

AN INTERVIEW WITH IRVING KIRSHBAUM

An Oral History Conducted by Cheryl Rogers

February 23, 1979

The Southern Nevada Jewish Community
Digital Heritage Project

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

©Southern Nevada Jewish Community
Digital Heritage Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2014

Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries
Director: Claytee D. White
Project Manager: Barbara Tabach
Transcriber: Kristin Hicks
Interviewers: Barbara Tabach, Claytee D. White
Editors and Project Assistants: Maggie Lopes, Stefani Evans

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grant. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Southern Nevada Jewish Community Digital Heritage Project*.

Claytee D. White
Director, Oral History Research Center
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

—Riviera Hotel. The date is February 23rd, 1979. His home—I'm doing this interview at his home, 3767 Territory, Las Vegas, Nevada. The person conducting the interview is Cheryl Rogers. My address is 2801 Pinto Lane, Las Vegas, Nevada. The name of this interview is Gambling and the Riviera Hotel from 1955 to 1975. This is an oral interview project for Dr. Roske's class.

Mr. Kirshbaum, when did you come to Las Vegas and why did you move here?

Well, I came here Christmas of 1955. I was on my way to Minneapolis when Willie Alderman and Dave Berman asked me if I wanted to stay and work for them. They had the Riviera Hotel at the time.

Had the Riviera Hotel been open for long?

I think eight months prior to that was the time they took it over; it went bankrupt.

Did they take it over after it went bankrupt?

That's right.

What area of the country had you been living before you came to Las Vegas?

Los Angeles for two years.

And before that?

Minneapolis the rest of my life.

What did you think of Las Vegas when you arrived? Can you tell me what the town was like?

Well, it was perfect. There wasn't much traffic and there wasn't many hotels and the Strip was just starting to percolate at the time.

Was there a lot of desert on the Strip?

Oh, yes, empty space wherever you went.

What about the highway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas; was it just a two-lane road?

Yeah, they didn't have the freeway at the time; that came in later.

How large was the Riviera Hotel in 1955 when you came to Las Vegas?

Well, it was the original building. It had two hundred rooms.

Just two hundred rooms. How large was the showroom and the casino?

Well, it was smaller than it is now. They extended a couple of times probably in the last twenty years.

Did it have more than one restaurant?

Yes, it had the main coffee shop and then the gourmet room, which was called the Hickory Room at the time. It was one of the very few gourmet rooms on the Strip.

What kinds of menus did they serve in the showroom; was it mainly a steak menu or did they have several selections?

Well, they had a few selections. It was more or less like it is today.

Did they have two dinner shows or what?

One dinner show, an eight o'clock show and a twelve o'clock show, and the eight o'clock show was the dinner show.

What did they serve at the midnight show?

Just drinks.

Did they have a cover charge?

I don't think originally they had a cover charge. Business one too good and they'd encourage the dealers to bring their wives to come for free.

For the second show?

For the second show.

How many hotels were on the Strip in 1955, do you remember?

Well, there was the Riviera. I think the Sands was built right before that and the Desert Inn and the Sahara and the Dunes.

And the Flamingo.

Well, the Flamingo was the first plus hotel on the Strip.

And how did the Riviera compare with the Sands and the Desert Inn as far as size went and plushness?

I think the Sands and the Desert Inn were much more plush than the Riviera was.

Who were the original builders of the Riviera?

Well, there were three brothers, Lou Ginsberg and Dave Ginsberg. There was another brother; I don't know his name. And they had an attorney that represented them, Harvey Silbert, which wound up with the hotel later.

Why did it go bankrupt?

Well, the bosses were playing and drawing their winnings out of the cage and didn't pay their markers. They actually made money while they were there. Poor management.

Now, when the group took it over that you went to work for, did they continue to own it, then, up through the time that it was bought out by a corporation, or did they change hands?

Well, they just leased it. The Ginsberg brothers were the original owners. They still had the building. See, I think Mr. Berman about the time in '55 and six that their overhead was about eighteen thousand dollars a day, which compared to today is nothing.

