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2010

An Interview with Kathleen Harney

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee White

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Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

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

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

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## Interview with Kathleen Harney

July 19, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Claytee White

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## Preface

Kathleen and Tim Harney moved to the John S. Park neighborhood in 1975, about ten years after relocating from Ohio to Las Vegas, where teaching jobs paid more and the education system was more innovative. The Midwestern ambiance of John S. Park was attractive—large trees and older homes among the outstanding features.

In this interview, Kathleen laments the neighborhood changes that may be part of a normal aging cycle of any neighborhood as being more acute because of commercial changes on the Strip. Of the years they lived there, Kathleen speaks glowingly of the neighborhood's diversity—diverse in work schedules as much as in religion. She lists the various restaurants and describes the activities that drew the community together. It was a wonderful place to raise their girls who each graduated from Las Vegas High School.

As a passionate educator, she also speaks about the importance of schools, after school programs no matter what neighborhood one raises their children. And while the Harneys moved from John S. Park, she fondly recalls it as the place where she “really became a Las Vegas.” It was the place where her family grew up and a place that “needs a little love” at this time.

*Special Note:* Tim Harney, Kathleen's husband, and Kimberly Harney-Moore, their eldest daughter, are also participants in the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood* oral history project.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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Claytee D. White 7/19/2010  
Signature of Interviewer Date

## **Interview with Kathleen Harney**

July 19, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Claytee White

**This is Claytee White. It is July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and I'm with Kathleen Harney in her home here in Las Vegas.**

**So how are you doing today?**

Doing just great. It's a very warm day but very nice.

**Yes, it is. And you are just in such a beautiful location here.**

Oh, the geography of this area is incredible. I can remember the first time that I came to the Las Vegas area. Of course, all of this development wasn't here. There wasn't much past Boulder Highway. We would drive out this way and, quite honestly, when I first came, I thought it was the ugliest place I ever saw. It looked like the face of the moon, just so barren. It looked like a lot of paper stuck in chain-link fences. But there was a magic in the evening, when the lights came on, the warm desert nights, and as we would drive out here. It was the first time I saw color in the desert. Some of the areas are referred to as Calico Ridge and Rainbow Canyon. So, yes, I think it's a beautiful area and I think the desert is beautiful.

**Oh yes. So where were you coming from that this was such a contrast?**

I was coming from the Ohio Valley. We lived on the Ohio River, a small town of about 7,500 people called Toronto, Ohio. I grew up with four [siblings]. I have three sisters and a brother, so there were five of us in the family. After I was in junior high, my mother went back to work. She had been a teacher prior to that. And my dad was a minister at a medium-sized church in this small town. We also had my mother's sister, who always lived with us. She was deaf. A remarkable woman really when you think about the times.



Her mother, my mother's mother, actually went on a train with her every week to a school for the deaf in Cincinnati [Ohio], through high school, and then on to cosmetology school. She always did our hair. She did a lot of hair for people around the community and family, but she never really practiced the occupation. But I think maybe the interest in education came from the fact that my mother was a teacher and my dad was a preacher and that's kind of a teacher, too, and then my aunt.

**So what was it like growing up as a preacher's kid?**

Oh, you were very visible. You knew everywhere that you went, that in a small town people would know who you were, the association, and the actions and the things that you said would be subject to evaluation and observation. All small towns are kind of like that. I think as the preacher's daughter that there's always a little more of a microscope.

**So what was school like there? Did you excel, of course?**

I didn't until I was in second grade. I was an only child for six years before my other siblings were born. I was really quite spoiled. I really was. I pretty much got my way in everything and did what I wanted to do. And my grandmother was appalled when she saw my report card, because it wasn't very good, and so she said, I will pay you a dollar for every A you get on your report card. At a time when getting a nickel or a dime was a big deal, that was very motivating, even though it was kind of crass. But I did have a lot more success, and I had like a great teacher in the third grade, so that was a major influence, too. I liked school; even when I was kind of an ornery little spoiled kid, I still liked it, and I always liked learning things. You really have kind of a love of learning that comes early.

**So where did you go to college?**

I graduated from a small school called Franciscan University [of Steubenville]. I had gone two years prior to that to a church school in [Elizabethton] Tennessee, Milligan College, but I came to Franciscan University actually in the summer before my junior year and graduated there. So I had the benefit of a very intense Protestant education for two years, and a very intense Catholicism-for-Protestants education the last two years. Most of my teachers were brothers or priests. They were fabulous, very disciplined.

**And they instilled that in their students?**

Oh, very much. I couldn't say enough about that small school. I'm a great fan of going to the small schools, too. Of course we have outstanding large universities and I certainly bow to that prestige but there are a lot of really fine schools. Ohio is peppered with a lot of fine schools; still is.

