

An Interview with Lee Gray

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The UNLV @ Fifty Oral History Project

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Table of Contents

Family history; moving to Las Vegas; Father's work history; Mother's employment; neighborhood school; childhood memories of Strip in 1950's; remembering youth organizations; businesses and nightlife on the Westside.....1-6

Early television show with Bob Bailey; discussion about Jimmy Gay, one of the first African-Americans to hold high position in gaming; Jimmy Gay's philanthropy in old neighborhoods; brief discussion on bigotry in Las Vegas.....7-8

Education through high school; working for entertainer Bob Williams; college in Glendale, Arizona, and in Denver, Colorado.....9-10

Coming to UNLV; working on grounds, then on moving crew, then moving to heating and ventilation; taking classes at community college to become AC man; upgrading to supervisor at UNLV's HV/AC department.....10-11

In-depth discussion of digital-control systems that heat and cool new buildings; description of 'suiting up' to enter areas deemed hazardous (areas that have asbestos); method of 'quartering' the campus so that 13 men can handle all buildings; doing preventive maintenance to stop problems before they start.....11-14

Brief musings on dormitories (maintenance); privatization of maintenance jobs; influence (if any) of change in university presidency on maintenance department.....15

Work and hobbies outside of supervisory position; wife's influence on owning property; opinions on how to keep children out of gangs; son's education at a private school; importance of wholesome activities for youth.....16-21

Preface

Lee Gray has been in Las Vegas since the 1950's. His father moved here in 1943, worked several jobs to save money, and then sent for his brother. He bought land, had his brother build a home on the property, and then sent for his wife and children. The whole family lived on the west side, and Lee's father and mother worked several jobs to provide for the large family. He has fond memories of the many youth organizations in which he and his brothers and sisters were involved.

Lee attended school at Westside Elementary, K.O. Knudsen Jr. High, and Rancho High School. After high school, he worked for Bob Williams during the summer, helping with Bob's comedy act. Lee attended 2 years of college at Central Arizona College in Glendale, and then transferred to Regis College in Denver, Colorado. He worked as a teacher's aide for a school district for a short while, and then got a call from a friend to come out to Las Vegas and work at UNLV.

Mr. Gray's work history at UNLV started with grounds keeping, next the moving crew, and finally heating and ventilation. He wanted the opportunity to work in air conditioning, so he took courses at the community college to earn qualification for AC work.

Today Lee is a supervisor in UNLV's HV/AC department. He and another supervisor oversee the work on heating and cooling systems in most of the buildings on campus. Their primary area of focus is preventative maintenance, but the entire crew stays very busy trouble-shooting, maintaining equipment, and answering calls from various sites.

This is Claytee White. It is November the 20th, 2006, and I'm with Mr. Lee Gray this morning here in the -- facilities management building?

Well, we're in the HV/AC shop.

Okay. So how are you today?

I'm doing fine. Yourself?

Great. Now, you have just been telling me some interesting things. So we're just going to get right to it. Your parents came here from Fordyce.

Yes.

Tell me about that. Tell me when they came and why they came.

My father was in Las Vegas in 1943 to get out of the south. He came here and, you know, jobs were hard to get. So he used to tell us that he used to shine shoes for the military guys and he did pretty good. Once he made enough money, he sent for my uncle. My dad bought some land, and he had my uncle build him a home. My uncle also built a home right behind our house for himself.

I guess two years later he sent for my mom and my two older sisters and brothers. When they came to Vegas, my mom started working at the Thunderbird hotel. Then they started having more children, so they sent for my grandmother. I think in '48 my grandmother came to take care of all the children. There were 13 in the family.

After he got everything together, got his home, got his family out here, he started working for a little place called the Dollar Market. It was run by Ron Silverman of the Silverman family.

Where was it located?

It was on Main Street off Bonanza. There were lots of little shops -- there were furniture stores, there was a grocery store -- all kinds of shops up and down from Las Vegas Boulevard going toward downtown, towards Main Street. He worked there for years, and he used to take us to work with him to help him out, you know, just to get us in the workforce. From there he did little jobs. He had about three jobs.

Then he worked for a little place called Brimey's Print Shop. They used to print bingo cards. He used to go in there and do maintenance in his shop. Then he worked for a little jewelry store. I can't think of the name of it right now.

So he never worked at BMI?

No. No, no, no. He just did more grocery stores and a lot of maintenance.

Now, where were the houses located that your uncle built for the family?

