hottest little house band. There was no velvet rope line and someone turning their nose up at you. It was everybody having a good time and I said, I like this place. Then we went over to Vic and Anthony's [Steakhouse]. (It's the old California Pizza Kitchen in the Golden Nugget.) The best crab cake I've ever had in my life. I guess the Landry's people put in the Chart House [Restaurant]. It's teeming with activity.

Mark Brandenburg owns the Golden Gate [Hotel and Casino] at the corner of Main [Street] and Fremont. He's managed to retain the integrity of the history of the place and still upgrade it. They just put in a coffee shop, Di-Par's. It's the best pancakes in North America. They are wonderful. And they still have the shrimp cocktail and they have the flapper dancers. Of course that's the first hotel [in Las Vegas]. The old phone lines are there and some of it is original. So they've managed to upgrade it and still retain [history].

So do you think we should take down Fremont Street Experience, the overhead, and open the street again?

Oh, I kind of doubt that would happen. At the time, when I first moved back here, I thought it was really misguided because I said, You took the most identifiable street in the entire world and closed it. But my experience of that is nostalgic. We would do Chinese fire drills, and everybody on a weekend would cruise Fremont. A Chinese fire drill, I think, is where you go around the block and when you get to the light, everybody jumps out of the car and you run around it. [Laughter] I don't know why they called it that. And more. I mean there was the usual, the B.A. (I think that stands for "bare ass." It's where you moon somebody, I think. It's what somebody always did at the light.) Anyway it was great fun.

But that was Glitter Gulch. And the thing is, most people from the Strip made their way downtown to see the lights, to see Glitter Gulch, to see the brightest street in America, to see the one that you can see from the satellite.

So do you see that coming back?

You know, the canopy, the Fremont Street Experience people seem to be programming it really well. I've had the occasion to talk to their director or chairman, and last summer, they did this thing called Summer of Love, and they kind of capitalized on that Sixties era. There were bands out there every night. It was kind of the hippy, love, groovy [atmosphere]. Even the hotels started theming with the same kind of experience. And the light shows can be phenomenal. They're great.

There are great things. There's Tinoco's Kitchen in the Las Vegas Club. The Firefly [Tapas Kitchen and Bar] is in the [Plaza Hotel] in that round room that overlooks

the Fremont Street Experience. [Firefly] was originally the pool. What's now enclosed, if you look at it from the street, it's shaped like a champagne glass. That was a champagne glass with a pool, and it was open to the elements.

Interestingly enough, that was my very first job. Sam Boyd hired me when I was fifteen-and-a-half. My dad took me in to see Sam Boyd, who he knew, who was a friend. He owned the Eldorado Hotel in Henderson. He had his cowboy hat and all of his cowboy stuff, in a beautiful big office. They were slapping each other on the back and catching up with old times. The hotel was brand-new. And I was fifteen-and-a-half, and my dad says, Sam, my son needs a job for the summer.

And Sam Boyd said, So. Hmm. Well, let me ask you this. If you could have any job in the hotel, what would you like?

Well, I'm fifteen-and-a-half. But I looked around his office with all of his statuary and I said, Well, if I had my choice, I'd have your job. [Laughter]

Sam goes, Well, I like a kid with ambition. Why don't we start you out as a busboy in the coffee shop?

I hated it. It was my first job. I wore a wig. You had to cut your hair, keep it short. My hair wasn't really that long but I stuffed it up [in a wig] and I think I finally did cut it. It was a miserable job, but it was a job. It was a start.

He [Sam Boyd] used to come down in the coffee shop and kind of check on me, see how I was doing. He was a very nice man. Those old casino operators really knew how to treat their employees.

Tell me about juice. In Las Vegas you have to have juice.

Well, I was somewhat of a recipient of that, I mean a job like that. Interesting question. I had the unique experience of having been exposed to a lot of folks at a really young age. Jean Weinberger was the treasurer of the Focus board. One of the jobs that I had was to go over to her house every week or so (they lived on the Desert Inn Golf Course) because she had to sign all of our paychecks and all the checks for the utilities. There was a whole stack of them. As the treasurer of our board, that was part of her job. So, I would go through the gate and arrange to meet her. Probably one of the kindest, nicest, down-to-earth women. And I've always had a fancy for [art]. I've always been an art lover. And she had some original Picasso drawings and some Picasso clay pieces, plates, and some really, really nice tastes. Apparently Billy [Weinberger], her husband, started out [with] real humble beginnings in I think it was Ohio, but somewhere in the Midwest, and rose through the ranks to become president of, at the time, the premier casino in the world [Caesars Palace]. But couldn't have been nicer. I remember I was over there a couple of times and Alan King, the comedian, came in. Anyway, at one point, I remember Billy said to me, How old are you getting to be now? And I must have been a little older. And he says, You know, you're a good kid. He says, When you're ready, we'll get you a job downtown, I think he said at the 'Shoe (I'm assuming he meant the [Binion's] Horseshoe [Hotel and Casino]) and we'll keep you down there a year and get you all seasoned up, and then we'll bring you over to the Palace. He goes, You ought to learn to deal craps. And I said, Oh, that's not a job I'd be interested in.

