

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH MAX GOOT**

An Oral History Conducted by Charles Collins

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The Southern Nevada Jewish Community  
Digital Heritage Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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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 accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

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**Okay, Mr. Goot. Were you born in Southern Nevada?**

No. I was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

**Saint Paul, Minnesota. Why did you or your family come here?**

Why did my family come here?

**Yeah, uh-huh.**

My brother Albert was here at the time. And I just had gotten out of the army in 1944, in the latter part of '44, and I couldn't get anything in my particular mind like if it came to all metal goods, which was commercial stationery. My brother Albert asked me to come here to Las Vegas from New York City. At the time I lived in New York City. I got on the train—I didn't fly at the time—and got as far as Chicago and turned around and went back to New York. He flew out three days later to New York and got on a train with me and I came back here to Las Vegas with him. That's the reason I'm in Las Vegas as of today.

**What year was that?**

Nineteen forty-five. It was on April the third of 1945.

**Were you educated in Southern Nevada?**

No, I was not educated here. I was educated in Crown Point, Indiana.

**What was your occupation when you came out here?**

At the time I came out here, I didn't have a thing in mind. But I did purchase Stoney's Jewelry at the time I got here; that's what I went into at the time I got here in 1945.

**Is that the business you have right now?**

No. That was the business I had until 1951. That's what I did when I got here until '51. Then I sold Stoney's Jewelry and went into the Eldorado Club, which is now Benny Binion's Horseshoe Club, for six months and four days. The place didn't last after that and I went out of there.

At that time I happened to be walking by Tinch Furniture Store and I had heard from my wife that Tinch Furniture was quite a quaint place and whereby they had all these old antiques and things, old furniture in there. I walked inside and as I walked by her office, I heard her say that her husband had been very ill and she was going to try and sell the place. So I waited until she got off the telephone. When she got off the phone, I asked her what she wanted to do about the place and she said she wanted to sell it. I more or less made the transaction that same afternoon and purchased the place in 1951.

**Were you married when you came out here?**

Oh, yes. I had married a long time ago. I was married when I went in the army.

**When were you married, when and where?**

In New York City in 1942.

**Is or was church activity and important part of your life?**

Yes. Yes, it was.

**What church do you belong to?**

That was the Jewish community center or the Jewish temple, I should say, and I belonged to it here in Las Vegas. I belonged to it since I've been here, for the past thirty-one years.

**Do you remember the visits of any of the presidents or other important people to the Las Vegas area, such as President Roosevelt or Hoover, or spectacular events such as the 1942 crash of Carole Lombard's plane, important persons, divorces or marriages, such as Clark Gable?**

Well, I remember all of those when they happened. Of course, I wasn't here at the time that Carole Lombard had the crash against the mountain. I was here when Senator McCarthy was here for his speech. He was challenged by Mr. Greenspun to take a debate with him on the stage and he refused. I was here when quite a few presidents came out here. Matter of fact, I was here when the president came out here to take up on behalf of a few other candidates here in Nevada. I remember quite a few of them. Matter of fact, I remember quite a few influential people in the movie industry that's been here. Matter of fact, I've seen a lot of them and been in their company. What else would you like to know?

**Well, could you expand a little more on that, on that subject?**

For instance? What would you like to know about them? I mean as far as what I have done with them?

**Exactly.**

As I said before, I have spent time with them. Matter of fact, I happened to be a very, very good friend of Mr. Hank Greenspun, who owns the Morning Sun here in Las Vegas, has owned it since 1951. I've been in his company when he has entertained some very, very influential people from various parts of our country and also from other countries, like Israel and England and all throughout the world. I've been in his company when this all happened. I have enjoyed the people who he's been with and I've enjoyed the people whose company I've been in myself.

**Were you active in politics?**

I have been active in politics as far as going out and trying to help politicians, yes. I have been active when Ralph Lamb was candidate for our sheriff the first time, when he ran against the former sheriff here. I was active as far as a few presidents are concerned.

**Excuse me. What year was that with Ralph Lamb?**

Well, that was 1954. I've been active in quite a few local political battles, I imagine; you can call it that if you want to, as far as city commissioners are concerned, county commissioners are concerned. Yes, I've been very active. I was always interested in our community and wanted to make sure that the community had the right people in there. I was here when we had twelve thousand population when I arrived here. Today in sum total I think we're at around a hundred and seventy to a hundred and eighty thousand people. I think I had part or a parcel of Las Vegas and had done something for the community. I am very proud to say that I did have part of it.

**Could you tell me what party you were for?**

Democratic Party, although I did vote for our dear President Eisenhower when he ran for president. I thought he was a better man at the time. But I am a Democrat at heart, a full-fledged Democrat.