Oh, West Las Vegas. All of the blacks, our people, lived from A Street up to K Street, almost up to Martin Luther King. I can't think of the name it was called before Martin Luther King. In that area it was just a big family of our people. You know, everybody knew everybody. I guess that's where I can say all the kids got to know each other. We lived there for a long time, until the freeways came in and dispersed all the families, you know, throughout that neighborhood.

Now, today, I know where the radio station is.

Old Westside. I went there, Westside Elementary School.

Now, how far was your house from Westside Elementary School?

One block away.

Wow.

I lived on Morgan Street and the school was on Washington. It was off of D and Washington. I used to walk to school. I think there were only Kit Carson and Highland. It was called Highland, up on Martin Luther King now. It's called something else now. I don't know why I can't think of these names.

But was it called Highland before it was Martin Luther King, the street?

Yes, exactly. It was called Highland because they had a school up there.

Now, your mom worked for the Thunderbird.

Yes.

Now, tell me about that. Did she work as a maid at the Thunderbird?

She was a maid at the Thunderbird.

What are some of the stories that she used to tell you about the Thunderbird?

Well, my mom didn't really tell us too many stories about the Thunderbird. You know, she was more family-orientated. She never brought the job home. It was very seldom that she brought the job home to the kids. So we really didn't know too much about it.

Did you ever go to work with her?

No. No, no, no. My dad used to take us out on the Strip. We couldn't go in any hotels. But my

dad always took us out on the Strip. We walked the Strip.

He was really a forward-thinker.

Yes, he was. Yes, he was.

Now, tell me what did the Strip look like to a young boy back in the 40's. Now, when were you born?

Fifty, 1950.

Okay, 1950. So what did the Strip look like, let's say, in 1958. You probably remember.

It was bare. You started at the Sahara. There was the Stardust, the Sands, and the Castaways. The last thing on the Strip was the Hacienda. There wasn't a lot out there. But he used to take us to the Sahara and we used to walk around. They used to have those little camels. They brought the camels back, see, those statues. He used to take us around and show us things, tell us things, you know. My dad was a very outward person. He never wanted for anything. That's something that -- you know, even with 13 children, he took care of his family. You know, I was very proud of my dad.

Yeah, you should be. I mean 13 kids and he took care of them well; that's great.

Now, were your parents members of the NAACP?

No. My father was the superintendent of Church of God and Christ under C.C. Cox.

Now, where was that located?

That was on E and Madison, the Upper Room Church of God and Christ.

So that was probably one of the first churches over there.

Yes.

Is that where you went to church?

Yes. That's where I grew up. For the whole family that was our church.

So tell me some of the church activities that kids were involved in.

Well, we weren't really too involved with a lot of activities. It was more of the Sunshine Ministry that we would go in. But a lot of the activities that we were in, like the Boys Club, which we had a group of guys -- you know, it was boys club, Boy Scouts, we played Catholic youth basketball, football, baseball. This is, again, stuff that we were in. We'd go to camps. You know, they took us to different areas of Las Vegas for camp, like Camp Bonanza. That's up in Mount Charleston.

They took us up to Lee Canyon with some of these groups.

So now, Boy Scouts, you had a Boy Scout troop?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Now, who were some of the scout leaders?

One of the scout leaders was bishop -- the pastor of Brown Derby. I can't think of his name right now.

Brown Derby as a church?

Well, now. It's a church now.

Oh, I see what you mean.

I can't recall his name.

That's okay.

I don't know why I can't recall his name.

No problem. You just also said a couple of other things that young boys did. You said something about a Catholic?

Catholic Youth Organization.

Okay. Now, tell me about that.

This is where it was. The church was on H and Morgan. It was a Catholic church. We all would visit the church, not every Sunday, but we would visit. They'd tell us about different sporting events that the church is going to have and we would all just join up, most all the little kids in the neighborhood. This is what we did.

So whom did you play against?

Oh, we played against St. Anne's and a lot of the other Catholic churches in Las Vegas.

It was called the Catholic Youth Organization?

Yes.

Was your part of this an all-black group?

Yes. Yes.

And you were playing against St. Anne's. Now, would that have been an all-white group?

That's right. Yes, and the same thing with basketball. With basketball sometimes I would be the only black kid on the whole team, and we'd play against other churches.

Do you remember any of the priests who were at -- that was St. James; is that correct?

Yes.

Do you remember any of the priests who were over there at the time?

No. It's been so long.

But now, very, very interestingly, you have brought with you today a program, 1963 -- 1963.

-- when Martin Luther King, Jr., came here to speak --

At the NAACP.

Okay. So this was probably their big banquet of the year.

Yes.

And the thing that I like about this is some of the sponsors of this event who took out ads in the program were some of the businesses on the Westside.