**Wonderful. So, tell me how you made the transition from there to Las Vegas.**

It was kind of like my grandmother's dollar-for-the-A. I was making \$4,200 a year as a first-year teacher in Ohio, and if I came here I could make \$5,300. [The Clark County School District] was one of the highest-paying districts in the country. And it was a time where they were having a terrible time getting people to come here to teach, and they were having explosive growth. They had just come off a very bad time in real estate: a lot of vacant apartments and unfinished projects and unfinished golf courses. They were having a hard time recruiting [teachers]. Even my own family thought I was insane.

**This was the mid-Sixties.**

Yes.

**Why did they think you were insane?**

There are no schools in Las Vegas. That's a place for entertainment and casinos and showgirls.

**So your father must have been just appalled.**

Oh, they were appalled. But I also, from the very early days growing up in this small town, was enamored of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. I knew when I was in first and second grade that I wanted to live in the West, and I wanted to live in California. I just absolutely knew that's where I wanted to be. And it was very much an influence of those movies and such.

**I wonder if that's what influenced me. I moved here from North Carolina and I always wanted to live in California.**

Well, maybe, when you think about the movies you saw and the allure of it all.

**So did you hear that Trigger [Roy Rogers' horse] was sold last week?**

Yes, I did. Oh yes. Not only Roy, but also I was very enamored of Gene Autry and his horse Champion. Yes, I wanted to come west.

**Great. That is wonderful. So 1965, and you came alone?**

I did. Well, I came with my daughter. She was just a baby then, just a tiny baby. I came to get a good job.

**Well, how adventurous of you.**

You know, I didn't think of it as adventurous. I thought it was very logical. But looking back on it: I think if my own daughter were making those decisions, I would probably have said the same thing my parents said.

In any case, I felt like I had died and gone to heaven when I came to this school system. I couldn't believe it. I was used to scrapping for every penny for pencils and

paper. Even though I grew up in a public school system and then taught there for a year, and I certainly think it was fine. I could not believe the innovation compared to where I came from.

**So give me some comparisons, other than just not scrapping for everything.**

It was a time when we had modular scheduling and brand-new schools were opening: Valley and [Ed W.] Clark [High Schools]. They were sister schools, I guess you would say; same design, but the difference was that Valley High School was on a 22-Modular system and you met your students in different-sized groups every day. You had a college-style schedule. I might meet you for a one-hour seminar, and the next time I would see you would be for a one-hour lab, and then I might see you twice a week for a large-group lecture for like 300 students. It was all team-teaching. The grades were ungraded. So I taught a combination of grades. We all did. People were grouped by achievement index and it was a number, an evaluation if you will, that was made up of achievement scores as well as ability scores. Plus the grades that you had, and the scores were indexed and you were in Deck 1, 2, 3, or 4. You could be in classes with juniors and seniors. The first year there were no seniors. Like most new schools opening, they phase in.

So we ended up in a school, all team teachers, many of us new, because they all had been lured by salary. Quite frankly, you know, it was just an amazing salary; plus you had all this innovation in scheduling [and] the idea was individualized instruction. We were in the spotlight at Stanford University. We had a lot of researchers that came to the Clark County School District at that time, and they would conduct studies on how we were doing with this individualized learning and ungraded classes and team teaching. As a matter of fact, Valley High School was in *Time* magazine, in an article called "School

Without Bells, School Without Doors,” because we had no doors in our classrooms. The walls didn’t go all the way to the top, and the walls could slide and go into a very small seminar or a large lab or you would have a lecture hall. And students had the same variation on their schedules, too. Of course you always hoped they would go the library, which was called the Learning Center, or a back lab, which we would have called in our day a study hall, or they could go to the Luncheteria and they had snacks and food.

**That sounds amazing.**

It was amazing.

**So what grade levels did you teach? All of the high school levels?**

I was always a high school teacher. I had some junior high students in summer school but I was always a high school teacher, and mostly taught juniors and seniors.

**And your area?**

English. I also taught Journalism a few years, so I got to be the sponsor for the school newspaper, of course. I will tell you, it was a very exciting time. It was a growing community and a growing school system, and everybody was from everywhere. It was so diverse.

**So how did that system work, the modular [system]?**

You know, it was like love and hate. When you signed on to that school, you knew that your building had been designed to match an educational philosophy and a curriculum approach. So if you signed on to do that, you had a commitment and you had an allegiance to it, if you will. I loved it. I thought it was very good. I did not think it was as beneficial for the students that needed more individual help, because they had so much freedom of choice that they didn’t always make the wisest choices and so more and more

it had to be more structured. And then we changed from the 22-Modular system to a rotating system, where you had Monday, period 6; 1, 2, 3, 4; second day you'd have period 1, 6 or 3, 2. It was a rotating system, so we still met them in different-sized groups and on a rotation kind of a system but more structured. And then eventually, within five years, the scheduling system was much more traditional. The upside of it was [that] we had a great computer center. It occupied a whole room in the science-math area.

**Oh, that was before the time.**

And that's where a lot of people would come to do their doctoral dissertations and research. And that's where I think a lot of students who are now in their fifties and sixties got their first exposure to computers, and probably became the computer geeks and nerds later on.

