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# An Interview with Judge Lee Koury

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

University Libraries

University of Nevada Las Vegas

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University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2012

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Dr. Harold Boyer. 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 the university 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.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

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February 6, 2013  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Claytee D. White

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**This is Claytee White. It is February 6th, 2013. We're in the Reading Room in Special Collections and I am with Judge Lee Koury.**

**How are you this morning?**

I'm just fine, thank you.

**Wonderful.**

My last name is spelled K-O-U-R-Y. My first name is Lee, no middle initial.

**Okay, and Koury...is that the way it's pronounced, your last name?**

Yes.

**Wonderful. So Lee, I want you to just start this morning by talking about your early life; just tell me where you grew up and what your family was like.**

I was born in Los Angeles and raised in Los Angeles, spent most of my life there. I had siblings, but we lived separate from each other. Basically my mother was a housewife as a younger woman and then in later life she started painting and made several paintings that one of them ended up in the Olvera Street community because she painted the first Mexican governor of California, Pío Pico

**Tell me what Olvera Street is.**

Olvera Street actually is in downtown Los Angeles and it's a little piece of Old Los Angeles, the Mexican culture there that people like to visit locally in town and tourists. So it was nice. In fact, I visited less than a year ago because I hadn't been there in years. It was interesting. It's a tourist situation, but it was nice. I like Los Angeles.

**Where is your mom's picture hanging; her painting?**

It used to be in the Pico House there on Olvera Street, but we tried to trace it and they've moved and nobody really knows for sure where.

*I think it's at Mark Harrington's house. Oh, sorry.*

**Okay.**

So we're not sure where it's at, but it's around somewhere I'm sure.

After growing up in the Los Angeles area, I ended up after being discharged from the Army after the Korean War, I—

**Okay, so prior to that, when you were young and growing up what area of Los Angeles did the family live?**

Basically the west Los Angeles area, I was born in what is old downtown; it was 51st and Main in Los Angeles, and then we ended up living in the west Los Angeles area.

**And by west Los Angeles do you mean Olympic and Pico or ...**

Yeah. In fact, I lived right off of Pico in Los Angeles. I actually went to work for the phone company at about eighteen, nineteen years old; the general telephone company there in Santa Monica. Then after getting out of the service I went back to the phone company. And then at twenty-three years old I took the exam to become a deputy sheriff.

**So you were born in 1932.**

Yes.

**Okay. Tell me about going to school in Los Angeles as a young boy. Where did you go to school in that area?**

Basically I went to school at different grade schools, but I did my junior high at John Burls Junior High, which was off of Wilshire Boulevard, and then I did my high school at Fairfax High and I believe it was 3rd Street or Santa Monica Boulevard, somewhere in there.

**Can you just give me your parents' names for the record and if you had any brothers and sisters?**

Yes, I had four sisters and one brother. My mother's name was Pauline Brown and my father's name was Lee Koury; I'm basically a junior—or was. There again, they moved quite a bit around L.A. and they lived up near Fresno for a while, too, which I did not; I was living with my grandparents at that time.

**And your grandparents lived in Los Angeles proper?**

Yes.

**Wonderful. Thank you for that background. So what attracted you to law enforcement?**

It's kind of odd because I used to see police officers on the street and I worked for the phone company. I did telephone repair. I thought 'Gee that looks like a nice job.' They appeared to have it easy. I had no big desire for it at that time, but it just looked like a good job. Actually I didn't really get engrossed in it until I passed the test and went to the academy and then I started getting a real interest in law enforcement and spent the rest of my life in law enforcement, in fact. I think law enforcement is something that – and I've seen it in other people – a lot of people think you get involved in law enforcement because you get to throw people in jail and hit the bad guy over the head, that sort of thing, and that's furthest from the truth because most of the time in law enforcement you're actually helping people, you're not throwing people in jail and it's a very satisfying job for that reason.

**So it's really to protect and serve.**

Yes, it truly is. And I found people who get into law enforcement and don't see that, they don't last very long; they usually end up leaving on their own or otherwise.

**So early on; we're talking now probably the late '40's when you first get into the sheriff's department, or later?**



It was later than that. I got into the sheriff's department actually in October of 1955 and I had just turned twenty-three at that time.

**What was the environment like in Los Angeles in 1955?**

I think the law enforcement was in a change at that point because law enforcement in Los Angeles had difficulties with the people. They didn't know how to deal with people and they had a lot of problems both in the Los Angeles Police Department and in the sheriff's department.

**And tell me the difference in the two for people who don't know.**

All right, the difference is the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is actually the largest sheriff's department in the world. They are nine thousand deputies. They operate hundreds of patrol cars, I think twenty-five helicopters and two fixed-wing aircraft and three patrol boats; so it's a unique service. It has one of the largest jails in the country; it's either second or first; I don't recall now. But because of all of that it's a major department. The Sheriff of Los Angeles, of course, is elected and he happens to be the top law enforcement executive in the county. And under California law, the sheriff can move in and take over any police department if he feels they're not doing the correct job, and that's been done several times. It was done in Compton and in another city; Signal Hill had to be taken over at one time.

As a deputy, depending on what your assignment was, you basically had the jurisdiction of the entire county. After my first year in the sheriff's department, I went to work on the vice detail. That's where they had problems years before because vice became a corrupt thing for both Los Angeles and the sheriff's department; and they cleaned that operation up. In fact, I remember to this day, the first day I went to work in the vice detail, my captain called me in the office and he said, 'Don't ever come in here and ask me whether you can arrest somebody; if

## **Preface**

Judge Lee Koury was born in Los Angeles, CA the son of Pauline Brown and Lee Koury. He spent his childhood in Los Angeles and after moving to Missouri he finally retired in Las Vegas, NV in 2010.

Judge Koury was a member of the United States Army. After the Army he became a Deputy Sheriff for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. While his time as a deputy Sheriff Judge Koury was involved in the popular Charles Mason case.

Judge Koury recalls inside details about the Mason case. He mentions and discusses in detail members of the "Family" who were involved with Charles Mason, and the murders of Sharon Tate and the LaBiancas. He describes in depth about an informant who provides information and leads that ultimately help law enforcement in the Charles Mason trial. He goes on to explain the attempt of an escape by Mason and an escape and rescue of a Manson partner, Kenny Como.