Yes.

Could you tell me about some of these businesses, some of the things that you remember?

I remember the Dixie Meat Market. We would always go to the Dixie Meat Market because Harry Shaw's father worked there and we always patronized with the little money that we had. Then, too, that's where a lot of the people shopped-- the Dixie Meat Market.

And this was located at 631 North H.

Yes.

Okay. Now, tell me about the barbershops. Did most men get their haircut at Crockets?

Oh, yes. Yes. Crockets. They had a few beauty parlors, too. I didn't bring everything I should have brought.

But this is wonderful. And the Crockets Barbershop was at 1305 North D.

Yes.

Was this also a place that men used to sit around and talk?

Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

Do you remember any stories that you used to hear in there?

No, I don't. I wish, you know...

Okay. I see a dry cleaner. I see a drugstore.

Yes.

Wow.

That was right next to the Dollar Market, Van Buren Drugs. It was on Van Buren. It was called Desert Drugs.

Wow. Tell me about the nightlife for the older people in the area. What did you hear about it?

The nightlife in Las Vegas was on Jackson Street. There was nothing but clubs all up and down Jackson Street. We were kids, and we used to just walk up and down the street, look in and see all these people in these gambling establishments. It was really something. Everybody had money. Everybody had money in their pockets. Just by looking, people dressed nice. They were up and down Jackson Street going from casino to casino. It was really something.

Sometimes a friend and I were at The Cove and The Cove had a pool in the back. You know, we were just hanging around. The guy would say, "Hey man, you guys want a dollar?" We said yeah. We didn't have anything. So what he did was he threw them in the pool. So me and my friend, hey, we needed a dollar.

Did you swim?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. So we both came out with a dollar. Las Vegas was, you know, a beautiful town and I still think it's a nice town. I love Las Vegas. There's nothing like it.

Yeah, I agree. I agree wholeheartedly.

Even back on some of these advertisements, they had Anderson Dairy, which put in best-wishes ads for the NAACP. There were -- the governor, Oran Gragson. He was one of them.

The mayor.

The mayor. I think he was at the --

I'm sure he was probably at the dinner.

Yeah, he was at the dinner. Sawyer, he was there.

Grant Sawyer, okay.

And, see, a lot of people don't know Bob Bailey used to have his own show that was called the Bob Bailey Show.

Now, was that the radio show or the television show?

Television show. When we were in the Boys Club, we went out looking for donations, and he invited us on his show.

Oh, fantastic.

So we were on his show trying to get donations for the Boys Club in West Las Vegas.

Wonderful. Now, tell me about the Bob Bailey Show. Did you watch it on television?

Yes, I did.

What was the format? What was it like?

He had all kinds of stars. He brought all kinds of celebrities in. It was a talk show, more of a talk show that he had here.

Now, do you remember when there was also a female hostess along with him?

No. No, I don't.

That would have been before your time, probably, about 1955.

So he would interview some of the stars that were entertaining in the town that week?

Exactly, yes, and even some of the local people, like Jimmy Gay. Now, Jimmy was one of the first blacks to have a position at the Sands hotel, I mean high position. From there he went downtown to the Palace Station -- not Palace Station. I'm sorry. The one right next to the --

I know which one. I can put it in later, but I know which one he went to.

Yes, and he was a big person in there. I guess he was over the whole casino, over really the whole establishment there. So Jimmy was well known. When Jimmy Gay first came out to Las Vegas, we used to have a center called Jefferson Center and he ran that for quite awhile. This is during my older brother's days.

Does your older brother remember when he had a beauty pageant over there at Jefferson Center?

My sister was in it.

Oh, fantastic.

She has pictures of that. My sister was in that when they had a beauty pageant there.

I would love to see those photographs that she has of that.

Okay.

Because we don't have those photographs on campus.

Tell me more about Jimmy Gay, what you remember.

Oh, Jimmy Gay, wow. Jimmy Gay lived on B Street. We lived on Morgan in between B and C. So we could go right down the alley. Jimmy Gay, Jr. -- see, we grew up together. We were always at his house. He had so many celebrities. You know, he was very well known in the community, had a lot of respect. A lot of people gave this man respect because he was a good man.

Did you ever hear that he could help you find a job if you needed one?

Oh, yes. Yes. A lot of people came to town and they'd go see Jimmy Gay, and Jimmy Gay would help them find jobs, even at RECCo. They have like Reynolds and RECCo. Well, my uncle worked for the test site, Sam Brandon. He was in that part, too, where he became foreman over some of our white counterparts. That was a big step, especially back in the 60's. After that everything started working out real good for a lot of us here.