What is an approximate overhead today?

It's over a thousand rooms. Let's see. Their overhead must be seventy-five thousand or so. It

might be more, I guess. I don't know.

During the 1950s, the early period on the Strip, can you describe to me what it looked like as far as the neon signs and the pools? Were they single-story buildings? Basically, what was the Strip like in the early period?

Well, there was a lot of empty space. As the years progressed they were taken up by different stores and shopping centers they built. At the time the Stardust was built, one of the developers died and it laid idle for six, eight months or more.

Were most of these people who did the building of these hotels, were they local people or did they come in from other places in the United States?

No, I think most of them were local. Barry Johnson I noticed has a sign on the building here.

The clientele that frequented these hotels during this period, where did they come from, the customers?

Well, most of them came from California. A little higher class of clientele in those days.

Certain people would be afraid to go in these plush places. Now they come in jeans or open shirts and so forth and it's like going into a grocery store.

So the clientele was a different kind than what we see today?

Yes.

Were most of the early customers of these hotels, were they heavy gamblers or did they come up for a vacation? What was their reason for coming?

Well, most of them were vacationers, I imagine, or weekenders from California, and then they had high rollers, also. People would come on their own from the East. Now they bring in a lot of people.

Did we have many people who came from the East in this early period, or from the South?

Oh, they came from all over, but they had better customers. They were, I'd say, wealthier people the further away they came.

What did some of the people, your family that lived back in Minneapolis, what did they think of the fact that you were working out here in the middle of the desert in an industry that was not common any other place in the United States?

Well, I don't know if they gave it any thought at all. I wouldn't have paid any attention to my family, anyway.

Corporations were allowed to buy interest in the hotels after 1967. However, before this time I would like you to comment on the attitudes of the owners on several items. Can you tell me about the policy of complimentary drinks and meals and shows during the period from mid-fifties up through the late sixties?

Well, there was a lot of that then. Good customers were always comped.

In what way?

They'd pick up their show tickets or restaurant, the checks and so forth. But the air travel wasn't taken care of like it is today.

And they had to pay and get themselves here on their own?

Most of them, yes.

Was there much abuse of this complimentary policy? Did people come in with their friends and expect to be comped?

Well, it was freer those days. Now it's checked more closely.

How did they treat their heavy losers? How did the hotels treat their heavy losers?

They must have treated them all right, I imagine. They'd comp them on certain things and that was it because they wanted them to come back.

If they would lose all their money, would they give them enough money to get home on?

Oh, I imagine if a person lost enough money, they'd always see that they got home.

How was credit checked and how was credit extended to these people?

It wasn't checked as closely as it is today. Somebody probably would be sent in or vouched for by someone and that was it and they checked their bank account like they do today.

So if they had a personal recommendation, sometimes that was enough?

Well, the bigger gamblers were known in different cities and they'd recommend them to someone here.

What kind of money would be considered a bigger gambler, the kind of pocketbook?

Oh, I imagine anybody (inaudible) ten, fifteen, twenty, forty, fifty pounds was a big customers.

Was crime a big problem with the hotel guests?

Not as much as it is today.

Why is that?

Well, there are probably five times more hotels, more people coming here now, and gambling attracts crime. But your hotels try to avoid as much as possible with security, but they can't be everywhere at once.

How do they avoid it in the fifties and the sixties?

Well, there wasn't as many people here then. The hotels weren't doing as much business as they're doing now. So as the business multiplied, the crime multiplied.

Was there any effort by security forces within the hotel to let people know that crime was not in any way going to be permitted, any strong-arm tactics?

Oh. Well, it wasn't permitted. Hotels wanted to protect themselves. They didn't want no crime in their hotel. In fact, some of their customers that would go upstairs to their room, a security

officer would go with them and open their door and inspect the room before they went in there.

Did they have the amount of robberies then that they seem to have now in hotels?

No.

How was the hotel security run? Was it an outside detective agency that was hired or did the hotel have its own security?

