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An
Oral History Interview
with
Albert "Bert" Hood

1998



Albert "Bert" Hood at Choices bar in Las Vegas
June 16, 1998

[McBride photo]

Las Vegas Gay Archives
Oral History Interview
with
Albert "Bert" Hood

conducted by
Dennis McBride
June 16, 1998

Bert Hood is celebrated in Las Vegas's gay history for his ownership of the Red Barn, one of our most famous gay bars. This is another of those serendipitous interviews I've conducted with someone I very much wanted to interview but didn't know how to find. Bert's in Las Vegas from Oklahoma City for just a short while visiting old friends, and I was lucky enough to have found him through Bill Schafer, president of the Southern Nevada Gay and Lesbian Historical Society. I want to thank you, Bert, for donating these two hours of your vacation time to me so I can preserve your stories for the gay community. Today is Tuesday, June 16, 1998.

Tell me first, Bert, where you were born and when you were born?

Oh, please do we have to get personal?

Very personal!

OK. September 21, 1930. Adelaide, Australia, in the boondocks. Actually about 90 kilometers, 62 miles out of Woodward. Sheep farm!

You were born on a sheep farm!

And I can still shear sheep fastern' anybody, even with those new good gadgets.

There's a lot of things you can do with sheep.

Yes. Did *that*, too!

But I left there when I was 17. My dad was a biochemist which was not very popular as opposed to a doctor, but it was a good profession. The Ford Foundation was very, very heavy into biochemistry which now, with chemotherapy, as you know is acceptable. It's just the accepted fact! But he was in the beginning of that. So the University of Utah, through the Ford Foundation—which was their headquarters in those days—[brought us] over in 1947. On the *boat!* [laughs] I won't tell ya how long it took. But they moved the headquarters to the University of Oklahoma, the Ford Foundation for biochemistry and a dozen other things, so they moved [my dad] there. Not just him, dozens of others. So I stayed in Utah for high school a little bit and my family moved to Oklahoma which they're still there.

I stayed in Salt Lake City, graduated, got *married*. Then the Korean War hit. Well, I could get my citizenship papers in three years instead of waiting. At the time I had another 4 and half years to go [for American citizenship]. Well, without citizenship papers you just don't get a great job. They didn't have McDonald's and Long John Silver in those days. [laughs] And we were getting over a major war.¹

Anyway, so I joined [the army] and they sent me to Columbia, South Carolina and I was just married for about a year after that time. I wasn't trying to fool anybody. I just didn't know about me. Married a Mormon. She smoked. I didn't smoke. She taught me how to smoke. I didn't smoke until I got into the army. I went in as a private and came out a sergeant first class and they wanted to send me to officer candidate school and tanks. *Tanks!* But in the army I knew I'm sorry, I think we're born gay. I've known it all my life. I just never paid attention to it.

Is [the army] when you first realized?

Yes. First realized that there's more to men than just going to the restroom and suckin' a dick! There can be an affair and I fell in love with a guy for the first time in my life in the army. And I thought, "Oh, my gosh!" I couldn't believe it. And I couldn't understand why I did. Didn't make sense to me at all. I was Church of England, but I went to a Catholic priest there and I told 'im exactly what I've just

told you, only a little more detail. And he was very, very kind. He said, "Suffer not. Live with it. *Learn* to live with it." He gave me a lot of good advice. Taught me not to be a whore.

Did he tell you that it was not a sin?

He actually did. He put it another way. And I'm very, very religious. I believe it. I pray every day for all my friends in Las Vegas. This is my *home*! He taught me how to live with it. He *did* teach me abstinence which of course I didn't listen. I did, maybe, for a week! [*laughs*] He did try to teach me abstinence, but I think that's normal [for a priest to say]. There was no condemnation.

When did you have your first sexual experience with a man?

Are you kidding? In Adelaide, Australia. Woodward.

How old were you?

Oh, I would say about twelve. Not boys just getting together and masturbating. I think that's sort of a routine. *Beyond* that. I had a crush on this stupid soccer idiot and I had no idea. He wasn't gay but he let me.

When did you have your first loving relationship with a man?

The United States Army in 1951.

How long did it last?

Pretty good. I was on two different bases. Columbia, South Carolina and Camp Atterbury, Indiana. About a year and a month.

You're still married during this time to the woman.

I got a divorce when I got out [of the army].

Why?

Well, first, she had a baby out of wedlock. The army'd kept us separated. They don't do that anymore. They kept us separated for a year and two weeks. She had a baby.

It wasn't yours.

Ha! I wouldn't dare! So that became my perfect excuse [for a divorce]. And at that time I was madly in love with somebody I'd met in Indianapolis, Indiana. I stayed in Indianapolis, got a job with Blue Cross Blue Shield and then they moved me to General Motors and I was in the payroll division in those days. I was 24, 23. I was in the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir. I got accepted on my first audition. I was very proud of that. I kept up with my music all that time. I got that because I had sang with the Salt Lake City tabernacle choir with Helen Traubel.² I was in the counter tenor section. Had a nice high voice then. That got me in [the Indianapolis choir]. By that time I had become a contralto. I was still alto but I was not the high. I could hit it but I couldn't stay on high C. So as a result at that point—I don't know why, I've forgotten completely—I got an audition with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, so I accepted the job and went to California. That was 1954.

And you stayed there in show business?

I lucked out. I got an agent. My first audition I have no idea why he sent me to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but he did. Now, don't forget, television was taking over but they were ignoring it. They hired me for \$75 a week which was pretty good in those days. And on my second six months I got a hundred and fifty. My next [contract] would have been three hundred and then their option. But at that point television, they wouldn't join it. Which they later did and they could have kept *all* of us there. But instead we lost out on everything. So I just came back and went to the University of Oklahoma where my parents were living at the time.

Did you come to Las Vegas from Oklahoma, then?

No, from California. When I got out of college [in 1957] I signed up with the Atomic Energy Commission for overseas. Money. And the salary was \$175 a week with everything paid. Board, room, the works. So I went overseas. I was in

construction maintenance. That next year we had "27" bombs in the air. The Japanese said we had 32, which we did. And we announced to the American public we had 7. And the Russians said we had 18. *They* were all out there, too.

Anyway, I came back from there with a bank account with Bank of America, money saved because you're tax-free after your eighteenth month.

Overseas.

Overseas, in those days. I don't know what it is nowadays. But anyway, I came back with *thousands* of dollars. Let me give you the figure—\$20,000! When I came back [to the U. S.] in 1959 to San Francisco. That's where they flew you back to from over there. I got a job with the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a payroll supervisor. At that time, data processing My data processing took up a barn [-sized] room. [The processing] took forever and all that room. Herb Caen, Dear Abby [are] personal friends of mine. I made their paychecks, etc., *ad nauseam*. Then, of course, being a ham, I could easily have been in the editorial department, but to be honest with you it just became too much of a hassle. You work your ass off! You writers work your *fanny* off!

On deadline, besides!

Yeah, that's the worst part. I could have done the work. I don't think I could have put up with a deadline. So I got a job at that point with the Steamship Pump Company. [Dear Abby] put me in with a touch who was doing something something and I got a job with Columbia Pictures—a one-shotter in those days—with *Bye Bye Birdie*.³

About '61, '62?

Right in there. So when it was over there were no more offers or anything.

A bit part?

No, no, we were just the chorus. Not the *dancing* chorus but the singing chorus.

Was this the film?

Yes. It led to other things. To be honest with you I wanted to take over a bar with the country club in El Monte. They offered me the managership of it so I took it. One thing led to another, I wound up with a gay bar, I was the manager of a gay bar—turned it gay—in Arcadia, California. At that point, then, that's where I met my lover. So, anyway, that led to my lover, who was my bartender, and his wife, who was a drag fag—I called her that all the time. She was a drag fag, very good friends.

When did you first come to Las Vegas?

March 19, 1962.

What was it that brought you here?

My sister lived here. My lover in Los Angeles, he was married and [his wife] liked gay guys. So I brought her up. She and I became good friends 'cause he and I broke up and they had a new six-month-old baby. And we came up here to visit, frankly. I was crushed because he gave me up and she was crushed he wouldn't go with her, so all of us I'm sure you've seen many television programs of such.