Did you actually say that out loud?

Well no, I thanked him, but it's not something that in any way interested me. I was telling someone a year or so later about Mr. Weinberger wanting to hook me up with a craps-

dealer job at Caesars Palace and they said, Are you nuts? Do you have any idea how much money a craps dealer at Caesars Palace makes? And they told me and I forget, it was a fortune, because I made \$5,100 a year. And they're like, You'd make that every month. [Laughter] And I just couldn't, for the life of me [believe that]. I still don't even know how to play craps.

I've had so many opportunities like that. I tell people that it's not the way of my people, success, financial anyway, and I always tell people, I say, I get to that fork in the road and it'll say "Money and Success," and the other will be "Work and Loser," and I don't even stop and hesitate anymore. I skip down the road. I just skip and whistle [whistling], whistle right on down that road. Because I have passed up every opportunity. And I tell people, Success, money, riches [dusting his hands together]. It's not for me. I don't play that. [Laughter] But yeah, I've had opportunities. There's a lot of juice, but unfortunately, I never got it.

When you were talking about the Arts District, tell me a little about First Fridays.

Were you instrumental in that at all?

No, I wasn't instrumental but I was there from day one. Three people—Cindy Funkhouser, Naomi Arin, and the gone-too-soon Julie Brewer. Julie Brewer created the Enigma Garden Café. She died; it's been a few years now. A wonderful, wonderful, wonderful soul. Her motivation was not about commerce. It was not about making money. It was about creating a venue for art and for artists and a way to develop community.

The First Friday experience, I think it's been, is it eight years now? I believe it's eight years. They've had their ups and downs. They do it on a shoestring. I think it is

probably the single most successful event, at least in the art world, for downtown. It's the single greatest event, I think, that's inspired an arts community. Some of the art down there is really bad, but some of it is very, very good. But it gives people a passion [and] an opportunity to get together. It's part street fair, it's part art, it's a little bit of everything. Every time I go down there, the last six months, and I try to make my way, I go and make my rounds, and I look around and I see thousands of people out connecting. It's community, and that's something that we didn't have here. Twenty years ago, on any Friday night I might sit around and say, Gee, what's there to do today? Well, there's nothing to do. Let's go over to the Hilton and play video poker, which I like to do. But, it's hardly a social event and hardly an opportunity to connect with people. But for the fact that I knew the bartender at the bar there when the show kids got out, it could be a very isolating experience. Nowadays there isn't enough time to do all the things that are out there, at least in my mind.

Yes. And this neighborhood that you're in—

It's ground zero. John S. Park: Bob Bellis, JoNell Thomas, they really took it by the reins. When young people started moving back in, we went through the historic designation process. They did everything like they should have done and like we did do. It did create a bit of a divide but I think that's been fairly well repaired. There were people who didn't understand the historic designation process. There was a lot of misinformation. And I think the downside of creating districts like that is that it tends to, if not done right and even then perhaps, it can divide a community. I was heartbroken because I saw the beginnings of that fracture taking place, having been on the Planning Commission when they had to come before us. But I also am incredibly passionate about

the economic opportunities of historic preservation. People don't understand it. It's not quantified. I have looked at wonderful cities all over the country, and I have seen where you take a historic building and you can retrofit it [and] you can add to it. I've even seen entirely different architecture added to it or connecting it, and it all works. I've seen glass and concrete connect a Colonial structure or something and it works, and I'm thinking, Wow! We need to do everything, I think, from a national level to provide tax incentives and things like that, because to tear down our history and build McOffices.... I always think about when somebody builds something, I'd like it to survive long after we're gone. Unfortunately, some of the stuff that I've seen built doesn't fit that criteria at all.