**Okay. Are you a member of a social club or other special interest group?**

Well, first, what kind of social club are you talking about?

**Well...I don't know, any social.**

Well, I belong to our Las Vegas Country Club. Is that what you're talking about?

**Yes.**

I belong to Las Vegas Country Club. I belong to the Saints and Sinners. I belong to the City of Hope. I belong to the Variety Club. I belong to the Temple Beth Sholom. I belong to the, as I said, Variety Club. I'm sorry. Oh, I can go on and on. I've made it my business. As a matter of fact, if you go into my den, you will find an entire wall of plaques of the things I have done for our community. As a matter of fact, I've been very active as far as the Greek Church is concerned. I got their church for them through our temple. As a matter of fact, they are on the grounds of our old temple. I think that kind of answered that for you, can I?

**Well, could you expand a little more on that as far as how did you get the church, the Greek Church?**

Yes. We had built our new temple and we had this old church on 13th and Carson. The Greek people at that time didn't have a place to take and worship. And I had known all the Greek people in town—Ted Syrus and Mike Mikalus and all the boys. And I had talked to them in regards to our place and told them that I could get the place for them. Matter of fact, it was so reasonable they couldn't turn it down. I got it for them—the building, land and all—for the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars with no interest and payable in ten years. At the time they purchased it, the day they purchased the temple, the value increased to around a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which they knew about. Matter of fact, they just burned the mortgage here a short time ago and they're pretty happy with what has happened to them. That have since built onto the temple, their temple.

I also am a little bit...well, I can say that I helped build the Catholic parochial school on 13th Street. Matter of fact, they had a cantor who was here many, many years ago appearing at the



Flamingo Hotel to take and raise money for Monsignor Lamb at that time. Monsignor Lamb was heading a drive to take and raise money for the Sheraton. They couldn't sell all the tickets. They were stymied. So Monsignor Lamb came into my place at Stoney's Jewelry and asked me if I could help them out. Inside of four days' time, I sold over eleven thousand dollars' worth of tickets for them, which helped them out a great deal. Then we raised a lot of money that particular night at the Flamingo Hotel to take and help raise the money for the parochial school on 13th Street for Monsignor Lamb.

**Is this Monsignor Lamb related to Ralph Lamb?**

No. No. Monsignor Lamb is not related to him, as he has since passed away, may he so rest. He was a wonderful, wonderful man.

I can go on to other organizations, like the City of Hope. I raised a hundred and eight thousand dollars for them in 1957. I did that because my mother and father were both suffering from cancer at the time and I thought, well, I should do my share to try to help the cancer patients. I raised, as I said, a hundred and eight thousand dollars for them. Per capita we raised more money here in Las Vegas than they did anyplace else in the entire world.

**How did you raise this money? Was it through...?**

Well, we raised it through the fact that we had the hotels working on this project to where they tried to raise more money than each other, each hotel on the Strip. As I said, in a short time we raised a hundred and eight thousand dollars in Las Vegas in '57. That was a lot of money in '57.

**Yeah, it sure was. It's still a lot of money today.**

As I said, I was also given a testimonial dinner and not many men receive a testimonial dinner their entire lives. So I have that to be proud of. I was given the Man of the Year Award by our temple, which I'm very proud of. I was given the (Ekeeve) Award. As I said before, if you walk into my den, I can show you the wall and it's plastered with a lot of plaques, which I'm very proud of.

**Well, do you mind if we go in after I finish the interview?**

Why certainly. You're more than welcome to come in and see them.

**Okay. I have another question here for you. Is or was gambling an important recreational activity for you or your family?**

Well, I'll tell you. I can say that my first two years of Las Vegas life was rather disastrous to me. I was more or less involved in gambling to my sorrow. I woke up one fine morning and said, "What am I doing?" And I just stopped gambling. Nobody can live here and be in business or live here too long and gamble. That's for our dear tourists and we should all have that in mind.

**What other kinds of recreation do you seek either alone or with your family?**

Oh, with my family, as a matter of fact, we do everything. I am a fisherman. We explore a lot of things—Death Valley and the river. I've been to Lake Mead. We go to Valley of Fire. We do a lot of things here in town.

My wife is very active with the ballet and she finds a lot of things interesting here. Matter of fact, she's active in church doings. We just make ourselves useful in our community. We are community-minded.

We have two wonderful boys that were born and raised here. They're now in Atlanta, Georgia, but they were raised, went to school here; went to Las Vegas High. They went to John S. Park Grammar School.

**Did they attend college here, also?**

No. They went to University of Arizona in Tucson. There was no college at the time they were here.

