An Interview with Robert Forbuss

An Oral History Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

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

Recorded interviews, transcripts, bound copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through a grant from the City of Las Vegas Centennial Committee. Special Collections in Lied Library, home of the Oral History Research Center, provided a wide variety of administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

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

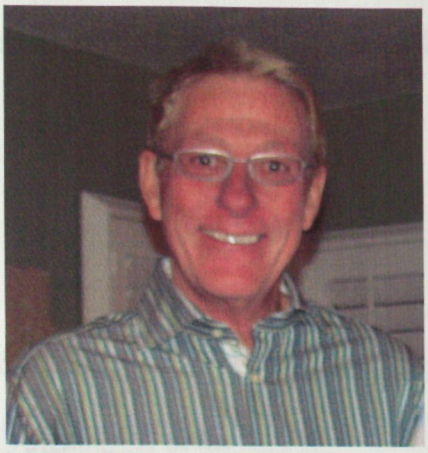
Patrick Jackson, Professor
John S. Park Oral History Project Manager

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

Interview with Robert Forbuss

February 12, 2009 in Las Vegas Nevada
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Table of Contents



Preface

In 1944, Robert Forbuss' mother bought a home in a new tract development called Huntridge, adjacent to the John S. Park Neighborhood. She was a single woman who had managed to put together the down payment from her earnings as a cocktail waitress. A couple years later John S. Park Elementary School was built nearby. Through any ups and downs, Marjorie Forbuss refused to live anywhere else for the rest of life, even when Robert encouraged her to move.

For this interview, Robert intersperse Las Vegas history while sharing childhood memories of the neighborhood. He graduated from Bishop Gorman High School, the private Catholic prep school, in the mid-1960s. A few years later, Robert returned there as a teacher from 1973 – 1981, teaching kids with familiar last names in the neighborhood he had grown up in. During that time he lived in the John S. Park Neighborhood.

He details the charm of the neighborhood, cruising the Downtown area, shopping on Fremont Street and much more. When Robert left teaching, he became the general manger of Mercy Ambulance and Medical Supply, which he ultimately owned until about 2003. During this time, he was a successful business leader and an active community member.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

1020 Franklin

Use Agreement

Name of Narrator: Robert Forbuss

Name of Interviewer: Suzanne Becker

We, the above named, give to the Oral History Research Center of UNLV, the recorded interview(s) initiated on Feb 12, 2009 as an unrestricted gift, to be used for such scholarly and educational purposes as shall be determined, and transfer to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude the right of the interviewer, as a representative of UNLV, to use the recordings and related materials for scholarly pursuits. There will be no compensation for any interviews.

Signature of Narrator — Date: 2-12-2009

Signature of Interviewer — Date: 2/12/09

Library Special Collections
4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 457010, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-7010
(702) 895-2222

Interview with Robert Forbuss

February 12, 2009 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

They detonated well over a hundred bombs above ground out at the [Nevada] Test Site [NTS] when I was a kid growing up.

And do you remember?

Oh, of course. And I also remember how those people felt; my parents, my dad was a World War II fighter, he didn't want communism, and we were kind of in Las Vegas feeling very patriotic about what we were doing, because we were testing nuclear bombs in case we had to fight those Russians. The irony of it is, in retrospect, that Nevadans never really made the feds [federal government] pay for that, nor did Utah, when all of the debris went sailing over their territory and nuked them and now there's literally leukemia ran wild. It was all patriotic, Americans. You can blow bombs up sixty miles away, it's patriotic. Today, you know, there would be no way. You want to put nuclear waste over there? OK, fund us five billion dollars a year. Cover all of our educational system. I mean, those could be arguments you'd make but it's a different world today.

Yeah, and I'm always surprised that's an argument we haven't made.

Well, it's such a sensitive venue in Nevada. Howard Hughes detested nuclear testing out there. He tried every which way [to stop it]. There's a funny story about that. He even tried to stop [President] Lyndon Johnson from doing it and threatened Lyndon Johnson, through a partner of mine who was in fact bated to do that. But, the Greenspun family, which part of your school [University of Nevada, Las Vegas, or UNLV] is now named after, Hank Greenspun has always been vehemently opposed [to] it. Brian and Myra and

everybody else in the Greenspun family are opposed to any sort of nuclear storage out there [at Yucca Mountain]. So, the political climate is not such to make that happen.

We've been putting this off, we've managed to stave it off for quite some time, but do you think that eventually that's something that's going to happen anyway?

Well, the transition might be something in terms of another way to look at it. If we really adopt a new energy policy, and some of that energy policy involves wind turbines and other things, solar-powered and things like that, I could see land that is under BLM [Bureau of Land Management] control becoming part of that distribution system, and maybe that would be able to create a tax base or something for Nevada. So, you know, I don't know how that unfolds in the next eight years with the [Obama] administration but they're clearly putting serious dollars behind it, and it may have benefits for Nevada.

Absolutely. Frustrating times, for sure.

It is. It is.

This is great. You have so much knowledge in you. I don't know where to begin but let's begin, I guess, at the beginning. You're a Las Vegas native.

Mm hmm [Yes].

When were you born?

January 31st, 1948.

And you lived in Las Vegas?

Almost directly next door to John S. Park Elementary School. I was two doors away.

Tenth Street, you said?

Actually Tenth and Franklin.

And did you live in that house growing up?

Well, that's a good story. Let me back up and give you a little history of [my] family. My mom [Marjorie Forbuss] was a farm girl, sort of like a small-town girl from Montana who decided early on in her youth that she didn't want to live in Montana any longer. And so my mom and her girlfriend traveled west and they looked around in different places and came to Vegas; so in 1941, my mom came here, probably during World War II. And she liked it, she stayed here, she became a cocktail waitress at the Golden Nugget [Hotel and Casino]. My mom married, then divorced, and decided she was going to go buy her own house. So she sat down with a guy by the name of Mr. [Tom] Oakey and cut a deal to buy a Huntridge home, which at that time was a pretty difficult thing for a woman to qualify for a loan on a house. But she did; my mom had made enough money that she had enough down payment. The house was something like five thousand dollars. She put five hundred dollars down or something like that. Her monthly payments were forty-three dollars a month. She saved every receipt. My mom passed away. I have a box literally of every receipt for that house that she bought in 1944 from Mr. Oakey. That house was for her. So my mom bought the house. I wasn't born until many years later. My dad [Lloyd Forbuss] met my mother when he got out of the war and came to Las Vegas as a bartender.

And where was he originally from?

He was from Oklahoma. [In] '47 they met.

What are your parents' names?

Lloyd Forbuss and Marjorie Forbuss. My dad was from Oklahoma and it actually turns out he was a hero in World War II, I didn't even know it, which is kind of ironic, not until he got close to dying. He came here in 1945 at the end of World War II and went to

work at the Green Shack [Restaurant] and met my mom and eventually they were married. And my mom already owned her Huntridge home, two doors away from John S. Park Elementary School.

And was she still working at the Golden Nugget?

Either she was at the Golden Nugget or at the Green Shack at that time. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Green Shack. It's sort of a famous place. When I was born, there's a photograph of me, my mother, my dad, and they're holding me in front of the Green Shack, in 1948, that little baby there. And my grandmother was working there, too. So my grandma was the cook, and my mom was the waitress, and my dad was the bartender, when I was born, at the Green Shack.

Anyway, my mom's connection to that and the fact that she was a woman buying a house in Huntridge, next to John S. Park Elementary School, [was unusual]. I think John S. Park was first built in 1947, is that correct? The school.

Yeah, I think so. I'm going to have to look at that.

Which would mean that when my mom bought the house, the school wasn't finished, or it may not have even been started. These are questions you wished you had asked your parents. I should've asked my mom if she can remember them building the school. I never asked her that question. But it seems to me [that when] my mom bought the Huntridge home in 1945 or '44, the school wasn't built yet. And it may've got built a year or so later.

It was built right in that time, though, because I've talked to a number of folks that went to elementary school there.

Right, and you remember, when it was built, it was one of many school districts in Clark County. John S. Park was part of the Las Vegas School District, but in this county, we had the Mesquite School District, we had the Boulder City School District, we had tons of school districts. It wasn't until 1948 that they finally decided to consolidate all the school districts into one [the Clark County School District, or CCSD]. And John S. Park was, I think, one of the first elementaries to become part of the consolidated school district for Clark County.

Yes, I find our school systems very interesting, too, and the history of those. Las Vegas is unique.

It's very unique. Actually, my business partner, Sig [Rogich], went to John S. Park, too. And he's older than I am.

We'll have to talk to him, too.

God knows what stories he has.

[Laughing] Those are the stories we want to hear, probably.

Anyway, so that's kind of how it started, my mom buying a house from Mr. Oakey, the school being built.

There are some interesting stories about the homes, about that neighborhood and it being constructed, because it was the first major project during the war [World War II] when housing was being built. Most of the housing was not built in tract homes. It was built in individual homes over the Downtown area. When they built the Huntridge area, apparently, I think I mentioned this the other day when Dick [Richard] Bryan and he didn't know this either, but all the Huntridge homes were built with fir, rather than with pine, which is sort of novel because fir is much more expensive today. If you were to buy

fir wood to build a house, it would be cost-prohibitive. But apparently, that was something that was available to the Oakeys and the people who built it.

By the way, I have the original title for the house.

I would love [it] if we could make copies of some of these documents. Would that be OK?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I've got tons of them, yeah.

Oh, that would be fantastic.

The original title, and it shows who the owners were. It was a company out of Beverly Hills [California] that built that neighborhood. I don't know if you knew that.

I had thought that it was a local company for some reason, but maybe they came down and set up [an office here].

Well, the title and all of the references to the Huntridge project, there was a local name, Mr. Oakey, but then when you drill down to where [it began], it was out of California.

OK. Well, I guess we've had that relationship forever with them.

So, I do have all that stuff. You can take a look at it.

That's fantastic. Yeah, I would love to. That's just so interesting. And I think it's the first time I've heard, of all the people we've talked with, of a woman purchasing the house, and I'm going to double-check when the John S. Park school was built because that's interesting, too. That really shaped the neighborhood.

