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An Interview with Louise Lorenzi Fountain

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

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LORENZI PARK AT LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic sources (housed separately) accompany the collection as slides or black and white photographs.

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

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Preface

Louise Lorenzi Fountain was born on Nov. 14, 1913, to David Lorenzi, a French immigrant, and Julia Travesse Moore from La Belle, Missouri. Her younger years were devoted to helping her father develop and manage Lorenzi Lake Park, which was built by Lorenzi and is considered a primary landmark in the development and life of the citizens of Las Vegas.

Louise Lorenzi's father has been noted as one of the 100 most influential citizens of Las Vegas by the *Las Vegas Review Journal*. He opened the park in 1926 with a pair of man-made lakes and a swimming pool, dance hall, band shell and other amenities. In the interview, Louise talks about her father and mother and describes Las Vegas during its early years.

Louise Lorenzi married Edgar Fountain in 1936. He had hitchhiked from Georgia in search of work on the construction of Boulder Dam, now Hoover Dam. The couple left Las Vegas for 10 years and lived in Grand Coulee, Washington, where he helped build Grand Coulee Dam.

After returning to Las Vegas, Louise became a full partner in several business ventures the couple started. Those included the Nevada Amusement Co., a collection of 35 coin-operated phonograph machines; Frontier Radio and Appliance Co.; and later a television sales business; partnerships in two soft-drink bottling companies and a Toyota dealership.

Louise Lorenzi Fountain was active in two Methodist churches and was a member of the First Presbyterian Church. She was a charter member and regent of the Valley of Fire Chapter of The Daughters of the American Revolution. Louise Lorenzi Fountain passed away on January 29, 2006 at 92 years of age.

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Louise Fountain
Signature of Narrator Date

Address of narrator

Claytee D. White 3/30/2004
Signature of interviewer Date

Seven Lake cabin



63

8/2/52

Seven Lakes



21

9/3/52.

This is Claytee White. It is March 30th. And I am in the home of Louise Fountain.

How are you this morning?

Fairly well.

Could you give me your full name, please, just for our records.

Louise Lorenzi Fountain.

Give me just some information about your early childhood, where you grew up.

I was born in Las Vegas. I went all through school, from kindergarten through high school, here. And I took a postgraduate course, too, here. I guess that's about it.

So you went to UNLV in the beginning?

What's that?

After high school, where did you go to school?

After high school, I just went to my regular high school and took a little extra course later.

I see. Okay. Do you mind telling me when you were born?

November the 14th, 1913.

So that means that last year you were --

70 years old this last November.

How about 90?

I mean 90 years old.

90 years old. Isn't that great?

Yeah.

So tell me about growing up in Las Vegas. What kind of things did children do?

What kinds of games did you play when you were young?

Oh, Run, My Sheepy, Run. Hopscotch. After I got a little older, I played a game of 500.

What is that?

Oh, it's something like bridge.

Oh, okay. In 1913, what did Las Vegas look like?

Not 1913, because that's when I was born.

So right after that, when you were about five or six years of age, what did it look like?

Well, I didn't realize I was sitting right in the middle of a desert until I went on a trip out of

here and saw how green it was outside of Las Vegas.

Where did you go?

I went to Los Angeles.

Did the family go to Los Angeles often?

No. My family didn't travel very often.

So you had everything that you needed here? You could buy all the clothes you needed? Anything you needed you could buy in Las Vegas?

Well, yes. Well, years ago JC Penney store and Adcock's was the only stores you could buy anything.

So now, what was the second store?

Adcock.

Tell me about that store. I never heard that name.

Well, it's so long ago.

What did they sell?

All clothing.

For women and men?

Um-h'm.

Oh, okay. Where was it located? Which street?

On Fremont Street.

What did Fremont Street look like? What else was on it?

Well, let's see. It started from Main Street onto, I guess, Third Street. The only building on Third Street was on the corner. So there wasn't much on Third.

Where did you live?

I lived on 419 South Second Street.

How many children in the family?

There is just two of us. My sister, Pauline.

Now, is your sister, Pauline, still here?

Yes, she is. But she's in a rest home. I was the oldest. Five years older than her.

Did your mother work outside the house?

No. My mother never worked.

Was she a member of any of the organizations or clubs?

No. My mother was just a plain old home-keeper.

Now, tell me what your father did. And what was your father's name?

It was David Gerard Lorenzi.

Tell me about him, what he did for a living.