**Oh, oh. That must be quite a few years ago.**

Yeah, that's quite a few years.

**Do you remember anything about the early aboveground atomic tests?**

Yes, we do. We certainly do. We remember the first one, where the first one went off. It took our window shade right out of the window and tore it off in half. That was quite a big boom. Of course, it was a new one, new thing for us. We found out how strong it was. Of course, there's been some stronger ones since, but we have come along with that. So we're pretty proud of what they've done with that.

**How many homes have you had here?**

I have only had two, two homes.

**Two homes. Could you give me the address before this one?**

Yes. The funny thing is it's the same address, 1920, Bracken, and now I live at 1920 South Sixth Street.

**Did you own the house at the time?**

I owned that house. When I first came to town, I lived at 901 Bridger; I rented that.

**Okay, let's see. What changes have you noticed in Southern Nevada since you've first arrived?**

Oh, so many of them, so many of them. And everything is for the better. Of course, we did have a better town when we had a smaller city. But you can't stop progress; you've got to go along with it. As I said before, we all helped particularly in having our city progress and we're very proud of it.

**Okay, let's see. Well, could you tell me something, well, about the economic changes in Nevada as far as...I mean, everything; industries, hotels, tourism?**

Well, when we first got here, we had two hotels. We had the Last Frontier Hotel and the El Rancho Hotel. We saw each individual hotel built. We used to feel very sorry for the hotels as they built for one reason. The reason was that we used to see, oh, as few as four to eight people in the showrooms when they were first built. There weren't that many tourists that they could fill up these showrooms. They weren't that many people they could fill up the gambling casinos. Of course, as I said before, with progress we did not stop and more tourists came to our town. The more tourists that came to our town, the bigger our town got and the more hotels we got. And now, as you see what's happened to our city, as a young man in our college, I guess you understand what growing pains we've gone through, young man. I think that we are in for a lot more to come and I hope in my boys' days—after all, I am getting on—I hope my sons will appreciate this town of Las Vegas.

**What environmental changes have you seen taking place?**

For instance?

**Pollution. I don't know. How was it in those days when you first came here?**

How was it in those days? The air was beautiful, clear, brisk. Of course, summertime, hot. And you didn't have no air-conditioning. We had the water coolers. We didn't have the humidity we have now because we didn't have the foliage. Of course, it was a little bit miserable. But the evenings were cool and we didn't mind it. Right now with all the humidity, the evenings are still very warm and you suffer quite a big deal. But we didn't mind it.

**What about social changes?**

Quite a bit, quite a few, quite a bit in town.

**Could you—**

Elaborate?

**Yeah, elaborate on that a little.**

People used to take and have a lot of doings in their homes prior to all this and they've gone away from it. They don't have the social feelings that they used to have in town here many years ago. When you used to take a visit, you used to drive to a person's home and you saw all the cars parked there. You knew that's where you ended up for the evening. Drive around today and you don't see that. People are out at the hotels. They have nothing else to do. They're out at the hotels. Of course, now they don't have these little sideshows like they had—what they call them? Anyhow, that's where they are. They're downtown.

Our downtown today is beautiful. At the time I was here, first got here, we had, I think, two or three little places downtown. My brother got here many years before I did and he had a grocery store on the corner of Eighth and Fremont and they said he won't be there very long because he's all the way out in the country. That's Eighth and Fremont; that wasn't too far outside of city. So it's all changed. I still say it's changed for the better.

**Yes. Does your brother still have that business?**

No. My brother has retired. He's retired.

**Okay. Well, I think that's about it of my questionnaire I have here. Would you like to add anything else?**

Well, I just hope I've been informative to you, son, and I just hope that whatever I've told you can help you and help the college because I'm all for our college. I'm only sorry that UNLV lost our game the other night.

**Oh, yeah. That was bad.**

As a matter of fact, as far as the social thing is concerned, we had to look forward to these things every time there was a game. I'm only sorry that it ended. But as I said before, I hope this has been very informative to you and your school and if I could be of any further assistance to you, don't hesitate calling. I'd be very happy to help you out. If you like to go and see that inside, I'd be very happy to show it to you.

**Sure, sure. I'd be more than happy to go in and see. I've got to take notes about that, too.**

All right. That's fine.

**About everything here in the house.**

All right.