**Wonderful. And you eventually moved out of the classroom, but before you tell me about that, how did you handle child care in a place where you didn't really know anyone?**

We interviewed sitters that took children into their homes. There were quite a few of them around Valley High School and one in particular kept like four children. So you'd drop off the children for school, and as we had more children we did that until actually our son, the fourth child, and that was a time when we actually interviewed and hired someone to come into our home every day. Oh, that was so much better. [Laughing]

**I can imagine. Yes. So, where were you living? Where did you first move when you [arrived in Las Vegas]?**

Very close to the school, close to Valley, [near] Desert Inn [Road] and a bit west of Eastern [Avenue]. It was Francisco Park, a Pardee [Homes] community. Still there.

**I think it was Kim [Bavington] who mentioned that community to me the other day and I had never heard of that name. I knew where it [was] geographically, but I didn't realize that had been the name of it at one time. I guess it still is.**

There were two communities on the north and south side of Desert Inn. We were on the northern side, more affordable family homes. On the southern side was what at that time was the country club golf course homes. Then it became the Stardust Country Club. We used to drive by those homes and dream about living in them, and now they struggle to sell them behind the Boulevard Mall.

By the way, there was no shopping. Your shopping was done in very few stores. There was a [JC]Penney catalog store downtown. Later on, Ronzone's department store. The old-timers would remember that.

**Was Fanny's [dress shop] still here in the Sixties?**

Yes. Fanny's, and also Bain's [woman's apparel], and also, my personal favorite, Joseph Magnin [Company], because I would wait for the sales, and then I could afford something.

**[Laughing] That's great. Tell me about moving into John S. Park [Neighborhood], why that appealed to you.**

It was probably most like the communities we grew up in: big trees, lawns, houses that were a little older, houses were all different. We used to drive down Maryland Parkway when it was a divided street with trees down the middle. Loved those trees in front of [Bishop] Gorman [High School]. I was so sad when they went. But the closest thing to big trees and old-fashioned neighborhoods was in that Huntridge area as it was sometimes referred to. Plus, it was a great place for kids. There were a lot of kids in the

neighborhood. Everybody walked to school, whether they were in elementary school at John S. Park [Elementary School] or at, at that time called junior high at Fremont [John C. Fremont Middle School], or high school at the original Las Vegas High School. You could walk everywhere. Your neighbors were all very much known to you, and their children, and yet we were all very different. We had a Mormon bishop across the street. We had the Binions [Jack and Phyllis Binion] next door to us; two Binion families as a matter of fact were down the street. The Ham house was down near Charleston [Boulevard]. The Mack home. The homes that were of course, you know, they rotate and they go to younger families. By the time we moved in, there was still a vestige of old families. I used to say that all of the people that lived in the neighborhoods around us had their names on buildings, because they were part of the original developments in this city, and government officials. I'm sure you've heard all of the tales and lore of those who went to Las Vegas High School: the Harry Reids and the Richard Bryans and the Brian Crams. Those were all people that went to Las Vegas High School and many of them to John S. Park, or Fifth Street Elementary [Las Vegas Grammar School].

**That's right. Yes. So, tell me about your particular house. You can give me the address as well.**

1508 South Sixth [Street]. It was on the corner of Sixth and Griffith [Avenue]. We had a huge pool in the back yard, which was considered a wonderful luxury, and I will say that our children and their friends were in that pool all the time they were growing up, all through junior and senior high. It was the hangout. The house itself was rock-roofed. You don't see much of that now. We had a room that had been for the previous owners what they called the cabaña room for their pool. We were a family that did not have a cabaña



room. It was our family room. [Laughter] We had turquoise appliances [and] black-and-white-checked linoleum floors. See, I loved all of it. Just kind of plain wood cabinets. But this humongous bathroom in the middle that the girls all shared, three of them. It was tile counters either side. I remember one year my husband begged that everybody would get the same brand blow dryer because all the sounds of the appliances were driving him crazy. [Laughter] And not only that, it was an older home. I think it was in the Sixties that it was built. (My husband might be a better source for the exact year. I think it was built in like '63.) It didn't have the modern plumbing, so with everybody going to school and getting ready (we both worked), it was like, I'm going in the shower now. Don't turn on the hot water, don't run the washer, because it was just disastrous. The rooms were smaller. A long corridor down the middle. A fireplace in the living room. The dining area was an area, not a room. And to modernize it, we built, of course, a patio on the back with an aluminum cover. That was also considered a great upgrade to have that. No, I'm mixing up houses. That was the Burnham Street house, or the Seneca house over by Valley High School, in Francisco Park. When we moved into the Sixth Street [house], that was a finer home. It had a built-in patio.

**Oh, there was a patio already.**

Oh yeah. That's what made the backyard just heaven. We later built a gazebo there, which turned out to be built by one of my former counselees when I was a counselor at Western High School. He came to build that gazebo. We moved into that house in the John S. Park area in the mid-Seventies, '75, and we lived there for over ten years.