No. Most of the hotels had their own security, a head security officer and he had his men under him, former retired policemen from out of town that came highly recommended.

Did they basically just watch the crime within the hotel, or what was their function?

Well, that was their function, in the hotel and parking lots.

As far as you know were there ever any large robberies in the hotels of outside people coming in and taking cash from the cages?

No, there was none of that. If anything it was the protection of the guests.

Did any of the guests that you know of ever have large winnings stolen from them?

Well, if they were foolish enough to take it to their rooms. Most of them would leave it in the cage.

So that was the policy; you could do that?

Yes.

Can you to this day still do that?

Oh, sure, you can get a box there and put your money in there. They encourage that. That's what they want you to do. They don't want you to carry the cash around with you.

What were the personnel policies at the hotels? Where did they get their dealers and their box men and the other people who worked within the hotel?

Well, the dealers and box men and so forth, they knew who they were or where they worked

before. A dealer wouldn't come out raw and just start on the Strip. They'd have to work downtown for a while and then they'd get an audition and see how they dealt and so forth. Then if they were good enough, they'd put them to work.

And the ones that they took from the downtown hotels, usually that was a training ground, an apprenticeship for the dealers?

More or less, yes.

Was it considered a privilege to work on the Strip?

Oh, yes. They make more money. The tips were better and their wages were better.

Once a person would hire in at a hotel, was there a lot of turnover or could he stay for quite some time working in a hotel?

He could work as long as you wanted if he was a good dealer.

What makes a bad dealer, one that just isn't quick?

Not only that. They talk to the customers too much or they hustle them for tips and so forth. We won't tolerate that.

How does a person move up in the business from a dealer on up through, say, to become a pit boss?

Like any other business. If they're good and they want to go on the box, they go on the box.

After they're on the box a certain length of time, if they see they're capable, they move them up to a floor man.

Was there much nepotism in the gaming industry where somebody's son or nephew or a cousin who had come in from out of town would be guaranteed a job because his uncle was in a position of power?

Well, they didn't recommend that. They didn't want any two of one family working in a place as

a rule. There were probably exceptions.

Were a lot of the early leaders at the time the Riviera opened and the Stardust opened, were they brought in from other areas of the country or were they people—

Well, they came here on their own. They just didn't bring them in as dealers. They came here.

They probably went to school and worked downtown and then they'd come out on the Strip. See, a lot of dealers wanted a change. So when a new place opened, they'd put in their applications while they were working someplace else.

Did you have to know somebody in order to get a job at a big hotel?

No, not necessarily. Listen, they probably got a hundred dealers. A hundred dealers...can't know a hundred people. They were as anxious to get good dealers as the dealers were to go to work.

Who were some of the early big stars at the Riviera Hotel?

I think Liberace opened at the Riviera. Red Skelton was there. Humperdinck, he opened there for his first—

MRS. KIRSHBAUM: Wasn't Sheeky Greene in that—

Sheeky Greene was in the lounge for years before he moved up to the big room. And Harry Belafonte was there. There were so many I can't remember.

Did the hotel have the attitude that the big-name entertainment was necessary to bring in the gambler, or was it just part of the image that went with the plush luxury of Las Vegas?

Well, the bigger the name and the better show you had would naturally bring in the customers.

Did they lose money on their showroom?

I wouldn't say they'd lose money. I don't think so. Earlier they'd lose money on their food and different departments, but today everything pays for itself.

Did they have bargain buffets at the Riviera, the two ninety-five or the two fifty?

Well, they had buffets in those days [that] it would cost you twenty dollars today, blocks of smoked fish and all that expensive delicatessen. You could probably pay a dollar and a half or so and eat all you want.

Did it bring in people?

Well, as many people as there was. There wasn't as many people those days as there is today.

You mentioned Harry Belafonte was an entertainer at the Riviera. Was he allowed to stay at the Riviera Hotel or did they find accommodations elsewhere?

No. He stayed there and he was quite a crapshooter, also.

Do a lot of the guests gamble—did a lot of them?