See, here in Las Vegas I didn't see a lot of bigotry. Now, when I was young we used to ride the bus all the time. I'd sit anywhere on the bus back in the early 60's. We'd go downtown to theaters. I could sit up front or I could sit up high, wherever I wanted.

Did your older brothers also have the same experience with the theaters?

Yes. We've heard a lot about it. We read a lot about it. But a lot of it, we didn't really see it here. Now, I got a little bit like -- say, when I was playing sports, I'd be called the "N" word every now and then. I just took it out in the sport.

Okay, good. That's great.

Like I say, I'd be the only black one on the team. But then my white teammates would say, "Don't worry about it, Lee." So I'd just say okay. I'd just play harder; that's all.

That is great. Tell me about your -- any political involvement at all?

No, I had no political involvement at all. No.

When you had elected officials like Oran Gragson and Grant Sawyer and all of them, did your family vote for those?

Oh, yes. Yes. My folks were very political. Yeah, because I guess they would always say this is for the grown people. So they did it for themselves, you know, trying to help us out.

That's great. So now, where did you go to school?

I started at Westside Elementary School. At Westside Elementary we were predominately black. We may have had three Hispanic families in the community. From Westside we went to Madison. See, we didn't have buses back then. We had to walk to school. From the seventh grade is when we started integrating schools. I went from Madison in the seventh grade to K.O. Knudsen.

Now how far away was that?

Then we were bussed. They started giving us buses and we would ride to school because K.O. was on Atlantis and Boulder Highway.

Oh, okay. It was across the city.

Yeah.

Now, what about sixth grade centers? Do you remember when they had those?

No. We went from -- it was called elementary school to junior high school to high school.

Okay. You were born in the 50's. Did you have any kids in school in the 1970's? Do you know anything about school desegregation in the 70's?

No.

Okay. After high school you came to work here at UNLV?

No. No.

Tell me about the jobs you had.

Okay. I used to work for an entertainer. His name was Bob Williams. He had a comedy act. That was right out of high school. Well, that was like during the summertime I'd work for him. He would come to my basketball games. He would take pictures. This is in high school. Then I went to college in Arizona, Central Arizona College. He called me up and said, "Lee, I've got a performance." I think it was in Glendale. He said, "I want you there because I've got a job for you." It's a dog act that he had, and he said, "Okay, Lee, all I want you to -- I'm going to introduce you and what I want you to do is to" -- he gave me some food in my hand -- "Walk and just drop little pieces of food and the dog will follow." So that was my part in his act.

So now, this was in Glendale, California?

No, no. Arizona.

Glendale, Arizona. Okay.

Yes. I went to school there at Central Arizona College for two years.

Did you play any sports?

I played basketball.

Okay, great.

I also ran track. Then from there I went to Regis College in Denver, Colorado. After that I started getting little odd jobs. I worked for the school district a little bit.

What did you do for the school district?

I was a teacher's aide. I was six hours short, but I never went back to get all my credits.

No. And you work right here at UNLV.

Yes.

And you would never go and get the six hours?

No. I haven't gotten them yet.

What are you waiting for?

I don't know. I told my wife that I think I'm going to just go back so I can substitute. But I haven't done it yet.

Then I came out here. I had a friend that said, "Hey man, come on, I've got a job for you." So I started out here at UNLV in '82, 1982. I came out here and I worked on grounds. I was mowing lawns. I was pruning trees. I guess about a year and a half later they had moved my friend over to the moving crew, so he moved me with him. I started working in the moving crew and I worked there for about a year and a half. Then one of my bosses came to me. He said, "How would you like to have an upgrade?" And I said, "For sure."

So what he did was put me on the heating and ventilation, HV/AC, crew where I was taking care of all our cooling towers. I did that for about two years. After the two years he asked me whether I wanted to be a boiler man or an AC man? So I told him I want to be an AC man. He said, "Well, you go take some classes." So I took classes.

Where did you take the classes?

Community college. I got my certificates and got my credits. After that I came back. I guess I worked another three years right here on campus doing hot calls, repairing chillers, repairing cooling towers. Then he said, "Well, look, we'll get you another upgrade." So now I'm a supervisor here at UNLV's HV/AC department.

And we know this as facilities; is that correct? What do we know your department as?

Yeah, it's facilities. Yes, it is. It's the facilities and we work the HV/AC.

So when my office is too cold, you're to blame?

No. Our control guys are to blame. We're there to repair it. If anything's wrong with it, we're there to make sure that you're comfortable.