Well, he was a businessman. But he was always doing different kinds of businesses, bought and sold and changed.

Buying what, property?

He bought property when he first came here. He bought out where Lorenzi Resort is today on Main Street and then on Second Street.

Where was your father from?

My father was from Monotones, France, on the outskirts.

And your mother?

My mother was born in La Belle, Missouri.

How did they meet?

On vacations. Both of them were on a vacation in San Diego and they met.

And how did they get to Las Vegas?

Oh, gee, you're asking me something that I don't even know. I guess it might be the railroad. It wouldn't be by car because people didn't have cars that much.

Why did they come to Las Vegas?

Well, my dad was a very adventurous-type person. My dad came first to Las Vegas -- let's see, what was it? -- when Las Vegas was six years old. Then my mother came a year later. They got married here. I guess that's it.

Did they ever talk about their wedding, where they got married, or anything like that?

Oh, I think it was just the justice of the peace. My dad was a divorced man, and he was a Catholic. So he was excommunicated. They didn't take him back into the church until on his deathbed when they gave him his last rights. So he became a Catholic again because

he always gave to the Catholic Church. He would go visit the sisters every week. So that's why they did that to him, you know.

Growing up, did you go to church?

I went to church all the time.

Catholic Church?

No. It was a Methodist Church. Second Street was just like one of the main streets years ago, just like Fremont Street nearly, because everybody had to go down our street, it seemed like, to go to Fremont. So the children in the neighborhood started to take me to church. And I've gone ever since until the last five years, I guess it is.

I don't know if I asked. What is your mother's name?

Julia Travese Moore.

You were talking about your father and the kinds of things that he was involved in.

He purchased property. Do you remember what he did every day?

Well, he had a candy and soda fountain and a tea room all together. I can remember him saying that during the war the troop trains would come in here and they wouldn't be here very long. So my dad would stay at the cash register. And he would have sandwiches and fruit and everything lined out for the boys. They would pick up what they wanted to buy and then pay him at the cash register so off they could go.

Which war was that, Louise? World War I or II?

World War I. Oh, I'm sure it is, yes. Because World War II, I was born.

So that was in 1918, 1919, then?

Um-h'm. Let's see what all he was into. He started building the Lorenzi Resort. It was called resort first. It took about ten years to get it developed, all by a team of mules and drag lines to make the lakes and the swimming pool. And the dance hall was the last thing put up.

How did he come up with that idea?

Well, my dad had been brought up in Europe. He traveled. He crossed the ocean 15 times. So he had lots of ideas, you know. He kept using them as he lived.

So what did Lorenzi Park look like when he finished with it?

Oh, we had a big swimming pool, the largest in the state. A roller coaster went down into the swimming pool. All the entertainment in Las Vegas was out there.

Give me an example.

Like all the holidays, the Fourth of July, we'd have parades down Fremont Street and prizes for dancing and swimming and all those things. And for the children, there were different games to play on the Fourth of July.

Fireworks? Did you have fireworks?

Oh, yes, we had fireworks over on an island, and it shot out into the water. It was beautiful.

That sounds beautiful. What kind of entertainment did they have for adults out there?

Oh, we had swimming and dancing and then lots of picnicking.

What kind of music did you have for dancing?

There were different troops of musicians that would come through the country and would stop over and play. Then we had our own band, too, orchestra.

So your father had an orchestra that played out there?

Um-h'm.

Was the orchestra made up of all local people?

No. Most musicians came from out of town and formed their own bands.

So how did it work? Would they play for the summer season, or were they there often --

It was the summer season. We tried it in the winter, but it didn't go over in the wintertime.

So how long did your father make a living with just that amusement area?

Oh, I don't know. But we had those houses. Well, I forgot to say that all the property he bought, he went and got property from up at Frenchman's Mine and hauled it down off of the mountain. He redid all these different buildings that he brought down and we had it for rental property. One building on Main Street, he made a triplex out of it. Then on Second Street, we had three houses, two in the front and one in the rear. So that was always our ace in the hole to have rent money coming in.

Now, where did the buildings come from?

Frenchman's Mine.

Did you ever go to Frenchman's Mine?

Oh, no. It was abandoned when my dad bought that property from up there. They said it couldn't be done, to haul it down off of the mountains.

How did he do it?

I don't know. I'm too little to know about all of that. I imagine by teams of horses.

This was a silver mine?

A gold mine.