I should've asked my mom but I think it seems logical that the school may have been built a couple of years after the Huntridge neighborhood had started.

And I feel like if I take a walk by there, there should somewhere on the school be something that says something [about it].

I think it says 1948.

I'm going to have to look closer next time.

So tell me what it was like, what some of your earliest recollections [were] of being a kid in the neighborhood.

Well, let me give you one recollection that was very interesting, because I was a kid who grew up with Catholic parents, and all my friends down the street were all Mormons, and then I had some friends were all Hebrew [Jewish], but they all collectively lived close together, so I had friends in the neighborhood who went to Catholic school with me, because I went to St. Anne's [St. Anne Elementary School] later on. And also my best friends were Mormons as well, so we would all go over to John S. Park and play basketball.

Who were some of the kids you were hanging out with?

One of the kids' names was John Gallo. He was one of my best friends. His great-uncles were Ernest and Julio [Gallo, California winemakers], and his father ran the Golden Gate Hotel [and Casino]. And he lived over on Franklin right at Seventh Street where the Mormon church is next to John S. Park.

There was a house there?

Right across the street. It's still there, the same house.

Where the Schofields are?

No, that would be on Seventh Street. This was on Franklin. It faces the end of the church. There's four houses across there. One of them was [the home of] another good friend, Kenyon Moss, his father was the Mormon bishop, and he was also in charge of the Boy Scouts for Las Vegas.

So that was one house. Good friends. The next house was the Gallo house. Then Pat Clark lived there—I don't know if you knew that—on that same street. Mr. Clark lived there. Then a variety of different, interesting families that go back many years in Vegas.

So what kinds of things did you guys used to do?

Well, at that time, growing up, I can remember having my bike and riding it through John S. Park. There were no barriers. They didn't have gates. So you could go zipping around through the classrooms and out in the play field, which I did as a kid, because it was so close to my house, it was like right next door, so we would all hang out and play there. Today they fence schools off, they lock then down. Back in the 1950s, they didn't fence schools off, so you'd go hang out over there, go play with the equipment, you know, go out and play on the basketball court, do stuff like that. So that was kind of a meeting point for a lot of kids; and having a bike, tooling around the neighborhood, was kind of what got you around, too.

I did a lot of that, and knew people all throughout the neighborhood. It was a very close neighborhood. People knew each other. I don't know what it's like today over there. I will tell you that that house my mom bought from Mr. Oakey—my mom, she passed away a number of years ago. Let's see, it would've been '95 my mom passed away. So that's quite a few years ago. The neighborhood was kind of running down a little bit and I had enough money, I said, Mom, I'm going to get you a place to live, a nicer place to live, I want you to move out of the neighborhood, I just don't feel good over there. My mom looked at me, as only my mother could, and she said, I'm not moving. I'm dying in this house. So, you don't argue with your mother on an issue like

that. So I said OK, and quite literally, my mother, who bought the house from Mr. Oakey, she died in the house. And not in a hospital. In the house. Had nurses staying at the house with her and, to her pledge, she died in the house.

And I was going to keep the house, and I didn't know what to do with it. I was going to rent it. Six months into it I thought, ah, this is a headache, so I decided to sell it. And I had some friends who were show people, a guy who is still in charge of the show at New York-New York [Hotel and Casino], *Zumanity*. He's the stage manager for *Zumanity*. He wanted that house. So I didn't put it on the market. I didn't list it. I just sold it to him. To this day, he lives in that house. So here you have a Huntridge that was originally purchased by a woman, [and later by my friend], two owners have lived in that house. It's never been put on the market for sale. Ever. That house.

How old was your mom when she purchased it, do you know?

Yes, I will tell you. I'm going to have to do some math here. She was born in 1917. She bought it in 1944. She was about twenty-eight years old. Lots of interesting tales that went on with her. When she was a young girl, after she bought the house, she befriended a [young cigarette girl]. Cocktail waitresses had a very close community. My mom had befriended a very good gal who was a cigarette girl. Did you hear about that? They'd literally walk around and sell cigarettes on the casino floor. Well, this girl was a very, very attractive cigarette girl, who was a few years younger than my mother.

And apparently, the story goes (my mother told me this story), that when Bugsy [Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel] came to town to build the Flamingo [Hotel and Casino], and this was after we had casinos already here, Bugsy was sort of aggressive, and when his spouse [girlfriend] Virginia [Hill] would leave town, Bugsy would pursue these cute

girls, and one of the cute girls he pursued was my mom's best friend, who was a cigarette lady, right? And I think she was the cigarette girl at the Flamingo, when it first opened, but it may have been someplace else.

So anyway, my mom told me this story; she says, everything went well until Virginia, who is Bugsy Siegel's girlfriend, came back to Vegas, and learned that her boyfriend was sleeping with this cigarette girl. And Virginia let it be known that that girl's days were numbered. So my mom received a phone call from this girl, and she said, Marge, I don't know what to do. And my mother said, well, why don't you come over and we'll hide out at my house. (This was before I was born.) So my mom let her stay at the house for almost two months, in seclusion, so that she wouldn't be shot by Virginia. [Laughing]

That's great. So what kinds of people lived in the neighborhood? I mean it sounds like a very close-knit neighborhood, it still is, and I'm just wondering, given its proximity to Downtown—

Let me just run through the dynamics of the neighborhood. As you looked around, people had some construction jobs but not so much. Casinos? For example, I mentioned the guy who owned the Golden Gate, or he was the GM [general manager] at the Golden Gate, Mr. Gallo. But you also had Pat Clark, who sold cars, down the street. Living across the street from me, you had a gentleman who was a post-World-War-II vet but very politically involved in boards and things like that. Several families.

We had several educators who lived on that street. On Franklin, you have Mrs. [Doris] Hancock. (There's Doris Hancock Elementary School.) She lived four doors down from me. She was a teacher. Mr. [Harvey] Stanford, right six doors down from me

on Franklin. He was the principal of [Las] Vegas High School. (Now there is Stanford Elementary School.) And then there was also another lady who I can't remember her name, but she lived on that street also. There were three educators that lived on Franklin.

There were people who worked in hotels. For a long time, the lady living right directly next door to us, her son was a lawyer. I can't remember exactly what she did. I was too young at that time.

Some of the houses were for rent periodically, then some people would buy, but it was mostly with families, kids, and usually long-term. They usually didn't come and go in a year or two. Usually most of those kids stayed for quite a while.

Did you guys do social activities, your family, did you do neighborhood things?

Some. Yeah, my grandmother was quite a neighborhood lady, and that's the other thing. My grandmother lived with us, so my grandmother was more social. My mom worked. My mom worked her whole life, essentially.

And did she stay in the entertainment industry?

No. No. In 1954, my mom decided to open her own business, which at that time was pretty difficult to do for a woman as well. I was about five years old. And she opened a dry cleaning business with my uncle. My uncle and my mom together, fifty-fifty, opened I think maybe it was the third dry cleaning store in Las Vegas. She gathered the money together. At that time you couldn't get bank loans, so she figured out how to launch it, and essentially it was the business that I grew up in, as a child.

Where was it located?

It was located at Charleston [Boulevard] and Eastern [Avenue], right on the corner there.

So, yeah, my mom was always working. My grandma stayed at home. My mom was divorced from my dad when I was very young, a couple of years old, so I grew up as a single child. My grandma was the more social one in the neighborhood. She got very involved in elections and stuff like that. We knew all the neighbors, of course. I don't recall any times where we'd go over and eat at their house or they'd come to our house and eat. Maybe that did happen in the neighborhood, but I don't remember that, per se. I just remember close friends with everyone. Everyone knew each other.

I guess I'm curious more to know how the neighborhood interacted or was situated with the development of the Strip as it happened. Of course, Downtown was kind of more thriving, I suppose, at that point.

You have to go back and time it out to see what was happening when but the El Rancho [Vegas Hotel and Casino was the first on the Strip]. Actually that's another place my mother did work before she worked in the dry cleaning business. As a matter of fact, I have some of the original paraphernalia from that hotel. But the El Rancho [built in 1941] was the first product on the Strip, if you would. It was located at what is today called Sahara [Avenue]—but that was originally called San Francisco Street—and Las Vegas Boulevard [previously Los Angeles Highway or Highway 91], which at that time was the Strip essentially. The El Rancho was the first property built, and subsequent to that there were several others that developed. Originally when my mom came to town, none of those existed. What she saw in terms of gaming was Downtown, and what she got as a job as a young woman was a job at the Golden Nugget. And I can't remember the name of the guy she claimed to work for, but he was the owner of the Golden Nugget. [Note: Guy McAfee built the Golden Nugget in 1946. See Eugene P. Moehring and Michael S.

Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, University of Nevada Press, 2003, p. 139.] She was very proud. I have a picture of my mom in her Golden Nugget work attire, this twenty-one-year-old girl.

Being a woman that purchased a home in the neighborhood and then living alone, do you know if she ever experienced any kinds of harassment or was the neighborhood fairly open-minded?

No, I don't think my mom ever experienced that. I'm trying to remember back here if there was anything. I never really picked up on any of that. I mean, obviously most of the families living in our neighborhood had, you know, what I considered normal kind of relationships with a father and a mother and kids, but that wasn't true of every place. There were a few houses where they were single adults or somebody living there. There was a neighbor next door to me who rented the house for a number of years and it was interesting because I remember his name was Chris Prieux, who is now an educator someplace. He's older than I am. But his mom also was a divorced woman, and so I remember thinking, divorced woman, one single son, my mom is divorced, single son. And they lived there probably six, seven years in a rented house. They didn't buy the Huntridge home; they rented it.

Interesting. It seems like quite the variety of folks that were in that area.

Yeah. And the neighbors directly behind me, their parents were in the grocery business. It was the grocery store to go to, way before Safeway was built, or anything. Dick Bryan would remember it, I'm sure. The closest supermarket, when I was very small, was located on Las Vegas Boulevard at Gass [Avenue]. Well, there was also a Safeway. But

this was a smaller market owned by some private individuals. The Safeway was really down on Charleston right below Maryland Parkway, right below the Huntridge Theatre.