Okay, I see.

But anytime if you're cold, I'll give you my card. You call me, and I'll take care of you.

Fantastic. That's wonderful.

So what do you think about UNLV at this point? You've been here since 1982. So how many years have you been here?

Twenty-five years.

So what do you think of this place?

UNLV has grown so much. When I first came to work at UNLV, Thomas & Mack was only foundation, and they were just finishing up Beam Hall. It wasn't a lot of campus. It was very small.

Oh, it had to be.

I love working at UNLV. I love the people here. I've made a lot of friends. I've made a lot of friends here.

That's wonderful. That is great.

Let's say that there is a new building, let's say Lied Library, which was built a few years ago, is a brand-new building, from the beginning what does your department do with a new building?

Well, here lately, since we've gotten a new engineer in our department, we look at all the plans that come out. Any of the plans on these new buildings that come out now, we spread them out and we make sure that everything that we need to take care of this building is in the specs. That is the most important thing of all. See, for a while we never did it. We had so many problems with these buildings after contractors would leave that we had to go in and repair everything. But now since we've got this new guy --

And what is his name?

Don Land. Since he's been here with us, he's been a great help to us on getting a lot of things straightened out around campus from our DDC systems, that's our digital-control systems. See, right now all the new buildings are on a computer system. We have a control guy that's up here in the CSB building, Campus Services Building, and he can see all the equipment, what's running and what is it doing, on a computer from Lied Library to Bigelow Health, all the new buildings. Sometimes he may look at it and say, hey, it's showing 74 degrees, but it may be 80 degrees in there. So we have to send somebody over from our crew to verify what's going on in that room from our air handlers to our VAV boxes because really that's where you get all your heating and cooling from. Well, the boilers, we have boilers, too, that ship heat into the building through air handlers and through coils in your rooms. So you're in the Lied Library, right?

Yes.

See, that's how yours work. We have a big air handler on top and then we have a chiller, which is like your home air conditioner. What it does is push all this cold water up through those air handlers and it pushes all that cold air into the rooms. That's where you get our cooling from, which they have like boxes in there. We call them VAV boxes, variable volume. They've got a damper on them that opens and closes, and when that thermostat says it's 74 degrees in here so let's close off, it will close itself off. You'll get minimal air, maybe 20 percent, that's all you'll get, into the room until it calls for it again.

The same thing happens with heating. You have boilers, which send 150 to 170-degree water through coils all through those VAV boxes. You have a diaphragm, a valve, which controls the flow of that water. When that valve is open, if your room is too cold, it will push heat in there. Once that states, okay, I'm satisfied --

(End tape 1, side A.)

Then that coil will start cooling off. Once it cools off, it will keep your room comfortable. Then once it calls for whatever, heat or cooling, it will go either way. So it's a great system in some of the buildings. Now, in some of the buildings we have to manually do a lot of the work.

These are the older buildings?

These are the older buildings, which keep us running to these buildings. You know, too hot, too cold. So we have to go up and make some kind of adjustment.

So Flora Dungan building, that seven-story building...

We just about have that -- we've got some of it. Our air handlers, we have those under control. Air handlers and our cooling valves and hot water valves, we have those under control. But it's just the VAV boxes are the mixing boxes that's in there because, see, we can't get up in the attic.

Why not?

Hazardous waste is up in those attics. So they won't let us go up in there. It's asbestos. But it's up top. It's all on the walls. So it's sealed. But they will not let us go up in there to do anything. So we have two guys on campus that if we have a problem over there, they have to suit up and go up and repair and solve our problems for us in those attics.

Now, what do you mean by "suit up"?

They have to put their masks, their white gown, their gloves. They've got to tape it off. They've got to do all this before they get up in there because they've got to protect themselves, too. These guys went to school for this. We also have a monitoring system out there making sure that we're not getting a good backflow of asbestos into the room. It all has to be monitored. So it keeps them safe and it keeps the clients or customers safe. But they are getting rid of it from a lot of the buildings now. Like the small technology, geosciences, they had a lot in there. They're bringing companies in now to remove all this stuff out so we can go in and do our job.

I'm sure that the law school, which used to be the old library, probably had asbestos before they renovated.

It did. Exactly. So they had to go in there and do that first. They had to go in and take it all out first. The same thing happened at Paradise. Paradise was the same way. They've cleaned Paradise out.

That's wonderful.

I think they sent some company over there and took care of all of that. So they keep us safe. That's a good thing. You know, you don't go home with all these particles on you, taking it to your family. So that's what I really like about the safety here on campus because they let us know where every hot spot is on campus. We've got a record of everything that's hot, where you can't go, and that is very important.