**Describe the neighborhood itself. Did you do a lot of walking in the neighborhood?**

Oh yes. Yes. You could walk to restaurants; you could walk to a 7-Eleven. Our daughters all worked at Luv-It [Frozen] Custard. You probably have heard of that. Have you had one yet?

**Finally, yes!**

Aren't they like divine?

**Oh yes! Wonderful!**

I know. They are the best. Our daughter Stephanie [Stephanie Harney Gates] actually worked there, I think, six years, all through high school. I think she was maybe like a shift manager by then. But all of the girls worked there. They could walk to work. You felt that it was very safe. I would say you felt very safe in the neighborhood. There was a lot of babysitting at that time in the evenings. If it did not come from senior students in high school, it would come from teenagers in the neighborhood who were, I just think, first-rate babysitters, because we knew their parents, and they knew us.

But I would point out there was this tremendous diversity of religions and even work schedules. There were people that worked downtown in the casinos, shift hours, and there were people who were teachers, people that worked for government, policemen, [and] firemen. There was a lot of variety in what people did for a living, and where they worshipped. But the common denominator was, they all went to these public schools.

**And they all lived there in the same neighborhood.**

They did. A lot of sleepovers. A lot of birthday parties in the backyard. Weddings: the neighbor's wedding, I remember, was in the back yard and it was very lovely. You watched people grow up in the neighborhood, and you saw their children marry and have children. There's a great sense of community.

I mentioned the safety thing first. You did feel very safe because you were so aware of where everyone lived and who they were and you could count on them and I think everyone kind of watched out for each other. We didn't have a neighborhood watch but we definitely knew when people were on vacation and when they changed jobs and when they hired someone new. Did they talk about Leo, the landscaper?

**Your husband [Tim Harney] mentioned Leo but tell me from a woman's perspective about that.**

Leo was a prince among princes. He was so hard-working. We kind of inherited him. We never had anyone to do our yard. We cut our own grass and pulled our own weeds. The neighborhood had that kind of old-fashioned yard with bushes and trees that were trimmed and you cut your palms. You wanted to fit in to the neighborhood, so you inherited Leo. He was just an expert at what he did. He did most of the homes in the area. You would drive by the homes and you would notice that they had new bushes and you would say, Gee, Leo, could we do that? Or, What's wrong with this ivy? He just knew. I think he worked until he was eighty, maybe. He worked all the time we lived there and had worked for quite a while before, and after [we moved], we would run into him. He was expert at what he did and much admired and just really a nice man.

**So were there any other community, I'll use the word "characters" like that?**

Not really characters, but I do remember different policemen. We had a motorcycle policeman who had children who were in similar grades. He would cruise through the neighborhood and around the schools. You knew him by first name. So not really a character but a known personality. Then you had the Binion family who lived there who were so nice to us, just very quiet and unassuming. I guess you would say that would be a

character, too, because again you'd see their names on buildings, but they were very unassuming, living there with their children and all.

**So, for adult entertainment, did you have a chance to go out on the Strip?**

We did.

**Yes. What was that like?**

Even when we were pauper teachers, there were a lot of places you could go. There were like afternoon lounge shows. They would become popular. There was the 49-cent breakfast at the Showboat [Hotel and Casino]. Then at the Dunes [Hotel and Casino] I think that was *Bottoms Up*, maybe, or *Viva La Girls*. I can't remember the names all precisely. I know we went to the Thunderbird [Hotel and Casino] and the Dunes for afternoon shows, and they had wonderful concerts at the Flamingo [Hotel and Casino] and Tropicana [Hotel and Casino], big names: Count Basie and Trini Lopez and Fats Domino at the Flamingo.

**So did you get an opportunity to see those shows as well?**

Oh yes, yes, because two drinks was the price of the show. And then for special occasions, anniversaries, birthdays, you'd save up for a dinner show and you see like *Hello, Dolly!* or *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* or *Sweet Charity*. Those were things that came later. Mostly it would be lounge shows and musicians who were in the lounges.

There were favorite places to go. Again, birthdays, anniversaries, you'd go to the brunch at the top of the Dunes. That was lovely because the view was magnificent. And then the neighborhood that we lived in was quite close to Sahara [Avenue] [and] Las

Vegas Boulevard. We would go to the coffee shop at the Sahara [Hotel and Casino], mostly for sundaes and banana splits. So good. And my husband got his hair cut there.

**[Laughing] You're about a size 2, and you've said so many things about food, I cannot believe it.**

Well, you know, it was such a value. We were so poor, and you could, for 49 cents, have breakfast for a dollar [for two people], and the price of two drinks at that time was probably five dollars and a tip, [so] you could go out for a ten-dollar bill. That was a lot of money to us at that time. It was budgeted for. But you very much could participate in the street known as the Strip.

**Now what was downtown like?**

We went there, too.