So what other businesses were in the area that you remember as a kid, or growing up?

Gosh, you know, all of that Huntridge area was all residential, and there was nothing on even Maryland Parkway that was essentially commercial. It was all homes. The only place I remember any businesses per se, when I was a child, was more over towards Charleston, and along Charleston you had a business corridor with some offices and fast-food restaurants. Actually there was a couple of car dealerships over there for a long time. So if I had to identify business-related locations, it would be either Fremont Street or Las Vegas Boulevard or Charleston, but the neighborhood itself didn't have anything. Even Sahara really didn't have much on it, as a child.

So kind of similar to now. It's still a very residential area.

Pretty much, yeah. The exception to that is they allowed Maryland Parkway to take some of those Huntridge homes and turn them into doctors' offices and lawyers' offices.

But Maryland Parkway, for the most part, had homes like that up and down?

Yes. And Maryland Parkway looked very different, too.

That's what we hear.

Unfortunately, in one of the poorer decisions of the city, they decided to streamline Maryland Parkway, and when they did, they turned it into a three-lane thoroughfare. When I was a kid growing up, it had a beautiful center divider with trees and plants. It was a very beautiful street, and they took it out.

How far up did it go at that point?

It went all the way to [Bishop] Gorman [High School]. Up to St. Anne's and Gorman. It went all the way up there. From Circle Park forward.

It goes a little farther up now. [Laughing]

A little while ago you talked about the different [families in the area], that there were Catholic families and Jewish families and Mormon families. How did that go? As a kid or maybe in hindsight even, were you ever aware of any kind of [difference]?

Oh, yeah, you had to be aware if your best friends were Mormon because, come Sunday, you didn't have anybody to play with. The damn Mormons would go to church all day. And, you know, I was a Catholic kid. I'd go to church and in and out in an hour. Then I'd be home and I'd want to go play basketball or something and there was nobody to play basketball with because they were all over in their church. It's funny, I don't ever remember any Mormon kids ever trying to recruit me. You know how you hear, oh, this is the way the Mormons are, they're always trying to recruit you. They never did. I was a Catholic kid, they were Mormon kids, they went to their Mormon things on Sunday. That's just the way it was.

Were there any tensions ever, like between the families?

No, really, I didn't ever pick up on it. I mean you kind of felt that there was a bond of friendship that was stronger in some ways with the Mormon community, mainly because of the fact that they spent so much time together on Sundays and at events, and there was that certain kind of cliquishness that went on. My mom would not go down to the Mormon stake down there at the Seventh Ward and hang out on Sunday. My mom would go to the Catholic church.

It [the John S. Park Neighborhood] has been and I think it still has a fairly significant Mormon population. Do you know how or why it is that in that particular neighborhood, in the Huntridge and the John S. Park area, that there's such a high concentration of Mormon families?

It has to be with the Seventh Ward, I'm sure, when they built that church. It kind of was an anchor. The first Mormon church that was built was over by what used to be Las Vegas High School. And I don't even think it's a church anymore. I think it's just a records center where they keep records. And I think that this church that was built on Franklin there at Seventh was either the second or third Mormon church in Las Vegas. So it was there early on and, you know, lots of the neighborhood were LDS around there. Schofields were LDS. A lot of my friends were LDS.

Were there a lot of Jewish families, too?

They were more on the other side of Maryland Parkway. It tended to be a little bit, I would almost call it segregated. But I only kind of connected with the Jewish kids when I was a little bit older. And the Jewish kids, remember, the only temple in Las Vegas was Temple Beth Sholom, which was located essentially on Oakey [Boulevard] and Sixteenth [Street]. So that neighborhood down there at Oakey and Sixteenth, those homes around there tended to be more Jewish families, while the homes around the Seventh Ward tended to be more LDS, and then around Gorman, there were a lot of the old Catholic families. So you found a little heavier concentration, I think, of people associated with that religion in the neighborhoods.

So there were pockets.

Pockets, yes. Around Gorman you had the Mowbray family, you had the Foley family, you had all these families that were very, very Catholic families. Pinjuv. That's another famous old family.

That's interesting. I didn't realize there were so many different populations in that area. What about the racial composition of the neighborhood?

It was pretty white. Honestly, I do not ever remember any black families living in that neighborhood when I was a child. At that time, you know, Nevada and Las Vegas were very segregated. They even used to refer to it as the [Mississippi of the West]. It was very, very separated. The only black kids you would ever see were usually over on the west side of town [Westside neighborhood] and they would be going to a school like [Las] Vegas [High School] but it would be still very segregated. If you went to a movie, even in the movie [theatre] it was segregated. Black kids would have to sit in one section and white were allowed in another.

And there were basically three sorts of theatres.

The El Portal, the Fremont, and the Guild. In all three of them, if you were to go there when I was twelve [ca. 1960], you would never have seen a black person sitting with a white person. They'd be sitting in a separate section. And it was very clearly enforced. I mean as a kid I didn't even think of it as what that meant, but as I've grown up I've looked back and thought, oh my God, how horrific.

As a kid how would you even know to think about that?

No. Ten years old and you're going to see a movie, you don't think of that. And the Huntridge Theatre also had a segregated area as well. And I don't know if they enforced

that for Hispanic kids. Maybe only blacks, but I cannot remember what they did. They might have. I don't know.

Was there an Hispanic population here at that time?

Very small. When my mom opened her dry cleaners, she had one Hispanic family that became very close to her. His name was Phil Basaldua. And Phil worked for my mom for ten years. But a small number of Hispanic families back in that period of time.

So anyway, that's kind of an interesting part of Las Vegas. If you talk to people who remember that degree of segregation, it was pretty apparent that there was two sides of the tracks; and one side was over there and the other side was over here. I don't remember the segregation persisting much beyond the movie theatres. I mean I never saw, that I can remember, a drinking fountain that said Whites Only or anything. But I know in the movie theatres they were segregated.

So maybe in social-type public settings, because I know the Strip has a long history of segregation.

Yes. And actually, you know, I know that when many of the Strip properties first were starting, even the Flamingo, they had very famous black entertainers here, who were brought in and essentially performed and would leave through the back entrance to the stage and then would go and re-perform or stay on the Westside at a hotel over there.

Yeah, definitely, Las Vegas has a history [of segregation].

So did you go to Las Vegas High?

I didn't. I went to [Bishop] Gorman High School. I ended up going to St. Anne's and when I completed my eight years at St. Anne's, Gorman was right next door so I just migrated over to Gorman. Went to Gorman for four years. I graduated, barely. Vietnam

was in full tilt at that point [ca. 1966]. Decided that, gee, maybe I should really go get an education. So, migrated to Southern California, went to school, and struggled because I wasn't a very good student in high school; so I had to learn it all in my first year, which I did, and ended up after four years graduating.

Where'd you go to college?

Cal [California] State University, Long Beach. I graduated from Long Beach and came back to Las Vegas, entered graduate school at UNLV, and decided that I needed something to do. My degree was in public administration. I went to work for the county manager for a while. I thought, oh my God, I made a mistake. This is not something I want to do. Which most kids do. Tried a couple of other things that were not very interesting, and then found an opportunity to go to work as a teacher. The principal of Gorman High School, Father Harris, asked me if I would come over and go to work teaching. So I went over to Gorman and started my career as a teacher in 1974, I think.

What did you teach?

I taught U.S. History, government, and debate. I was a young teacher at that time, and it was kind of like the return of Kotter [from television show, *Welcome Back, Kotter*], coming back to the same high school you had gone to, and running into kids whose last names were your friends when you were there. The Foleys, for example, or the Tibertis. I went to school with the Tibertis, but now I'm teaching the Tibertis. I went to school with the Foleys, now I'm teaching the younger Foleys. I loved teaching. It was a great, great thing.

When you came back, where were you living?

When I first came back from college, I stayed at my mom's house. She had like a little apartment on the side. I stayed there for probably a year and a half. And then eventually, I had the wherewithal to get enough money to buy a house, which was over on Santa Inez [Drive] and Saint Louis [Avenue]. That was my first house I bought.

So you were still sort of in the area.

Oh yeah. Well, that's very close. So I lived in the neighborhood for a long time.

What was Las Vegas like then when you [returned] in the seventies?

The Stratosphere had not been built. It was just kind of a little twenty-story building. Bob Stupak was struggling with it. He'd already let it burn down once. But a very different place than today, obviously. Still very much a neighborhood. I drove by that old house that I bought, and it was kind of interesting. The neighborhood has completely deteriorated over there. And it was such a cool little house. I remember it as my first house. It even had a swimming pool. I really thought I was hot shit.

[Laughing] And so how long did you live there?

I bought that house, I'm guessing, let's see, in 1977, and I lived there probably about nine years.

OK. And if you don't mind me asking, in 1977, how much was a house like that?

Oh, I paid forty-seven thousand [dollars] for it, I think.

And so how long were you teaching? Because I know you took sort of a different trajectory.

I started teaching high school at Gorman in 1973, about two years after I graduated from college. And so I taught from '73 right up through 1981. But I wasn't teaching full time the last couple of years. I was teaching part time because in the meantime I had found this

other career path that I went on, and kind of made a migration over there, and finally quit teaching after seven years.

Tell me about how you started that trajectory because that's really [interesting].

It's a bizarre story. Let me talk a little bit more about the teaching aspect of it. One of the funny things today at my age is to see some of the Nevada leaders who were former students of mine. And I'm very proud of them. I mean, some of them have done amazingly, amazingly well, and so you look back and I can kind of relate to them and they're fully adults now, way, way beyond [childhood], they're in their forties or something. God, they may be in their fifties. The Manseys are in their fifties. But, to look back and see, you know, the district attorney, David Roger, was one of my students. Bill Young, who used to be our sheriff, was one of my students. And actually the Surgeon General of the United States used to be one of my students. So, I look back at these kids and I'm very proud of what they've done and their families, they've grown great, beautiful families and stuff, so that, for me, is a very prideful part of my life.