Once retired from Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Judge Koury moved to Missouri. He became the United States Marshal for Missouri. After serving as a U.S. Marshal during two different president terms, Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. he became a municipal judge – criminal court judge in Boone County.

they're committing a crime, you arrest them.' And he said, 'You don't have to worry about any political problems; you just do your job and everything will be fine.'

**Why do you think it was necessary for him to say that?**

Well, I think it was a hangover from before because a lot of times people with political power or whatever would be exempt from it and this captain didn't want that; that was basically the judgment of the sheriff's department. When I first went to work for the sheriff's department, the sheriff was E.W. Biscailuz, which is an old name in law enforcement. In fact, he became sheriff the year I was born and he was still the sheriff at the time I came on the department. Several years later he retired and Peter J. Pitches became the sheriff and he was a good man to work for, too. I had personal contact with him, well, sometimes during the Manson thing, as well. But because the department had cleaned itself up...

Now, there was a problem with LAPD. LAPD in the attempt to clean it up, they were broken down in divisions and each division was like an independent police department. For example, homicide detail from... West Hollywood Division was not to contact a different division about their investigation; they had to go through what they call headquarters; homicide, they had to go through there and it made a poor job of communications, and that happened in the Manson trial, too. One of the things; you had the two killings – the Sharon Tate killing and the LaBianca killing the next night were two separate police divisions. So they weren't communicating with each other.

**I didn't know that.**

A good friend of mine, Bill Gleason, who had handled the—Gary Hinman case – this is a musician who was killed by the Manson Family just prior to these other murders in Malibu – he

handled that investigation. It didn't make much of a press release because it wasn't somebody significant, but they had the writing with the blood on the wall; the same thing.

**So since you have already started talking about that, let's go ahead and start from the beginning about the Manson trials. And I guess you've already started, so there were three bloody incidents.**

Yes.

**Okay, so you've told me about the singer who was killed in Malibu.**

Yes.

**Then they did – go ahead and tell me about those two that became well known.**

There again, I wasn't involved in those investigations.

**Right, but just give me some background.**

The Sharon Tate killing took place about two weeks later. And when that happened, my friend, former detective who just died last month, he tried to tell L.A. that he thought his case was related to theirs because of the blood writing. They didn't buy it at first and, of course, they had that murder the next night of the LaBiancas. Again, LAPD assumed that that was just a copycat, which it turned out not to be, of course. Then they finally got the right information and made the arrest. But one of the things that was unique is at the Sharon Tate killing, when the people involved in that killing left the house, they threw the gun out the window; that landed in another jurisdiction of LAPD, so you had three divisions involved. In fact, they made a kind of a joke about it because the gun was unique because part of the gun broke off and was found at the Tate murder site. When the gun was found, it was found by a citizen who turned it into the police department; it was on the side of the road. And even the citizen realized that's what the gun was and, yet, the press had been talking for a couple of weeks after that that they were still looking

for the gun. He finally went to the press and says 'I gave it to this other division; they've got it. And they finally put it...so that's where that problem was.

**I see.**

I mean, LAPD; the officers were doing a good job, but because of the lack of communications by the desire of their own department made it difficult. So after they made these arrests and were getting ready to go to trial, which was –

So who was arrested? If you don't have names, it's okay, but it was the same family ...  
Yeah, it was the –

**So tell me about this family and what they were and how they got together and lived together.**

Well, that's again basically hearsay on my part. They lived out at the Spahn Ranch and they had contacted people out there. They were stealing cars and several people that they stole cars from are basically still unknown. They don't know where they're at; it's assumed they probably killed them, but it's never been proven.

**Bodies were never found?**

No.

**Okay. Where was the Spahn Ranch located?**

Inyo County.

**Another jurisdiction?**

I think it was, yeah. Yeah, it had to be because when they were first taken into custody I think they went to the Inyo County Jail first and then were transferred, all of the ones that were involved. They were basically arrested for stolen cars.

**Is this near Los Angeles or is this south or is it north of it?**

It's north of it.

**So out in one the valleys?**

One of the desert areas out of Los Angeles County.

**So are we talking about near Lancaster, that area?**

Further north than that, north and east of there. And there again, I was not involved in that. It wasn't until we got ready to go to trial that the rumors were coming up that they were going to try and break Manson out of county jail.

**This is prior to the first trial? Prior to the trial?**

Prior to the trial.

**And they – who is going to try to break him out? How many people were arrested?**

Well, that was the problem. We knew the people that were arrested and in custody, but we didn't know anybody in the Family other than that. We knew there were people and other than the three girls that were on the corner...

**Explain that, 'on the corner.'**

All right. When the trial started or was ready to start—I'll look at my notes here because we're talking forty years.

**Yes, take your time. I can't remember things that happened yesterday, so please take your time.**

I know what you mean.

**So is this a typical notebook used by an officer?**

No, not really. This is what we developed because of the problem. We didn't know who was in the Family. The only ones that we really knew were the three girls on the corner because they sat there and they started preaching to the people on the street, 'Free Charlie,' you know, he's a

good guy, that sort of thing. For that reason the three girls on the corner were the only lead we had.

So we set up under this—I say we; the sheriff's department set up an operation, which we called essential to this thing. What we did is we took a detail of people, and I was part of that detail, to find out who the members of the Family were and find out what they were planning to do, if anything. It turned out that their rumors were basically true that they were trying to do something and we had to use the only leads, which were the three girls in the van. And they were |shuffling pages| Lynette Fromme, which her nickname was called Squeaky and she was in the van. Sandra Good, she was known as Sandy; she was in the van. And Nancy Pitman; she was in the van.,

**Who had been arrested other than Charles Manson? And just take your time.**

If I could read their names that are typed in here...those were the ones.

**So we have Charles Manson. We have Robert B-E-A-U-S-O-L-E-I-L. Susan—what is Susan's last name? I'm not sure what Susan's last name is. It looks like it could be A-T-H-E-M. Do you think that's Susan or is that –**

Atkins. Susan Atkins.

**It's Atkins, okay. Susan Atkins. And Steve Dennis Grogan, G-R-O-G-A-N. Okay, so those four were arrested first.**

Yeah, and so were these at the same time.