So how many men do you supervise?

Well, there are 13 of us, 13 HV/AC techs. We have two supervisors here, Steven Joseph and myself. What we do is just split the guys up and we have RW's, which are repair workers who assist the technicians. You know, we have four areas here. What we did is we quartered the campus. We have two techs and one repair worker working with each tech, you know, working with two of the techs at each area. It's been working real well for us. We're getting a lot more done now instead of everybody just running all over the place. We've got a great bunch of guys.

Wonderful. Now, when you say "techs," those are the guys who have taken some of the classes that you took over at the community college?

Yes. A lot of them come in from -- we have some come in from the air force, where they've been working air-conditioning. So they just come right in and don't really have to take a class. They just have to learn what we have out here. We've also got guys out here that are very good at what they do. We teach a lot of the guys. We brought some guys in from regular air-conditioning places. Once they get on campus, we just take them around and show them the buildings, things that should be done about their chillers, their air handlers and the exhaust fans. We've got so much. We've got hundreds of PM's that we do each month.

PM's?

Yeah, preventative maintenance. Then we've got to split maybe 300 PM's up into eight guys with four RW's. We can be doing that all day, I mean for the whole month. A lot of times, too, we get a lot of calls -- you know, too hot, too cold -- which we're trying to get away from. See, we're here for preventative maintenance. We're here to stop the problem before it starts. But it's hard when you have to take a lot of "too hot, too cold" calls.

Oh, yes, I understand that.

So that keeps us really busy. Sometimes Steven and myself go out and help the guys. We go out and make sure that things are being done, which a lot of times we don't have to because these guys are good. They're good.

That's fantastic. Now, is it 24 hours, your department?

It's seven days a week.

But eight hours a day, probably.

Well, yeah, because we get guys -- we go home at five o'clock. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday

we've got one guy here that comes in early and gets off at five and then we have another guy that stays until ten. So we're pretty much covered because usually we were taking a phone home. We were on-call on the weekends, which sometimes, you know, when you have the phone you really don't want to go.

Oh, yes. Now, what about the dormitories where kids live 24/7?

Well, we used to take care of the dormitories, but we don't take care of them anymore. The dormitories, the student union, the Thomas & Mack, all have their own crews now. All we take care of is the whole campus.

Which is a big place now.

Yes, it is. We're hoping that they don't privatize a lot of our jobs. We're going to lose our jobs if they start privatizing. So this is why we try to do as much as we can around here. If they say something needs to be done, look, we can do it. We don't need an outside contractor coming here to do anything for us. You know, this is stuff that we can do because we have the guys here that have the knowledge to get it done.

Good. That's great. That's wonderful.

Now, does it make any difference to your department when presidents change on campus? Do you feel it in your department at all, in any way?

No. (Carol) Harter was a good president. I like Carol. You know, I hate that she lost her job. But I guess that's just the way politics...

Politics; that's all it was. Yes.

But she did wonders for this campus for as long as she was here.

I agree, yes. I think she's going to do wonders for her new endeavor, the Black Mountain Institute. I think that's going to be a wonderful project for her.

Explain. What is it?

Black Mountain Institute, it's going to be like a think-tank. They bring all kinds of speakers to campus. Tonight Henry Louis Gates comes to campus.

Oh, okay.

So it's going to be really, really interesting. Yeah, you would probably enjoy hearing him.

Tell me about your family. Does your wife work outside the home?

No, my wife doesn't work. In '83 we started buying properties in the West Las Vegas area called Cadillac Arms. My wife and I bought ten properties down there in '85. We lived down there for about 15 years with the properties. What we did was run all the druggies out of there. It was so bad that the lady that owned them -- see, my wife already had two places down there. She was running a group home.

Tell me where Cadillac Arms is located.

It's in between Owens and Lake Mead off of D Street. The lady said that she wanted -- she had some people in front of us -- they were drug addicts. So what we said was, "Look, we want to buy that from you." So we bought it from her and we fixed it up for us to live in. We lived in that one and we fixed the other side up. We rented the other side out. So after we got going with those first ten, we got tired of the people across the street. So we bought the other side of the street.

That's fantastic.

I was working here and then trying to work my apartments. It got so hard on me. You know, I'm not a young man anymore. What we did is we sold most of them last year. Last year we sold most of them, but I still have some. I kept four because I can take care of four of them plus work here.

My wife has a master's degree in education. She ran a group home through the Mental Health Center and we used to house mental health patients. She did a great job with mental health, but they just weren't fair. That's all. I hate to say it.