To answer your question about how I made the transition, teachers in high school don't have much to do in the summer because you're on a nine-month cycle. And so one summer I didn't have anything to do, and a friend of mine was working at this little tiny mom-and-pop ambulance company called Mercy Ambulance [and Medical Supply]. He came over to the house one day, no rules broken, but he says, do you want to go on a call with me? So I went, in the front seat of the ambulance, I'm just a pedestrian, and we went on a call, up to Mount Charleston. I remember his first call was up on Mount Charleston and I thought, God, this is kind of fun. This is interesting. It was a traumatic injury. We transported the patient back. And I was interested in it. I thought, well, maybe this

summer it'd be kind of fun to go to do that. So I've got to get my EMT [emergency medical technician] certificate. I've got to get certified somehow.

So I went and got my EMT certificate, and once school was out at Gorman, I started as a part time employee over at Mercy Ambulance, driving ambulances and being an attendant. That was in 1976, I guess. And that migrated into a little bit more involvement and more involvement. I was teaching school full time, so I wouldn't give that up. I'd work part time on the weekends, I'd work on the weekends, I'd take my students' tests with me to work at the ambulance company and grade their tests while I was riding on ambulance calls.

Eventually, the company sold hands. It was owned by Howard Hughes. I don't know if you know that. Howard Hughes bought Mercy Ambulance [and] Medical Supply indirectly. He didn't buy it himself. It doesn't show as an asset that he purchased. He purchased it through his chief of security, who purchased it because it was Mercy Ambulance and Medical Supply, and it was a way for Howard Hughes to clandestinely bring medical supplies into his suite at the Desert Inn [Hotel and Casino] without anybody knowing it. We had a whole medical supply with drugs and everything else, and they bought it so Howard Hughes would never be pinned with using drugs and other things. [Note: Howard Hughes lived at the Desert Inn Hotel in Las Vegas from 1966-1970. He left Las Vegas in November 1970 and never returned.]

So, when Howard Hughes left Las Vegas [in 1970], and somebody else ended up buying it, it didn't work, [so] my boss[es], Bruno Cohen and Tom Bilk, approached me and said, do you want to run it? You'd have to quit teaching. Do you want to run it? I said, oh, I don't know. So anyway, I got involved as the general manager at a young age.

And eventually they went their separate ways. They all went different ways. I ended up buying them out and owning the company after many, many years. [The name was changed to Mercy Medical Services.]

And so that was in the early eighties.

That was in the early eighties. Mercy Ambulance has a history of being connected to Howard Hughes. Not many people know that. The ambulance part of the business made no money, but the medical supply business did. Howard Hughes really didn't care because he just wanted a pipeline [to obtain drugs].

And so how long did you continue to [work there]?

Well, I started there, I guess, in 1975 in the ambulance business and I'm still there, actually. I was there the other day. I'm working as a consultant for them now. But I sold the business about six years ago, and got out of it.

The other thing I definitely want to hear about is your path into sort of the civic and political involvement.

That's interesting. I read back and think, what was I thinking? I was teaching at Gorman High School, and something inspired me, I can't quite remember what it was, that public policy, and education public policy really needed somebody who knew something about education. That's how I got into it because I thought, I'm a teacher, I've been a teacher for a couple of years, so I know about education. I was only twenty-five or twenty-six, right? But I was ready to go.

And so I decided to go down and file to run for [the Clark County] school board. So I ran against a guy who'd been on the school board since its inception, thirty-some years. His name was Claire Woodbury, who was [County Commissioner] Bruce

Woodbury's uncle. And I filed and I went out and started campaigning. I'm a young guy in my twenties. I walked every precinct. I shook every hand. I even have the old campaign material, which is a hoot. I should show it to you. It's really funny. I had pictures of me in the classroom at Gorman High School and it said, "Forbuss cares about education." Well anyway, I was twenty-five or twenty-six [ca. 1973], and when it came to the final ballot, I lost to Claire Woodbury by about two hundred votes. That was very impressive.

And like I say, I was twenty-five, and I thought, oh, what do I do now? So I started going to school board meetings. I thought, I'll just learn what they're doing. I literally attended school board meetings for almost the next four years, and decided to file a second time, four years later [ca. 1977]. The second time out when I ran, Claire Woodbury decided to resign. He was getting senile and he decided to step down. So I drew an opponent who was a Mormon bishop, by the name of Ed Smith. Very prominent business guy who lived over on Sixth Street. And I'm just this poor teacher, you know. So I filed and ran, and I beat him. I clobbered him. And so at twenty-nine I was on the school board, and one of the youngest school board members they ever had, at that point. But I had actually run at twenty-five.

So, got on the school board and served a number of years on the school board. And a lot of changes, a lot of interesting things that were going on. [Former Governor] Kenny Guinn was actually the superintendent of schools at the time. Kenny came here as an educator. He was a teacher, worked in the school district, and then they promoted him to superintendent.

It's so interesting. There's just such a history of Las Vegas and education. I mean it plays such a huge role and yet, here we are, in this [budget crisis] situation. But that's just an aside.

Now the Woodburys also lived in John S. Park, yes?

Yes, they did. I'm almost certain that probably Bruce went to John S. Park [Elementary School]. I know he went to [Las] Vegas High School. Bruce is older than I am, of course, not many years but a few. Bruce never got involved in politics until after I got out of politics. Bruce was like the guy who would kind of support politicians and help them run. He ran his uncle's campaign against me. And when I beat his uncle, he wrote me this very nice letter which I framed—I still have it—and it says, you have done a great job of campaigning, you know, please—total support. It was really magnanimous. That was before Bruce even ran for the county commission. So, when he resigned the other day from the county commission, after he had served and had been termed out, I went over to the ceremony and I said, do you remember that? Well, he sure did. A long time ago.

It's funny, after his uncle stepped down, Bruce called me one day and he said, look, my uncle's getting pretty old and senile. He lives right across from Vegas High School. Would you mind just going over and talking with him, because he knows you've got the school board seat that he served on for thirty years, and it would be a great honor for him to have you go over and ask him for things, and get information. So I would go over to Claire Woodbury's house, which is still there, and sit there in the living room, and I remember being this young guy, sitting there looking at an eighty-year-old guy and asking him how to do it. It was pretty funny. It was very funny. He was at that point in his life where he wasn't practicing medicine and he was pretty much retired and his

school board job had meant everything but he couldn't really do it anymore. He used to fall asleep at the school board meetings. Poor guy. But he is the founder of the first hospital in Las Vegas, which was called Las Vegas Hospital. Claire Woodbury found that hospital, along with some other doctors.

So, you've had a hand in lots of other things, too, around Las Vegas.

I don't know what it is. One thing led to another. My parents were never really that involved in anything that political, or that involved in the community. Other than my mom's involvement in the church, she'd never been like that. My dad had not. My uncle Keith was on the Gaming Control Board, so I kind of saw it a little bit different from there. But my intensity of getting involved in the community was kind of driven by my own passion for making it a little better place to live, sort of the idealistic reasons that young people get involved and want to play a role in the community. And, to that extent I mean I've been involved in many, many parts of committees and programs and structures and elected boards, appointed boards, and I've had a little bit of an input in that process, over the years.

Well, I guess I want to backtrack for just a minute in thinking back to your growing up in the area and even when you came back and lived sort of still in the area after college. Do you recall or is there anything that stands out in your mind as kind of political or any types of issues that were important to the neighborhood in shaping it and developing it, whether that's just politically zoning, anything like that?

It depends on which time you're talking about. I mean there were some things. I remember as a smaller kid, my grandma, who I mentioned before, I used to call her Nanny, she went on a tangent because she said, we don't have any sidewalks and the kids

are going to get run over walking home from John S. Park [Elementary School]. So she went around with a petition drive and got zillions of signatures so that they could put sidewalks down Franklin. My grandma did that.

As far as any big political issues as a child, I don't remember much. I remember Alan Bible landing in a helicopter at Circle Park, as a kid, and biking over and watching a U.S. Senator—he was campaigning of course—land in a helicopter. For me that was pretty cool.

There's always been cycles in the economy of Las Vegas, maybe not nearly as deep as we're in right now, but over the years I can remember tougher times for the community. I remember one time when I was young where, in the sixties [1960s], I believe they had overbuilt the holy heck out of Las Vegas in housing, and there were whole areas of neighborhoods that were just vacant houses. Nobody could buy them. You can't compare that to where we are today because the size of this business model today is so enormous, versus what we had then, but it was a downturn.

We have gone through downturns in Las Vegas history. I think we were probably in a downturn in Las Vegas up until maybe the building of Caesars Palace [Hotel and Casino] which was a new and innovative kind of thing. Caesars was like the first new property on the Strip that had been built in years. The Flamingo had been there, the Desert Inn, the Sands [Hotel and Casino], the Sahara [Hotel and Casino], and all of a sudden, in 1968, they built Caesars. So that was sort of like a wave of new kind of growth. And then it kind of subsided again for many, many, years. Howard Hughes came to town [in 1966]. He bought hotels all over the place but he never built one of them; he just ran them.

And do you think that was a turning point for Las Vegas, in the [casino] industry?

Yes, Howard Hughes was a turning point because he legitimized the industry more than anything else. Howard Hughes buying into the gaming market here, people said, oh, he's a legitimate businessman. He's buying assets in a legitimate business. Because part of that, these properties all, you know, had their interesting characters and shadier folks behind the scenes who ran the place. Caesars was basically all [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters [IBT] money. Jimmy Hoffa had put up the money for that. Matter of fact, I worked there as a kid on the opening day and saw him.

What did you do there?

My uncle had gotten me a job. He was on the Gaming Control Board. My first summer when it was opening, I was responsible for getting furniture in hotel rooms, in time for the grand opening, which we didn't accomplish very well. But the idea was I was supposed to have a chart or a checklist and as the movers were taking the furniture off the trucks in the parking lot, it was my job to get all the furniture in the hotel that summer, and on time. There was only seven hundred rooms. We didn't do it.