But, anyway, we came up here to visit my sister and her husband. Irene—that was [my lover's wife's] name—decided to go back [to Los Angeles]. I really can't blame her. And I decided to stay here with my sister. So I got a job at the Sands Hotel as a bartender, which I was. But I also had a degree in English from the University of Oklahoma so getting a job was no difficulty at all, even with a population then of 66,000 *plus*. Someone said, "You should be bartender or a waiter at the Sands." Which was the *major* hotel then. And you could count the hotels on your fingers. If you could get a room at the Sands on a weekend then you were somebody *in!* The bungalows and all. It was *gorgeous!*

But, anyway, I went there and applied for the job. I went through the union in those days and said I wanted to be a bartender. The bartenders union. And they said, "There's a long wait."

I said, "Then I'll be over there till you call me in." I went over there and got a job waiting and I got my job bartending in less than six weeks by pulling strings on the inside! [*laughs*]

What strings did you pull on the inside?

Frank Sinatra I waited on almost every day with the Mob. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin We don't have to name those names, do we?

*The Rat Pack.*⁴

The Rat Pack. And they took care of me to the tune of a hundred, two hundred, three hundred dollars a day in tips! When they came in there to the Garden Room, which was *the* place to be in those days, let me tell ya, in Vegas I'm Australian and so I had an accent in those days—but I had an even better one when *they* were there! [*laughs*] I think it's called tips! We called 'em tokens.

As a result I met Marge Jacques.⁵ And the only sea food place in the city, the King of the Sea owned by Murray Posin, he's an attorney still here in town with his son. I became the bartender over at the Sands Can I say that the *Association* [i. e., the Mob] became too strong for me at the Sands. [The King of the Sea Restaurant] offered me the bartender's job and [the place] became *exceedingly* successful. The Rat Pack and everybody else came there. It was *gorgeous*. And that's how I met Marge Jacques in 1964. She became my cocktail waitress. We only had *one*! [*laughs*] So we had it made! [*laughs*] Let's go from there.

When you got to Las Vegas in 1962 what kind of gay life did you find here?

Maxine's was the only place. And glory holes.

Maxine's had glory holes?

No. Little joints with slot machines. *Not* the bus stations.

Sawdust joints, they call those little gambling places.

Yes. I'm sure they're all gone.

And the park downtown. The city hall was right here [*gestures*] and that park *Dozens* of us! We met constantly down there. It was a 24-hour town in those days. When we'd get off shift we'd go down there [to cruise]. But that was the only place the police gave anybody a bad time.

How did they give you a bad time?

Caught you.

Were they under cover?

Nope. Didn't have to be.

Did you ever get caught?

Nope. Van [Morrell] didn't, either. None of our friends did but a lot [of others] did.

Was that the rose garden or Squires Park, they called it?

Squires Park!

But then glory holes, you had to be very careful, á la LA, New York, etc., and so forth you really had to But glory holes were *the* thing. A little tap of the foot underneath Those things probably still exist but they don't have to be, nowadays. But in those days everything was hidden: "Whadda you mean you own the Red Barn?"

"Who said I did?" [*Hood speaks with a very sober face to mimic the suspicious self-protection of gay people in the days he's speaking about*] It was an automatic [reaction] in the straight public.

What did they do to you if you got caught?

Routine booking and then nothing. Hundred-dollar fine, fifty-dollar fine, yeah. There were no MADDs⁶ in those days, there were no drunken driving laws in those days. And you gotta remember one thing. It took a *long time* to get to Maxine's bar, the only bar in those days. [*laughs*] And Charleston was like this [*motions the road going up and down through hills and hollows*] And half of it was gravel.

There's a couple of bars I want to mention from that period you might remember. The Tail of the Pup?

The Tail of the Pup, yes. I vaguely remember. It just wasn't my hangout so I didn't go. But now there was one bar right off Nellis Air Force Base which was a service station. But I can't remember the name of it. Nellis Boulevard, right across Las Vegas Boulevard North and there it is right there. The front gate of Nellis Air Force Base, then move back a little, and there it is. It was a converted service station.

And it was a gay bar?

Yes! And [the owners] were from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They had a gay bar there and they opened the gay bar [near Nellis Air Force Base]. This was in the late '60s before I owned the Red Barn. I had the Hickory House Barbecue at the time.

I want to know this in detail because you did it. When you were cruising Squires Park, how did you cruise? In those days you had to be so careful.

You had to be real careful but there were no windows, just the door.

In the bathroom?

Yeah. And the urinals were long so you just went in and pretended to take a pee. Typical San Francisco, New York City [move]. Pretended to take a pee and if there wasn't any response you just zipped up and waited [for another guy to come in]. Most of it was waiting, to be honest with ya.

Cruising the bathroom, not the park itself?

We *did* [cruise the park]. It was easy because right behind it was the city-owned tennis courts, so whether you played or not you *dressed* like so, so you were in [the bathroom] from the court taking a pee. So if they did question you that was one of my ... *drag* outfits! In case they did question you. Most of us left our shifts at the Sands and went down. Horny youth. *Youth!*

We didn't have to worry about AIDS in those days. We didn't even know what it was. So we just did our own silly, stupid thing. And by the way, it was silly. It was stupid! *[laughs]* It was youth.

Were there any—we call 'em adult bookstores, now—then?

Yes. Let me think of the time element. You're on Las Vegas Boulevard South, still in the downtown area before Sahara. And one on the Strip. *[Another]* in that shopping center just right down from Gelo's—it's no longer there, I think.

The Mayfair Shopping Center?

Yeah, in that Mayfair Shopping Center. There was one there for years and years and years. *Back row movie house*, we called 'em! *[laughs]* I don't think I ever saw a picture. I was *cruising!*⁷

*Do you remember the Flick?*⁸

The Flick. That was downtown!

Tell me about the Flick.

It was not as popular. There was no place to park even in *those* days. And occasionally police would walk in and make us worried so the ownership must not have done something to please.

[But] never was there any cash payoff to any official of any kind, nor to a uniformed policeman or anything else in Las Vegas, Nevada. And I owned a bar for *[all those]* years. No way.

*I find that amazing because that sort of thing happened in other cities. And Las Vegas was a very Mormon town, to begin with and very conservative on a number of levels. Yet they left the gay bars alone. Except [John] McCarthy kind of messed around with 'em later, but that was later.*⁹

Yes, and he was making a name [for himself], really. I'm sorry, but once his name got up there [and his harassment of gay bars] was faded news, he was no longer interested.

Were you familiar with the Red Barn [in the 1960s]?¹⁰

The Red Barn at that time had just barely You've got to think of the *show* people from this point on at the Red Barn. They met up the street there [at the Bonaire Club on Tropicana Avenue]. After twelve midnight the show people would gather there after their second show [on the Strip]. One day the owners and the straight bartenders decided to kick them out. Well, right down the street was that old [Red Barn]. Horses every Friday and Saturday out there. I'm not kidding you! Well, they started going there so it was *gay* after twelve midnight. And so we started going out there.

Of course, at that time we had one other gay bar, Maxine's. It was a small town, don't forget. The Mafia gave us no trouble whatsoever here, neither—and this is important in your record—neither did the police in any direction.

Why?

'Cause we didn't cause *them* any trouble.

Tell me about Maxine's.¹¹

One of the cleverest bars—I wish she'd got air conditioning. But anyway, other than that it was packed constantly and we had a good time.

You were talking Sunday when I was with you about flash floods running through there.

Well, it was low. It still is, but it's been corrected, of course. If you were there, which I have *been*, when the flash floods hit everything on Nellis Boulevard and on Tropicana, everything rises, water in the streets. And Maxine's was on a little [rise] there so we didn't have any water in the bar but your cars and everything were all the way up over the hubcaps with water. You couldn't walk anywhere because there were huge holes. One time we got stuck at Maxine's And this

was a gay and lesbian bar. It just worked out fine. No fights in those days. I got stuck for two and half days. I just stopped by for a Wednesday afternoon and I didn't get back out of there till Friday. No one else did, either.

Did you even go to buy the Red Barn?

What did they do in the bar for two days?

I met my lover there because of that! [laughs] You had no choice. You were stuck with who was there! Maxine made everything free for us. Oh, beer was a *horrible* price! Thirty cents a bottle!

Marge Jacques got 86'd from Maxine's in the late '60s. I think it had something to do with a *beautiful girl!* [laughs]

Maxine's. One Sunday we would play at the Red Barn, her team, girls ...

Softball teams?