You mean the—

Hotel guests—the entertainers.

Entertainers. Well, Phil Silvers, he was there. He lost a lot of money there. He was one of our best customers. Dean Martin, he played at the Riviera, also.

And was he a good gambling customer?

No, he didn't gamble as far as I know.

Were the gambling games in the fifties and sixties basically the same as they are today or have there been new ones added? Or possibly the greater emphasis upon—

In those days they didn't have baccarat. The rest was all the same, but they didn't have as many tables as they have today in each place or as many slot machines.

What was the key game?

I think blackjack always was the key game, but the bigger money game I think was craps.

Did they have many slot machines in the early fifties in hotels?

No, not as many as—probably a fourth of what they have today. They found out that slots and

rooms are the essential keys to success in hotel, the more rooms you got and the more slots you got.

The better off you are.

Well, it stands to reason that the more rooms you've got, the more people will be staying at your hotel. They go to sleep at night and they get up in the morning and they're right there.

What was the attitude towards minorities, namely the blacks, as guests in your hotel?

Well, there was always that frigid feeling. But as the years went by they started coming in more and more. And nobody pays more attention to them than they do anybody else today.

In the early period of the Riviera Hotel were they welcomed?

Well, they weren't exactly welcomed. The few that came, nothing was said or done to harass them or anything, but it wasn't encouraged, I don't think.

Did you get many of the black entertainers or the black sports figures who came to Las Vegas for a vacation, or for the most part blacks coming into the hotels, were they locals?

No. Most of them were from Los Angeles. In those days you didn't have as many black sports figures as you have today. Wilt Chamberlain came in there one day. He could hardly get in the Hickory Room; he had to bend down.

Bend down so far.

Yeah, to get in.

What about the “Black Book” that was initiated by the gaming commission in the late sixties, did that have an effect on gambling in Nevada?

No, I don't think so. That was all by association and so forth. They just didn't want there to be any connection with anything, I imagine.

Were the names that were in the book, were they there for a good reason did you feel? Did

your colleagues that you worked with have a feeling that it was fair?

Now, we always dealt with people like that and there was no difference.

But once the “Black Book” was initiated and they were no longer allowed in your hotel?

That's by the higher ups. As far as the workers are concerned, I didn't care who came in.

Who were some of the important gaming figures in Las Vegas during this time and why were they so influential?

Well, there was a lot of gaming figures here. A lot of them were not influential. Let's see. Nick the Greek, he was part of this notoriety. He was probably one of the best known gamblers in the state of Nevada in his day.

Now, was he—

He was a player, strictly a player.

What about people who ran gambling establishments, Moe Dalitz and Wilbur Clark or Jake Freedman?

Jake Freedman was a player. I don't think Moe Dalitz or Wilbur Clark played. There was more playing done by owners in the early days. Today there's practically none.

Did any of these owners organize an organization of hotel gaming owners together so that they had some strength?

Well, I think there's a hotel association today that's been in for a long time.

Did the hotel owners have much influence on the local government, the city or the county government?

I imagine because anytime there's money there's power.

Do you remember anything in particular?

No. So many isolated incidents. Just a common worker like me would never know about it.

Besides Nick the Greek or Wilbur Clark and Moe Dalitz, can you think of any other people that you feel were influential?

There was Gus Greenbaum.

Tell me how Gus Greenbaum was connected with the Riviera Hotel.

Well, he was originally in the Flamingo Hotel; when Bugsy Siegel got killed that outfit bought it and then they sold it to this furniture manufacturer in Los Angeles. I forget his name. And then they were out of action for about six months. And then when the Riviera was available, they leased that.

It was probably the leasing that took over after the brothers went bankrupt.

That wasn't bankruptcy, but they went broke. Then Sid Wyman and Charlie Rich went in with this group that took over the Riviera. Then they left there and went to the Dunes, which they were there for a long, long time.

Charlie Rich was in one?

Right.

And Greenbaum stayed at the Riviera?

Until he got killed.

Do you remember when he was killed?