The next summer I went to work in the advertising department, got a promotion, and worked alongside of a very nice lady who was young at the time, who was the executive assistant to the hotel, to the president, Nathan Jacobson. I worked for the advertising department, a guy by the name of Sid Gather, and his office was right next door to the president of the hotel, who was Nathan Jacobson, and right outside of our doors was a desk, and that was Carolyn Goodman's desk. Oscar's [Mayor Oscar Goodman's] wife was a secretary for the president of Caesars Palace. That's one reason Oscar got all of his clients, was because it was all kind of Mob-owned and Carolyn would

make referrals to her husband, and Oscar was pretty good at defending them. I guess Oscar's first case he ever got from a mobster was a bankruptcy case, and Oscar to this day will tell you he still doesn't know anything about bankruptcy, but in some miraculous way he won the case, and the word got out among the Mob guys that he could really carry his own, and so one led to another to another.

That was in 1967 that I met Carolyn Goodman. She had been there when the hotel was being built, with Mr. [Nathan] Jacobson, Jerry Zarowitz, and Jay Sarno. Those are the three guys who basically launched Caesars. She was out in a trailer all summer as they were building that hotel, and when it opened she was there the day it opened.

She had come here with her husband. I don't know if you know the story about why [they came here]. Oscar, a young lawyer, gets out of school in Pennsylvania, looking for a job. Gets a job with the attorney general of the State of Pennsylvania [actually the Assistant District Attorney for the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], who is a senator now, in the United States Senate. He's one of the three votes that turned Republican [actually Democrat] two days ago. Senator [Arlen] Specter. Senator Specter is eighty-some years old. [Note: Senator Specter was born in 1930. He is seventy-nine years old.] The first job that Oscar Goodman ever got out of college, out of law school, was Arlen Specter hired him as a prosecutor. And Arlen Specter was his boss and, to this day, Oscar looks at Arlen as like being his father. It's his guy he looks up to. So Arlen Specter calls Oscar and says, I've got a money-laundering case in Las Vegas, Nevada, and I want you to go out there, drive out, spend a month, and figure out what the story is. It's money-laundering.

So Oscar and Carolyn pack up their goods and drive to Las Vegas, representing the attorney general's office of Pennsylvania, and they liked it out here so much, they decided to stay. Carolyn got a job at the Riviera Hotel [and Casino], and Oscar was this young lawyer looking for clients. And that's how they got here. Most people think that, you know, he came here with the Mob. He didn't come here with the Mob. He came here, actually just the opposite, as a prosecutor. [Note: Oscar Goodman accepted a job with the Clark County District Attorney's office in 1964. That is the reason he and Carolyn Goodman came to Las Vegas. See John L. Smith, *Of Rats and Men: Oscar Goodman's Life From Mob Mouthpiece to Mayor of Las Vegas*, Huntington Press, 2003, p. 19.]

Right, and sounds like he built himself a great reputation though with them. That's the way to do it.

He did. He did. He had good clients and he represented them well. He's the only attorney that I know of in Nevada ever that actually represented one of his clients before the entire [United States] Senate [actually a 12-member panel of senators. See Smith, *Of Rats and Men*, p. 209] in an impeachment trial. The federal court judge who represented this area was a very, very esteemed attorney who was given a job as a federal judge, and took the job as a federal judge. He was a brilliant attorney. Brilliant. But he would hang out with the Binions and the government didn't like his association with these shady people, so they collected enough information on him to indict him. And an indictment of a federal court judge is a big deal, because federal court judges are appointed for life. And, when it came down to the indictment, Oscar represented him. And they fought it all the way through the indictment through the courts. The only way you could remove somebody from the federal bench is to go to a full impeachment. So he was fully impeached in the

House of Representatives, and then it went to the Senate as a trial, and Oscar represented him there. His name was Harry [E.] Claiborne. One of the most brilliant attorneys but kind of connected to the old guys and stuff like that. But Oscar's the only attorney that I've ever heard of that actually represented a client before an impeachment case in a federal district court matter.

Oscar's always had a history, but these are some things we don't know.

I just told you how he got here.

Yeah. That's great! Thank you.

So you worked at Caesars. Did you ever have any other summer jobs?

My first summer job was as a busboy at the Thunderbird Hotel [and Casino]. Then in my second year I was a waiter someplace. Then my senior year, I believe, it might've been my junior year, it was when Caesars opened and I did that furniture thing, and then the next three years of my college, I worked at Caesars every summer. I'd come back and go to work at Caesars for three months.

I helped make a movie one time. It was a movie with Brenda Vaccaro and it was about the casino business. I can't remember [the title] right now. But it was filmed all at Caesars Palace. David Janssen and Brenda Vaccaro. At the time it was a superstar cast. I think it was called *Where It's At* [It was. The film was made in 1969]. It was a goofy name. So that was a hoot. I did that and I got assigned to work with them all summer and to make a movie. It was fun.

One summer I drove around all the stars that came to Caesars Palace, like Milton Berle and Jack Benny and all these famous old people.

Did you get to meet them?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Who was your favorite? Or one of the favorites.

Oh gosh, my favorite? Milton Berle was kind of weird. He was a pretty bizarre character. I remember I was driving him down Las Vegas Boulevard, driving the Caesars Palace limo, or not limo but it was their nice car, and he's in the front seat and we're talking and a dog runs in front of me. And I almost run over this dog. I literally [makes squealing sound] like this. Milton Berle almost went through the front windshield. And I thought, aw, I'm going to be fired, they're going to kill me, what did I do? And they were all fine. Made some stupid joke after I did that.

But [I met] everybody from people like that, I mean back in those days, and being part of Caesars because Caesars was the spotlight of the Strip. There was the Sands and Caesars. Those two places were where all the superstars went. So you had this parade of people that would come, especially in the advertising department or the executive office [of Caesars Palace], so if I didn't get to meet them, I'd at least get to see them, and as a kid you always kind of knew who these people were.

And did you get to go to a lot of shows?

Oh yeah, I even had a comp [account] from the hotel for a while. [Laughing] I could comp up to a certain amount; so yes, I could go to shows and I could go into the coffee shop for a free lunch, just sign my name.

Was it pretty common that kids in the [John S. Park] neighborhood got jobs or summer jobs and stuff over at the Strip?

You know, not on that level. Many of my friends were working at Caesars, but they were working as pool boys, and I was not working as a pool boy anymore; I was working in

the advertising department. And they [my friends] were always kind of envious of me. But the reason I got the job in the advertising department was in large part because my uncle was chairman of the Gaming Control Board, and when he called over to the guys as Caesars and said, I want my nephew to go to work, I had a job. I had a better job than working at the pool. Although I probably would've liked working at the swimming pool, too.

It was a very interesting time because I got to see Caesars unfold with its parade of characters, to meet and be part of and see Jay Sarno's brilliance and also his amazing arrogance and his good side and bad side. I got to see and meet a lot of the Mob guys who ran the casino, like Jerry Zarowitz and some of those people, Nate Jacobson. Very Jewish, by the way. Sarno was Jewish, Zarowitz was Jewish, Nate Jacobson was Jewish, all the key players. My boss Sid Gather was Jewish. So kind of jokingly at one point, people started calling me Forbush. And I didn't change it. I thought, well, Forbush sounds good. They all think I'm Jewish. I'm Robert Forbush.

Did you ever think about going like that route as a career or staying in that industry?

No, no, I really didn't. I was so focused on college, especially my second and third year into it, and I just would go and focus on that. I'd go back to school and that would be my [emphasis]. Because back in those days, there was some other motivation. Vietnam [War] was fully underway. A lot of my friends had been drafted and gone and been killed in Vietnam. I wasn't too much of a big supporter of Vietnam. And the only way you could avoid the draft was by staying in college fulltime, which was fine, but they gave you four years to finish college. You couldn't take four-and-a-half years; you'd be drafted. So you

didn't have a lot of time to doodle. And really quite frankly, even though I wasn't very academic or very much into education in high school, once I really engaged in college and got to the point where I realized I wasn't stupid, realized I liked to read and I liked to study, it was like I was almost a kid in a candy store. I loved college. It was a very, very significant changer in my life.

I thought maybe when I got out of college, I would come back with a degree, and my degree was in political science and public administration, that I'd come back and work in county government, you know, do something in planning or that sort of thing, and I actually did. I went to work for the county manager, his name was David Henry, for about six months, when I first got out of college, but I really didn't like it that much. Richard Bunker was there. He was one of our managers. Today Richard Bunker is retired but he was county manager; he's done everything. There was Ashley Hall, who was a very good friend of mine. We had desks next to each other. Ashley stayed. He became city manager. Richard Bunker became everything in the world. I left, and I went to work teaching.

I did a little stint, too, one summer along the way. I worked at the Sahara Hotel as a floorman. A floorman is somebody who works on the casino floor and handles the slot machines, in that case. I remember doing this one summer, and even though I was born in Vegas, my family worked in the gaming business, I thought, if I have to do this for a career, I'm done. It ain't going to happen. So I lasted about three months at the Sahara Hotel. And to this day, I don't know how to gamble. If people ask me for my advice on how to play craps, I say, just throw the dice. I don't know how.

Yeah, I mean it's interesting, especially since the John S. Park Neighborhood is so close to the Strip. I mean now with the Stratosphere, of course, it's literally in the shadow of it. The Strip has changed quite a bit. This wasn't obviously the skyline of the Strip for a long time.

Yes, it has, as I look out at the towers of Planet Hollywood [Hotel and Casino]. I mean really, the other major steppingstone towards changing the Strip to what it is today is clearly the result of Steve Wynn, and what he did. Las Vegas was in the doldrums when he decided to build the Mirage [Hotel and Casino], and everybody really thought he had lost his mind. How can you spend eight hundred million dollars to build something on the Strip when that model won't work? And he leveraged that to get in that property, significantly. He borrowed it at a very high interest rate. And people said it would never work. When he launched and created that property, it became such a hit. At one time, when he launched that property, something like 50 percent of all the tourists coming to Vegas had to go into that property. I mean that's how much of a magnet it was. That was the next catalyst that really expanded Las Vegas to the next phase because with that came Treasure Island [Hotel and Casino], then came the Bellagio [Hotel and Casino], then came Kirk Kerkorian building the MGM for the second time. Remember, Kirk owned another MGM [MGM Grand]. Kirk is a businessman. He is a savvy businessman. I would never challenge him. But he's not Steve Wynn. Steve Wynn has a sense about this market that no one has ever had that I can recall. Ever. He really has done an amazing part of what Las Vegas is.