It's okay. If it's truth, it's okay.

They weren't fair because she was working every day with these people, with the clients. She was getting them ready. They would move in and we'd give them their apartment. She'd make sure that their hygiene -- their place was always clean. When they needed to go to get meds or food stamps or whatever, she'd pack them in her van and she'd take off with them. She wasn't really making any money off them. Mostly, she was just doing it for herself. This is what she loved to do.

Now she's at home taking care of my 15-year-old. She's a homebody now. We're still into the real estate thing. Right now we're going to start buying homes and flipping them.

And this is the time to buy.

Oh, yes.

Oh, you're going to buy and fix them up and flip them.

Yes.

Oh, wonderful.

So we've got a little plan where right now we're going to sell our home that we're in.

Where do you live now? What part of the city?

I live in North Las Vegas. We're going to fix the house up, put a little bit more money into it, and then we're going to scale down. We're going to scale down to a smaller home. With that money that we have, we're just going to start buying and pay cash for them.

I think that's wonderful.

That's how we got started. She came to me and said -- we were just dating -- she said, "Lee, why don't you save a thousand dollars up and I'll save a thousand dollars and we'll buy a HUD home." So I said okay, yeah. So what we did is we bought our first HUD home for \$13,500 in Vegas Heights. We got a 10,000-dollar construction loan on the home. I do all the repairs. I went in. It cost me \$3,000 to repair this home. Once we got it repaired, we sold it.

How much were you able to sell it for?

It was 50. Then after we sold that one, we bought two more on the same street. We rented those two out. Then I sold one of them. I sold the other one to my sister, to get her out of the projects. So she's been living there for quite awhile, too. From there we moved down to Cadillac Arms.

Now, tell me how are we -- I saw a headline in the newspaper yesterday that young boys are joining gangs. And they're probably talking about white, Hispanic and blacks.

Yes.

They're joining gangs earlier and they're more violent. How are we going to get rid of gangs in this city, especially in the inner city area where it seems to be a tough problem for most cities?

You know, the ones that are having kids are the gang-bangers. Those are the ones that are having all these kids. You know, even if they don't be with the child, if the mother guides her child in the right direction -- not all of them; some of them are great or they don't want them in gangs, but some of them are just gang-orientated. If we can get them out of that gang orientation, I do

believe that we would really get rid of a lot of gangs right now.

Usually, we say there are not enough black men in the community; so, therefore, we have these kinds of problems. Well, what can be done?

You know, they say black men, women. Women are much better parents than men. I hate to say that, but it's true.

No, okay. You think they're a better parent?

A woman is a better parent because they want this child to have more than what they had. I know I do. My son, I want him to be -- I said, "Don't be nothing like me; I want you to be better than me." This is what a lot of these parents have to do. I don't want you to be like me.

So what do you want your son to be? What do you want him to do?

I want him to become an architect -- I don't care about a lawyer -- doctor, veterinarian. He really likes animals. But if he can become a vet, that would be the ultimate.

That's right. That is right.

If some of the mothers, even the fathers -- you know, I love my son. A lot of his friends -- I grab his friends. We used to get these boys -- I have an old white truck. I put all the bicycles in the back of my truck and we used to ride up to Floyd Lamb Park. All these kids would get their bikes out and we would just ride around Floyd Lamb Park. We'd take them roller-skating down at Crystal Palace. We'd just load the cars up, you know, just the kids in the neighborhood. We'd just load the cars up. Some of them couldn't skate, but when we left, they were skating. But, you know, it was so funny. We have a lot of film of some of the kids that we made contact with.

So do you think that there are fathers in the communities now doing the same thing?

Not many. Not many. There are some.

But not enough.

It's not enough. Even the mothers, too, can grab some of the kids in the neighborhoods. It would be good to have a mother and a father or male counterpart with a mother with a lot of kids where they can get out and just enjoy Las Vegas. A lot of them don't even get out of Westside.

I know.

That's bad. I try to take my son everywhere. If we travel, he goes. I don't leave him. He's got a little nephew that goes anywhere with us. He's right there. What he does his nephew does. So it's

good.

Sometimes I hate that I left Cadillac Arms because of the kids. I mean they have some good kids down there. Like I say, there were a lot of kids with no fathers, but there were kids with fathers. We didn't care. We say look, can he go with us to the skating rink? Can he ride with us up to Floyd Lamb? The parents knew that their kids were safe. Come on, let's go. We would ride up and down the street on our bicycles, just having fun with the kids. That's what it's all about. It's having fun with the children, and that way they won't think about these gangs.