It was in the sixties, I think. I'm not sure.

Can you tell me any of the—

Because my boss also got killed at the same time.

Can you tell me any of the history behind what happened to Gus Greenbaum and why it happened?

No, I didn't know nothing about Gus. The only thing is when he went in the Riviera, he had

some investors that went in with him from Phoenix, people that he knew. That's as much as I know about it.

Were these individuals who owned the hotel, the Riviera in particular, were they continually selling a few points, shares, buying and selling so new owners were coming in all the time?

No, no. Out here if the owners (inaudible), they'd stay in there most of the time.

How did some of these hotels, mainly the Riviera, treat their employees?

If you ask the employee, they've got a different version and the bosses have a different version. I'd say they treated them as well as any other hotel as long as they worked and minded their own business.

Did they give their employees like a turkey at Thanksgiving?

No, give nothing. I was there twenty years. They didn't say goodbye to me when I left.

And they didn't even say goodbye to you. No gold watch?

No gold watch.

You know we were the first people—the first telephone we got when we came here.

No, we weren't the first telephone. We got a telephone right away, which was tough to get at the time. You couldn't get a telephone. But on account of her condition...you had to have a doctor's certificate.

A residential didn't have no phones. But he told them what condition I'm in. They put in a phone right away.

We got the lines out there.

Really.

That's the way doctor -if you had to have a note from the doctor. You had to verify it.

[Inaudible] skimming in the early days of Las Vegas?

In the early days we didn't have the rooms set down for accounting and so forth like they have today. Today the bosses don't even see the money. In those days the bosses used to count the money. So they could do what they wanted. Not just the help that wants the money. But there isn't the skimming today.

Is it easy or would it be possible for any of the help to take money from the cage?

Well, anytime there's money involved somebody can steal something (inaudible). But one person can't do it by themselves.

In the late fifties, did the money actually go into the boss' office and he just did the count?

Certain people did the counting after every shift.

And those were frequently the owners?

Mostly the owner or friends of owner, trusted people.

And today it's done by shift bosses.

No. Shift bosses don't do count. Maybe accountants in the cage that count, but bosses don't even touch the money.

And then what happens to the money after the count is done? Is it just put it in the safe?

Just put it in the safe and have a record of the amounts and so forth. This is probably watched closer today than General Motors.

Is it watched also closely by the gaming control industry and the FBI outside—

Not the FBI. The gaming control has their investigators out and so forth and they sit down and pattern the controls in accounting that hotels abide by.

(Inaudible.)

Sure.

You spent twenty years with the Riviera Hotel. Looking back over those twenty years, what do you feel was probably some of the greater changes that were made? How did you see the industry change or see the Riviera Hotel change?

Well, as the years went by the hotel discovered the more rooms they had that more people would come. You have to get them through your door to make any money. That's what's been happening the last ten years; all these hotels have been adding and adding rooms and bringing in more people and adding more slot machines, expanding their casinos.

Can a hotel make as much on a slot machine as it can on...well, the same area that it would take to put a crap table, if they were to put in the same area, fill it with slot machines, can they make a sizable amount of money off of slots?

Oh, slot machines, everything is cash. You don't have any credit. You don't have to carry any books for your creditors and so forth, which makes it nice.

That's why a lot of them have gone to—

Slot machine is a machine. You don't need dealers. One person probably can watch fifteen, twenty, thirty machines. You don't need much help.

So the profit on a slot machine is higher.

The percentage is much more higher.

Do the hotels set their machines to pay...certain areas of the hotel, for instance, heavily trafficked areas where the machines get more play, are they a tighter machine or a looser machine?

Well, no. I think there's a state law where you have to give back so much percentage and you can only keep so much. I'm not sure.

But it is adjustable on each machine as to what the—

Oh, I imagine they can do anything they wanted with a machine, but they don't do it. They just go to a certain percentage and that's it.

What other changes have you seen in the Riviera Hotel in the twenty years you were there?

Three times bigger.

How many rooms do they have now?