**At the same time we also have Patricia Kernwinkle; that's K-E-R-N-W-I-N-K-L-E. We have Mary Theresa Brunner, B-R-U-N-N-E-R. Bruce McGregor Davis. And Leslie VanHawten, V-A-N, capital H-A-W-T-E-N.**

Yes.

**So these are members of the Family.**

Right. And I put the homicides that they were involved in right above it. For example, that Susan Atkins, she was involved – Hinman was the musician I was telling you about I couldn't think of his name – but that was Gary Hinman. Susan Atkins was present for that murder and she was also present at the Tate, where five people were killed at the Tate house.

**So how much do we know? Do we know how they were captured or how they were found?**

I think it was when one of the girls—I just saw her on TV the other day. She was the one that ended up being the primary witness and she was a participant at the Tate house but did not do any of the killing. I think she was also present at the LaBianca residence the next night; but again, she was there but did not take anyone's life. She ended up being a witness for the prosecution and testified as to who did what and what she saw. She's the one that blew the whistle in the first place to where they decided to charge these people. And that was again the problem; nobody knew who was in the Family and there was quite a few members of the Family. Some of them were passive, but some of them were very active. That's where I got involved when we decided we've got to know more. I say 'we;' the sheriff's department has to know more about these people to make sure they don't attempt anything because they had high security on the court and the court house, but we weren't sure what these people...because they were capable of doing anything.

**Other than the car thefts that you knew about, were these the first murders, that musician in Malibu? As far as you know, were these the first?**

No, I think there were others. Some of them can't be proven. But Shorty Shay, the person who was in charge of this Spahn Ranch, he was killed by Manson. But we didn't know at that time



because they didn't find his body; I think they found his body just a couple of years ago. We knew that he had killed him, but we didn't have any evidence of it.

**So getting back to the three girls in the van, you started to tell that story. So please continue.**

Okay. We had to set up an operation, and I think I have the paperwork right here. It was almost like a fly-by-night situation because we had to hit it on the fly; we had to set up surveillance. Now, the old Hall of Records was across the street from the courthouse and we set up a twenty-four hour observation post there because the van – and there again, we allowed the van to stay there. We could have made them move probably because there was no parking in that area. But we allowed it to stay there because that was our only contact to find out who's in the Family and what they were doing.

So the three people in the van—again, besides having the observation post, we had detectives from our unit doing car surveillance, as well. If the van moved we did a tail on them and followed them wherever they went and they began to know. We had good chase cars because our cars were not police cars; they were truly undercover cars and sporty-type cars, which was new to police work at that time, at least in L.A. So whenever they left, we tailed them with both cars. Within a couple of days they knew who was doing the tailing. When somebody came in contact with them at the van, when they left we stopped them and identified them and saw what their contact was. Also, during this same period we were getting a copy of every letter coming out of the jail that Manson or any of the girls was sending to anybody. That's how we found out that they were sending these pictures, for example.

**Tell me about those.**

Okay, they were sending pictures.

**These are pictures with some of the members, bare breasted.**

Yes.

**With guns.**

Yeah, they had rifles and they had shotguns, such as these here. They took Polaroids. Now, the one up here is original; these are copies that we made. They sent these pictures to prisoners at Folsom Prison because at that time, and it may still be so, prisoners – no matter what their crime was, whether it was murder or what – they could get time out of jail; they could go home for a weekend.

**Furloughs.**

Yeah, a furlough from the jail, which I don't believe is correct when you've got somebody doing time for murder, but that's my personal opinion. So they were soliciting these guys. Now, some of them did come out, and instead of staying a weekend they stayed with them.

**They escaped?**

Well, no, they came out on leave and then never returned, so that would technically be termed an escape. So this happened quite frequently. It was interesting because they would come and join the girls. They didn't care about Manson, but they liked the idea of the sex and the drugs and the rest of it and so it worked out pretty good. But with all this mail, we knew who was doing what. They had their own code system and I have a copy of the code, here. Everybody had nicknames. It took a lot of work to put these nicknames up, like Sunshine or Starshine, that sort of thing, were certain people in the Family. We had to identify, okay, who is Starshine? And we found out where she was supposed to be or who she saw and when we knew that, we knew who Starshine was. So it was a matter of piecing this all together.

As a result, we determined that there were several attempts; overt acts as far as legality is concerned, because they would get weapons and they had planned on – in one case planning on going into the Hall of Justice late at night and actually taking the jail elevator up and freeing Manson. They probably wouldn't have succeeded, but somebody would have died as a result of that. So when we knew they were going to do things like this, we'd pounce; arrest them and take the prisoner that got out of Folsom and any weapons they had and that would stop that. But then they'd plan another one. And there again, this trial lasted nine and a half months, the longest sequestered jury at that time in California history.

So this continued. The number of characters that came along, like I say, these young people that came out to the van we kind of knew who they were; I mean, once we identified them we knew who they were. And they wouldn't stay long, but enough for us to find out who they were.

There was one individual that surprised us. That individual was an older man that used to come and see Squeaky Fromme. His name was Isadore Greenbaum; they called him Izzy. He worked at a clothing manufacturer and he ended up being in our book. Everybody that worked the field had a copy of this book because there were so many people we couldn't remember them and we couldn't remember what they looked like without having a book. You needed a program. He would come and visit her a couple of times a week and they'd get in the van. We were aware she was probably having sex in the van with any of these people that got in the van with her. In one of their attempts, to break Manson out of jail we recovered a gun. Well, the gun happened to be stolen from the night watchman where Izzy worked. He stole the gun from the night watchman's locker and gave it to the Manson Family. So these are the kinds of things we had to

deal with. He was purely innocent as far as the crimes were concerned other than stealing the gun, but he got conned by her to steal that gun and he ended up in trouble for it, obviously.

So this was the kind of thing that went on for the entire thing. But we were able to stay on top of it only because we had their mail, we knew who was doing what and there were a couple of houses that they dealt with during the trial where they went; took baths or something like that or got drugs.

**Tell me about the listening device that you tried to plant in the van. And how could you do that with them in the van all the time?**

I don't know the individual who planted it or how it was; I just happened to be there and recover it when it fell out and Squeaky Fromme found it. Like I say, it wasn't successful because whenever they were in the van in the cab where the bug was placed with the engine running, you couldn't hear anything on it. So it didn't do much good.