That's wonderful. Do you remember anybody doing any mining in this area as you were growing up?

No, I don't.

Now, tell me about the railroad. In the early 1920s or late 1919, a lot of people worked on the railroad.

Yes. That's all this town was here years ago. The roundhouse was here and all the shops. In later years, they moved it out of here, I think, to Salt Lake. But the people that lived here were just the business people and professional people. And then the laboring people were from the railroad. That's why we have a lot of old railroad houses here.

What did those houses look like?

Well, nearly all looked alike, nearly.

Were they little?

And they were made out of cement block.

Do you remember any of those railroad workers? Did you play with any of those children?

Yes, I did. That's all you had to play with nearly.

Do you remember any family names?

Yes. McKenzie and Devril.

Do you remember any African-Americans living here at that time?

There were very few.

Did they work on the railroad, also?

Yes. But those days, we didn't have hardly any foreigners in Las Vegas.

So just blacks and whites?

Um-h'm.

What about Mexicans?

They were very few, too. It was mostly white. All white nearly.

When you started school, you were older than your sister. So which school did you attend?

In those days kindergarten wasn't like it was today. They didn't teach you reading and writing and arithmetic like they do today. They just taught you how to behave and be able to stay in your class and listen and pay attention.

Maybe we need to go back to that. Do you remember the name of the school?

Well, it was just all called Las Vegas Grammar School and Las Vegas High School.

What did you and your sister do for fun just in the house with your mother? Did she teach you how to cook?

Yes, she did.

What else did the three of you do together while your father was out working?

I just can't remember what we did. We mostly entertained ourselves playing with children.

When your father finished Lorenzi Park, did you ever work there?

Oh, yes. I was the boy of the family. I always helped my father. I sold swim tickets. I sold pop and cigars, cigarettes, and candy and then even rented the boats. We had boats outside on the lake we rented out.

So tell me what the average weekend was like.

Average weekend? Well, it was quite exciting because those days, later on when they were building the dam, all those boys would come in. And they'd come in like three carloads of them at a time. Like I said, Lorenzi Park was the only place they had to go.

They would come in, carloads of them, from the dam. Did you ever go to Boulder City while the dam was being conducted?

Yes, I did. And I went and climbed the face of the dam, too. I didn't know what I was

getting into. There was supposed to have been another girl go with me, and she backed out. So I thought, well, I guess I should go. So I had to go up on a little skid partway up. Then I had to climb ladders up the face of the dam.

Now, was this while it was being built?

50-foot ladders together and up.

So was that after it had been finished?

No. It was being built.

While it was being built?

Uh-huh. The dam was poured in sections so that concrete could cool. So I didn't know what I was getting into until I got up there, or I would've never done it. But they had just plank boards to cross over from one section of concrete to the other. And you looked down 200 feet, you know, or more.

Did other people go with you, or were you by yourself?

No. Just one of these fellows from the dam would talk me into it, and he took me.

So they allowed people to do that?

Well, I guess he must have had permission. That was the most exciting thing in my life.

Did your family own a car?

Yes, we had a car.

So you drove back and forth to Boulder using that family car?

Yes. But we didn't go back and forth to Boulder. You know what I mean?

So it was just once in a while?

No. It was a rarity for us to go to Boulder.

Did you see Boulder City while it was being built?

Um-h'm.

What did that look like?

Well, it had government houses. The main street was about like what it looked like today, nearly.

Now, there were a lot of single men who lived out there who worked on the dam.

Yes. Well, they had dormitories for the men.

How did they eat?

Through a big dormitory, too.

So they had a big kitchen?

Um-h'm.

Did you ever see in the kitchen or did you ever --

Yeah, I was invited out there to eat.

What kind of entertainment did they have out there?

Gee, I just don't know. I don't think they had very much for them. I think most of their entertainment was when they would come out to my folks' place, Lorenzi Park.

You had dancing out there.

It was called Lorenzi Resort those days.

Oh, really? Oh, good. Now, at the resort, the men would come out to swim and to dance. Were there a lot of single girls in Las Vegas?

Oh, yes.

Did any of the girls marry the men who came in to work on the dam?

Yes. That's about all they had married to. Then I've got to put this little part in. Around the lake, we had weeping willows that were clear down into the water. And they said a lot of marriages were performed by the people in those boats that would go underneath the weeping willows.

Wow. That's nice. Tell me about how you met your husband.