Now the problem is today, all of this is so heavily leveraged, it's so based on a model of volume and revenue and rooms that, given the state of the economy, I don't

know how much of it can really survive. The next year is going to be really tough for Las Vegas. Really tough.

That's what they say. It's interesting. I mean, just to think that in not a very long time the trajectory of sort of the genesis to what we are now is really not a long time.

No, it isn't. It has been fifteen years in the making, essentially, of what you see today. You go back much beyond that, it was a very different place. One of my friends if Rossi Ralenkotter, who went to Gorman High School and runs the LVCVA [Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority]. And I can remember Rossi saying, it will never get more than thirty-five thousand hotel rooms here. Never more than thirty-five thousand. Well, you're now running at a hundred and thirty thousand hotel rooms.

Yeah, we've got like one of the highest hotel room counts in the nation, I think.

In the world. And more significantly is the average tourist used to come and spend two-and-a-half, three days here. So if you look at what's called room nights occupied, which is one of the criteria for measuring tourism, Las Vegas by far exceeds any other city in the United States—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles—on room nights occupied. Now, once you create that giant monster, and the model is all these hotel rooms, filling them up every night, three nights in a row, and it starts to fall, then you're really out there, and a lot of these properties are so leveraged with debt, it's going to be hard to keep them open.

Well, what about the Downtown area?

Let me tell you one of my funny stories about the Downtown area. I told you my grandmother lived with us, right? Well, my grandmother, God bless her, she was the sweetest [lady], I loved her dearly. She died when I was a senior in college [in] 1970. But she raised me essentially with my mom. And the only problem with my grandma, she had

a gambling habit. She loved to play bingo and play slot machines. So, the Huntridge home we lived in, which was at Tenth and Franklin, was not too far away from Fremont Street. And my grandma would actually go to bed, show my mom like she was sound asleep, my mom would fall asleep, and my grandma would get up at one o'clock in the morning, put on her clothes—I could see her doing this—and go down to Fremont Street and pull slot machine handles all night long and play bingo, because bingo went on at night. And then she'd come home at six o'clock in the morning, act like she'd been asleep all day because my mom would get mad at her. So my grandma was sort of a gambling addict who just loved to play slot machines and play bingo. Of course I have some of her old photographs where, back in the days of slot machines, and these were really hand-pulled slot machines, if you won a big slot machine [jackpot] they'd come and take a picture. So my grandma has all these photographs of her in the Las Vegas Club or one of the clubs downtown, pulling slot machine handles at three in the morning. And it never rubbed off on me because I never have ever wanted to gamble, nor did my mother. My mom would play bingo once in a while, but that was it.

What was the Downtown area like?

It was pretty interesting. Fremont Street was a street where you could drive up and down it, and as a matter of fact I did a lot as a kid because that's what you did; you cruised Fremont Street up and down. And it had its assortment of [hotels and casinos], [like] the Golden Nugget [built in 1946], which is one of the more glamorous places that's always been down there, even though it's very different today than it was then. You had the Fremont [Hotel and Casino] when it was built. I think the Fremont was built in the 1950s [1956] sometime. That was considered revolutionary because it was a twelve-story

building. That was a big building. The Horseshoe [Club, built in 1951] had been there for a long time. If you pulled the signs off of the front of the Horseshoe, the infrastructure of that building quite literally dates back into the 1920s or '30s. [Note: The Horseshoe Club was built on the site of the Apache Hotel, built ca. 1931.] It's very old. Very old. And it never was remodeled. The Golden Gate. Old stuff. [Note: Information on the Golden Nugget, the Fremont, the Horseshoe Club, and the Apache Hotel was taken from Moehring and Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, p. 139.]

But it was all Fremont Street, and that's what I remember. That's where I used to go shopping as a kid. The first mall was the Boulevard Mall over here. That came later. When you went shopping back at that time, you'd go down to Fremont Street, and there were clothing stores and there were all sorts of stores where you could shop. There was a store called Allen and Hansen [Men's Shop], which I thought, boy, when I was seventeen, I could go to Allen and Hansen. I could buy a nice shirt. I was really cool. That was right next to the El Portal Theatre on Fremont Street.

So Fremont Street was this collection of businesses that started at the top on Main Street, with casinos, and then it would kind of taper into the theatres, and then it would go into different varieties of business, and then as you got down towards Fifteenth Street, it all turned into car dealerships. So all that stretch of it. And then there was a motel down there that was called the Blue Angel. That was the turning point that you would turn around. And my mother's dry cleaners was only a few blocks from there.

So it was really like a thriving business district and sort of the epicenter of the city?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's where you went shopping. You didn't go on the Strip go to shopping. You went down to Fremont Street and all the shops were down there. There

was actually a J.C. Penney's [department store] there. There was a Sears [department store] on Fremont Street. As a matter of fact, if you go to Sixth and Fremont, there is now a doctor's office there. It's called Fremont Medical Clinic. It's right next to the El Cortez [Hotel and Casino]. That was J.C. Penney's. And the building directly across the street of it was Sears. So you had J.C. Penney's, Sears, right on Fremont Street. And that's where you went shopping.

So when did this transition to where we are now with the Downtown area and Fremont Street start to [occur]?

I think that evolved over time. The malls started opening. I remember when the Boulevard Mall first opened, which was the first mall here, it kind of shifted that center of attention away from the Downtown area. And over a period of time as the city kept getting larger and larger and another mall would begin, or people started moving out to peripheral areas, you'd see shops. And that was a period of time, too, where the strip malls became quite popular, and you'd see a strip mall that would develop with maybe a restaurant and some clothing stores, something like that.

Was this sort of coinciding with the development and the growth of Las Vegas?

Yes. As the population grew. I mean if you go back, I think, and track the population growth of Vegas, from the 1940s, the fifties, the sixties, and see these curves, you'll see probably some correlation to when these things were all licensed and came on board.

So how has the Huntridge area and the John S. Park neighborhood changed or has it?

Well, ethnically it's changed a lot. I mean today there's a large Hispanic population that lives there that didn't live there before. There's also older people who live there, and

there's families that live there. It's not the same as it was in maybe the 1950s but it is still a very nice neighborhood, and it's maintained some degree of its integrity from its past. That's my impression at least. And I know some of the people that live there. For example, the guy that we went over to his house for the [John S. Park Roundtable], Bob [Bellis].

He's my neighbor.

I think the integrity of the neighborhood has maintained itself. There are still some old families there, like [Jack] Schofield still lives there. He's got to be a hundred and ten, right?

Like eighty-eight, I think.

Jack was a [state] senator and all sorts of things. He was actually in public education. He was a teacher. [Note: Jack Schofield served in both the Nevada State Assembly and the Nevada State Senate, 1970-1978. He also worked as a Clark County schoolteacher, coach, and school administrator. See Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood: Interview with Jack Schofield, January 13, 2009.]

Yeah, he's an interesting guy. I talked to him a couple of weeks ago. We had a good talk.

Yeah, that's one of the interesting things [that] you say there were no older folks [in the neighborhood when you were a child]. I mean, the older folks that are in the neighborhood now are the people that originally bought houses in that area and are still living there.

That's very unusual for Las Vegas to even have.

It seems like it. Were there other neighborhoods around like when you were a kid that were the equivalent, or was this pretty much the central area?

Well, as time went on, of course, some of those neighborhoods evolved in different parts of the town. But clearly the Huntridge was one of the first. The first small housing tract ever built before Huntridge was called Biltmore. Even before Huntridge was built, there were a group of maybe fifty homes built over off of Bonanza [Road] and Third [Street] or over in that neighborhood. That was the first housing tract ever built in Vegas. It was called Biltmore. Then, subsequent to that, right on the heels of that was Huntridge, which was a big project at the time. Subsequent to that developed other neighborhoods north and south of there, east of there. Houses were starting to be built out, scooping all the way down to Eastern. Those neighborhoods came later. Then you started developing neighborhoods further on the other side of Oakey and out that way. When I was a kid, I'd get on my bike and I would go over to Sahara, which was San Francisco, and everything on the other side of Sahara was wide-open dirt. There was nothing over there. That's where I would take my bike and go [riding]. We'd go out looking for lizards and chase things and do [stuff] out there. There was nothing out there. It was miles and miles of square dirt. Then the first thing that was built out there that I recall was a racetrack, a horserace track, right behind the [Las Vegas] Hilton [Hotel and Casino], which didn't survive at the time, but then over a period of time then it became a golf course. So today what is the golf course, the old Las Vegas golf course, [is where the racetrack was], which was all dirt when I was a kid.

That must have provided some fun times.

I think that that's interesting. I know that the neighborhood has gone through several ups and downs and some of the changes people cite were [that] there seems to be more of a homeless population that's in the area now. I mean was that an issue [when you lived there]?

I don't ever remember any homeless people there at that time. When I was growing up, you didn't see homeless people. They probably were here. I just didn't see them in that neighborhood.

I'm sure, I think, this is a newer social phenomenon that we have.

People were always able to get some sort of work in Vegas. That was kind of the mantra here.

It's in pretty close proximity to the railroad, yeah?

Yeah, well, the railroad is really the catalyst for building Las Vegas initially, you know. All of that old property downtown, which is off of Main Street down there, and everything east of Main Street was built by the Union Pacific [Railroad]. In fact, [part of the land sold at the] Las Vegas [land auction in 1905] came from the Union Pacific Railroad. You know the story about the railroad coming through Las Vegas and why it came through Vegas.

Tell us.

Well, the railroad decided that they needed a travel route going to Salt Lake City and taking produce from California through the desert. Well, taking produce like lettuce through the desert on a train car in the summertime, when you don't have refrigerated train cars, is a problem, because the lettuce wilts and it'll never make it to market. Nothing would make it to market in a train car that would take a ten-hour journey or a

twenty-hour journey from Los Angeles. So, they didn't have refrigerated train cars at that time [actually they did; cars cooled with blocks of ice were refrigerated cars], and they created a project called Las Vegas, and the focal point of the project on the railroad track was an icehouse, a big, giant, green building, where they literally would pump water into it and freeze ice into giant cubes. So as the train would come into the station, they would put these giant cubes of ice on the railroad car to maintain the integrity of the coolness they needed to do to transport produce out of Southern California.