**So now, these girls would go to the trial every day, leaving the van parked on the street?**

No, they stayed on the street. I think they went up very rarely, very rarely. They stayed on the street and that was their contact. Now, there was one thing that did occur and let's see if I can find the photo of the guy.

Like I say, there were several attempts to break out of the county jail. Now, there was one attempt that I was fortunate to find out about because I had an informant and he said that Manson was getting ready...let's see what the other guy's name was...there was a guy that was in the same cell with Manson. Manson was kept in a section of the jail which only had two cells and a shower. It was an exclusive, closed area. I had an informant that I was fortunate enough to place in the cell next to him on the basis that they had been in jail together; not Manson but the individual - I'll find his name in a moment.

**So the person that you planted beside Manson had been in jail with...**

With the individual that is going to make the escape.

**With the individual that's going to try to break Manson out of jail?**

Right, well, Manson like I say...can we pause this?

**Of course, yeah, we can pause it.**

**Okay, so continue.**

The informant that I had that was put in the same cellblock with the excuse that he had been in jail with this guy Kenny Como, this individual, who was in Manson's cell because Kenny—

**Who was in Manson's Family?**

Yeah, he was because he was with the girls when they committed a robbery to get those weapons that we saw; that was in Hawthorne, California they robbed a surplus store and they actually ended up with a gunfight.

**So was that during the trial, well before the murders?**

No. That was just before the trial started; these people wanted to get weapons. That's I think part of what alerted us. We figured these people – Family members – are getting weapons; what are we going to do?

So Como was in the same cell with Manson. My informant, who really did a good job, he knew Como. They had been in jail together, so that's why I used that excuse to put him in; he was in the next cell. The security was so tight. The deputies watching that cellblock...on the graveyard shift there was one deputy watching just that cellblock with the two cells. He was instructed that if he had to go into the cell for any reason to call for a backup.

Well, they got to the point where they realize that once in a while he wouldn't call for a backup and what they were going to do was hopefully get the deputy to come in – because he

would come into the cellblock – not into the cells but just the cellblock walkway to give them aspirins. He wasn't supposed to come into the cellblock without a backup. So he was supposed to come in and they wanted my informant, who was bigger than Kenny Como and Manson; Manson was only like 5'2" and 120 pounds or 125 pounds. Como was not much bigger than that, if that; but my informant was a bigger man. So they wanted my informant to grab the deputy and then they would come out of their cell and kill him. So he made the excuse –

**The deputy had the keys to the cells on him?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. So he made the excuse the first night—what Como and Manson had done...every time they'd go in and out of the cell they'd take the leaded toothpaste tubes, roll them up and slide them into the hole where the locking mechanism went in. If there was enough to block that mechanism from going all the way, you could slide it back without a key, because if it didn't go all the way the latch didn't lock. So what they would do is they would hold the bar when the deputy would close the door. He would turn the key and they'd ask him a question and he wouldn't listen to the lock tumbling. So they knew they could get out. So my informant made the excuse he had hurt his back; he wanted to wait a day or two to where he felt he could hold the guy. Well, it turned out that he got ahold of me the next day –

**How?**

We had a code where he would say he wanted to see his attorney and they would take him out to the attorney room and I would see him there. He told me what they were up to and that they had been putting these leaded toothpaste tubes in there to keep the latch from falling. So, to prevent that, we had the jail do a routine shake-down and accidentally find the toothpaste tubes and put the locks back on. My informant had to move on because he was in custody of State Prison; he was doing time in prison, so we had to move him out. So we didn't have him in there.

In the meantime, Manson and Como basically sawed their way out of the jail. All they had to do, because the bars were so small, this far apart...you move one bar and you got that much space and they were small enough to go through that.

**And what were they sawing with?**

I'm not too sure, but I would assume it was a hacksaw blade; that's the easiest thing to smuggle in and out. They got the bar off to where they could go out, and we're talking this is about two o'clock in the morning. This happened after my informant was long gone. They got out into the cellblock area, which didn't have an outer wall other than the jail wall. They had windows there that had these steel openings that were probably less than twelve inches square. They were easy to get out of that; you could squeeze through. They had made a rope to go down the side of the building because the old jail was the top three or four floors and then the rest were offices and courthouses and things like that.

**And we're talking about a building that's how tall?**

Probably fourteen stories and they were on the thirteenth floor. So when they got to that point and they had made a rope out of their sheets and blankets, Como was willing to go down but Charlie wouldn't follow.

**He was afraid?**

Yeah, he was really afraid. Como went down on the outside of the building from the thirteenth floor to the eighth floor. Easily the windows were open. You could open the window and go in; you're in a courtroom area. You go out in the hall, go down the stairs and out the door.

**How were they dressed?**

Jail clothing, jail blues.

**Which at that time?**

They were blues.

**Blue jumpsuits?**

Blue jeans and —

**Oh, blue jeans.**

Blue jeans with a lighter blue shirt, like a work shirt. Fortunately for me and like I say, we had surveillance on these people all the time.

**But they did all of that; that guy did all of that; went through the window and no one saw him?**

No one saw him 'til fortunately the deputy that was on duty—Jimmy Knowles was his name—he was on duty at two o'clock in the morning watching the van. Fortunately he wasn't goofing off or watching something else. He saw somebody in blue clothes; jail clothes as he referred to them, go out and duck into the van. It was a weird situation because like I said this detail; the sheriff happened to be in Hong Kong. My commander was what they called an inspector at that time; he was the acting sheriff and my lieutenant was the acting inspector, so that put me in charge.

I was at home and I had a police car. And the sergeant that was on duty, Billy Hoffman, called me at home and he says, 'Somebody, just got in the van and it looks like they've had an escape from the jail, but the jail hasn't said anything.' So I said, 'You call the jail and tell them to check that cellblock right away.' He says, 'The van's going to start moving.' I said, 'You stay on that van, I don't care where you go; you stay on that van.'