**[Pause in recording]**

**Maybe if you would like to tell me a little bit more about your business and how you got started?**

All right. As far as me getting started is concerned, when I first got here I had a partner that was picked out for me by my brother whose name was Harry Wallerstein, who has since passed on. He was in the jewelry business and I had not known the first thing about jewelry. That was a very, very lucrative business at the time. And then, of course, when I went in the furniture business, I seeked out Mr. Harry Wallerstein and I took him in as a partner at that time to go into the furniture business with me at Tinch Furniture. From there I graduated and went into the furniture business at Hollywood Furniture, which was an upgrading furniture business; it was a better grade of furniture. I started that in the latter part of '51. I was there until 1965. Sorry, forgive me. I was there and I started Hollywood—I mean I bought Hollywood Furniture out in 1958 and was there until '65 and gave up the furniture business in '65 and then went into the vending business and sold out the vending business to ARA. And I am still public relations with them and also public relations for a food company called Casino Food on Western Avenue. Now, the public relations in those two firms, I enjoy it. I have a very wonderful relationship with both firms and they look forward to having me on for a long time and I hope I can stay on for a long time.

**Did you have a lot of competition at the time with the jewelry and the furniture business?**

Well, yes, there was competition, but...Shall I be braggadocios and say that I just kind of sold myself before I sold my merchandise? And that's about how far as I can it will you, son. I think that was it.

**Tell me a little more about the—why did you sell your business?**

Well, in 1965, we had a strike of all unions and I think I had around a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars in repossessions of furniture at that time. There wasn't a union that wasn't on strike at the time. I just didn't want to fight it anymore and I just gave it up, sold out what I had, and that's why I was out of business. I didn't just try to be in business anymore; that's exactly what happened.

But I still am very active in quite a few things, as I said, in the vending business and also in the food business. And I still am charitable minded. I still work for different charities. I hope and pray that the good Lord will keep me here for a long time to be able to help them for a long time to come.

**I have another question, too, that just came into my mind.**

Yes, go right ahead, son.

**What were the—I mean was it very expensive at the time when you were here? Everything had to be shipped out here—food, supplies, everything. Compare it to other cities like Arizona and even more important, California.**

As long as you're asking, I'll tell you this. Our living conditions here were much cheaper than they were Back East because I had gone Back East a few times. And we went into Los Angeles



many times and our living conditions were as cheap, if not cheaper here, than they were in Los Angeles.

As far as the renters were concerned, as far as people were concerned for renting out apartments or homes, it was very reasonable here. There was nothing wrong with what we had here.

As far as food was concerned at the hotels, it was a cinch. It was beautiful. When I first got here, you could walk into the hotels—there were two of them at the time—you could walk in and get a seven-course dinner for a dollar and ninety-five cents. Of course, it has changed since, but it lasted for a long time. The hotels were only interested in one thing. They weren't interested in making money on the food; they were interested in bringing people here for the gambling. As far as the food was concerned that was secondary. Living conditions were very, very reasonable in Nevada.

**Another thing, could you tell me anything about Howard Hughes?**

Well, yes. I remember seeing Howard Hughes many times. I seen how he used to walk around with his jacket over his arm and a pair of tennis shoes and a dirty shirt. And I seen him many times at the Desert Inn and the El Rancho and the Flamingo and many places in town. When he was interested in buying these hotels, it amazed everybody. I remember when he bought the land out here on West Charleston, when he bought those thousands of acres. We didn't know this was going to be the start of something that he's going to come along later on and buy all these hotels.

I'm sorry to say and sorry to see that he got the okay from our state for six hotels. I don't think he should have gotten the green light for it. I think he has control of too many hotels, which is...I think I stayed on the (stands in Caesars.)

**Yeah, which has prevented other big companies and corporations to come in.**

You're right. I think it's very bad. But now we just have to wait and see what's going to happen.

As I said before, I'm very sorry that our state saw fit to give a green light for anything like that.

That's very bad.

They say, "Is he alive?" Well, I don't know. I remember I saw him alive. I haven't seen him alive lately. But time will tell.

**They say that—well, it's a fact that Las Vegas was first settled by Mormons. Nowadays it seems that the Mormons have kind of rather moved away from the city.**

I don't think you're right, young fellow.

**No?**

I think the Mormons are still here and there's nothing wrong. They are religious people. They belong here and they have a right to have taken worship the way they want, the same as anybody else.

**Oh, well, I have nothing against that.**

I know; I understand that. I'm just talking in general. I think they have the right and they should be here and they're going to be here for a long time to come, the same as anybody else, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Jewish people or anybody else. I think it's great. We have a wonderful town here and we don't have any religious feelings, which is great.

**Well, do you have anything else to say?**

No, I think that is about all. And as I said before, if I can be of any further help, don't hesitate calling on me.

**Okay, sure. Well, I think that's about all.**

All right. Now if you turn that off, I'll take you inside and show you something.

**Okay. Thank you.**

**[End of recorded interview]**