That's it.

Keep their minds on school. I said, "I don't care. In school you've got to do one thing and that's to learn. You don't have to talk to this person next to you. When you're out on the playground, you have fun. That's where you have your fun--on the playground. But when you're in that classroom, the teacher's going to teach you. You've got to learn."

My goddaughter just graduated from Mesa College. We went over the summer to see her graduation and it was great. She comes out of the same area, Cadillac Arms.

Good. So did your son see that graduation?

Oh, yes, he was with us. He was with us. Yes, he was.

Wonderful. That's what kids need to see.

That's right.

And they need to know they can do the same thing.

Absolutely, and that's what I tell him. I drop him off at school in the morning. I say, "Okay, Doctor, I'll see you this afternoon."

That's great.

My son is a great kid. I've never had problems with him. Like I say he's 15. Girls -- a little bit right now.

Of course.

But, you know, I can understand that, too. I talk to him about them. I say, you know, okay, don't let them just distract you. I know it's going to be hard, but you just hang in there. He goes to a little private school.

Where does he go to school?

It's called Gateway Christian Academy.

Now, where is that located?

It's on Lake Mead. It's in between Nellis and Lamb off of Lake Mead. It's a street called Gateway.

Now, how close is that to West Middle School?

Oh, a long ways. Yeah, West is down on Revere.

Okay, that's right.

He's up between Lamb and Nellis.

I have an idea where it is. How did you find this private school?

Well, I sent him to public school for the first three years, where I didn't think he learned enough. So we started at another little private school, which went under. Then we found this little school, and he's been going there ever since. He loves going there. The school is not a real big school. I guess they have maybe a couple hundred kids there. He's really getting a good education. That was the most important thing. I said I don't care how much I've got to spend. His education is more important to me than anything.

That's wonderful, and it's wonderful that we can do those kinds of things for our kids.

Absolutely, because, see, I was a poor, young black kid. Like I say, I had 12 brothers. I had six older and six younger.

All boys?

No. I had seven sisters and five brothers.

Wow, a lot of dresses.

Oh, my goodness. Like you say, when you go to school, you're wearing high, high-waters because you can only --

Yeah. You've got to hand them down.

That's right. That's right.

I really appreciate all of this information, all of the information about the Westside. It's great to hear about what you're doing when it comes to real estate and property and all of that because like you I would love to be rich, also.

Oh, yes.

And I like your attitude about drugs and everything else that's going on.

We just need our kids to -- we need Boy Scouts. We need boys clubs. We have boys and girls clubs. But I mean we need boys club. See, it was the boys club. It was just us boys, all young boys in this one club. We had a president. We had a vice president. We had a secretary. We had a treasurer. We had a sergeant in arms. We had all this in our club.

Now, this is not the youth organization. But which club are you talking about now?

No. This is the boys club that we had when we were young, when we were kids.

Now, where was this located?

At Jefferson Center. We would go to the Jefferson Center. That's where we were coming out of. Just like I said, the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts. I went from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts. See, these are things that we need.

Are there any Boy Scout troops now over on the Westside or North Las Vegas?

I don't think so. I truly don't think so.

Now, was your son ever in Boy Scouts?

No, he's never been in Boy Scouts. But these are things that -- I talk to my son about right and wrong. I tell him you know right and wrong. I don't have to tell keep telling you what's right and what's wrong. You already know. I say if you've got something to say to me, don't sit here and mumble, don't stumble, don't lie to me, just tell me, and he does. If something's wrong he'll come and say, "Hey, Dad", you know. I'll say, "Okay we'll take care of it." So that's one good thing that I really like about him.

That's great because you've got to have that trust.

That's right. I tell him I'm going to trust you. I'm going to trust you. I'm going to trust you. But don't ever lie to me or take from me. If you need something, ask me. He gets his allowance. He just opened himself up a checking account.

Fantastic. That's wonderful.

Well, he opened a savings account. But I wanted him to open up a checking account because I want him to pay for his own schooling.

Oh, good. That's wonderful. Now, does he work at all?

Just out of our business. He works out of our business.

Oh, that's wonderful.

Now, with your wife having a little more free time these days, is she a member of any organizations in the community?

She's with the Calvary Baptist. That's what she does. She does a lot of Calvary Baptist.

Okay. So she does a lot of volunteer work for the church.

Yes.

That's a lot of time right there.

She also walks the dogs a lot.

Well, this is wonderful. I really appreciate all the information. And I appreciate so much you bringing this material.

Yes.

Thank you.

Any time, Claytee.

Okay, great.

(End tape 1, side B.)