Well, my mother and I were walking down Fremont Street, which was a Sunday, and I was all dressed up. Those days, we all wore hats and got all dressed up. I can't think of the name of the place, which hotel it was. But anyway, he happened to look out the window and saw my mother and me go by. He took a liking to what I looked like, and he went to the cashier and asked her who that girl was that went by. And she told him it was the Lorenzi girl. So he made a trip out to the resort. Then that's how I met him.

Now, what was your husband's full name?

Edgar Watley Fountain.

Okay. In the early 30s, gambling was legalized here. And at the same time --

Yes. Oh, what a celebration we had.

Tell me about it.

Yeah. Well, the whole town turned out. And they all, of course, came out to the park out there. So they just really celebrated by dancing and swimming and picnicking and the whole thing. It lasted for one day and one whole night, the celebration.

Where did people go to gamble in the beginning?

On Fremont Street. That's all the gambling we had.

Okay. Do you remember any of the names of the early places on Fremont Street where you could gamble?

Well, the Golden Nugget.

So it was there that early. Okay.

The Northern Club. There's another one, though. I can't think of it right now.

The Mint or the Nevada Club?

Oh, no.

Okay. Those were later.

But as far as the Nevada Club, I lived across the street from Sam Boyd years ago after I was married and was a friend of his.

Where did you and your husband live when you got married?

Gosh, I'd have to think where we lived.

Now, when you lived across the street from Sam Boyd, was that after you got married?

Oh, yes. That was a long time.

So you had been married for a long time before you moved there?

Um-h'm.

Tell me about your husband's business, what kind of work he did.

Well, my husband first started out as an engineer on Boulder Dam. Then later we moved to the Grand Coulee Dam [*Editor's Note; located in Washington state*], and he worked on that. Then we saved up our money and came back to Las Vegas to go into business.

What kind of business did you go into?

Well, when we first came here, he would read the paper and read all the classified ads and see, you know, what he could buy or go into. So he came home one day and he says, we're in business now. But he said, I couldn't come and tell you about it because there were two other men that were ready to buy it, too. And it was a jukebox route.

So tell me what that is.

Well, it's like you put a nickel in a machine, and it would play. That's called a jukebox.

And what did he do?

Well, he bought a bunch of these machines. They were old, and they weren't in very good condition. So he had to redo each one of them. We bought new ones as it went along. My husband was always very fond of music and that's how he knew what records and all to put in those machines. He kept up with music a lot.

So he put machines in different locations throughout the town?

Um-h'm.

Where are some of the places that had jukeboxes?

Well, one of them was the Golden Nugget. He had to fly in that machine. It was just before the place was to open, the restaurant part there. That was our biggest customer we had.

What about live entertainment? When did the different gambling locations start having live entertainment?

Oh, I don't know. It just happens in your life, and you don't pay much attention.

Yes.

We never thought about gambling years ago.

As newlyweds, what kind of things did you and your husband do for entertainment?

Did you go to Lorenzi Park to dance, or what did you?

Oh, yes, we danced and swam.

Did you go out to dinner?

Oh, sure.

Where are some of the places that you went to dinner?

I don't know. I just can't remember now. I can remember one place. It was called the

Green Shack on Boulder Highway.

Good food? Was the food good?

Delicious.

Now, did you ever have children?

Yes, I had two daughters. My oldest girl is Julia Ann and the other one is Mary Belle.

Where did they go to school?

They went to Las Vegas High. All the way through Las Vegas schools. And then my oldest girl went to UNLV somewhat, too. Then she finished her nursing career out of Washington, D.C. She got her master's degree.

How did you feel about her leaving home?

It wasn't too hard for us to have her leave home. But it was hard. But my youngest one, her being the last, why, that was the worst, you know, to be left alone.

I have heart trouble, so I cough quite a bit.

Did you ever work outside the home?

No. Wait a minute. I guess I did when we moved to Coulee Dam. Well, I worked a couple years in Las Vegas doing beauty work.

Explain. What is "beauty work"?

Oh, hair styling and facials and manicuring.

So where did you do that work?

At the Marnell Beauty Shop here in town. Then I went in one little place. I can't even remember. It was in a home after I quit working at the other place, but I can't remember the name of it or where it was now. I'm 90 years old, so my memory isn't very good.

I think you're doing great. I think this is great. I was going to ask about your children. So they went through school. One went to UNLV. Did the baby girl go to college, also?

No, she did not. She got married when she was 17 years old. One day she was 17, and the next day she got married.