So, the two chase cars—and again, the Family knew that we had two chase cars. So the first chase car took off after the van. Then the van stopped at Sunset Boulevard and one of the girls got out and started walking up Sunset Boulevard. So the second chase car went after the



girl. The first chase car stayed on the van; followed them all the way into Hollywood and the van couldn't lose them, so they were stuck. So they went down a street; I wish I could remember the name of the street, but it was between Hollywood Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard. There was a street there that they turned in and Como jumped out of the van. We didn't know it was Como at that time, but he jumped out of the van. So the car was asking for help and that was in L.A. City. So we asked the city to give us help and they sent some cars over and cordoned off a four-block area for us with a car on each corner. They said, 'You know we can't keep our cars here forever;' they looked, but they couldn't find him. It was fortunate because where he jumped out, across the street was a schoolyard and it had for some odd reason, I don't know why, an eighteen-foot chain-link fence. So he was forced to go between the houses in this block. That's the area that we were cordoning off, that four-city block area.

So I called the inspector. I was on my way down there and I was in my car. I called the inspector and I asked Billy Hoffman, 'Are you sure he's still here?' He says, 'Yeah, we've got it covered and LAPD was trying to pull off, but we asked them to wait. I asked for four cars right away to contain the corner.' Then the sheriff's department had a unit called Sheriff's Emergency Bureau, SEB, which was a crew of elite deputies with twenty patrol cars and four men to each patrol car. I asked the inspector, I says, 'I need four cars right now to relieve the LAPD.' This happened at two o'clock in the morning. And I says, 'At dawn I need SEB,' and he says, 'No problem, Koury, you got it.' And it was funny because it was an exciting moment, you know?

**Oh, it had to be.**

And so I get down there and Billy Hoffman says, 'I know he's still in here.' And so when SEB showed up, and it was almost like you could have made a movie about it – because here comes twenty police cars, sirens and red lights. It was funny because the captain that was in charge of

that unit – and see, with police work I was a sergeant, but that was my operation. And the captain got there and he had just been promoted to captain and to that unit and I thought, ‘Oh,’ because sometimes you have problems.

**Of course.**

And he says, ‘What do you want me to do, Koury?’

**Oh, fantastic.**

I says, ‘I need every house searched in these four block areas and every piece of the property searched. If there’s anybody not home at that hour,’ I says, ‘kick the door in.’ I says, ‘This guy’s in here and we’ve got to get him.’ So they started searching door to door. I blocked all the traffic off with these cars and even the buses that came down Sunset Boulevard couldn’t stop; we told them ‘just go on through.’

So it was about twenty minutes to ten in the morning and the duty inspector, who was the duty inspector for that area, had just come on duty and he says, ‘What are you doing, Koury?’ And I said, ‘We’re searching for this guy.’ He said, ‘You’ve got traffic stopped,’ and he says, ‘They’re all upset.’ Anybody leaving to go to work, their car had to be stopped and searched. Anyways, to make a long story short, about ten minutes after he got there and was giving me a bad time, they found him, Kenny Como; he was hiding in a wood shed in the backyard and we took him back into custody.

Fortunately for the jail people, the sheriff was out of town because the sheriff, Peter Pitches; you knew who was the sheriff, he was the boss and he would have fired that jail captain just because it shouldn’t have happened. They should have been more attentive as to what they were doing. But deputies have a tendency when you work in the jail, it’s routine, it’s routine, and that can end up hurting.

**So there was no way of having—I don't know if you use cameras at that time.**

No.

**There were no cameras in that cellblock.**

No, they didn't use them at that time. There again, that was the old jail.

**Yeah, and then we're talking about 1970.**

Yeah. So it turned out well; we got him back into custody. But that was a thrilling moment for me and I enjoy commanding law enforcement officers and I enjoy investigative tactics and that sort of thing, so it was good. Apparently the sheriff liked it because towards the end of the trial this guy, he looked like a dirty old Santa Claus; that's Ronald Hughes.

**Is this one of the Family?**

Well no, he was Manson's attorney. But he was a crazy attorney; he was crazier than the dickens all the time in the courtroom. On that Thanksgiving weekend, the trial was over, the prosecution had rested, the defense had rested, there was nothing left but closing arguments. So the judge recessed for the Thanksgiving Friday, Saturday and Sunday to begin again on Monday with closing arguments.

**And so the jury is still ...**

Still sequestered.

**Oh my God, over the holidays.**

Oh yeah, there was nine and a half months they were living in the hotel. Like I say, I'd heard from other deputies that relationships began and ended with the jurors.

Anyway, I had just gotten off work on Monday morning. Got home and got a phone call from my lieutenant. He said, 'Ronald Hughes is missing and the sheriff wants you to investigate it. Last word he was in Ventura County at a park area up there called Sespe Creek.' It was

weird because California had one of their so-called floods; if you get an inch of rain in California, it's a flood. So I said, 'Why me? I just got off work and he's got sixty-five homicide detectives.' And he says, 'The sheriff said he wants you.'

**Which was an honor.**

Yes, absolutely. And this is Ventura County; I don't even have any jurisdiction there.

**So give me an idea for someone who doesn't know where Ventura County is.**

Ventura County is the county just northwest of Los Angeles County.

**So one of the big cities would be ...**

Oxnard. I'm trying to think. Buy anyways, the Sespe Creek camping area was where Ron Hughes had gone and this is where Bugliosi was wrong in his book. It says so in the first edition; he says 'Ronald Hughes was killed by the Family,' and that's not true.

**So now, Bugliosi, because this is a long time ago, is the District Attorney of Los Angeles County.**

Well, he was a deputy district attorney.

**Yes, deputy. Okay.**

He was in charge of the case and he did a great job on the case, no doubt about it, because his big problem—he had an eyewitness testifying—his big problem was to convict Manson of the murders because Manson was not present when these murders were committed.

**Manson was not in Sharon Tate's house?**

No. Never did go in her house. But he was convicted of all the murders because he masterminded them and told the people to do it and Bugliosi was successful in convincing the jury. Of course, Manson helped a little bit convincing the jury, too, because he was weird.