Yeah. And then the next time we would play down at Maxine's bar. And this went on for, oh, gosh! A whole summer. One time she chartered a bus, her team did. Whichever one lost had to charter the buses and she lost. Cheap buses in those days. So we went down [to Los Angeles] over night, early, early Sunday, played a game down there. Her team won. Some girl's bar down in Long Beach. We went to three bars and got kicked out—the whole bus load. So [Maxine] said, "Hell with it. Let's go find another bar." And so we found a bar and took over!

What years, what period was that?

This would be the early '70s.

Did the bars sponsor the teams?

We sponsored 'em, yeah.

Did you have names for the teams?

I used the term, instead of Red Barn, I used RB. My little news sheet once a month was the *RB* whatever. And I was the gossip gal with the ugliest picture of a broad on there you ever saw in your *life!* No last names. "Well, did you hear about

Jerry" Blah, blah, blah. Cheap advertising is what it was. Gave us a chance to advertise.

How did you come to buy the Red Barn?

Well, first of all, I had City of Music here. I was at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for pictures as a singer, and Twentieth Century Fox and Warner Brothers. They said that television will go away and therefore all of us who were under contract—I was very handsome and what have you—they got rid of us. Including Elizabeth Taylor! I'm talking about B stars. They thought we were *fighting* television.

Anyway, I opened the City of Music here. I taught piano and voice. We had about six accordion players, teachers, two guitarists, etc., etc., plus a dance studio with kids. Nearly all kids. At that point I auditioned and got a job at the Thunderbird Hotel for a back-to-back show: *Anything Goes* and *High Button Shoes*. And that was the last thing I ever did [in show business]. The last thing I did [in California] was Columbia Pictures' *Bye Bye Birdie*.

Well, at City of Music, there was a restaurant right up the street from us [where] we ate all the time. It was delicious! It was called the Texas Barbecue. My partner Betty [Taylor] and I bought it and we changed the name to the Hickory House Barbecue. And I opened another store very shortly—didn't cost anything in those days—and I lucked out. *Luck*. Kentucky Fried Chicken was opening branches everywhere so they wanted my second store location. So that got me out of that, so from there, the Red Barn. I had learned from the owner, Rick was his name, he said, "I'll sell it to you." Here's why we bought it. My partner's friend, that she went to school with, high school and everything, was Ralph Lamb¹² the sheriff. And her niece [Sue] had married Bob Broadbent, who was the head of the [Clark] County Commission. So we knew what was going to happen to the widening of Tropicana Avenue. That's why we bought the Red Barn as opposed to a gay bar. We bought it because the lease was \$244,000—*option to buy*. The seller We wound up with the Red Barn for free because the seller, after we signed all that, thought his *attorney* had signed the option papers with the landlord, Claude Howard—who's a *legend* here in this city, by the way. Everything for children at the University Medical Center is named after him. Claude I. Howard. And he was my landlord for 20 years.¹³

Anyway, so. The attorney thought that Rick, the seller, had signed [the option papers]. So we wound up with *zilch* except the Red Barn. And I told my straight

Mormon partner Betty all this and I said, "Well, you realize that it's a gay bar." And they said, "Well, we're stuck with it. You run it!" They didn't know particularly that I was gay.

What was Betty's last name?

Betty Taylor. She's dead now.

What was her relationship with Ralph Lamb?

Vegas High school. And Bob Broadbent,¹⁴ of course, was *the ...* . He knows me very well. We get along fine.

Anyhow, everything we did was before AIDS. Only thing we had to worry about then was syphilis and gonorrhea. The old routine.

When was it that you bought the Red Barn?

I took over July the first, 1972. July 1, 1972. In those days you had no meetings here except once a month in Las Vegas. Once a month with the Nevada Gaming Commission for your slot machines. And we *owned* the slot machines in those days. It was easy. As opposed to now.

What kind of background check did you have to undergo to get your licensing?

Everything! They knew more about you than your mother and your father ever thought.

What about you, in particular?

They knew everything about me. I had been with the Atomic Energy Commission. I didn't fool them and they didn't fool me. So no problem.

But they had to fly in those days to Carson City, or drive. That was how you got your license. Now, of course, you do it here, mostly. So Betty flew up there and got the license because only one partner has to go and we were fifty-fifty partners. And we took [the Red Barn] over at that point.

They still had the gay people from the shows. In those days they had a tremendous amount of *male* show people. I don't think they have that so much anymore, but they did then. So I'm not kidding you. We thought nothing of putting in—against the law, of course, the fire department—but we put three and four hundred people in there easily on a Friday and Saturday night after twelve. But we decided to go all gay and get rid of that daily no-money horse trade which was a legend out there.

You gotta remember, now, this is important in your record—that was *boondocks!*

What did the Red Barn look like?

One swamp cooler air conditioning! But the humidity in those days was only 6% average so that huge swamp we had worked great! [The building] had no insulation in there, nothing. I will be honest that within two years we had to change that and put in some huge window air conditioners and used the swamp cooler for the back. But mostly I started making money and going on the map when Le Café opened. Le Café opened one year before I did and we were always good friends¹⁵—until I became competition! Even Maxine

Was there contention in those days among the bars? I think in those days there were only three bars: Maxine's, Le Café, and the Red Barn.

We actually fought each other constantly.

In what ways?

Word of mouth. Openly. "Well, did you hear what Marge did last night?"

"Did you hear what Bert Hood, that *faggot*, did?"

Did it damage your businesses?

Nooo! Everybody ignored it and had a laugh out of it.

And Marge [Jacques] and I started out about the same time, and I'm gonna be honest, I don't know whose idea it was first, doesn't matter. That little newsletter? Hand-written.¹⁶ We could have type-written 'em but couldn't have cared less. Before computers! [*laughs*] Hand-written. But it was just a camp.

And I wish you would mention that we made a covenant without any signing, without any, "I pledge allegiance." We all agreed that whatever we wrote for the public, no last names were ever mentioned. Except the owners of the bars. We couldn't possibly [cost] anybody their jobs.

How serious was the threat?

As far as the police were concerned the threat was zero. But let's assume—and we had many, I could name names right there—let's assume you were an assistant pit boss.¹⁷ You know what *their* power is. If they had accidentally wanted to get even with somebody, somebody wanted his job and took that name in there—"Hey, do you see what" [rolls his eyes] The Mafia was that way. The *Organization* was that way in those days. They put up with anything as long as it was private. When it became public then they just took care of it.

How did they deal with the show people, then, who were very open about being gay?

They couldn't care less. They were open contracts and that was it. They weren't on their payrolls.

The casino personnel were on the payrolls.

Yes.

So we set up the gossip columns [in our bar publication] And then, of course, being an old show man, I started 'em all—Maxine and Marge followed me. I started the first shows.

What sort of shows?

Well, I had a bartender who had been with the Mary Kay Trio. He was their accountant manager, for years traveling with 'em and so forth. He knew all the show people and he introduced me to all of them. And, of course, I was in show business. Bill Lundy, Bill was [also] my bartender. Bill had been a dancer for years in shows and so forth and shows and shows. I was 40 and Bill was about 5 years older than me. Well, he said, "Let's do a show!" He knew exactly [what to do].

Meanwhile, I paid a carpenter friend of ours—gay—and he came in and lined [the inside of the building] with [insulation]. That saved everything. We did our first show, which lasted about 40 minutes.

What was that first show? A drag show?

Yeah, drag shows. But we had show business people do their special this or that. And I was in show business so I did Anna Russell.¹⁸ "Are you from Big D?" I never did any other number. And I did the Anna Russell number [*mimics*]: "Today's performance is intended for those who wish to make a *ca-reeah* of the voice. I'm very well qualified for this position because I was for almost ten years the perfect idol of my *favorite* voice teacher, Harold Schlackoschlockylockshiko. He taught me *everything* I know [*laughs*] *including* singing." All that sort of thing. It was a nice little fill-in. Because we would have serious drag numbers. But mostly we had serious comedy. And this is important, I hope you list it. Although everything was destroyed by the break-in that I had in my house—we did 17,781 shows.

How come you remember that exact number?

Because I ran the lighting and the sound. In the beginning we had to do huge reel-to-reel [tapes]. And in the middle of a *brilliant* number if the tape broke you were in trouble! [*laughs*] And now it's just cassettes and easy.

There were a couple of things I had from other people. Marge [Jacques] said at the time she opened Le Café, and later when she opened Gipsy, there was a law on the books—as there was in southern California—that an individual couldn't wear more than two or three items of clothing from the opposite sex.