**With the Binions so close to you, did you get any special comps or anything?**

[Laughing] It's funny you would say that. We were really very sensitive about that. We didn't want to feel like they would feel like they had to comp our meals or anything, so we actually would avoid [the subject] even. We would just go, mostly to the [Binion's Horseshoe Hotel and Casino] Sombrero Room for Mexican food. But I remember one time that Jack Binion saw us all coming out with the family and said, Where have you been? And he says, Oh, you ate in, I think it might have been in the steakhouse but probably with the kids, the Mexican food, and he said, Well, you should never be paying for those things. Who was your server?, and called them over and said, These people are not to pay. Afterwards, the waitress, who was so sweet (I mean he wasn't mean), the waitress says, I don't know who you are, but he said I was never, ever to see that you paid for [your meals]. But you didn't take advantage.

**That's so good, though. That's wonderful.**

Yeah, it was. We went to the Fremont Hotel [and Casino]. We went to the top of the Mint [Hotel and Casino]. The Four Queens [Hotel and Casino] had the [restaurant] in the basement. It's where they gave all of the women the rose. It's still there. [Hugo's Cellar].

**Yes, I've heard about that. Yes, that's what they say. It was the steakhouse.**

That was a popular one when the Four Queens opened and people in the neighborhood would talk about going there.

**How do you like downtown today?**

Oh, it's very different. There are still places I like to go: Chicago Joe's [Restaurant] used to be a favorite for Italian food. My husband now, since he's working, goes out to lunch. Oftentimes they're working lunches. So we're less likely to go out as a social thing for lunch. But I still like to go to the hotel coffee shops. What's the one down there by the Four Queens across from the Lady Luck [Hotel and Casino]? It's a little tiny place. It's a kind of a mover-and-shaker place.

**It's not the Golden Nugget [Hotel and Casino].**

No, but when the Golden Nugget opened, it was like paradise. We would go to that brunch. Oh! Nothing like it. It really set the stage for what happened later on the Strip.

**Yes, definitely, because of Steve Wynn.**

Oh, absolutely. It was genius. It raised the bar. It was a different era. The Golden Nugget was a different era to downtown.

We're less likely to go there as a single destination now, but there are, I would have to say, old-timers who will say, Oh, let's go have, you know, we'll go to one of the older places. And I hope that all of the mayor's [Oscar Goodman] plans for revitalization

really work because both of us come from small towns and we've seen the struggles they've had with their downtowns and their cities. You see a little bit of life coming back into Duluth [Minnesota]. I noticed this time their new funds, I guess, I don't know if they're reinvestment funds or stimulus funds but they have roads being improved all over. We were just there a few weeks ago and you could hardly drive around. I notice that here: a lot of the changes in the road to L.A. [Los Angeles, California]. Even in the Sixties, we were talking about a train to L.A. from Las Vegas.

**Yes. And it sounds like it's going to happen now.**

I hope so. Again, even though teachers did not make grand salaries, we would budget and save for treats, whether that was going downtown to a hotel or to the Strip shows, or maybe it might be going to Los Angeles and seeing the beach, or, there was quite a bit of travel to Palm Springs [California]. That was not one of my favorite destinations at the time, but I knew there were teachers that would have like a girls' getaway to Palm Springs. I think that most of the people that came to this community, whether now or earlier, had a sense of invention and were willing to take some risks, and you kind of took pleasure in the adventure. I never would have found tacos if I hadn't moved to Las Vegas. [Laughing]

**[Laughing] That's very interesting. I really enjoyed that. Thank you.**

**The John S. Park community politically: Were there any kind of events or campaigns that pulled the community together while you lived there?**

While I lived there, there were a lot of activities in the evening, whether it was a bike rodeo [or some other activity]. There was quite a bit of PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] involvement, which is how I met some of [the residents], like Ann Lynch

and some of the names that we hear now in community service or in other jobs. The PTA was very active, and there were a lot of things at the schools, a lot of bake sales. I think of the bike rodeo because I remember it was a big deal for the children. At the high school, we all went to football games. We watched practice. I think the community was drawn together by their involvement in the schools. Fremont [Middle School] at that time: even as late as when Kim, the oldest daughter, was in Fremont, she was on the tennis team, a swim team, she was a cheerleader. There were a lot of activities going on. At Las Vegas High School, there were still the regular sports. They had a girls' golf program that was really good. I think that the big events that drew the community together were very school-centered, and they probably would've been church-centered to some degree.

Now there was, and I won't be able to put a year on this without doing a call and having someone search in [CCSD] Facilities (because I worked in School Facilities for almost five years), a revitalization and expansion of the John S. Park school during that time, and we had an anniversary celebration, and people like Richard Bryan and Harry Reid and others (I apologize to all of the politicians I cannot think of at this moment) came from there. So many did. And I remember Bob [Robert] Forbuss, who was prominent. His mother still lived in the John S. Park area. I remember one time when I was in Facilities, a very nice call from him saying, You know, have you seen John S. Park lately, like the grass over around the—?