How did you feel about her getting married so young?

Oh, it broke our heart. But she was crazy about him. So...

(End side 1, tape 1.)

They left here because he was in the Air Force. So they left here for Wichita, Kansas. He was on alert to go to war, too. He always had to have his bag packed ready to take off to go, so that was quite an ordeal for my daughter to go through. Then after they were married a year, she had her first child.

So that was World War II?

Um-h'm.

Okay. Did you join any clubs?

Yes, I did. I belonged to the Mesquite Club, Valley of Fire DAR, and church. Years ago, before all that, I belonged to churches and things like that.

When you said DAR, you said some other letters before that. What was that?

Oh, Valley of Fire chapter.

Okay. Of the DAR.

What kind of projects did the Mesquite Club work on while you were a member? Do you remember any of those?

It was mostly social. Then we donated lots of money to different organizations to help children and stuff like that.

You were president of the Mesquite Club at one time?

Yes, and I was head of the church, too. I taught Sunday School for years and years. Then after that, I was the head of the Women's Society at a church. I used to give speeches to the church.

All local? All here in Las Vegas?

All local.

Give me some of the projects that the DAR worked on.

Well, we had lots of schools that we gave to, even the Indian school. Then we watched real close about what's happening in the world, and we signed up for supporting different national things from the national DAR. We were a real patriotic society.

At the end of the 20s, in 1929, the Great Depression started. What was that like here in Las Vegas?

Well, I don't know about Las Vegas, but I know about my family. I know I wore cardboard paper in my shoes. I didn't have very many clothes. But we'd wash them and put them back on. My father was a very generous man. We had a house that was up on a hill. I think that's before the park was formed or just at the very beginning. He fed and clothed one whole family up there. So instead of giving it to our family, we shared with other people.

That's great. Did it make a difference when gambling started? Did it get a little better financially?

Well, it didn't help my family any different.

But could you tell a difference in the town?

Oh, heavens yes. It just, you know, kept growing and growing so fast.

Now, in the early 1940s, the Second World War started, and also they started building casinos, a couple of casinos on the Strip.

The El Rancho.

The El Rancho. I think downtown was the El Cortez. Do you remember that phase?

Oh, I sure do.

Tell me what that was like living here and seeing all that happening.

Well, my family was not gambling-oriented. We didn't pay too awful much attention to that.

Which year did you get married?

I got married in 1936.

Your husband did all kinds of different things. What was his major way of making money, making a living?

Well, we had Frontier Radio and Television.

What was that?

Frontier Radio and Television store.

What did you sell?

Oh, all nice -- we first started out with radio, you know. And then the Frontier Radio was one of the builders of Channel 8 television. You know, the mechanical and technical work

there. That is how come we got interested in Channel 8. We owned stock in Channel 8.

After that, did your husband at one time own a car dealership?

Yes. We owned Toyota.

Was Toyota the first one that you owned?

Yes. One and only. We started out in the used car business.

Where was the car dealership located?

We started across from City Hall. Archie Grant's building. No. I think that's where the used cars were, too. Then it was on Fremont Street, quite a ways down on Fremont Street.

Did Toyotas become very popular?

Toyota had a franchise with somebody else, and they went broke. So then my husband got it. It was a hard row to hoe to start out with because we had to finance our own business.

Toyota didn't do it in those days. Ford always finances their stores.

What ways have you seen this city change? What were some of the major changes that you saw living here so many years?

Well, I just saw it growing with businesses and houses and streets and all that. Oh, I want to throw this idea in, too. When my father came to Las Vegas, there were boardwalks down Fremont Street.

Did you tell me which year they came?

Well, my dad came in 1911, and my mother came in 1912. Then they were married in 1912 here.

So the sidewalks were made of board?

No. He got his divorce here.

You were saying that there were boards. Were the sidewalks made out of boards?

Yes. That's why they called them boardwalks.

Okay. Wow. In the 1950s, they tested the atomic bomb really close to Las Vegas. Do you remember that time?

Yes, I do.

Do you remember seeing any of those tests?

No. But I remember that flash.

There were some businesses here that began to make money off of those. They had a Ms. Atomic Bomb. And they made cocktails called the Atomic Cocktails. Do you remember any of that or reading about any of that in the newspaper?

No. I didn't pay any attention to that.

There was an airport here early on where people would fly in private planes sometimes. Do you remember that airport, the early airport?