The downtown area around the old historic cottages and the homes, the attorneys and the accountants did a wonderful job. I think we could've lost all of that. The code used to require in certain areas that when you were going to build a professional building, that it retain a residential character, and I'm not sure that's in the Centennial plan anymore, because it was one opportunity that you could convince somebody to go back, yes, you've got a vacant lot, build a wonderful structure that meets your professional needs. We'll work with you on parking and landscaping and everything, but let it fit in with the rest of everything. Don't let it stick out like an eyesore where you build to the lot line and you have no architectural integrity to it. I'm convinced that, like a lot of those older historic homes that have been used as professional [spaces] will be worth far more in the long run than if they try to tear them down and just build something on them that doesn't fit into the character [of the neighborhood]. And some people still live down there.

Yes. Give me an idea, or your interpretation, of what it means for community in this area of the city.

You know what, it's been really organic. I mean, I find myself going to places; the [Downtown] Cocktail Room is a good example. But I could leave here and go to Thai BBQ on Third [Street] right off of Casino Center [Boulevard] and I will probably run into somebody from the neighborhood [that] I know there. And then I can go over to the Firefly, no doubt I will see somebody there. I can go to the Downtown Cocktail Room, I can go to the Fifth Street School to a lecture, I can go over to the Government Center to a concert. Everywhere I go, I see people that I know. Many of them live in the core areas of downtown, whether that be McNeil [Estates], Glen Heather, John S. Park, Southridge or the Beverly Green or the Marycrest or the Huntridge, they're all kind of downtown neighborhoods, and they're full of people with passion.

I'll tell you something. These friends of mine, I love this idea, it's like everything that I think we should be: Heidi and Scott Swank. (Do you know Heidi from the university? She's in India right now, but she'll be back in a month or something. I think she's doing a lecture or something.) Heidi and Scott live in the Beverly Green neighborhood, which is adjacent to John S. Park. Two years ago, we talked about the idea of community and they took the bull by the horns and they started a monthly roving cocktail party. The motto is "Developing community, one cocktail party at a time." The first one that I went to was at an elderly guy's home. His wife had died; he was a widower. He had on his wife's little apron and he had all these little canapés from her Betty Crocker cookbook. They've got a beautiful home that is relatively untouched from the mid-Sixties. A wonderful guy. There were a couple of other older fellows and an

older woman and a couple of older couples who were mingling with all of these young people who have kids, and some of the older people are babysitting for the younger kids. Everybody seems to know everybody. We joke about the older ones. Heidi used to say that this older group of people that have all kind of reconnected walk through the neighborhood for exercise [and] we call them the gang members. We go, Do you guys have tats [tattoos]? Do you have like gang signs and stuff? [Laughter] And when we have parties, it's everybody from the young people all the way through to retirees who are at the twilight of their life. It's community. We all care about safety, keeping our neighborhoods well-kept, and having a place for our kids to grow up and recreate, places to shop, places to eat. Those are the little things that are huge. They're huge.

Now I hosted it about a year ago, and we had about two hundred [people]. The host can invite anybody they want, and then there's the usual cast of characters. Every month it's hosted by somebody, primarily in the downtown core. A great way to meet your neighbors, just a great way to meet your neighbors.

I love that. I don't know if you were here when [Bob] Stupak wanted to do some things. Do you remember any of the events that sort of also brought this community together, rallying around? Tell me about a couple of those.

Sure. Sure. Well, the Stupak thing, I wasn't involved with it. I know it. There was a lot of controversy. I was appointed to the Planning Commission nine years ago, and I had only been on there a few months when the first proposal from the Stratosphere [Hotel and Casino] to create the rollercoaster came on board. I got together with a number of the neighbors from the John S. Park Neighborhood and I went to Thai BBQ and set out a little spread and invited them all to come over. I had about ten people from the

neighborhood and I said, Tell me what your concerns are. I had the staff report. I try to keep an open mind on all of these things. I listened to everybody. They talked about their concerns. I met with the attorneys for the Stratosphere. It ended up being continued a number of times. It was actually voted on twice. It came before Planning twice. There were hundreds of people from the neighborhoods that came out, some in support but primarily in opposition. I think it was a flawed design and I pretty much championed the denial of the Planning Commission. It ended up in a tie vote twice, I believe, and then it ultimately went to the City Council and it was defeated at the City Council. The mayor pro tem voted against it and the mayor. But there was some serious lobbying. I mean Carl Icahn owned it [the Stratosphere] at the time and he's very influential. It's a composite character but if you remember [actor] Michael Douglas from the movie *Wall Street*, Gordon Gecko, they based that character in part on Carl Icahn. You can imagine the influences. The neighborhood prevailed on that. Whether you agreed or didn't agree, it was another catalyst for bringing people together. You sit in those meetings for hours on end to have your three minutes of say. I mean it's government at its finest. I met many, many people through there. There's always events like that that I think coalesce people, and that was one. That was a big one, I think.