So when I get up to Sespe Creek, I found out that the people – first of all, there were twenty-nine people at Sespe Creek that did not get out on their own and Ronald Hughes was one of them. They were trapped in there and they had to be rescued by a Coast Guard helicopter had to fly in and bring these people out. So it was a simple case in that sense is that all the people were there. They saw Ronald Hughes alive. So the rest of the people that left had nothing to do with his disappearance; at that time it was a disappearance because they didn't know where he was. And his car was there and the twenty-eight people made it easy for me to investigate because the Coast Guard had all their identification and names so I could interview these people. The only similarity; there was a couple there that had the same first names as two people in the Manson Family, and that's where the prosecuting attorney thought they were involved, and it's just coincidence, same first names. But all these people checked out and they all said they saw him, but he was worried. They said Ron Hughes was worried because he knew he had to get out, and this was Sunday. He knew he had to get out and get back to L.A. and they figured he disappeared so they couldn't find him.

So after talking to them, they saw him alive and they were the only people there. So I knew it had to be something other than that. So I wrote my report to the sheriff saying that 'he disappeared; I think he's died of natural causes; no Family member was there or involved in this disappearance.' And six months later they found his body wedged up under a tree; he'd tried to cross the creek. The creek is truly a creek except when there's a rain. In fact, the Ventura County Sheriff's Department lost what they call a D9 Caterpillar Tractor, which is one of the big ones, lost the tractor and the deputy on it. The only thing they ever found—they never found the tractor or the deputy—they found his gun belt, but they never found the deputy. So that was a successful ending to that.

**So without an attorney who gave closing arguments?**

Another attorney took that over. I'm not sure who it was; I'm sure it's in Bugliosi's book. But like I say, Bugliosi kept trying to say that he was murdered by the Family, and like I said, he put it in his first book and it was absolutely wrong. Now, this book he changed it a little bit; he says, 'he may have been murdered by the Family', but he didn't say it positively. He named these two people and I think he ended up getting a lawsuit from these two people.

But the Family continued clear up until the end, after the trial was over and they were sentenced and sent off. In fact, I was one of the officers that took Manson to the state prison after his conviction.

**So which location?**

I can't think of the name of it, but it's a state prison just outside of Los Angeles, kind of a holding area where they get cleared to go to a different prison in the state.

**How was he taken? How was he transported?**

We transported him in a sheriff's prisoner bus, a big bus.

**Just one prisoner on the bus; nobody with him?**

You know I can't remember. I know he was on there. I thought there was somebody else, but there was only like a couple, and those others may have been Family members. I know I was sitting across from him and we were talking. But anyway, they were wanting to get him out of the county jail because of the possible threat of trying to break him out. They figured let the state worry about him now.

**So when you were talking to him, what kind of person did he seem to be? I mean at this point most drugs must have been out of his system and all of that.**

Well, probably.

**Yeah. (Indiscernible)**

He was still very cocky. Of course, at that time he was convicted and sentenced to death, as all of these people were convicted and sentenced to death, but the California Supreme Court threw out the death penalty and when they did the only thing that was left was life in prison, which in California meant seven years; that's why he keeps coming up for parole. But he's not going to get out of jail; they're not going to let him out and he doesn't want out. I mean, look at his age now. What would he do on the outside?

**So now he must be how old? Eighty something.**

I would think he's probably seventy-five at least would be my guess.

**But by this time—we are now in 2013—most of the Family members are out?**

Some of them are. Now, I just found out not too long ago—you know Squeaky Fromme was the one who attempted to shoot Gerald Ford.

**Exactly.**

And like I say, she's so flighty. She had a .45 automatic and what she did is she pulled the slide back enough to cock the hammer but not far enough to pick up a bullet. So when she pulled the trigger, the thing went click, but there was no bullet in the barrel. And that's why she said, 'I know it misfired. I know I put a bullet in there,' but there was no bullet in the chamber. I'm sure without a doubt I'm sure she would've killed him because she had kind of a problem there. The Family went up north into Central California. The other girls, the couple that was named by Bugliosi as being the ones in the killing, they were a couple; they went up north. They killed a couple up there.

**Wait, wait wait. So the girls who were on trial ...**

Oh, they all went to prison.

**Okay, okay.**

These were the girls that were on the outside and they were looking for drugs. So they went to a drug family near the Sacramento area; I'm not sure where. And there again, it wasn't our investigation. That kind of comes back through hearsay. Squeaky Fromme was with them. Well, what they did was they went into this house of this drug dealer. They killed him and his wife or girlfriend, put their bodies in the basement and started living in the house and using their drugs and took their money; whatever. The police apparently got word of it up there and they hit the house.

When they hit the house to arrest these people, there's all kinds of police cars. Squeaky Fromme had gone to the store or something. She's coming back. She sees the police cars. She doesn't have sense enough to just walk away; she walks into the house and says, 'What's going on?' So there's no doubt she was involved in what went down there because she'd been with them there, but because she had walked in they couldn't tie her to the murders, so they had to release her on that charge. And that's when she – now the rest of her friends are in jail.

**Okay, so she's out; she's the only one left now.**

Yeah. So I think that's why; she was lonely and she decided she'd do something to go to jail, too, and she was going to kill the President. But it's a funny thing about it because like I say, I've grown to know her a little bit just by her ...you know, Squeaky Fromme.

**In what way?**

Well, only because of my contacts with her during the trial. I saw how flighty she was. When she escaped after she was convicted for attempting to kill President Ford, she was sentenced to a federal female prison in Alderson, West Virginia I believe and she walked away from prison.

**So she was not in a maximum security?**



No, it was a minimum security actually. So she walked away. Well, it hit the press that the Family had come up and got her and took her back to California and doing all this. At that time I was the United States Marshal in Missouri. So I called the marshal and sent him a teletype. He was getting all kinds of reports because she's escaped from a federal prison, so it became a United States Marshal's problem. I explained to him, I said, 'She never planned on anything; she doesn't plan on going to the bathroom 'til she goes.' I says, 'You're going to find her; she's going to be within two miles of the prison, wandering around.' 'Oh no, we got reports she's in New York; we got reports she's here.' Two days later they found her within two miles of the prison, just wandering around.

**So tell me about your career path after you left. After this trial was over you remained with the sheriff's department?**

Yes.