And I said, No, but I'll go over and take a look.

He says, The only reason I know is that my mom is there, you know, and she calls and she says, I think there's something wrong with the grass or something over there.

[Laughing]



I looked and there was an area that needed revitalizing. I worked for Dr. White, who was Associate Superintendent of Facilities then, and he said, You know, we need to get over there. It was enhanced and they did some modernization to the entry and, of course, with the growth, a lot of portables went to John S. Park, and that drew a lot of community involvement pro and con because there were people who wanted the portables because of the class size, and those who realized it wasn't a permanent solution.

I think that [for] that celebration, there was a lot of time spent that year in Facilities, and I would have to say that might have been like 1980, something like that. We had like a program with music and famous alumni came back and visited and a lot of community leaders came and took part. I think that was a good thing to do. I think that we need to do more things like that of celebrating what was and what can be and move forward.

**I agree. Explain to me what a bike rodeo is.**

Oh, they have like races. My daughters would be so disappointed [that] I don't remember all of the levels but there were like levels of things. I think they had a written test about bike safety, and then they would have like races, and then they would decorate their bikes and have kind of an art contest. There may have been some relay races also. I remember it was a big deal.

**Great. Were there a lot of artists in the neighborhood when you were there?**

I would have to say I wasn't as aware of that. There may have been and I missed them. Because of the age of the children, I was so focused on our son in elementary, the two girls in junior high, and the daughter in high school that I probably had most of my time between work and the kids taken up. However, across from us now, across from the

house we lived in, are Tim and Kim Bavington. Kim Crisostomo-Bavington was one of my daughter [Kim's] roommates when she was a young adult and also is still one of her very best friends, and Tim Bavington is a prominent artist.

**I have a feeling maybe the artists are about that age.**

I think you're right. I think that there is a tendency for older communities to give rise to that, which we should nurture and develop. Over on Charleston, a girlfriend and I always liked to haunt the antique shops, and there were some secondhand clothing [stores], and there is the arts center there. I would have to say that for a while I was on the board of the Lied Discovery Children's Museum and there were avid supporters of the arts on that board, and some of the members even had galleries, so were artists themselves. So I wasn't immune to it but I sure couldn't claim I perhaps did as much as I could to be aware of it.

**But it's OK. Tell me about how the community changed as you'd begun to think about leaving. What are some of the changes that had taken place?**

People stopped enhancing and adding on to their homes. Obviously, the population was older, and they were looking at moving to condominiums [and] senior citizens' [communities]. Those who came in were younger families. I saw all at once that [among] the [older] families, their children would move on, get married, have children, and they would move. It's a natural process. We used to say in Facilities that there is a twenty-to-twenty-five-year swing, which if you look at the demographics of neighborhoods you can see, and if you are going to retain what is there, it takes some championing, and even some heroism and some vision to do that. So I would have to say, as the older families moved out, there was less attention to what was old and good about the neighborhood and

it was more into more modern things. I think the homes became more transition homes. When we moved there, we thought maybe we'd just live there forever, but I think they became homes that people thought they would live in a while and move on.

**And now I think we see the revival of that other idea that you just said. I think now people are moving back, and they're there to stay for a while.**

I hope so.

**That's the impression you get from Kim [Bavington].**

We had good, fond memories of that, and I think that those children would, too. I do hope that what you're saying and what I'm saying are absolutely true.

**Yes. And what they are doing to the house is just amazing.**

Isn't it marvelous?

**Yes. I'm just so impressed.**

I am, too. And you know, there is a keeping-up-with-the-Joneses aspect that isn't all so bad, and it's catching. The neighbor paints the house and you think, Oh, gosh, maybe we should paint our house now. It's catching. It's addicting. I wish it had been more addicting in the area. I think that a lot of the change in the Strip affected the neighborhood, too.

**Because it's so very close.**

Exactly. And you had mom-and-pop operations close up and other things come in. My kids used to go and buy pizza two blocks away and now it's a gentlemen's club. That's the way things change. I think we do have to remember who we are. We didn't become a growth community because we had a lot of small businesses. We grew as a community because we were in the entertainment and the gaming business.

**That's true. Yes. What would you like to see happen in that neighborhood now?**

I would like to see a commitment to people staying and growing in the neighborhood, and not only that, I would like to see them taking passionate interest in their schools. As you may have seen from my biographical notes, I'm on the board of After-School All-Stars; it used to be called Inner-City Games. I'm absolutely passionate. I know from my years in education at all levels, whether it's teacher, counselor, administrator, that after-school programs have the promise of making a huge difference, not only as a place for children to go because their parents are working, but for enhancement of what they're doing. I think it's wonderful in these after-school programs that we have dance and chess and cooking, things that they might not be exposed to. Who knows [if] the next chef comes out of that, the next ballerina, whatever? I think after-school programs should be a part of every school. I think every school should have them. I would like to see a campaign start for after-school programs.