No, I don't remember. I remember people flying in with planes. But there was already an airport here. I think it was Western Air or something like that.

About the political side of the city: do you remember any of the mayors? Was your husband ever involved in politics?

Yes. My husband was city commissioner for 12 years.

Which years? Do you remember when he was involved?

I hate to say that I don't remember.

Did you enjoy that part of your life, being involved in politics?

Yes, I did because my husband was the type of man that was always trying to help somebody. It gave him an opportunity to do so in that.

Do you remember any of the special things that happened while he was commissioner? Was that a city commissioner?

City commissioner.

Do you remember any of the special --

Well, I know one of the main things is my husband really helped the colored people a lot. They called him "Big Daddy."

What kind of things did he do?

He helped feed them and clothe them and have them where they were rested and saw they had a fair trial.

So were there African-Americans at that time who were having special problems with jobs or anything?

Oh, yes. They weren't accepted like they are today. It took a lot of years before the black race was accepted. My husband hired the first -- when he was in the car business -- the

Well, when they came into town, they didn't act like Mob figures. They just blended right into the community. They did a lot of charity work and all that. So we weren't against the Mob. We never even figured they were the Mob.

You didn't know that until later?

No.

When the casinos were owned by the Mob, the town ran a certain way. And later on, they became big corporations. Which did you enjoy more?

What do you mean by that?

Did the city change? When the Mob left, did --

Oh, yes, it did change. But I can't remember what it was. But I know the prices and all changed. But it was just economically.

With the entertainment on the Strip, do you remember how --

If you'll name the different ones, I'll tell you if I can remember them.

Do you remember seeing Frank Sinatra?

Um-h'm.

Liberace?

Um-h'm. My husband shook hands with Liberace.

Wow. Did you like him?

Yes. We all thought very much of him.

What about some of the acts like -- who was the other man who played the piano?

Borge?

Victor Borge.

Do you remember him?

Um-h'm.

So what kind of shows did you like best?

I liked all the shows they had here those days. But anymore, they are so loud that I really don't enjoy going to the shows. Of course, I'm not able to go now. But when I was able to, I wasn't too interested in the shows anymore because they were so loud.

They were better shows then, too, weren't they? You got dinner, also. The dinner

shows.

Oh, yes. We had dinner shows. That's what I enjoyed the most is to go to a lovely dinner and then see the show. But I don't know how come they went and cut them off the way they did. But it seemed like it happened all at once. I guess it wasn't paying their way enough. They made more money for just letting them gamble, I guess.

Which place did you like best? Which casino? Which hotel?

Well, I liked the Tropicana because he was a dear friend of ours.

Who was that?

Isn't that awful?

That's okay. It'll come back. So you liked the Tropicana. Which other one did you enjoy going to?

Bob Cannon. Bob Cannon was the head of the Tropicana.

The other voice that you hear is Joan Demitt. She's in the room with us, as well.

Okay. Go ahead.

Well, I guess that's about all I can say.

Did you have a lot of visitors coming to town, family members from outside of the city coming to visit you?

Yes. When we first came here and we were just getting started and buying into a business and all, here people would come and visit you. And finally, we had to say we would have to go Dutch on the treats because you couldn't afford to take everybody. But people did just pour in here.

Tell me about your husband. I know that he has several businesses. The automobile business, was that his major one?

That was a major one, yes.

Did it allow you to live better? Did it allow you to move into a better house, a bigger house?

Well, I don't know. It was so gradual. And we watched our money and saved it so carefully that I didn't pay too awful much attention.

When did you move here to Spanish Trails?

Oh, that's after my husband was dead for 20 years.

So before your husband passed away, I know that you went out sometimes. You went to dances and things like that. What kind of entertaining did people do in their homes?

Playing bridge. I belonged to about three different bridge clubs off and on.

What did the men do?

Well, my husband was always so busy with working that he didn't have too much time for anything. He never played cards or anything like that, but he did play golf.

So he was a golfer. One of the things that you said is that when your husband was on the city commission that he did a lot of for the African-American community.

Yes.

Can you remember any of the specific things that happened?

Well, he worked through other people to help him do the things that he did. One other commissioner was in charge of banks here. So through my husband, the colored man got his first credit to buy merchandise because years ago a black man couldn't buy anything on credit. So my husband was the instigator of the black man getting credit.

Do you remember any of the other things that happened while he was on the city commission at that time?

No. I just can't remember.