That was true.

Which is why they tried to stop her from having drag shows. Was that the case in Las Vegas, too?

Yes.

What happened that you were able to give your drag shows? '60s to the '70s.

They'd just ignore us.

Why? remember much about it?

They could have cared less. I to go there. So they went broke. We got warnings, warnings—but not from the police department or anything. We were just

They didn't enforce that law? You'd come in and say, "Riah blah." And I'd listen. that worked on the Strip, and so forth. Hit bosses and others. "We gotta

They couldn't have cared less. And by the way, it's no longer on the books. We helped get that out and we used Bob Broadbent and a whole bunch of us that just quietly "Let's get rid of the stupid thing." That was when we were still very small.

But don't forget, now, this is important. The Organization [Mob] kept us in the boondocks. Marge Jacques' Le Café was in the boondocks. My Red Barn was the boondocks. Maxine's, *certainly*. "Stay away from us and we'll stay away from you." It was that simple. May I say that one more time?

Yes. as there before. In those days it was Young Electric Sign Company. The major

[moves closer to the microphone] "Stay away from us and we will stay away from you." Can you understand that?

That's why there were no gay bars on the Strip? The university never gave us

[mugs] Ohh! It would have been blown up, destroyed *immediately*. at the sign

There was one I remember from 1978 [that was on the Strip]. The Alibi Room. body

The Alibi Room.

The Alibi. Do you remember the Alibi Room?

Vaguely.

It was on the Strip in a couple of different locations from the '60s to the '70s.

Yep.

Do you remember much about it?

Nope. Everybody was afraid to go there. So they went broke. We got warnings, subtle warnings—but not from the police department or anything. We were just quietly told not to go there. You'd come in and say, "Blah blah." And I'd listen. People that worked on the Strip, and so forth. Pit bosses and others. "We gotta hide this. Somethin's wrong."

Word just went out to stay away from it?

You better believe it.

The sign, the Red Barn sign. Did you buy that sign, did you bring it in, or was it there before?

It was there before. In those days it was Young Electric Sign Company. The major owner was a personal good friend of mine. He was gay. Oh, not a love affair, but *he* had a lover. They did all the signs on the Strip. I certainly won't mention his name.¹⁹

In the early '70s that was a lot of money when you got a \$680 bill to have that simple, little old sign [repaired]. This is important. The university never gave us any trouble. I'm talking about officials or students. But kids walking home off of their [school] buses in the boondocks out there would throw rocks at the sign because all the Red Barn parking lot was rocks. They would throw rocks and break all our neons. Finally we decided that we don't really need that [sign]. Everybody knows what it is. It's now in the archive, or whadda you call it.

The graveyard.

The graveyard. Somewhere over there.

Ralph Vandersnick told me that at one time in the early '70s the Red Barn had the centerfolds from Playgirl magazine, the [naked] men, tacked around and that the police came in and said, "Take 'em down." Do you know that story?

No. I'll you the truth, we did not do that.

When Ralph Lamb lost the election and Sheriff John [McCarthy] came on in the early '80s, he caused trouble with a number of gay bars in town ...

Never with the Red Barn.

But never with the Red Barn. How long did you own the Red Barn?

From 1972 until 1988.

Why did you give it up?

The last two years I was on a month-to-month lease.

Why?

Because [Claude Howard] would not renew the lease because he was selling the whole property. I could only rent this part because the option to buy, which we did buy, was to buy the property because we knew what the lighting and sidewalks and the widening of Tropicana was going to be. We knew that we would make a fortune off our \$240,000 [investment]. And by the way, [Howard] sold it for over \$1.6 million.

Did he sell it before you closed the Red Barn?

Oh, yes. And while they [the new owners] were trying to find a buyer out of Manhattan Beach, California, they just allowed me to continue so long as my rent was paid at \$1000 [a month]. They had moved it from eight hundred to a thousand dollars. But I could stay there until they sold it. They had to give me thirty days notice [but] they gave me 60, so it worked out fine.

Do you remember what part of 1988 that it closed?

March. March 31, 1988.

And then it burned.

This is important. Let me state it my way, and then, of course, you'll edit it. We had, because of the property there on Tropicana and Maryland Parkway, we had more hobos than you knew what to do with. Homeless. Anyway, after I moved [from the Red Barn] they moved in there before the new owners [took it over]. Before they built the fence around it they were sleeping in there. They were cooking. Their little fire set it on fire. That's exactly how it was.

That happens to a lot of buildings in Las Vegas ...

Does it?

OK. Before we go on to Numbers,²⁰ did you briefly own Disco Fever?²¹

Yes. That was a lark. My partner, Betty Taylor, her husband fell off the roof of his house over here on Bonita. He wound up with strokes and everything thereafter, died in a nursing home. They had an offer for coastline property in Oregon and [they] wanted to take over the Red Barn property. He was a commercial real estate man. Three bankruptcies, of course. He said we were gonna buy a bar. I don't know how many times we flew up to Reno—we were gonna buy a gay bar up there. And I finally talked him into Disco Fever so we flew down to Long Beach and talked to the owner.

Was that George Adamian?

Yes. So we [Duke Brown and I] bought it for \$400,000 which was a lot of money in those days. Today you can't touch anything [for that amount]. But, anyhow, with options like you wouldn't believe. Our down payment was only eighty-some [thousand] so it was no problem. Believe me, the Red Barn *did* make money. Shows made money. '72, '73, '74 we had to borrow a lot of money to stay in business! [laughs]

Anyway, I ran [Disco Fever] and it was a fiasco.

Why was it a fiasco?

Frankly, I didn't want it. I had other projects in mind but not that.

Was it a gay disco at that time?

Oh, yeah. And we decided not to change the name. Adamian was rich. He was from Lebanon. So when my attorneys checked it out for escrow, they [Adamian and company] didn't owe anything so we just kept the name. Normally, if I owed a lot you wouldn't take over my name. Logic.

But anyway, we took over their name. And I have to be honest that until Marge Jacques' friend—who is now a bitter enemy—Camille [Castro] opened a gay bar right up the street [Carousel], and at the same time Marge Jacques sold to Howard Thompson [what] became the first Buffalo,²² believe me, we had it made there! *Until*. And Camille wrecked us. From that point on you were lucky if you did \$400 a night with shows. And we were opened, by the way, at 6 p. m. We'd open at 4 p. m. to get our deliveries. We closed at 6 a. m. I'm sorry, that was the end of it. But after [Camille] opened—she was so rich. It wouldn't have mattered whether she made money or not, but, unfortunately, people do go to new gay bars. And anything to get against Marge Jacques [Camille did].

How long did you have Disco Fever?

OK. Let me tell you when I bought and then when I sold it. Let me see. OK. We bought it in 19[79] and we let it back to [Adamian] Duke did a special thing. He said, "We're not making it." 'Course, he was looking forward to all the slot machines to make a fortune. Well, guess what? They had no slot machines at the Disco Fever. So I started in with disco. And in those days \$300, \$350 a week to hire a DJ. Today it's even higher. But I mean, it was a *fortune*. My bar, shows at the Red Barn, made a fortune. We did eight hundred to over fifteen hundred a night. That's unheard of in a gay bar in a little country. You know what I'm talkin' about. Seriously. And I'm talking about an average of eight hundred every night. But, at any rate, I was bleeding money off [the Red Barn] to meet the bills [at Disco Fever] and we all decided this was *asinine*, ridiculous. So I'll tell you what I did.

What I did was behind Duke's back I went down to the county—which I'd been here all these years and I knew it backwards and forwards because I'd had liquor licenses for years in my barbecues and all that—and just signed off the liquor license. So, instead of my now owing him \$400,000, he said, "I'll forget the debt if you'll go and re-assign the license on." 'Cause then he can run on *my* license until they approve *him*. [laughs] So I did exactly that.

Do you remember when it was that you were out of Disco Fever altogether?

April 1982.²³

Can you describe what the inside of the old Disco Fever looked like?

Not anything with the beauty Chuck Melfi's got it.²⁴ Sunken floor, of course. We did do a couple of drag shows but it proved to be unattractive to the younger, *younger* crowd. So we just gave it up and went totally DJ. And this part is important, now. As opposed to Marge Jacques and Camille down the street I was getting older, too. I could not relate. So I hired Jerry Guerin²⁵ as my manager at the Disco Fever. Well, we almost got arrested twice so I hope he sues me! We almost got arrested twice because in my office in there he was snortin' up [sniffs]. Let me put it this way, smokin' the grass.