**What kind of rank did you...**

I was a sergeant. I liked that rank because it's a working rank. I had detectives under my command; depending on what I was doing, I'd have five detectives. If I had a big thing going along, I'd borrow five more detectives or whatever I needed. And it was good because I wore soft clothing, not a suit and tie. We did investigations as far as thefts from major cases. I did homicide investigations involved with drugs, that sort of thing. We were called the Metro Team and we picked up assignments that took more time than the station detectives had to put on one case. They'd say we know we've got this; can we get somebody to work it? They could come directly to me and say 'can you work this?' So I could pick my own cases. In nine-tenths of the cases, I could pick my own cases.

**So at what point did you go back to school?**

I went to school basically during my career with the L.A. County Sheriff's Department. I took different classes and did that. But I retired from L.A. County in 1978 and I moved to Missouri. I got tired of L.A. I was tired of the hassle and everything that was going, the traffic, you name it. There are a lot of reasons to get tired of L.A.

**But did you go to law school at some point?**

No, I did not. I had approximately three years of college, but I did not go to law school.

**So why Missouri?**

Well, my wife at that time, her father was from Missouri. He sold a hotel he had in Los Angeles; the Hilton hotel that was down near Disneyland. He sold that hotel and wanted to return to his home in Missouri. I went out there I guess just maybe a month or two before I retired to look around; I'd never been there. We went out there for the holidays I believe. I looked around and saw green trees and blue sky and friendly people and thought 'What the hell am I doing in L.A.?' So we went back to L.A., sold the house, retired. My wife at that time had cancer and was recovering from that, so she wasn't employed. She did work at the sheriff's department.

So I retired and went back there and got involved. It was excellent timing because in 1978 Missouri decided to pass a law that police officers ought to be trained because before that, if it wasn't St. Louis or Kansas City, they didn't have any training and they didn't need any training. You got a badge and a gun; they said 'go to work.'

**Wow, just like the Wild West.**

Yeah, absolutely. So when I got out there that bill had been passed and now they had to train. So I went to work for the University of Missouri, teaching law enforcement procedure for them. I was fortunate because at that time I was going all over the state teaching different departments different procedures, as well as teaching right at the university, as well, but I was doing both. It

was fulfilling. I enjoyed working with police officers because a lot of them were dedicated but just didn't know what to do. It was really fulfilling to teach them.

Then I ran for sheriff in Boone County. The reason I did that was because I was just moving into a new house down there and I had my daughter with me; she was sixteen years old, I guess, seventeen, something like that. We were driving from my father-in-law's farm over to my house because I was expecting delivery on furniture. When I get there, there is a car in my driveway, which there shouldn't have been. I was in a pickup truck, four-wheel drive, which sits kind of high, and I could see my property in the back seat of that car. So I knew I had a burglary. I told my daughter I says, 'You stay in the car and lock the door.' And I didn't have a weapon with me, which I usually do, but I didn't like the idea of not having it. I knew my weapons were in the house because I had brought those with some boxes of stuff. No furniture was in the house other than the gun cabinet but boxes of things; linens, dishes things like that. I get in the house and I run up to my gun cabinet and there's nothing in it. He'd taken all my guns.

But there was a bayonet in there and I grabbed that and the nightstick, which were the only things he left. I saw the guy running by the front door trying to go back to his car. So I ran out and apprehended him. And one of my guns was in his back pocket.

**He just didn't have time to get to it?**

I didn't give him much time.

**So you moved from Los Angeles ...[laughter]**

Yeah, because I don't want this stuff.

**That's right. To this small town in the middle of nowhere.**

So anyways, I arrested him and detained him and called the sheriffs. They came out and got him and it made a lot of press.

**It should have.**

The guy was wanted in three states. At the time he was arrested he was wearing some of my new underwear. So anyway, that got a lot of publicity and everybody was saying, because this sheriff... **There's a new sheriff in town.**

Well, and the sheriff they had unfortunately was a typically good old boy; he had no training whatsoever and everybody didn't like him. So I ran against him and that's very difficult because I ran as a Republican and this is a strong Democratic county. This was at the time of the Reagan campaign and I ran as a Republican. Then I got sick during the campaign and I didn't get out of the hospital; I had lost a kidney and I didn't get out of the hospital until about five days before the election. So I didn't get a chance to campaign as much as I would have liked to, but it turned out to be a blessing in the long run. I lost that election by, not that I remember, but it was by 492 votes.

**[Laughter] I can tell you don't remember.**

So I can't remember some of these names, but I can remember that. It turned out that even though President Reagan won Missouri, he lost Boone County by several thousand votes.

Wendell Baily was the congressman running at that time; he lost Boone County. Both of them won their election, but he lost Boone County by three or four thousand votes. And I lost it by 492 votes, see, and that was only after the sheriff had to fix the voting machine. It broke down, he fixed it, and suddenly I wasn't in the lead anymore.

**[Laughter] I love it.**

But you know those things happen in Missouri. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise because after that I got nominated as the United States Marshal for Missouri.

**Nominated by whom, the governor?**

No, a senator, Senator Danforth. It was kind of funny – and this was something new for not only Missouri but not many states were doing it – looking for qualified people to be United States Marshal. So there was a test and I came out in the top three. When it came out in the paper, I was one and there was a sheriff out of northwest Missouri and a federal law enforcement officer out of Springfield, Missouri. My wife was thrilled at the time. She said, ‘You’re going to get selected.’ And I said, ‘No.’ I says, ‘You’ve got a sheriff who’s been here for years and well-liked, you got a Republican law enforcement federal officer from Springfield; why would they pick me?’

So about three or four days went by and the senator called me one day and he said, Are you just passing—because I’d only been in Missouri eighteen months. He said, ‘Are you just passing through Missouri?’ And I said, ‘No, I’ve decided to make Missouri my home.’ He says, ‘Well, I’m going to nominate you to the President,’ He said, ‘But I don’t want you to say anything because I want to make a press release.’ I said, ‘Okay, how long do you think that’s going to be?’ And he says, ‘Not long. My phone’s been ringing off the hook for you.’ Well, the reason it was, was because I’d been all over Missouri teaching law enforcement.

**Oh, that’s right. Yes.**

I had a lot of support from the law enforcement community. So they were bugging his office. So I got the nomination. I served as the United States Marshal two terms with Reagan and most of Bush Number One’s term. Then I ended up with bad blood pressure; it was through the ceiling, so I ended up retiring. I actually retired; I wasn’t replaced. I retired.