In the middle 1950s, 1955, a casino opened on the Westside called --

Um-h'm. The Moulin Rouge. Now it's being revamped again, which is wonderful.

Did you get to see it while it was in operation for that six --

I never got to go inside. But when my husband was commissioner, I did get to go to a black church over there on the Westside, which was very interesting for me.

It was different from the church that you attended?

Yes.

Do you remember any of the differences?

People were -- I don't know -- more in the spirit of singing and all that in the church.

As you were growing up, as you got married, what kind of stories did you hear in the

town? What kind of stories did your father tell? Did your husband tell stories when he would come home? Any favorite family stories?

No. I can't remember anything like that.

Las Vegas became a big tourist town in the late 40s, early 50s, all of these casinos. Did you see a change in the town at that time?

Oh, yes. I can see a change all the way through from way back when. You know, that's how Las Vegas was built, by gushes it seemed like. Then we would overbuild and be in a depression. Then we'd start in and build up again. It seemed like it was these gushes that would come and build our town up.

What about when the air base came, Nellis? Did that make any difference in the town at all?

Oh, yes, it did.

What did you see?

Oh, I didn't really see that much. But business-wise, it did.

Could you explain?

Well, it just made the town more prosperous. That was one other influx that came in to create a boom. This town had lots of growing pains as it was developing.

Do you remember a racetrack, the Joe W. Brown Racetrack?

Yes. I can remember the first racetrack we ever had -- my father had at Lorenzi Park. But the climate here isn't made for races. So it didn't go over too big. But we did have that. We had rodeo grounds and everything at Lorenzi Park. I forgot to tell about that.

How big was Lorenzi Park at that time?

Well, the grounds started out with 80 acres. Then my dad sold off 20. Then it was just a section of it that was the park section. He bought it really for agricultural purposes, the ground. But the ground is very spotty, and just some places it was good soil, and other places it wasn't. There wasn't any market to sell produce or anything in those days.

When you go over to Lorenzi Park now, there are houses right around. They're very close.

I lived in one of them at one time. It's called Twin Lakes.

Did your father help to put up any of those?

No. That was all separate. But I was in the first house, Block A, over there, right off of Tonopah Highway. See, years ago, the railroad came right down Tonopah Highway. Then it was called, later on, Rancho Road.

I guess that's where it got the name Rancho.

What was the most fascinating thing that you saw as you were growing up here?

I don't know. I don't think I've paid too awful much attention. I was busy living my own life, I guess.

What was the most interesting part of your life, the most interesting time?

The most interesting time, I think, was when I had my first child. I just feel sorry for anybody that never had children. I thought it was so wonderful to have a child.

Did you ever take your family up to Mount Charleston?

Oh, yes.

What was that like then?

Years ago, it was an all-day trip to get up there and back.

What was up there?

Oh, there were campgrounds.

(End side 2, tape 1.)

At one time your father owned a shop that sold sandwiches. What was the name of that little shop?

The Oasis. The sandwich part there, that was for the troop train. There was a soda fountain on one side. It was really a candy store. My dad hired a professional candy maker. He made chocolates and all different kinds. At Christmastime, we had ribbon candy. They'd have a tree down on Fremont Street and give an orange or an apple and candy canes to each child.

So did you eat a lot of candy?

Not that much. I was crazy about nuts and stuff. I used to go in there and steal nuts, and that would make me sick. I remember that.

Did you ever work in that shop?

Oh, no. I was just a child, like five or six years old.

So you didn't actually work until Lorenzi Park?

Yeah. That's all I ever did.

Now, you told me about the dances at Lorenzi Park. Do you remember anything about a tea dance?

A tea dance? No, I don't. But I can remember my dad would give gold coins for dance prizes.

And this was for the best dancer?

Um-h'm.

What kind of dances were you doing?

Ballroom dancing.

Good. Now, I think that Joan has a question that she wanted to ask you.

Where was Frenchman's Mine? Do you know where it was?

No, I really don't know. I think it was over on the east side of Las Vegas.

Near Sunrise Mountain?

Um h'm.

How about the railroad? Was the railroad a big hub of activity? Did you travel on the train very much?

No. I don't know how come my dad got a free ride for us to go up to Tonopah on the train. But anyway, that was my first time on a train.

How old were you?

I was pretty young, about maybe six years old.

Did you actually live in Lorenzi Park?