Well, then, after you got out of Disco Fever did he go over and buy Gelo's?

Later. He came back to work for me at the Red Barn. *Thank you!* It was his brother's money, credit cards and so forth, out of Montreal. Anyway, Jerry and I were very good friends, still are. But he really went ape when he took over there. Anyway, I got out of the Disco Fever by that little trick I just told you.

Were you out of Disco Fever before Marge took it over as Village Station?

Marge Jacques?

She managed it.

She was managing for my landlord.

Adamian.

Yeah.

You were out of it before then?

Yeah.

You got out of Disco Fever and you got involved with later with what we call—again—the Backdoor.²⁶ Only you took it over when?

Before we go to the Backdoor I'd like to add one thing. That other than Chuck Melfi and Marge Jacques and Maxine and Camille, Jerry Guerin and Howard Thompson worked for me for a long time at the Red Barn. Both of 'em, thank you very kindly. And so did Rafaél [Navarré].²⁷ He and I go back to '64, I think. '63 or '64. They were all my employees.

When did Jerry and Howard work for you at the Red Barn?

At different times. It would have been in the late '70s. Jerry. I really could have used him as a manager 'cause he was hep with that younger crowd, naturally.

You took over the Backdoor.

We closed the Red Barn March 31, 1988 and we deliberately stayed idle the month of April till we took over [the Backdoor] May the first. It took us that long to get approved by the liquor commission.

You did talk briefly about having problems with the ...
Gaming Control Board only.

Why? You'd been around all these years.

Dare I mention names?

Of course.

Because my landlord [Jack Galardi]—[who] I happen to think the world of, by the way—but the Gaming Control Board *hates* 'im!

Why?

You can go ask the owner of the Backdoor, who is his daughter [Teri Galardi], right now.²⁸

But we changed [the name Backdoor] to the word *Numbers*. OK. 1317 East Tropicana [Red Barn]. Backdoor: 1415 East Charleston. Another bar before it closed, 1610 East Charleston.²⁹ 13, 14, 15, 16—back to the Red Barn, 17. So we said Gay Numbers. [*laughs*] Though we had to leave out the word *gay* or we wouldn't have got a license.

Let's go back to the licensing. This is what broke the Numbers, was simply the fact What [the Gaming Control Board] did was they held me up. Instead of just transferring [my license]. The county would approve me if the state approved. Now, think state only, Gaming Control Board. On Channel 13, in full suit, they said, "Rise up, Albert Hood. You've had a license for ages and you're welcome." It's on record at Channel 13. The camera moved in [on the Board] during the meeting and [the Board] said, "Mr. Hood, we *hate* your landlord! Therefore we will review and review and *review* your license application." They held me up for eight months. Without slot machines, let me tell you, in *this* town your income is almost nil. I had signed the contract with my landlord and everything was cool. He and I got along fine. But he helped me every way he could. I dare you or anybody else, short of having \$40 million in a bank account, or hitting that fancy \$10 million sweepstakes, to make it under those conditions [i. e., not having slot machines]. But we *did* make it fairly well. I started shows down there. Gorgeous. New stage, whole bit. Got rid of all food. Wanted nothing to do with food. Got rid of the cockroaches! Tons. Numbers was an excellent bar, I enjoyed it. The shows we did real, real well. We also had, by the way, two murders out of the bar. Not in the parking lot or in the bar, but after the shows they went somewhere else [and got murdered]. Two murders of customers over nothing. Over *nothing*! Not a sale of drugs or *nothing*! I mean, it was ridiculous.³⁰

Anyway, by their holding me up *then* Now we made it , went before [the state gaming control board] and got approved. The city automatically gave me a transfer. So now we're open, everything's fine. I'm with American Coin for years at the Red Barn *and* [at Numbers].³¹ We had no idea of all that bull crap that happened with American Coin. Unfortunately all my machines were confiscated by the gaming control board and you can't replace one without their approval. You can't just go and get some other [slot] company. They confiscated all my machines, including the money in 'em out of Numbers. And held it up from April till November. I had no slot machines the *second* time. It took me all that time to get another company. The first time the gaming control board held it up [was] because of my landlord—[thought] I was in cahoots with him. They proved that I certainly was not. And make it for the record, I *wasn't*. I was an individual lessee and that was it. At that time Jack [Galardi], my landlord, was gonna be in really bad trouble and I still had to meet all obligations. I dare and defy you to meet all the obligations that you signed at the time that you got a gaming license that everything's working. And be held up for eight [months] in the beginning and from April until [November] There's no way you could make it. Beer and wine you might have, but not when you're paying four and five thousand dollars a month rent.

Then I got another [slot] company, they came in and rescued me. It just went along fine. But from that time with American Coin and no slots I never recovered. Not ever. We're not talking about years. Just a few months. I couldn't recover with the obligation to my landlord and the purchase price. It was a gorgeous purchase price. I had 20 years on the lease with option to buy at anytime. Which I was buying , by the way. Anyhow, I put the bar up for sale and listed it, naturally, with professionals—by the way, it was Maxine's [Perron] lover, Marlene [Pendleton]. She put it up for sale and we started it high, \$300,000, ready to negotiate any time. She had many, many inquiries but the minute it was mentioned that it was a gay bar Nothing. If I sold my bar, the option to buy the property was nil. I had the option to buy the whole thing [but not anyone else]. I'm not too sure I'd want it, but anyway. So everything went down the tube because of no slot machines. And American Coin American Coin ruined a lot of us.

How long did you own Numbers, then, till you sold it?

May 1, 1988 till November 2, 1992. I had the Red Barn for [16] years, and that one for 5.

Who did you sell it to?

I didn't. I just let it go back to the landlord.

What did you do after that? Did you leave town or did you stick around for awhile?

I stuck around for a little while. Fighting a bankruptcy, finally took it. And now I'm recovering.

— λ —

There's a couple of places I want to ask you about that I don't know very much about and you might. And this is just tell me what you know, anecdotes, whatever. You mentioned one of these places—1610.

Oh. I've known 'im for years. That's where Scott Olsen, who now works for Choices,—I met him there. I knew the owner Jim, very, very well. He's dead now. I said [to Scott], "This thing is going down the tube in three weeks." I had him come to work for me at the Red Barn just barely before the 1610 closed.

What kind of a bar was 1610?

The 88-year-old landlady gave [Jim] a bad time constantly. Leaks in the roof. Frankly he just didn't pay the bills. They had a good crowd, by the way.

Couple of bath houses. If you ever went there ...

Big whore that I was! I never learned the trade, but I tried! [laughs]

It's on Main Street, the Vegas Club Baths.³²

Let me think for just a moment. [pauses] Yes. I met Howard Thompson in there one night. I said, "Howard, what're you doing in here? Your lover's down in

Pasadena, California." He went one way in the hall and I went the other! [laughs]
That was before he owned the [Buffalo].

Was it a very big bath house?

Yes. A dump. Clean bedding's about all you had. Clean showers, clean restroom,
clean bedding's about all you had.

Did they have films?

Nope.

Do you remember the Confederacy bar?³³

Yes! It was very popular. We all went there. You should look *that* up and see why
it closed. None of us ever found out why, including Marge Jacques when she and I
talked to each other. We never knew. So we think there was something
Licensing division or something.

Was it a big flashy disco [or] was it a small, dark neighborhood bar?

They had food. Then they got rid of food and went to a disco-type thing. Do you
know Vanessa? My friend, Van?

Yes.

Ask Van [Morrell]. He and I spent many hours up there. But we had a good time.
It went down the tube real fast. It seems like everytime we turned around, and
people don't like this I don't care if you're in California or Connecticut, the police
were in the door. So there had to be some reason we didn't know. Something we
didn't know. So we stayed out of it.

— λ —

*There's an individual I want to ask you about. [He's] very well known but ... dead
now.*

Can we make that clear before I answer? [He's] dead now.

Yes, [he is] *dead now. Absolutely. Three or four years ago. Grant Sawyer.*³⁴

Yes, Grant and I were old, old friends. Long, long time. That is, not in *public*. But he was at the Red Barn. His lover at the time was a famous waiter, became a [restaurant] manager

Was that the German?

Uh, huh. Yeah.

He's dead now, too, but I don't know his name. He went back to Germany and died.