It's close to a thousand now or more from two hundred. The ceiling has been expanded. The restaurant has been expanded. There are more slot machines, more crap tables, more twenty-one tables.

What about the different attitude that was there today with the bigger business that was there fifteen or twenty years ago both from the standpoint of the employee and from the standpoint of the guest?

Well, the smaller the place is, the more familiarity there is amongst the help and the boss and so forth. After a place gets so big, you lose all that.

Who were the people who stayed in the Riviera Hotel as owners from the time that you began working for them in 1955 up until a corporation took it over? Do you remember some of the people?

You mean workers?

Yes—no, the owners.

There are no owners, I don't think, from the original group. It changed hands about three or four times.

Could you tell me some of the owners then when it changed hands?

Well, this last time AIPS Corporation took it over, which are the present owners.

Let's start back in 1955 when you went to work for Burton and at that time—

Burton?

Barton? Dave?

Berman.

Berman, Dave Berman. And you say Wyman and Charlie Rich and then there was Gus Greenbaum. Now, those were four or five of the original people who leased it from the brothers who built it.

Right.

And then they kept it for how long?

Well, after Gus Greenbaum got killed, some other outfit bought it. Ross Miller was in there, the district attorney's father. He was in there for five, six years. Then another group took it over from them. Eddie Torres represented this group. He was a big boss there and he just quit this last year. (Inaudible.)

But he was an owner before the corporation?

I don't know if he was an owner or a worker. The paper said he was making a hundred and eighty thousand a year for his contract and then when he quit he got twenty-five thousand a year, which, I guess, according to the paper he wanted to break the contract.

When Ross Miller was in there, did he buy out a share of the ownership when the original four or five had it with Gus Greenbaum and Berman?

He was the only one that remained; all the others left.

By *he* you mean?

Miller. He had a real small piece. A friend of Miller's by the name of Nemeroff brought him in that knew Berman. So they gave Miller a small piece. Then he got a little political. He became head of the shrine here and so forth. Then he took over.

And he managed it.

He was the big boss.

Did he buy more of a percentage?

That I don't know.

But did he retire from the hotel when the corporations took it over?

Yes. He retired, I guess, about two or three years ago.

What about Wyman and Charlie Rich, did they go to the Dunes when the Dunes was first built or did they buy into the Dunes later?

No. They went out; after Gus Greenbaum got killed, they left.

The Riviera.

Then they went to the Dunes and they're still there.

And they sold their interest to somebody else in the Riviera Hotel?

I'd imagine so, sure.

Now, then with Eddie Torres, you do not know if he actually owns some of the—

I don't know if he had stock or not. But he had the say-so and his word was law.

How many corporations have owned the Riviera Hotel?

I don't know if they were corporations or groups or...I know this last one was a corporation because AIPS is a travel agency. Rickles is the head of it.

How long have they owned it?

Four, five, six years.

What about some of the other individuals that were involved with Moe Dalitz with the Desert Inn? Did he retire from gaming or did he stay involved with the Desert Inn up until a corporation took it over?

I don't think so. According to the paper that I just read that he leased the Desert Inn for so many years.

He leased it from—

Dalitz. As far as I know, Dalitz doesn't have anything to do with it anymore.

When did you begin to see the clientele at the hotel change, going from more people from the East and a group of people that possibly were not as, quote, high class, end quote, as the early gamblers here on the Strip?

Well, after the town got bigger and all the rise in the sixties and so forth, people started moving around more. Some of these same people that wouldn't dare walk in one of these plush joints just on their own and now it's just they're going to the supermarket.

Do gamblers that come here to visit gamble smaller purses now than they used to?

It all depends on their bankroll, I imagine. A gambler is a gambler. He'll gamble what he has, I guess.

Well, do you still see the same number of high rollers?

Oh, there's more high rollers today because there's more money around. People have made more money. The dollar ain't what it used to be.

What about the credit that's extended nowadays, is it more difficult?

I think it's much more difficult today than it used to be.

Why?

Well, there are rules from the gaming commission, I imagine, that have been set down and you have to abide by these rules.