Perhaps the historic designation may have been another, although I think that had more of an opportunity to divide neighbors because of misperceptions of what historic designation is. It's worked out just fine, I think.

So do you think any of the other neighborhoods in this community will apply and try for the National Register of Historic Places?

I don't know. We went through this with Westley. At the last minute, the whole thing got torpedoed and the majority of the neighborhood was opposed to it. It's a cute neighborhood. The people who wanted historic protections, I have to applaud all of their efforts, but no one came on board really to oppose it until the end of the process. But I think, in all fairness, I listened to some of the folks that came out to oppose it. They said, I work two jobs, I got kids, I get a notice in the mail, come to the meeting. I don't want to come to a meeting. I'm tired. And then suddenly they realized that there have been all of these meetings and that they believe they're going to be told what they and can't do to their own home. And so, it's really unfortunate. The process might be a little broken, even though it is designed, I think, to be inclusive. And at the end of the day, I think most people want the same thing. It's just that for whatever reason, it gets miscommunicated. If a neighborhood is going to undergo the historic designation, it's imperative that they lobby and get everybody they can on board. Everybody. It's a tough one. It's a tough call.

With this neighborhood though, you asked about it, and I'm not the expert, I mean I make it my business to know stuff, but you might want to talk to like Helen Foley or somebody, and I thought of calling her, today as a matter of fact, because her family has been here forever.

I think I have her on our list. I'm not sure. I think Lance [Kirk] and Sarah [Haggerty] gave me [her name] and I think I have a phone call in to her now.

Good. I had tried calling her earlier today to suggest that you would be [a good person to talk to]. But just in a nutshell, I first started the neighborhood newsletter and loosely created the Marycrest Neighborhood Coalition.

OK. Are you president of it?

Well, there is no president and I'm the de facto [head of it]. Nobody else will step up, so it's usually me. There aren't any pressing issues. I'm really pleased that we got Nevada Energy to put in the sidewalks on the power line corridor. They're being built right now. I try to keep an eye on stuff. When I first moved here, it was just the beginnings of the Summerlin developments and we were losing people to the suburbs. Green Valley was in full swing. A lot of the older people were [moving]. There was an exodus. I was really worried that we were going to be lost in the dust. So I hosted a meeting at the Griffith Church and we had like seventy-some people come out. I had my friend Tinoco cater it. It just tells you the passion of the people who live here, that they want to see their neighborhoods thrive and be safe and all that. It's interesting the way it was done.

Talking about community: [Bishop] Gorman [High School] was built, I believe, in 1954. [The school] no longer is there. It is now the Eldorado [Freshman] Prep [School]. I'm pleased it's still a school. The [Clark County] School District [CCSD] entered into an agreement. From what I understand, it was very convoluted because the land was actually owned by the Vatican, so they had to sign off on the deeds when Gorman chose to move. I was really distraught when I first heard the rumors a decade ago or more about Gorman moving. It's always been the premier school here in town. Everybody went to school there. They're landlocked. The campus is small. It's old. I get it. But I was thinking, Build a new school somewhere [and] keep this in the heart of the city. The demographic of the Catholic Church is very brown [Hispanic] and it serves this central community. Ultimately they got a lot of money, I think, from Mr. [Frank] Fertitta, and they built the campus out in, I believe it's in Summerlin. I've not even been there, to

tell you the truth. But I know they have ball fields and all the things they wanted to have, yet they survived for half-a-century without them here.

But, why do you move into a neighborhood? That was a key element of this neighborhood. Your kids could go to Gorman and you could walk to school. They had the middle school as well. Saint Anne [Catholic School] was on the corner, and then we had Temple Beth Sholom across the street, and then Griffith Methodist. So you had the premier Catholic parish, or one of them; you had the only parochial high school; you had a wonderful Jewish temple; you had the new Methodist church; and you had the LDS church in the John S. Park Neighborhood. So this was a community anchored by people of different faiths, most all of whom lived right in here. Another way of developing community. You're right next to some of the biggest, most fervent Catholics in town, next to the rabbi, next to the pastor of the Protestant church. And the kids play together. It's just like Carver Park. It's community.