Eddie Zuckert. He drove his car one time right through the juke box area of the Red Barn. Not deliberately. Before MADD he had many drunk arrests. He did die of alcohol. And he hit it again with his car. The first time it cost nearly \$3,000. [lowers his voice] But Grant took care of it. Well, he and Grant were lovers. Grant just decided to stay in public. Now, if this comes back on me I could be in trouble because [Grant] had many, many friends and [we were] friends. So let me just say this, truthfully. [Grant was] *never* at the Numbers, *never* at the Disco Fever, but he did come in at the Red Bar, oh, seriously, about four times. But each time he came in he was so totally wasted, drunk-wise, that we were surprised that he was even driving. We helped to get him out of his car, and what happened we would have somebody follow and his friend would drive him home. Or very *close* to his home.

Eddie and Grant—how long were they together?

Years! Even from when I worked at the King of Sea. For ages and ages. Eddie Zuckert.

Because Grant was married and had children, how did [Eddie and Grant] manage?

He just did his public life and everything [else] was private on [Eddie's and Grant's] part. With *tremendous* taste and class. I say that. *Tremendous* taste and class. Both of 'em. Tremendous.

Did they share a place together?

Yes, Eddie's. But [Grant] paid and everything. But Eddie worked hard, too. Eddie was an excellent Just started [as a] waiter. He was excellent at the German restaurant that's been here a hundred years. Alpine Village. He practically *ran* it. Until alcohol took over and just wrecked him in later years. He never quite got over the break up with Grant.

Why did they break up?

Grant was going to go into a higher office, judgeship and so forth.

After he was governor?

Yes.

Did Grant ever talk to you at the Red Barn about his relationship with Eddie?

No. No, he did not. The answer was this—and I hope you print this if you get into that paragraph— [Grant said], "Bert, it's just *not* an open subject." And I sort of agree with that.

He kept it to himself?

Real private, yeah.

Do you feel that [Grant] was able to accept himself as a gay man?

Well, you've got to get some Mormonism in there somewhere.

I didn't know. Was [Grant] Mormon?

Gotta get some Mormonism in there and so forth. They were strict, you know. I lived in Salt Lake City. Got married there. Yeah, so he had a rough time there. But he really *loved* Eddie. I could tell now. We had a phone conversation once and he was inquiring, "Have you seen Eddie?" He was just lookin' for Eddie because he hadn't seen 'im in days. I guess they'd had a spat or something.

How was Grant accepted among the gay community?

Awe.

In awe?

Governor. [laughs] Awe! I'll give you an [analogy]. "Oh, look, there's Liza Minnelli! Look, there's Liza!" And when she came to our bars—by the way, we're good friends. No, she's *not* gay. But it was in awe. "Look who's here! Look who's here!" And gossip. He just didn't feel comfortable.

I'm surprised that as a public figure he would even go out to the bars or be involved. He'd be afraid.

He didn't. He would go at 11:30 pm, after midnight, type thing. The shows are getting out and tons of people are coming by drunk. Usually he was drunk when he was in the bar. Not *wiped out*, just drunk. But at that point, see, he and Eddie were splitting. I have to be honest for your record—I—Marge Jacques, too—all of us stayed out of it. There was no way that we could help their personal problem. We didn't know anything about it. They wouldn't tell us so we didn't know anything about it.

Did Grant's wife, Barbara, know about [Eddie]?

I never met [her] nor heard of any of the family. I think they just sort of ignored [it]. The house, the position, everything was great, so, you know But he was gonna be a judge or something, I don't remember.

Did Grant buy Eddie his own restaurant at some point?

Um, hm.

Which one was it?

I'm trying to remember. Marge Jacques and I talked about it one time.

But, anyway, Eddie was gone. *Eddie* was gone in those days [from alcoholism]. See, we weren't heavy in drugs in those days. Some of the dancers in the shows were. We weren't heavy into cocaine and all that jazz. A little marijuana here and there. But [Eddie's] alcoholism

Was Eddie's drinking a factor in their breaking up?

Oh! It was the *total* factor in [their] breaking up. *Uncontrollable*. He deliberately drove his car through [the Red Barn's] side there. But not mad at me. He was mad at [Grant]. [Eddie] came to my bar when I owned the Numbers and I said, "Look who's here!" He just got out of jail. May I say that he looked 70, 80 years old. And this would be '89. I said, "Eddie Zuckert. Please don't run into my bar."

— λ —

Can you give me some more background on Claude Howard?

He was great, great [in] construction, in real estate. He built everything behind the Red Barn.

*All that Camelot stuff?*³⁵

All Camelot was his when it was dirt and shit and nothing. When we first took over the Red Barn we had well water. Our well was almost 400 feet deep and many times we had bottled water in the Red Barn. But [Claude Howard] finally in the late '70s put us on [the city water system] because that's when he was gonna sell. We got connected to the sewer, thank heavens, so we no longer had to go back and take care of that cesspool. But it was approved by the health department. This is important. The people who helped us most, but were very, very strict, was the Clark County Health Department.

You were in the county?

Yes. Except for Numbers.

But both health departments were very, very kind. But you *had* too have a clean joint or you were in trouble.

Was your bathroom inside?

Yeah. We kept it plain cement so we could clean it. No paint, no tiles, no nothing. What they taught us was [to] use—and you should do it in your *own* house, a teaspoon full or so. Forget all that [cleaning] crap you can buy. Use bleach. It kills and cleans almost everything.

But you had a cesspool in the back.

Not very long. [Howard] put us on the sewage [system] long before that. But that was by law, not his choice. The water was by his choice.

As far as you know, Claude Howard was straight?

Oh, definitely. Never married. He [had] a doctor friend from Germany, a female medical doctor. And they courted for ages. Oh, yeah. And he built the children's ward, beautiful! At what is now University hospital but in those days was the [Southern Nevada] Memorial Hospital.

And, anyway, when I was in my thirties he was in his seventies.

You got hit in the head at the Red Barn you said the other day.

Oh, it was simple. I had a show on with Bill Lundy doing it for the people there. And I was running the lights. The security guard was strictly for ID checking or if we needed to kick somebody out or something like that. But [this guy] came in with this hooker. He was huge and tall, like Scott Olsen, only bigger. And she was a beautiful hooker, by the way, and they got into a fight 'cause he was drunk. And I said, "Why don't you just get out and let us do our own show." He was from Kansas. It turned out later after two trials—we got 'im convicted—two trials, they released 'im here in Nevada and took 'im back to Kansas [where] he was wanted

for murdering his wife! But anyway, he hit me with a beer bottle. I said, "Please just leave." I didn't say, "Get out!" I said, "Please just leave." We'd had a party that afternoon so I wasn't exactly sober. Sunday afternoon. We used to go to the Daydream Ranch all the time. That became gay for a little while in the late '60s. Didn't last long. Gals took it over.

Gals turned it over?

Gals. They turned it gay.

A lesbian place.

Yeah, Marge knows all about it. Before Le Café.

But, anyway Gosh! I didn't realize I could remember all this stuff.

But anyway, he [hit me with] a Budweiser bottle. I was DOA. That's official. At Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital. The interns were practicing with some new equipment they had over there and they rescued me. Fortunately I wasn't brain dead. I was there a long, long time. The operation was nine and a half hours at the Mayo Clinic. I have a plate in my head. [My face] was paralyzed but they re-attached everything except the eyebrow. I can't raise my left eyebrow. I can raise the right one. They had to attach all of these nerves back together because they were severed.

Tell me about the Daydream Ranch being lesbian.

No, no, we didn't have lesbian bars in those days. We had gay bars. Everybody was welcome. And we got along fine.

Where was the Daydream Ranch?

Eastern [Avenue]. Keep driving. Keep driving. Cross the railroad tracks and turn left.

And it was gay for awhile?

Yeah.

How gay?

Oh, two gals bought it and decided to turn it gay. They had a swimming pool. It was very popular before that, by the way. Horseback riding. We all went out there for that. Van [Morrell] could tell you all about it.

*Do you remember Talk of the Town and the Peekarama?*³⁶

Yes.

Did you go there very often?

Talk of the Town was too dangerous.

Was it gay or was it a place gay people went?

Just a place that gay people went.

*Do you remember that they had some kind of a bath house in there briefly?*³⁷

Yes. Five dollars to get in and that was it. Just came in to cruise.

Was it a very large bath house?

Nope.

What kind of facilities?

They did have a sauna. Not steam. Sauna.