How do they check a person's credit today?

Well, I guess they go by their checking account. A successful person is known by someone.

What about the entrance of corporations to the gambling industry, what is the policy now on complimentary food and meals?

They've tightened up on a lot of them. A lot of them cut out a lot of junkets. See, originally with these junkets they get so many good ones and so many bad ones. The hotel has their names, their records and so forth. Some of these junkets here they don't need. These good ones, they can invite themselves and bring them in. That eliminates the bad ones.

Who sponsors the junkets? Do the hotels themselves sponsor them?

Oh, sure.

Do they have any special policy as far as inviting somebody on a junket? Do they have to be recommended by somebody else or do they have to be a known gambler? How do you get your name to be invited on a junket?

Certain hotels have offices in bigger cities and they have someone running these offices and these people are the people that run the junkets. So in their own town they know the good ones and the bad ones. So they invite the good ones. Sometimes you get some bad ones. They're working for the hotel; they're on the payroll.

Now, when the hotels were not owned by corporations, the transportation was not paid by the person who came out to gamble; but, yet, the hotel would give complimentary room and board?

That's right. Then it got so big and this junket business entered the picture later on. And for some hotels it's very successful.

What hotels in Las Vegas use heavy junkets?

Well, the Dunes is one. (Inaudible) the Flamingo used to.

What about the Riviera?

Well, the Riviera, they use junkets, but they were much more strict than the other hotels. They watch it real close.

Does the Gaming Control Board have enough muscle over the gambling industry in the state of Nevada?

They have enough muscle if they want to expand it, I guess. They're the bosses.

Do they use their muscle effectively as far as what you could observe?

Like anything else it's all politics. I imagine they have to run it on the up and up or they're going to go to pot. It's too big now for any shenanigans. It's the lifeline of the state.

Do you think that the gaming control laws have helped the industry? If we wouldn't have had the Gaming Control Board, do you think the industry would be where it is today?

No, no question it wouldn't be. There has to be certain limitations on things if they're good or they're bad. But they serve a certain purpose.

The old owners of the hotels, were they glad to see the possibility of corporations coming in or was that something they did not want to happen?

That I don't know anything about.

How do you think the actual atmosphere or the gambling games in hotels, has it changed over the last twenty years other than through the increase of crowds?

Well, there isn't that personal touch that there used to be. You get lost in the crowd and you're just another player; that's all.

And you get to wait in line for the shows.

Unless you're a big player then you get to sit.

What kind of privileges today are extended to big players?

Well, all the things for free, most of them.

They still do have complimentary services for the big players?

Oh, sure. It's just like anything else in department stores. So they take the buyers out to lunch.

Or if they come into New York to see their line, they wine them and dine them. It's like any other business. It's part of the business. It's part of the overhead.

Was it done as—it was probably—was it done more heavily in the early days, fifties and sixties, or is it more heavily done now?

Well, I don't know about now. They cut down a little now. I'd say five, eight years ago it was done much more.

What do you feel will be the future for gambling in the United States as far as other states passes gambling legislation?

Well, as taxes go higher I think some of these states will stop and contemplate. They have a good chance to get gaming.

Has New Jersey hurt Las Vegas at all?

I don't think so. I mean here is a populated area where if they had three Las Vegases, they couldn't take care of the customers. The bigger they get, the more business they'll do.

So there's plenty of room left for everyone?

Americans are gamblers. They like to gamble.

The atmosphere on the Strip is different from what it was in the mid-fifties. It had fun in the sun, pleasurable spot to vacation. There were lots of marriages, wedding chapels, convertibles, stars who came here from Southern California. This is no longer true. Can you speak about this?

Well, in the earlier days a person would come here and get acquainted with a dealer, with a floor man and there was familiarity there and a closer kinship. Like when a person knows somebody,

they'd feel like coming back. But today everything is a business. You come into a hotel; it's crowded. You're lost in the crowd. You're just another player; that's all.

Unless you're a very high roller.