When we lost the temple, it broke my heart. Now, they sold to a group of people that I was not pleased with at all—it was a very fundamentalist church—and they were notorious for not getting involved in the neighborhood. It was sold [again]. The new owner is a group of investors and it's now a charter school, and they've put a lot of money into it, so I'm pleased. And it's teeming with activity.

At Griffith Methodist, they're trying to attract a younger congregation because they're congregants are older and they're dying. It's got stages and multipurpose rooms and it's a wonderful, wonderful church.

The temple: they moved the burning bush that was a big, beautiful sculpture to the new facility, and they took out the beautiful carved doors. It was a haven for community.

The B'nai B'rith girls, the Hebrew school, there was all sorts of sports stuff that went on there, the tennis courts, basketball courts.

A friend of mine, Nancy Deaner, who is the cultural affairs director [Office of Cultural Affairs, City of Las Vegas], and her girlfriend, who is a good friend of mine, were telling me that as kids they lived around the corner here. (Nancy Deaner grew up just a block or two away. She'd be a real good person to talk to.) Nancy was saying that she and her girlfriend were on their bicycles, and that a limousine pulled into the temple across the street, and out steps Elizabeth Taylor and she married Eddie Fisher right there. I've never heard that in print; I've never seen a picture of it. Those are the things that I'd love to see chronicled of the history of this neighborhood. Back in the day, she was on the cover of everything. She was on the cover of the Bible, I think. [Laughter]

So tell me some other stories about people in this neighborhood or the adjoining neighborhoods that you have met over the years, some of those stories, just a couple of them.

Well, there are so many. I talk to my friend Kerin Rodgers almost every day. Governor O'Callaghan lived at the end of the block on Bonita [Avenue]. After he left the governor's mansion, he bought that house down there at the end of the block. Then he died. That was their last home.

His best friend was George Brookman, who was a contractor who built many of these homes, and who actually lived in the middle of the street here, right around about five or six houses up from the governor. I think they spoke pretty much every day.

George was married to Eileen Brookman, who was my pal. She was a legislator, a friend of Flora's, a diminutive little Jewish [lady]. She served two different periods, I

think, in the legislature. She always had to pee, and her claim to fame was, she was apparently at McCarran [International Airport], on her way up to the legislature [in Carson City, Nevada], and she had to pee and she didn't have a dime. (They had pay toilets at the time.) So she sponsored the legislation and got it passed, prohibiting pay toilets in airports or public facilities. [Laughter]

She was only about four-foot-nothing, and she had a little box—she called her soapbox—and she would stand on it at the legislature. When I was a kid, when I lived up there in my late teens-early twenties, Eileen would stand up on top of that box and scream into the microphone. She say [using an affected female voice], Mr. Speaker! Mr. Speaker! Will you please recognize a little Jewish lady from Las Vegas? [Laughter] And they would always defer to her. You couldn't say no. And then she'd go off on who knows what. She'd carry on about, I want to welcome the Girl Scouts, or the Brownies, or who knows what? Somebody's birthday. I don't know.

A very pretty woman. Her hair was always orange (red, orange, fire-orange sometimes), her home was orange, and all of her clothes were orange. That was her thing: orange, orange, orange, orange, orange. She always said [using an affected female voice], Does this come in orange? She was a pain in my ass. I used to talk to her every couple of days for years and years.

Anyway. Two other very good friends of mine: Leola Armstrong (I met Leola through Flora and my friend Kerin) and her husband Bryn. Bryn Armstrong was the editor of the Las Vegas *Sun* under Hank Greenspun. He was also the political columnist. He was the John Ralston of his day. Leola was twenty-six years, I believe, as the secretary in the [Nevada State] Senate. Trained every lieutenant governor. Had their

back. Knew more about legislative process, parliamentary procedure than anybody I think in the history of the state. An old pioneer Nevada family. Her sister was a legislator. You never wanted to be on the wrong side of Leola. She was a pistol. She knew where all the bodies were buried. I used to beg her to write a book, begged her, begged her, begged her.

Anyway, apparently, I guess, Eileen was up at the legislature, and must have gotten a ride down here with Bryn Armstrong, Leola's husband. I'm guessing that Bryn didn't bother to tell Leola that Eileen was riding down with him. It was perfectly innocent, I'm sure. Anyway, apparently, Eileen left her sweater in the car. Well, the next day, apparently, it ends up on Eileen's doorstep in a hundred pieces, from Leola, because it was orange. She knew exactly who it belonged to. [Laughter]

Here's an interesting story, too, and I'm dying to talk to Bob Bailey, and maybe you can hook me up with him, because he has some incredible stories that I don't know about. I was looking through some of the clippings from Flora. Her nemesis was the John Birch Society. Anyway, there was a clipping in one of the papers about Assemblywoman Dungan (or whatever her title was at the time) was going to the airport to meet a known Communist sympathizer, a man known in Negro circles, and his name is Dr. Martin Luther King. "Known Communist sympathizer." Now this is before Martin Luther King was Martin Luther King. But Flora was there to meet this rabble-rouser.