Yes, we did. After a while, my dad got tired of us moving back and forth through the summertime. And so we lived in this house, and this house was built out of railroad ties from the Tonopah railroad.

How big was the house?

Oh, it was two bedrooms and a living room and kitchen. Oh, and then we had a sun porch out in front. And later on, they made that into a room for the help for the swimming pool,

to sell tickets at the swimming pool. We hired a regular lady to work at the pool then. And she lived in Provo. I don't know how come my dad got in touch with her. But anyway, she worked there and she stayed with us.

Do you have a picture of your first house in Lorenzi Park?

No, I don't. I'm real sorry I got rid of a lot of pictures that I had of different things. But I moved around quite a bit. I got rid of so many things.

Are both of your daughters are still living, Louise?

Um-h'm.

And they live here in Las Vegas?

Yes. My youngest girl lives up here at Spanish Trails. She married a man by the name of Chaisson, C-h-a-i-s-s-o-n. And my other girl, she lives over there off of Alta and Rainbow.

How many grandchildren do you have?

I had two grandchildren, and I've got eight great-grands.

How long have you lived in this house?

Since about '89.

This is a beautiful place. Is this your favorite house?

Yes.

Good. How big is this house? How many square feet?

I think it's about 3500. I don't know for sure.

Do you have a swimming pool here?

No.

What did your father grow in Lorenzi Park?

Cantaloupes and melons and stuff. My grandparents always lived with me. So my grandfather, to have something to do, why, he would grow watermelon and cantaloupe and stuff like that. My dad, when he first started out there, planted grapevines. He said that this is the most ideal climate in the world to grow grapes. Him being from France, he really knew what he was talking about.

Now, you said your grandparents lived with you, also?

Um-h'm.

Whose parents? Your mother's parents or --

My mother's parents. I have never met any of my dad's people.

Did you ever go to Europe?

Yes, but that was after my husband died. I married twice after my husband died because I was so lonely. And I married really for companionship. But it never worked out either time. My second husband and I traveled quite a bit.

Where are some of the places that you enjoyed?

We traveled all through Europe.

What was your favorite place that you traveled?

Oh, I love London and Paris.

I've never been to either place. What should I be sure to see?

Oh, I wish you wouldn't ask me all that because my memory is not very good.

Okay. Are there any other stories that you'd like to share with us? Any events about Las Vegas that you'd like to share?

No. I can't remember anything.

Okay. Well, I really appreciate all the things that you talked about and all the memories that you shared. Thank you so much.

You're welcome.

(Recording interrupted.)

It had a pool and a dance hall. We had an awful lot of wild ducks out at the resort. This house we had up there up on the hill, after this couple I told you about that my dad helped support, well, this is years later, he used that house for musicians for the dance hall. So a lot of them stayed up there.

You keep saying a house on a hill. Where was that hill? What hill do you mean?

Well, you know that whole property is on a hillside. I say up on the hill, up the most top part.

A few minutes ago, I had turned the recorder off. But you said something about your father eventually selling the property. Do you remember when that happened or

whom he sold it to?

I can't remember the man's name. But I'm just saying that he lost all interest in it up there when his son died.

What happened to the property?

Well, it just disintegrated like, you know.

At some point the city purchased it from him?

That man sold it to somebody else, too, Wilson or something like that.

Do you remember how much money the city bought it for?

I just don't know.

Do you remember how much your father sold it for?

No, I don't.

Well, I'm going to stop now. I really appreciate this.

(Recording interrupted.)

I think that I'm the oldest native citizen of Las Vegas. Out of those two high schools, there isn't anybody that's left.

Who were some of your contemporaries in that day, the same age as you, that you knew in high school?

They're all gone. It's very hard to live to be 90 years old when all your friends are gone, all your old friends.

What about your sister?

My sister? My sister wasn't as outgoing as I was. I was always a very outgoing person.

Is she still here in Las Vegas?

Yes, but she's in a rest home.

That's right. You told me. So do you have the opportunity to go and see her?

I have had. But in the last few years, I can't go see her because I'm not strong enough. It just tires me out to go. I'm so short of breath. I think that's the reason I can't think is all because I'm so short of breath.

It's probably oxygen.

Are you on oxygen?

No. But I'm on a humidifier all the time.

Well, I think you're doing quite well.

Me, too. I think you're doing wonderfully.

Yeah. Well, I am getting tired right now.

We've stopped. I've stopped several times. We've going to stop again.

(Interview concluded.)

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