And that was on Main Street.

Main Street. As a matter of fact, there's a bar over there.

Yes. There's now a place [restaurant/bar] called the Icehouse.

Yes, and not too far away was the original site of the [icehouse]. I just remember it as a big green building. But that was the icehouse, where they iced the trains. And so, Las Vegas had the water, which you needed to ice trains, through the well system, and, because of that, and because it was a travel route, the railroad came here, much of those old buildings downtown were built by the Union Pacific Railroad. Early days, most of those people worked for the Union Pacific. [Note: The railroad that helped to build early Las Vegas was actually the San Pedro, Los Angeles, & Salt Lake Railroad. The Union Pacific functioned as a silent partner in the SPLA&SL. Senator William Andrews Clark, owner of the SPLA&SL, and his top aides created a subsidiary, the Las Vegas Land & Water Company. The LVL&W actually auctioned the land and created the original Las Vegas in 1905. LVL&W controlled land and water rights, as well as railroad jobs, in early Las Vegas. See Moehring and Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, pp. 9-18.]

That's one of the cycles of Las Vegas, was the Union Pacific cycle, then another cycle. I mean, if you talk to people like the Cashmans, who would be a good family to talk to because the Cashmans lived over there [in John S. Park Neighborhood] too. The Cashmans lived over on Tenth and Frances [Street]. They had a house there. But the Cashman family, the old man [James Cashman Sr.] came here in the 1900s, 1910, was one of the founders of Las Vegas, first Chamber of Commerce, first this-and-that. [Note: James Cashman Sr. first came to Las Vegas in 1904, before the city was founded, when he worked as a waiter and dishwasher at the railroad workers' camp. He subsequently moved to Searchlight, where he founded an automobile dealership. He moved his dealership to Las Vegas in 1923. See Moehring and Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, p. 66.] There are a lot of interesting stories you can get out of the Cashman family because they really do predate way before me.

And they'll tell stories about how Las Vegas was cyclical and how it went through the railroad days and then the next step was the building of Hoover Dam. The economy was in trouble. Hoover Dam injected money into Las Vegas. Without Hoover Dam, Las Vegas would've failed.

And then Hoover Dam got built and then, my God, what do you do, what do you do? The economy is tanking, tanking, tanking. Let's legalize gambling. So they legalized gambling [in 1931]. And the idea of legalizing gambling didn't come from Las Vegas, it came from Reno, because a farmer or a rancher up there [Humboldt County Assemblyman Phil Tobin] realized that the state was going broke and said, well, let's legalize that damn gambling and we'll tax it. So gambling was another step up.

Las Vegas has always hinged on sort of epic events: the railroad, building Hoover Dam, gambling. These things have always been kind of like steps up. I'd even say Steve Wynn was one of those. Just kind of like another weighty move. Unlike other communities that kind of just smoothed out over the years, we've always been dependent on some big burst of something.

Well, we're waiting.

Fans. Solar power. Something.

Or the Mob Museum.

I don't know why this popped into my head, I think because you said Cashman and I was thinking Cashman Field and then—

That's named after the old man [James Cashman Sr.].

Right. But I'm wondering. Helldorado was a pretty big deal, I think, a lot bigger than it is now.

Oh, huge. When I was a kid, it was a big, big thing.

Is that something you guys did all the time?

Oh yeah. Of course. I even have a picture of me in a cowboy hat and stuff when I was about five, I think. Yes. I've got pictures of my mother in the float that went down Fremont Street that the Green Shack would put into the parade. Back in those days, Helldorado was a big, big deal. Everybody went to Helldorado. That was a tradition.

So what do you see, I guess just given the cycles that we're in, too, I mean where do you see the neighborhood going? It seems like it's on the upswing again, even in this economy. It's seems like it's attracting more and more of an eclectic mix of people.

Yeah, neighborhoods go through metamorphosis. I mean, you can go to New York and go into a neighborhood that, twenty years ago, would've been completely different than it is today. And there is something to be said about a city that gets this large and [a neighborhood] being still in the core and the heart of it. Some people enjoy living in the center of the city, and actually in some ways I regret that I'm not. The travel time back and forth. If I have to go from one side of town to the other, it's an hour drive. It's kind of better to be someplace that's safe in the middle to me than it is on the periphery.

Where do you live now?

I have a house in Green Valley right now, and then another house up in Summerlin, then a house in Mount Charleston. Yeah, I'm way out there. Quite frankly, I wouldn't mind living in the center of the city.

Would you ever consider moving back into that area?

I would. I would, actually. If I found something I really liked, I would. It is my home, but it's not just my home. It's not a nostalgic thing. It's more pragmatic. The house I had before this one in Green Valley, I lived in Rancho Bel Air, which is on Rancho [Drive] and Alta [Drive]. And anyplace I wanted to go, I could be there in a few minutes. I could be on the freeway, go this way, go that way. Boy, now where I live, I mean [it is] forty minutes, fifty minutes, sixty minutes, back and forth. If somebody wants me to go over to Summerlin, meet them, it's like, oh, that's my whole day. And I don't like that.

I think it's interesting still that that area is so central in the city because it really is.

I think it's a great neighborhood and I think it may end up being identified in certain ways as, you know, it's a protected neighborhood, it's comfortable, it's a safe place. I think it's a great neighborhood.

What do you think about the designation of the historic district to the certain streets?

Well, Bob [Bellis] had something to do with that if I remember right. Did he?

Yeah, he did.

We don't have much history in Las Vegas. We tear it all down. So to the extent you can designate something historical, I think that's important. That is one of the regrets I have about Vegas is it's very hard to [see its history]. You know, I can tell people about the icehouse, but I can't show them a picture. And when most people [I talk to] have been here a few years and I say the icehouse iced trains and that's how Las Vegas got here, [they say], you mean the bar? They don't know. You mean the iced drinks? So I mean we don't save much of our history, unfortunately.

And has it always been like that?

It has pretty much been move forward, don't look back. There's not been much saved. There have been a few times, like Jan [Jones; former mayor] when she decided to take some of the neon signs that were left and plant them up and down Fremont Street, some of that's historical. And there's a museum [the Neon Museum] that holds these signs today, which is historical. But not too much in the way of buildings other than the Mob Museum [actually the Las Vegas Federal Building and United States Post Office, built in 1931] that's really historical here. There's not much left. You can't even identify but a few buildings that are really old.

Now there is a building I will tell you about that's very interesting. You probably don't know this. And it's still there, and literally it's eerie to see it. It's really odd. It was called Roxie's. It was a brothel. Now Roxie's is located right off of Boulder Highway

and Sandhill [Road]. And if you drive down the freeway on [Highway] 95 or down Boulder Highway, you'll see this giant, large group of trees that are old mesquite trees. Giant mesquite trees. And they've got to be seventy-five years old. Just this giant group of mesquite trees, and at the base of those mesquite trees is an old wooden building that was built in the 1930s or '40s that was a brothel, and it was called Roxie's. Probably in the mid-forties it was built, '47 or something. What's fascinating about Roxie's was Roxie's was partially owned or completely owned by the sheriff. And what's funny is, and why I say everything is torn down in Las Vegas, if I took you over there right now, you could see it. It's still there. It looks like a wooden building. It almost looks like a barn, but it's not a barn. It's a two-story wooden building, under a clump of trees, and it's all fenced off and restricted. Nobody can get in there now. It's like somebody's land and they're going to sell it. And it has an evaporator cooler on the roof. But that was the original Roxie's. And it was owned by the sheriff at the time. I can't think of his name.

That's about the same time that the Greenspuns came to Las Vegas, and one of the first big editorial attacks that Hank Greenspun launched was against this guy for owning a brothel. And it was so successful that he was defeated in office, he was thrown out of office, and they had to close the brothel down. [Note: Hank Greenspun set up the sting operation in 1954. The *Las Vegas Sun* caught Sheriff Glen Jones on tape, expressing his willingness to protect brothel operations in return for gifts. Jones later lost his job over the scandal. See Moehring and Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, pp. 35, 118-119.]

We don't really have many brothels in this area.

No, that's the only brothel. Because, remember, in Nevada, you can only have brothels in fifteen [twelve] counties. Clark County and Washoe [County] [as well as Douglas and Lincoln Counties] prohibit them. So here you have a sheriff who's supposed to be supporting the laws, who owned a brothel that was illegal in Clark County.

Let me tell you a funny story. When I was kid, and I was a small kid, I'm probably six or seven, my mom opened the dry cleaners in 1954 and she was struggling to get customers. And my mom was this good Catholic lady. So the first thing a good Catholic mom does, or a good Catholic lady does, is go to the priest, Father Ryan and others, who were running St. Anne's Parish and say, please bring your dry cleaning in. We'll take care of it for free. Because my mom wanted to show that she was supporting the Catholic Church. And the clotheslines in the back of the dry cleaners had priests' clothes, and all of the priests took advantage of my mom. They'd bring their cleaning down and get it cleaned for free. She felt she was doing her good Godly duty. But my mom, also being a very pragmatic woman, knew that there was a brothel out there that was operating, so she went out and got their business, as well, and she would clean the trick suits of the girls. And so if you walked to the dry cleaning line behind my family's dry cleaners, you would see trick suits and priests' outfits. [Laughing]

Was there a large Catholic population in this area, in the Downtown area, in the John S. Park [Neighborhood]?

Well, I think there was St. Anne's, and then a little bit of Gorman, and a lot of the families, the old families that came here, like the Foley family and the Mowbray family, the Tiberti family. Those were all strong Catholic families. And yes, there was a strong Catholic population in that area. There were two parochial schools in that neighborhood.