That's right. And the close kinship is lost with these corporations. They're getting too big now.

How does the corporation differ from the individual owner that existed in the early days?

There isn't the same contact that they had before. In the old days they could do more without asking anybody. They could do more for a player or a customer. Today you have to be careful if you comp anybody that the fellow above you doesn't look at it and call you out and so forth.

They don't want to give nothing away. They don't give nothing away.

In the earlier days was it just the top owner that could do the comping or was it anybody, even a dealer?

No, no dealer. A floor man could comp. Today maybe one floor man in the whole place can comp for a dinner check or a show.

So from the floor man on up comping could be done.

But they're still looked over very closely.

They didn't question it, though, in the earlier days; that was just part of the business.

That's right.

They don't comp so much now.

No. That's what we're saying.

How does the corporation look at gambling versus the individual owner?

Well, I don't know what their attitude is, but I imagine they look at what their bottom line is and that every department is making money.

The corporation.

That's all they're interested in.

And what was the individual owner interested in?

Well, he probably was interested in making—well, he's interested in making money, but in those days a gambler when they gave their word; that was it. They don't have that same common touch that you had in those days today.

The word was important to the gambler.

That's all he had. There was no banker, no official or anything else. A gambler was looked down upon in the first place. If you didn't have your word in the gambling business, you had nothing.

What about the banking institutions in the beginning, were they willing to loan money to the gambling?

Banking institutions were a big fake when this town started. The originators of this town as far as giving money was Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters Union. They built this town, the stock.

What were some of the hotels that they loaned money to? Did they loan money to the builders of the Riviera or builders of the Stardust?

I don't know, but they did do a lot of hotels. They lent their money and they never lost a nickel. But then when Hughes come in and they say he have them a good image and all that. But Hughes didn't build this town. They came in after everything was built and they wanted the gravy. That's what they were looking for. That's what all these corporations are looking for.

They're concerned about profits?

Absolutely. But the Teamsters were the ones that built this town originally. Whatever they say about them, they built it.

I understood that the Bank of Las Vegas, which is now Valley Bank, was willing to go out

and loan money to some of the individual owners at these hotels.

With strings attached.

What do you think of the community, then? How has gambling affected the Las Vegas community? The community life is absolutely separate from the gaming life and the gaming industry, or...?

Well, no question about it. See, people come here and they think gambling is (inaudible) and they say, "You live here?" Where do you think we live? I've been asked that a lot of times, "Do you live here?" We have everything every other town in America has. We've got a hundred and seventy-eight soccer teams in this town; that tells you something.

Basically I would like your feelings about the growth of the industry today as compared to what it was like twenty, twenty-five years ago and what you think the future holds.

Well, the growth of the industry has been phenomenal. If there's more communications and more planes and so forth, this town will keep growing. If it's kept under check and policed right and taken care of, why, there's no limit. But we have to be careful and guard it because this is lifeline of the state. The percentage in rooms and so forth, they're the greatest percentage (inaudible). People coming here the first time, if they win that's the worst thing that can happen to them. I imagine they manage to come back again because they think winning is losing. It isn't.

(Inaudible) junkets?

Yeah.

What about the desire of people to gamble, is that always going to be—

Oh, yes, people are gamblers, especially Americans. They'll take a chance on anything. When they see all that money, they get carried away. Like I said, the first time they manage somehow

just even to get back here to play again. Your odds are the smallest percentages gambling places have for them. The biggest percentages are (inaudible). When they win that's the worst thing that can happen. They come back to try and win again, which is not so easy. Gambling is management. A lot of people don't know how to manage their money. The game can be beat if it's played right and you have to be lucky, which is the main ingredient.

Would you estimate that the percent of winners is probably about the same today as it's always been regardless of whether they're corporations or individual owners?

You mean the winnings for the hotels?

Yes.

Oh, it's much greater. The more money they're gambling, according to gambling, is the more money you make. But you handle accounts. If you don't (inaudible). If you handle a lot of money, it's (inaudible).

[End of recorded interview]