**So tell me about the All-Stars program.**

They're in thirteen schools right now. Most of us have been on the board for a number of years. I've been on the board fifteen years now. It was started initially by Elaine Wynn and Yvonne Atkinson Gates when she was in the county commission, fifteen years ago. Mrs. Wynn always had an interest in education, whether it was university or the elementary-secondary schools in the Clark County School District. More than that, she always put her money where the mouth was. She not only would talk about it but they would sponsor Golden Nugget scholarships or they would have GED [general education diploma] classes in hotels. She would just come to everything; if it was a soccer match, she'd come in her tennis shoes and her shorts and not stand on ceremony. And Yvonne

Atkinson Gates had this great sense that we needed to do more for the students in the inner cities that did not have the opportunities. So the Inner City Games began as a rec program in the summer, and we had quite a few sports: golf, volleyball, basketball, tennis (I think those were the main ones; I might be missing something), and then we expanded to art and music and chess, hip-hop. It is in thirteen cities. It was begun initially by [California Governor] Arnold Schwarzenegger and Maria Shriver in L.A. as a summer games program, but the research was showing that the biggest problem was after school from three to six p.m. It was hard because we were so committed to Inner-City Games, and most people recognize that name quicker now even than after After-School All-Stars, but the After-School All-Stars is about five-going-on-six years, so it will grow and mature also. We had to shift to after-school and we thought, oh my gosh, got to go into schools right after school. Will the principals want people there? How do you interface with the district? The trustees have a responsibility to the community. Who's using the schools? But if you really have passion for something, it works, and it did. We got into the schools, and I think a lot of it was due to the executive directors we had: Susie Lee, Mike Edwards, Chris Erbe, Terry and Jack Mannion, and now Jackie Locks, who I believe is probably going to become the longest-term executive director. They all came from school administrative backgrounds. They had management as well as educational experience. And they had credibility, so people would let us in and try, and we would try to be good citizens, and I think that we have. So we have this tremendous opportunity for children. We've had independent tests now of their reading and math scores, and it's significantly different. They get better scores in reading and math tests, and their school attendance [has improved]. Plus just think as a parent: you have your child going to do

something they want to do after school. The parents love it. We hire educators, so it's an opportunity for extra pay for an extra assignment.

Principals: boy, you know, they're fans because it builds community support, and it builds a network of businesses because the board members all come from like government, business, gaming, public relations, law enforcement, so you bring that network to your school, too. You're a principal and you need something, the word goes out: We need to do something about the bike racks over at Sewell Elementary. Who knows someone? I really think they should be in every school. I think that it would be a wonderful investment.

I'm also very passionate about summer school, and night school. I think we've missed the boat. It's a twenty-four-hour town. I know, to my husband and me, and I believe to my children, the education made all the difference. Absolutely. I don't think it is always the difference. I think a good role model or someone can influence you, or a program, but for most of us, it's education that makes the difference. And it doesn't take a lot sometimes. It might take one summer camp. It might take one classroom. It might take one teacher, one counselor, one principal. That makes a difference. So if we really want to be world-class in education, then we're going to have to think about it differently and we're going to have to treat it as something that's worth more than seven hours a day for 185 school days, whether it's year-round or nine-month.

Night school: a lot of people work in the day. They could go at night. All of these career changes, people that need new skills for technology, we have all this great need for nurses. Gosh, we should be building programs that build into UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas] and Nevada State College [NSC].

**OK. So this is not just night school for high school students, but night school you're talking about for all of us.**

For all of us. And I think summer school should be the same way. I mean it's hot here in the desert in the summer. I would rather be learning Conversational Spanish at John S. Park, or I would rather be over at John Fremont Middle School putting my scrapbook of the holidays together. It could be more, recreational as well as educational. And you meet people. And I said to you I thought that the sense of community came from school involvement, and also church and community involvement of course. But if we really want people to be engaged, why don't we create some venues where they can meet each other in positive ways? Now you won't want to include this in your report but my great joke among my friends is, I know what to do at Guantanamo Bay. Form a band. Now, I know it's kind of a smart-alecky thing to say, but, if you take a group of people and they have nothing productive to do, you're going to have nothing productive in the end. So, it's kind of a silly thing to say, have a band, but you know what I'm saying?

**No, I understand. Yes.**

And isn't that what we do in community centers? Isn't that what we do in senior centers? You put people of good will with like goals together. Yeah, I could make a soapbox speech about this.

**[Laughing] I have a lot of soapbox speeches, so I agree. Is the John S. Park School involved in the All-Stars program?**

They were. Let me check on that, if they still are, because what we do is it's all dependent on funding. We raise private funds. It's free to the children. We raise it. It takes about a million-and-a-half [dollars] of private funds to run it per year, and it goes to

between five and eight thousand individual children. So, John S. Park, yes, they have been. Are they this year? It's at the at-risk schools. We just go down the list and we add another one every time we have the money. But they were, and if they're not now, then I will probably be on the phone later tonight.