**Then how did you get to Las Vegas?**

That’s Linda’s fault.

**Okay. [Laughter]**

I met Linda during a major trial that we had in Kansas City, the Argent trial; that would have been the trial for organized crime taking over the casinos here in Vegas. That trial was in Kansas City.

**When was this?**

This was 1985, '85, '86. Organized crime figures. At that time when I took over the Marshal's position, I had basically thirteen organized crime officials in custody for the trial. Some of them were in custody itself; I housed them at Leavenworth Prison, but some of them were on bail. Of course, the illustrious attorney for the defense at that time was Oscar Goodman. So we knew each other.

**Wow.**

It was funny because Linda was doing a book on the United States Marshals and her home was Kansas City and the people in Washington told her go see Lee Koury, the marshal down there. He's got a big trial going on; you might like to see that. When she came down I'll never forget it because it was funny in the sense that Oscar Goodman and I saw each other every day, but because he was the defense attorney and I was the United States Marshal, we didn't gab; we didn't socialize, it would look bad.

**Yes.**

So the trial was going on and I brought Linda in the back of the court so she could see the trial. And Goodman looked at her and he looked at me; he thought I was bringing a new witness in that he didn't know about and he almost lost his place as to what he was doing. It wasn't until later that he found out no, it wasn't a witness, because I didn't go in the courtroom that much; I had my own office to run.

But it's funny; a lot of the things that I consider myself very fortunate; yeah, this was a big deal. Like I say, when you've got a department of that size and you and twenty-five other guys are picked to do this and do it—we spent months working twelve on and twelve off, seven days a week. After a couple of months we finally got one day off a week. But we stayed on twelve and twelve, I'm pretty sure, most of the trial.

I had a lot of experience working homicides in L.A. and I worked homicide proper; the Homicide Unit, for almost two years. Then the unit I had, the Metro unit, we did homicide investigations that ended up as a result of something else; in other words, I had an informant there that was outstanding. He was a Guatemalan and he and I got along good. I liked him. But I'd ask him, 'You ever hear about ..?' 'Oh yeah, I know about that.' And he says, 'They killed so-and-so threw his body in the bottom of a construction site where they're building a freeway.' I said, 'How do you know that?' He says, 'I helped them.'

**Oh my God.**

So you get informants like that, they're hard to beat.

**You have paperwork here from the Manson trial. Do you have that for the 1985 organized crime trial?**

I have a report that was written by one of our people. But like I say, I did not get involved. My job there was to make sure these people were secure. At the same time, while they're there in court as defendants, I had protected witnesses coming in, like Roy Williams, for example, the Union leader. He gave money to the organized crime to buy the casinos out here. He took it out of the pension fund and gave it to the organized crime, thinking someday he'd get it back. Of course, organized crime's not good about giving things back.

**But you don't have any paperwork related to that crime?**

Other than the report, no.

**Well, if you are going to give these things to Special Collections, I would love to have that report, as well.**

I know I have it because Linda has it someplace.

**Okay, good.**

No problem, you're welcome to it. It's a good report.

**Great. And that ties it all to Las Vegas.**

Yeah.

**So you moved to Las Vegas in which year?**

January of 2010.

**So you're just getting here. So comparing Los Angeles, moving to Missouri in a smaller area and then Las Vegas; how do those places compare?**

I like Las Vegas. I liked Missouri, but I had an unhappy relationship with my wife there and because of that it left me with a sour stomach and I wanted out of there. And like I said, I met Linda in 1985 with this Argent thing and we got to be good friends. Then I went on my way after I retired as the marshal and she went on her way and we parted company. I felt I wasn't as nice as I should have been to her. Then after I left her, I became the municipal judge—criminal court judge in Boone County.

**So now, how did you become a judge?**

Basically I got elected. Under Missouri law and I think it's true here, too, cities of under ten thousand can have what they call a lay judge; you don't have to be an attorney. There were two-year elections and I ran and got elected because I have a good reputation in Missouri. So I ran and I kept running.



Then the Missouri Supreme Court in its ultimate wisdom; all of those eighty-year-old and better people in the Supreme Court, decided someone who is seventy-five years old can't be a judge anymore.

**Oh wow. Okay.**

So I had to give it up at seventy-five.

**And then you came to Las Vegas at some point.**

Yeah.

**And how does Las Vegas compare; the lifestyle, all of that compare with the other places you've lived?**

Well, I don't really compare it to Las Vegas because I'm not a big casino fan. I am the most unluckiest gambler in the world. We live in Henderson and I like Henderson. It's a nice quiet community. Yeah, we've got a few casinos there, but it's nice.

**I go into casinos like the Bellagio to go to the conservatory to see how beautiful that is and I'll have dinner every once in a while some place on the Strip, but that's what it means to me.**

Now, Linda is lucky. She can gamble and she'll win.

**See, I can't win.**

If I stand next to her, she'll lose.

**[Laughter] This is wonderful, great information.**

We can go through this anytime you want and like I say if it's a duplicate, I'd like to have a duplicate.

**Here's what I'd like for you to do: Linda, would you like to just go through it?**

I could use a good pair of eyes.

**You don't have to do it today.**

*Oh, we can do it today just so you know what's what.*

Yeah.

**Well, it's up to you. What time is it now?**

*It's 11:20; that's why I just went out to feed the meter.*

**Okay, so we don't have to do this today. I'm going to see you many times over the next few weeks I'm sure. What I'd like for you to do is just take this with you and go through it.**

*Okay.*

**And when he has his good glasses, decide what you want to donate. It's not a rush; there's no rush. This won't be transcribed for another—about a month. I'm going to transcribe it, I'm going to send a copy to you and you're going to read over it and make sure that anything you want to change you can change it. At that time you can send this back or I can come out and get it and you can give me anything you've decided to donate.**

*Okay.*

**That would work wonderfully. And I'd like to have some photographs of you.**

Oh.

**You can give me a photograph when you first joined the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and one when you were in Missouri and just several photographs we can use throughout this book that we're going to do.**

*Do you mind if I take a picture of you two?*

**No, I don't mind at all.**

*Because I was going to send it in to the —*

**[End of recorded interview]**

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