Oh, that is amazing. You should write a book and just tell stories about the great ladies of Las Vegas.

Well, some of them were up north.

Tell me about some of the dramatic changes you've seen in the surrounding communities where we are right now.

For the better and the worse. Well, it's interesting. We're surviving this economic insanity. Changes for the worse, in my mind, the single worst thing, I think, for neighborhoods like these, these central neighborhoods, are the low quality and the poor staffing and the poor maintenance and the poor supervision and the poorly maintained shopping centers. A major focus of where anybody lives is wanting to go to the grocery store and feel safe. When you get out of the car and you get, Excuse me, can I talk to you? My car, my clutch, my gas, my kids. Maybe you can help me, I can deal with it. A widowed lady who lives at the Las Vegas Country Club doesn't or can't. So they're either going to drive to Hualapai and Charleston to shop, or they're going to say, I love living here and I love my home, but I can't go to the grocery store without being accosted, and I have to wait in a line for thirty minutes to buy milk, so I'm going to move out to Sun City or to wherever. You don't find the little communities. But we lose them. Many of them have moved back, by the way. I've heard that. That exodus from the early Nineties, these folks said, You know what, I don't like spending forty-five minutes on the road to get to see my grandkids. I like what I grew up with. I'm moving back.

One of the greatest communities, it's not exactly downtown but it's still in the core, is Spanish Oaks, where Nancy Deaner lives actually. Everybody has lived there at some point in time. [Former Governor and U.S. Senator] Richard Bryan lived there. [Communications magnate and philanthropist] Jim Rogers I believe still lives there with his wife. It's in the heart of the city. And you ask people who live there. They can get

anywhere they need to be. I mean I can get to Caesars Palace in six minutes if the traffic doesn't mess with me.

But there's great architecture through here, too, and big lots.

Do you think that most women in the neighborhood feel safe walking, now?

It depends on the neighborhood. I know there's an artist that lives three doors down, Leslie Rowland, who just moved in. Now, interestingly enough, her boyfriend lives across the street, and that was a conscious decision. She's got cats; he's got dogs. They live across the street from one another. I guess they meet in the middle of the road.

[Laughter] But they're both wonderful people. Ed Galinsky has been here forever. His father was the car-dealership guy that had commercials that ran 24/7. And Leslie is just a prolific artist and a wonderful soul.

I see people walking. My friends Heidi and Peter [Frigeri] live on Chapman. They own Gaia Flowers in the Arts District. They walk their dogs every day. I see them walking their dogs every day. Me, I go to the gym.

So, any closing remarks about the neighborhood that you would like to make?

I don't know what to say. I love it here. I mean I really do love it here. But when I first moved back here, I was mad, I was angry all the time, not at my neighborhood but I was angry by what I saw happening around me. The traffic was insane. We were growing like crazy. I saw decisions being made that I disagreed with. And I was worried that we were going to be lost in the dust of all the new growth. And what makes me excited and full of hope is the Heidi Swanks, is the Bob Bellises and the JoNell Thomases and the Greg Browns and all these folks. People of passion who are equally as passionate as I am are

putting their heart and their soul back into this [community], and they fight for it. They go down to City Hall and when something doesn't look right, they fight.

I said that was my last question but one more: tell me about the influence of Luv-Its Custard.

[Laughing] Oh boy, I just remember as a kid, I mean look at me. Does it look like I missed many ice cream cones? [Laughter] It's pretty good. It's a staple of the neighborhood. What can I say? I remember it for a very long time. You probably followed that whole thing from Mindy [Kaling]. I couldn't make it out there that night. And there's another one: Greg [Tiedemann], the owner, has been made every offer in town to go into casinos, to go here, to go there. He says, Why monkey with success? I'm perfectly happy where I'm at.

There's a certain interest. I think it's part of the fabric of an urban experience. You'll never have perfection. But the colorful characters, as long as they're safe, I'm OK. It's what makes the fabric of the community. So I'm full of hope. I'm full of hope.

Wonderful. I really appreciate this so much.

Oh, it's been fun. It's been fun. Don't get me carried away. I'll go on forever.

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