There was another place across from the Sahara. That turned gay.³⁸ No—it meant that we were all welcome, gay. Late '60s, not '70s. Didn't last long. Too much Cubans. That was whenever all the Cubans were coming over to America because of Fidel Castro and so forth. They just sort of took over that whole area [Sahara Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard South] and they'd kill any of us for a minute! One got me on the floor one time over nothing. I'm just sitting [at] the

bar! I mean, not singing, dancing, or otherwise. I was just talking to the guy behind the bar. Actually, I was leaving and going back to the Red Barn. So there we went. I got attacked. Fortunately, his friends got 'im off me. They just said [to me] in broken English, "Do not say one word. 'Cause he doesn't understand."

*Do you remember the Manhattan Hotel?*³⁹

Oh, yes! Let me tell you! Well! Now, he was a Cuban or something in that area. He turned out hating me for some stupid reason. I have no idea. Yes, I had spent many times down there and it was the first really gay You could stay all night, clean sheets. And by the way, it was *clean*. You couldn't get breakfast but you could get something to eat out of the machine. It was exceedingly popular.

What kind of a place was it?

It was the second floor of [the building] where we all got our electric parts. Hank's Motors. Right up there. All of that. It was just a flea-bit hotel and [the owner] took it over and changed it. You couldn't get a liquor license for things like that in those days. That's what he wanted, which would have helped 'im. Had he applied, even though he was a foreigner, he could have gotten slot machines. It was a very popular place.

Was it a bath house or a hotel?

It was called a hotel [but] it was a bath house.

What kind of facilities did the Manhattan have?

Room after room after room and cruising in the halls! [laughs] And an orgy room.

Did they have steam rooms, showers?

No steam room and no sauna. The activity was in the shower and the halls and in the orgy room.

Did you ever see an orgy in the orgy room? Did you ever do an orgy in the orgy room?

No. I couldn't get in. Hundreds! *[laughs]* This is before AIDS now.

What period were you going in there?

Late '60s and early '70s.

What did the rooms look like inside? How were they furnished?

Clean. Clean. All black. They literally painted it all black. That way you didn't have to worry about writings *[graffiti]* and all that. Used carpeting, of course. Worn carpeting. Windows. Everyone had a window. No, no, I'm wrong. Not every room, but most rooms had a window. But they were just cubicles. But they were private, meaning *[the walls]* went all the way to the ceiling as opposed to what I saw in San Francisco.

What kind of furniture did the rooms have?

Half beds. Short beds. Like a day bed sort of thing. Two or three feet. And they had a table and keys that you wore on your arm.

How much did they rent for?

Five dollars.

Could you stay all night?

Yes.

Did they ever have parties, events, functions there that you knew of?

No. That was *[Las Vegas]* city police and once they caught on they became heavy with 'em.

How did they become heavy with 'em?

I don't know. I started staying out. I was advised by good connections in the county, not elected officials. Frankly, it was ex-governor Grant Sawyer told me to keep my ass outta there.

Did it finally just close or was it busted and closed?

I have no idea. But I was advised through Eddie [Zuckert], but [it was] Grant Sawyer. "Rumor is" I got the message so I just stayed out.

Now, a question and you can end this whole thing. Where were *you* all this time that I was doing all this *evil* stuff? *[laughs]*

I was doing it, too.

[laughs] Oh! Bless your *heart!*

I'll tell you one thing. It should be mentioned in your [work]. There are tremendous amounts of wonderful, wonderful gay people who go to gay bars. But there is a wonderful amount of the population of gay people in Las Vegas, Nevada who do *not* go to bars as part of their habitué.

And in the old days that's the only place they had to go.

In those days people threw little parties or stayed home.

How did they develop a circle of friends if they didn't go out?

Where you worked and this and that and so forth. And we did have the Metropolitan Community Church, you know. I really supported that church, by the way. I loved it. I'm very religious, if you don't mind.

Were you involved with it when it was here the first time, 1974?

Yes, yes. I really was. My ex-bartender became the minister there, also.

Clonnie Lambert?

Yes! *(faint background text: I really can't because he kept to himself. Thank you!)*

Tell me about Clonnie Lambert.

(faint background text: it's a pleasure)

I really can't because he kept to himself. *(faint background text: Thank you!)*

Where did they hold services? Did you go?

If I was at the Catholic Church on St. Louis and Maryland Parkway, let's go down there and by the Jewish school, right up from the Jewish school there in that area. A rented area. Sunday at 1 o'clock. *Very* popular. We had meetings on Wednesdays, every week, a special get together. No booze. We weren't *against* it, it was just that there was no *need* for it. That's where I met a lot of people that did not go to gay bars. Gay men and lesbians. They had nothing against gay bars, it was just not their ball game.

Did the MCC last very long that time around?

No, because the lease ran out. It was money.

Did they have public activities outside the church?

No.

Or fund-raisers in the bars?

The bars did raise [money] for them and we did pretty good for them. I did a couple of shows for them. I deducted what I had to pay the cast, which was peanuts. All the liquor sales money we gave to them. Even in those days it was a tax write-off.

Do you know whatever happened to Clonnie Lambert?

No. If you don't mind I have to get back to the bar. They're throwing a party for me.

OK. Before we stop I want to say again thank you very much for spending the time with me today.

Notes

It's a pleasure.

Would you tell the young people, too, watch open sex.

Thank you!

END

Faded text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page, containing various names and locations.

Notes

1. McDonald's and Long John Silver are both well-known chains of fast-food restaurants which provide minimum-wage service jobs for teenagers, immigrants, and others just beginning their working lives. McDonald's is a burger and fries joint, while Long John Silver's serves seafood.
2. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, opera star Helen Traubel made her debut at the Metropolitan Opera Association in New York City on December 28, 1939. Traubel made coast-to-coast singing tours and radio broadcasts, appeared on television and in nightclubs, and starred in the 1954 MGM film *Deep in My Heart*. She was also the author of two books: *The Metropolitan Opera Murders* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1951]; and, with Richard Hubler, the autobiographical *St. Louis Woman* [New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1959]. Traubel died July 29, 1972.
3. *Bye Bye Birdie* [Columbia, 1963] was adapted from a popular stage musical. The film starred Janet Leigh, Dick Van Dyke, Maureen Stapleton, Ann-Margaret, Bobby Rydell, Ed Sullivan, and Paul Lynde.
4. The Rat Pack was a gang of stars and celebrities who gained notoriety for their appearances in Las Vegas during the late 1950s and early '60s. Their impromptu performances and "summits" at the Sands Hotel—usually inspired by plenty of liquor—became legendary and was the subject of an HBO film in 1998. Members of the Rat Pack included Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Peter Lawford, Joey Bishop, Sammy Davis, Jr., and occasionally Shirley Maclaine. The Clan, as they were also known, sans Maclaine, had starred together in the film *Ocean's Eleven* [Warner Brothers, 1960] which was shot in and around Las Vegas.
5. Marge Jacques, owner of the famous Le Café and other bars in Las Vegas, was interviewed for the Las Vegas Gay Archives Oral History Project on May 26 and 28, 1998.
6. MADD is the acronym for Mothers Against Drunk Driving, a crusading organization whose aim is to put an end to driving through ever-stiffer penalties and laws.
7. Among the better known adult bookstores and theaters active in Las Vegas during the 1960s and early 1970s were the Bookstore [2426 Las Vegas Boulevard in the Sahara Shopping Center]; the Book Bar [21 E. Oakey]; the Climax Store [4813 Paradise Road]; the Flick [see note 8]; House of Erotica [102 E. Charleston]; Downtown Adult Books [516 E. Fremont]; the Cinema Arts Theatre [5300 Paradise Road (Cinema Arts was the first theatre in Las Vegas to screen *Deep Throat* in 1973)]; the Erotica Cinema [2206 E. Charleston]; Folies Theatre [714 Las Vegas Boulevard North]; the 4 Star Theatre [on the corner of Fourth and Fremont Streets]; Fun City [115 N. Fourth Street]; the Gaiety Theatre [in the alley behind 1304 Las Vegas Boulevard South]; Mr. Uptight [121 N. Fourth Street]; Nitty Gritty [1820 Las Vegas Boulevard South]; Phil's Adult

Bookstore [1328 Las Vegas Boulevard South, then 1149 Las Vegas Boulevard South]; the Mini-Adult Cinema [in the Mayfair Shopping Center on the northwest corner of Paradise Road and Tropicana Avenue]; the Theatre Royale [Sahara and Teddy Avenues in the REECO Plaza]; and the Crestood Shopping Center, also known as the Adult Center, at the intersection of East Charleston Boulevard and Eastern Avenue. Even though gay men frequented all these places, the only ones which *advertised* gay attractions were the Erotica Cinema, the Gaiety Theatre, the Climax Store, and the Talk of the Town.