One was St. Anne's [St. Anne Elementary School], which is over on Maryland Parkway, but you also had St. Joseph's [Catholic School], which is located right off of Maryland Parkway and Carson [Avenue]. So there were two parochial elementary schools. And also Gorman of course, which now Gorman is no longer Gorman; it's owned by the school district.

That just happened.

Yeah. I'm the one who helped it out. Behind-the-scenes games that I'm doing. Walt [Walter] Rulffes called me, and I knew Gorman was building a new Gorman, right, because I was involved in raising money for that. So, most of us Catholics were going like, OK, what is the bishop going to do with the old Gorman? We need to get more money to finish the new Gorman. We're short of finishing the new Gorman. We need another, it was like fifteen million bucks. What do we do with the old Gorman? And there was some discussion that the bishop wouldn't allow it to be sold. So [Superintendent] Walt Rulffes calls me from the [Clark County] School District and says, I need that school. We need it for classroom space, and we're willing to buy it. So I hooked up Walt Rulffes and the bishop together and they cut a deal, and the school district bought [Bishop] Gorman High School. And that's the money that was used to finish the building of [the new] Gorman High School.

Yeah, so you really are part of this community. Now when did you get a school?

I got a school, oh God, it had to be three or four years ago.

Where is it located?

It's located near Fort Apache [Road] and Blue Diamond Road, way, way, way [out on the edge of the city].

But a really growing area.

Oh yeah, a huge area. The school [Robert L. Forbuss Elementary School] is spectacular. It's a very, very cool school. I couldn't imagine it being any better than it is. And I got very lucky. They got a phenomenal principal, a wonderful staff. Very diverse student population, one of the most diverse populations in Nevada. Like 30 percent Asian, 30 percent Hispanic, 25 percent black. All these kids are just the most beautiful children you've ever seen.

That's fantastic. What an honor.

Yes. It's huge. When you see the tape, you'll see. Not too many things intimidate me, I can get up and introduce famous people and stuff, but the day I was sitting there, I looked calm as I was sitting there [but] I was a wreck.

[Laughing] Well, that's the key, to keep the exterior.

I know we've been talking for a while and I really appreciate it. I know you've been involved with the LVCVA [Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority] also.

I was on their board for eight years.

It sounds like you had some connections but how did you decide to become involved with that?

Well, let me give you a little history of how the LVCVA came to be. Back many years ago, kind of the genesis for building the [Las Vegas] Convention Center came out of the Chamber of Commerce. These are the people that predate me, way before, like the Cashmans and others, but they had a strong presence in Southern Nevada and the Chamber of Commerce was one of the catalysts behind building the original Convention

Center over on Convention Center Drive. With that came the authority to appoint six of the seats on their board. I don't know how it happened in law, but when they adopted the law that built the Convention Center and allowed them to tax rooms—this was way before my time—the Chamber of Commerce was given the authority to fill six of the seats on the board.

So, if you go back through history, when the Convention Center was first built, it's always had Chamber people on it. Over the years, that was modified so three of the seats that they had were given to the Nevada Resort Association. To this day, three of seats that are on the LVCVA board are appointed by the Chamber of Commerce. So, there's a connection there. I was also involved in the Chamber of Commerce very, very actively. And of course then, over the years it expanded so it's a thirteen-member board. It's eight members who are elected. So you have the Mayor of Henderson, the Mayor of North Las Vegas, the Mayor of the City of Las Vegas. You have two county commissioners. It's a combination of eight elected, and then six appointed. Three are appointed by the Chamber of Commerce, and three are appointed by the Nevada Resort Association.

So how I got on the thing, I was the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, and as the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, after I stepped down, the board said, why don't you take the seat on the LVCVA? So that's how I got on it, and served for those eight years. I was there when we created the slogan, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." Although that's probably the wrong slogan for today.

Well, yeah, we may have to switch that. What were some of the other highlights that occurred during that time?

Well, during my period [with the LVCVA], we actually built the South Hall, which was a doubling of the size of the Convention Authority. I was actually the chairman of the board the day right after 9/11 (September 11, 2000). I think it was the next day, 9/12 or 9/13, I chaired that board meeting, when we were all sitting there going, we have no flights coming to Vegas, what are we going to do? And so I went through that period of time, which was pretty scary. That we survived easily. We have resilience. This downturn is not going to be so easy.

Well, that wasn't as entrenched and as permanent.

No, it was mostly attitude-driven fear. People had a fear of traveling. Today they just don't want to spend the money. Different scenario.

So I got involved in that. I was in the Boys & Girls Club [of America, BGCA]. I was chairman of that. Big Brothers Big Sisters, I was involved in. I was involved in, oh my gosh, chairman of the Rotary Club [International], the first Rotary Club in Las Vegas. Dates back to 1927 [1923. See http://www.lasvegasrotary.com/aboutus.cfm]. Still meets every Thursday. I was one of the youngest guys ever to get in that club, and met some very interesting people. (Many of them are dead.) So I became the chairman of that then. I'm very much about getting involved, and when I do I usually migrate through the process, moving up in the process, and then I move on.

I know we talked about this briefly but I'm just curious what you think it is that drives you, what is it that hooks you in to it?

I've always felt like Las Vegas was a very special place, and I think there's several things that make it special, and some of those things are not just in government. They are community organizations and things like that, that drives the community, and for me,

those are always important to be part of those things. To this day, I'm involved. Sig [Rogich] is the chairman and I'm the vice-chairman of the Public Education Foundation. I work with Don Snyder. We're building the Performing Arts Center downtown. We've been working on that for eight years. So those are big events for me, and at the end of the day, I always say, if I would've focused all my time on making money, I could probably be Sheldon [Adelson] now. Well, I don't know if I want to be Sheldon now. But the point is, I never did that. I developed a certain degree of wealth that I'm comfortable in, but I've never always thought the most important thing in my life was making more and more money. And maybe that's a mistake. I don't know. But I feel good about what I've done. I mean I really can walk away from the community and say, I've tried to do a little bit of everything.

And do you think that the value of community is something that was instilled in you, maybe growing up? Because you grew up in a community, in a neighborhood.

I think so. I think that some of my value sets was that I wanted it to be a better place, and you can do it in several different ways, and participation in the community is one way to do it. People who lament to me that they don't like it or this is bad or whatever, first I say, well, what do you do? What have you done to correct that? What's your level of involvement? [And they say,] Oh, I don't want to get involved. I just want to complain. Well, don't complain then. I mean, if you don't want to get involved, then you should not complain. You should just live it or move, one or the other.

Yeah, I mean I think that's just one of the things about Las Vegas that's fascinating, not just its history but the level of involvement of a lot of people that I've met here,

and you'd never know it, just looking at Las Vegas as a whole, that people are very involved.

Yeah, and it's very diverse in many ways, very, very diverse, too. I mean, a lot of people have different levels of commitment in this community that go back a long time. I would encourage you to talk to Jim Cashman, if you can hook up with Jim. He would be a very interesting [person to talk to].

Is there a way I can get in touch with him?

Well, they used to own all the Cadillac dealerships, but now he owns all the Harley-Davidson dealerships. I might have his number here. Let's see. [Pause] Now Timmy [Timothy Cashman] was one of my students, so Tim is ten years younger than I am, but his family, like all the other Cashmans, were part of that community and grew up around John S. Park. I think Tim might've lived over there, as a very young child, but then moved on with his family. They built their first house right near Oscar Goodman's house in Scotch Eighties, and that's where I think Timmy remembers growing up over there. [Pause. At this point, Mr. Forbuss looks up Jim Cashman's telephone number, then calls him.]

We've been talking for a bit now and I don't want to take any more of your afternoon. Maybe we can do a follow-up at some point.

Oh sure. That's fine. Maybe get Sig involved, too. Everybody has a different perspective of this.

And that's part of the goal of this project. That's why we're trying to talk to as many people as we can that have been involved in different ways that have lived there for different amounts of time. I mean, talking to the folks that grew up there,

though, really helps establish the history, and then looking at the different waves of people that have moved in. I know just from the university there's a lot of faculty that have moved in over the past ten years or so.

Oh, that's cool. I didn't know that. Like I said, if I were coming to Vegas right now, I would seriously consider that as a neighborhood.

So it's definitely a neighborhood that's still attracting people and there's some really good little communities; that's really what we want to capture is this history and the diversity and the different people.

I think that's a good thing. When you talk to Cashman, Cashman will probably lead you off to some other people who also were part of that community, because there were so many different people that, over the years, lived in that neighborhood.

What are your theories on this, that some of the names that I see all over Las Vegas, on the streets, on buildings, in the government, so many of those folks came out of that area, or around there, the Huntridge area, the John S. Park area?

Oh, well, that's because, at that point in time, that was the only neighborhood. I mean there weren't too many other places you could actually live, so people grew up in that neighborhood because that's where it was. And there were little pockets of different families throughout that community.

Yeah, I just think it's interesting, and even now, though, it's still drawing people in.

If I could find the right house over there, I'd probably think about coming back over, because I do like it over there a lot.

It's a good place, definitely. Is there anything that we maybe didn't talk about or cover that you [can think of]?

Oh, I'll probably think of ten things after you leave, but right now I can't think of any.

I'll probably think of ten things after I leave, too.

Go by the brothel. Take a look at that. That's pretty funny.

It's on my list.

You have to see it, because I know not too many people ever heard of it before and I said something to Sig about it, I said, did you know that thing is still up? So he knows all about it, because he's older than I am and he remembers when Hank Greenspun went off on a tirade against—oh, the sheriff's name was Dick Lybolt. [Note: The sheriff at the time of Hank Greenspun's sting operation was Glen Jones. See page 49 of this interview.]

Yes. And you know, actually I know now why I've heard of Roxie's, is because I was reading some other oral histories with long-time residents of Nevada and somebody was telling that story in their oral history.

And honestly, nobody knows about it, unless you've been here forever.

I can't remember who it was but it was somebody that's central to Vegas, so very interesting.

I think we ought to buy it and turn it into a tourist destination. [Laughing]

Oh, it would go over immensely, I think. Absolutely.

I know.

Now it's on my list, so, thank you. And thank you so much. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us.

Absolutely. Not a problem.

INDEX

S

T

U

V

W