**Oh, that is great. That's wonderful. You were talking about the schools, but a few minutes ago you also mentioned the churches in John S. Park. How did you see the churches helping to bring that community [together]?**

There was a community of LDS [Latter-day Saints] children and their parents who were very committed to education and schools, and they were very often leaders and classroom mothers and I think that their network was very strong. There also were a substantial number of Catholics down by Gorman. You had parents who had children in Gorman. They had their elementary-aged children in the elementary Catholic schools. And remember, right down the street, right down Oakey [Boulevard] was a temple, so you had a substantial Jewish community, too, and we would always refer to it as "the school is down by the temple." They had a little private kindergarten; I think it grew into a first-second-third-grade [school] maybe, too.

**So did you see kids that weren't Mormon in activities at the Mormon church?**

Oh yes. Oh yes. We were not Mormon, but probably more than 50 percent of their friends were LDS, and they're lifelong friends. They're still friends. They did the sleepovers. They would go to dances. And I would say that not only the Mormon children but also my children went to temple. They went to Mass. It's interesting. When you live in a neighborhood, I think there's always an evangelism that takes place where people want you to be like they are, go where they go, and there was some of that, but it never



interfered. There comes a time when you kind of let people be. When you see that your children aren't leaving their faith because they know someone who's a different faith, then you tend to support it.

**Tell me some of the events that caused you to decide to leave the neighborhood.**

There was growing crime. It wasn't so much in the neighborhood, but it was more towards the Strip area.

**Yes. So around your neighborhood.**

Yeah, around the neighborhood, and I began to be concerned. No neighborhood is perfect, I know that, but it seemed like it was growing, and I felt like maybe it was time to move. I wanted the children to finish school, all of them, through the same system, and they all did graduate [from] Las Vegas High School. So I think that it was a combination of I was disappointed by the outer rings of the community, that it just seemed like it was not developing, it was disintegrating, and then we had our last child in high school becoming a senior, so you put that together. Those two were probably the main reasons. And also, I will tell you that, remember, I always wanted to go to California [laughing], so I really didn't think that I would spend my whole life in one place necessarily. But that home was where our children grew up, and that's really the residence that was most homelike. But I fell in love with Green Valley, even before they built homes here, and I fell in love with this area out here as early as '91. They talked about doing this lake out here for forty years. When I was in School Facilities, there used to be plans that would come, every once in a while, that they're going to work on that lake out there. Then they would look at the cost of the engineering and it would just fizzle. So, there was always this, we used to call it the slope up to Black Mountain, and this valley out here. And for

those of us then that were in our forties, we were at that stage at twenty years in our careers or twenty-five, and you saw this growth finally happening. That was very enticing. And so of course.

**And this place is just fabulous!**

It is. I always ended up living in houses that were a lot better than I ever thought I would. I just feel like I was truly blessed to be here at a time when things were growing. It was affordable to have a home. When we were, oh, like third,-fourth,-fifth-year teachers, by that time we could afford a home for a family. And then by the time we advanced in our careers, there was more growth and more opportunity and that continued really until, what, '95-'96.

**So, after living in this area, what do you see now when you drive back to John S.**

**Park? Do you ever get the opportunity?**

Oh, I do. Oh, I often cruise the neighborhood. I cruise up and down Oakey and down by the temple. We have friends that live on Sixteenth and Seventeenth [Streets] and Oakey, in that area.

**I love that side also.**

So do I. There still is a lot of nostalgia, and it's not gone. It's not like it's war-torn. It simply needs some love, you know, it needs some TLC [tender loving care]. When I drive through now, it makes me sad to see a lot of the grass gone and desert landscaping, even though I know economically why. I remember the grandeur of some of the homes that have been kind of let go, and I'm sorry to see that.

**And some of the streets are so beautiful.**

I know they are.

**Sometimes you get on a street and say, Wow! It's just amazing.**

See, that's why we have to do more after-school, night school, [and] summer school programs. You never would've found Luv-It Custard if you hadn't had this opportunity.

**That's correct. That's correct.**

I think one of the prettiest buildings in town is the law offices that are there at Charleston and Sixth. That's a beautiful facility. It's now law offices. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You look at something and you go, That could be really magnificent. I could make that better. And so I hope there are more people doing that.

**Well, good. This is wonderful. Any other comments you'd like to make about the John S. Park Neighborhood?**

I think that it has a spark of regeneration in it, and I would challenge some of my fellow citizens on some of these boards I've sat on and meetings I've gone to, to go back and look because I know that some of their parents and even some of them graduated from high school there and probably went to John S. Park [Elementary School]. I hope that sparks grows into a big fire of people that want to go back and carry the torch.

**Great. So, last question: If I would say, so looking back, what does that neighborhood mean to you, how would you answer me?**

A sense of community. It's where my family grew up, and that's where I really became a Las Vegan.

**Thank you so much.**

- You're so welcome. I hope it helps you.

**Oh, it does, it does.**

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