8. The Flick Theater opened at 719 E. Fremont Street on November 28, 1969 [see *Panorama*, November 28, 1969, p. 6]. The Flick was advertised as showing "experimental" films such as Andy Warhol's *I, A Man* and *Wild Hippie Orgy* [1969]. The theater served refreshments and had a small coffee bar in the lobby. In later years it became a sex theater and adult bookstore catering principally to gay men. Authorities closed in 1990 as part of an effort to "clean up" downtown Las Vegas.
9. John McCarthy was Clark County Sheriff in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
10. The Red Barn was one of Las Vegas's most famous gay bars, catering in its later years principally—though not exclusively—to a leather crowd and rough trade. It was built in 1958 at 1317 East Tropicana Avenue as an antique furniture store. In 1964 the Red Barn was leased to a Mr. Davidson who operated it as a restaurant and cocktail lounge which was gay after midnight. On July 1, 1972 Hood and Betty Taylor leased the Red Barn and made it gay *all* the time. Hood closed the bar on March 31, 1988; the building burned on September 11 that year and was demolished shortly after.
11. Maxine's was opened by Maxine Perron at 5110 East Charleston Boulevard in about 1950 and for many years, as Max and Mary's, was Las Vegas's only gay bar. It was a legendary place, earning mention in the notorious Las Vegas exposé *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris. When Perron sold the place in 1981, the name was changed to Maxie's, which it remained until closed in January 1989. The site now is occupied by Duffy's Tavern II. [See *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris (New York: Pocket Books, July 1974), p. 97.]
12. Ralph Lamb served as Las Vegas's sheriff from 1962-80. The Lamb family is one of southern Nevada's most noted and most notorious. Ralph's brother, State Senator Floyd Lamb, served prison time for soliciting and accepting bribes while in office. Another brother, Larry, was acquitted of a murder charge in 1980, then convicted in 1985 on charges of cheating at gaming.
13. For information on Claude I. Howard see "Unassuming Philanthropist Howard Dies at 92" [*Las Vegas Sun*, July, 16, 1998, 2B].
14. Druggist Bob Broadbent served as Boulder City, Nevada's first mayor, was a Clark County Commissioner for several years, and during the Reagan Administration was given the position Director of the Bureau of Reclamation. On his return to Las Vegas he became the Administrator for McCarran International Airport and after his 1997 retirement started consulting through advertiser Sig Rogich.

15. Le Café, one of Las Vegas's most famous gay bars, opened on August 18, 1954 as the Club Black Magic, a popular straight nightclub at 4817 Paradise Road. It became a gay bar on January 16, 1970 when Marge Jacques opened it as Le Café and then closed after an arson fire burned it on August 8, 1978. On October 20, 1983 Marge re-opened in the old Rebel Steak House restaurant at 2710 East Desert Inn Road as Disco Le Café Bar and Restaurant but the business failed and closed its doors in April 1984.
16. Bert here refers to *Gay Notes from Le Café*, published from 1971 to about 1973, which was a small newsletter put out by Marge Jacques at Le Café. A set of this newsletter was deposited in the Special Collections Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 1998.
17. A pit boss and assistant pit boss have responsibility for the gambling pit, or table-game area, in a casino.
18. Anna Russell [1869 - January 16, 1936] was a classical stage actress who took her first role when she was 7 years old. She played many of Shakespeare's heroines, starred in such stage melodramas as *Miss Hobbs* and *The Girl and the Judge*, and created the role of *Major Barbara* in London in 1906.
19. Thomas Young, Sr. [1895-1971] founded the Young Electric Sign Company [YESCO] in Ogden, Utah in 1920. YESCO began providing signs for businesses in Nevada in the early 1930s and in Las Vegas in 1932. YESCO today is the principal designer of signs for Las Vegas's hotels and casinos. The identity of the gay major owner to whom Hood refers remains a mystery. See *A Legacy of Light: The History of the Young Electric Sign Company* by Barbara Barell [Salt Lake City, UT: Barell Advertising and Marketing, 1995].
20. Numbers is the Backdoor Lounge at 1415 E. Charleston Boulevard. Hood changed the name when he bought it, and then the name changed back again after he lost it.
21. Disco Fever opened at 4605 Paradise Road in July 1978. It's known today as the Gipsy, Las Vegas's premier gay dance club.
22. Camille Castro opened the Carousel de Paris gay bar at 4310 Paradise Road on April 2, 1977. The opening entertainment at the new bar was a transsexual show advertised as "a softly pouched revue featuring a clutch of heavenly looking transsexuals." Between 1977 and about 1988 when it closed, the gay bar at this address was known variously as Prelude [1978-79], the Garage [November 1979], Lipstick [1984], the Body Shop [November 1, 1985], and the Upper Level [September 1988]. It was when the Garage opened that business declined at Disco Fever.

The bar to which Hood refers as the first Buffalo was the Other Place which Marge Jacques opened at 5410 Paradise Road in the spring of 1978. The Other Place became the Interchange in 1979 and then opened on September 6, 1980 as the Buffalo, owned by Howard Thompson. In October 1983 the Buffalo moved north to 4640 Paradise Road where it stands today. Thompson also owns the Backstreet Bar and Grill which he opened in November 1987 at 5012 South Arville Road. 5410 Paradise Road was demolished in the 1990s during an expansion of McCarran International Airport.

31. American Coin Enterprises, aka the American Coin Machine Company, was charged in 1989 with rigging its slot machines. For more information on the case see "Cheating Charges Against Slot Firm Detailed [*Las Vegas Sun*, August 2, 1989, 1A]; "Gamers Can Resume Removal of American Coin Slots" [*Las Vegas Review-Journal*, August 12, 1989, 1B]; and "American Coin Banned, Fined \$1M Over Rigged Gaming Charge" [*Las Vegas Sun*, February 23, 1990, 6A].
32. The Vegas Club Baths was first known as Sir Gay Men's Spa when it opened in May 1971 at 1413 South Main Street. There is no record for when it closed.
33. The October 1976 issue of the *Pacific Coast Times* advertised the Confederacy, at 1151 S. Main Street, as "Las Vegas's Only Up Front Gay Disco."
34. Grant Sawyer [December 14, 1918 - February 19, 1996] served as Nevada's governor from 1958 through 1966. He established the Nevada Equal Rights Commission, built the framework for state regulation of gaming which today is known as the Nevada Gaming Commission, and co-founded Lionel, Sawyer & Collins, Nevada's largest law firm. His biography, *Hang Tough*, taken from transcripts of oral history interviews conducted by the University of Nevada Oral History Program, was published by the University of Nevada Press in 1993.
35. Claude Howard built the Camelot Apartments, shopping center, and health spa. The spa opened in May 1974 at 5090 South Maryland Parkway [see the grand opening ad in *Panorama*, May 10, 1974, p. 11].
36. These two businesses were located in the Crestwood Shopping Center, aka the Adult Center, on the southeast corner of Eastern Avenue and East Charleston Boulevard. Among the adult businesses found here were the Gallery Adult Mini-Theatre [1970], the Talk of the Town [1970], the Peekarama [1971], the Velvet Touch Massage Parlor [1972], Swinging Escorts [ca. 1973], the Pearl Adult Bookstore [1973], and the live Mini-Revue Theatre [1973]. For a detailed description of the Talk of the Town Bookstore refer to Dennis McBride's journal entry for February 6, 1977.
37. The bath house to which Bert refers was the Charleston Men's Health Club which stood in the Crestwood Shopping Center in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
38. This was the Jolly Trolley Casino at 2440 Las Vegas Boulevard South which was in business from 1977-80. The comedy drag show *Fantasy Follies* was performed here in the late 1970s by the Loose Caboose Comedy Players who included Ricci Kair, Noreen Cherington, and Joey Skilbred [see the *Las Vegas Mirror*, June 30, 1978, p. 55].
39. The Manhattan Hotel opened on November 25, 1953 at 1130 Casino Center Boulevard. Advertised as "ideal for working men," and for "men only," the Manhattan evolved into a gay hotel/bath house in the 1960s and early 1970s.

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