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## An Interview with Jack LeVine

An Oral History Conducted by Suzanne Becker

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Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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University of Nevada Las Vegas



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

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

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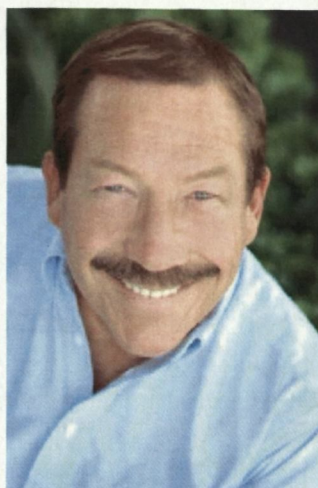
# Interview with Jack LeVine

June 28, 2007 in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

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## Preface

Jack LeVine offers a narrative as a real estate agent and a gay man who has lived in Las Vegas since he was a young adult in the 1980s. He first started visiting Las Vegas whenever his truck driver routes allowed him to visit his parents who had moved here in 1977. They owned a downtown sandwich and catering business called *Your Place or Mine*.

Then in 1985 Jack and his life-partner, J.J., decided to relocate to Las Vegas. Jack soon launched a real estate career that began with the purchase of a 13-unit apartment complex. Over the years he became knowledgeable about the history of the greater community and the individual neighborhoods; including John S. Park—"the earliest suburb" in Las Vegas. Jack and J.J have lived in a 1954 Mid-Century Modern home since the mid-1990s.

Jack is a strong believer in re-gentrification and mentions other cities where this has been successful. His philosophy includes an explanation of the sense of community that is derived from those who invest of themselves in that community life John S. Park.



ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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**So, if you want to go ahead and state your name for the record.**

I'm Jack LeVine.

**And where are you from, originally?**

I actually grew up in Columbus, Ohio, in the Midwest, and on the far edges of the Midwest, and I actually followed my parents [Sam and Rita LeVine] here to Las Vegas, and they came in '79, and I came in '85. I grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and my first career out of college was in the trucking industry.

**What did you do?**

I drove tractor-trailer trucks with a variety of different moving companies, Allied and North American Van Lines, and we drove around the country and had a great time and learned a whole lot of interesting job skills.

**Had you moved a lot of people out to Las Vegas?**

I did the household part of it for a very short period of time, and the majority of the time with them was actually in what we called the Special Products Division, which moved medical equipment and computers and trade shows and historical things, and I personally was handpicked to move the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian House from New York City to Phoenix, where it was set up and on display in downtown Phoenix for about two years as a major event in Phoenix. I handled a lot of big art exhibit movements for the Smithsonian and we had quite a varied history of fun tasks that were assigned to us as well as a lot of mundane ones, and a lot of trade shows that came into Las Vegas in the early days, and some of the first computers that arrived and some of the first banks were



brought in on my truck. So we did actually have a Las Vegas history even before we moved here, and those were the days when an entire semi-truck was filled with a computer for a bank, none of which couldn't be done on my laptop today, but it filled an entire semi-truck and it filled an entire room, twenty-five-hundred-foot room, of a bank building, to be able to just process their business, and that's the progress that we're in right now. And like I said, my laptop will do the same thing that those things will do.

**And take up a lot less room. So you did that. You said your parents moved out to Las Vegas. Was that for retirement?**

No, my parents actually moved to L.A. first, in 1975. I misquoted the date. They moved in '75 to Los Angeles, spent two years there and actually pretty much hated it. They had friends there, there were things they liked about it, but they hated the traffic and they hated the distances and the commutes and the noise and the smog, and in '77 they moved to Las Vegas, which presents another whole chapter because my parents, Sam and Rita LeVine, opened the Your Place or Mine for Lunch [& Catering] sandwich shop at the corner of Seventh [Street] and Carson [Avenue] downtown, which is still there today, and is operated by Renee Jacobs who bought it from them and was an early, early delivery driver for them back in the early Eighties. When my folks were ready to retire in the late Nineties, [she] actually bought the business from them and continues to operate it today.

**And what had they done in Ohio?**

My dad was always in sales. They were basically both always in sales. And they were both very much a personality like I am, very concerned about customer service but also very concerned about the relationships with people, and sales is about relationships and who trusts who. And, you know, I know when I teach as a real estate agent here, that



people do business with people they know and like and trust. And if they don't like you or they don't trust you or they don't know you, they're not going to do business with you, and so my parents were always very successful in the sales of whatever it was they were selling. My dad sold carpets, appliances, chemicals to factories throughout Ohio and West Virginia, big barrels of fifty-five-gallon drums of stuff that, you know, he went out as a salesman and took the orders.

**So it sounds like he's good.**

He was very, very good at what he did, and my mother was very, very good at it, and we had quite a few adventures and opportunities that we did together.

**Were you involved at all in their shop downtown here?**

Even when I moved to town and even while I was in the trucking business, whenever I was in town I would invariably get called in for lunch at 11:00 and said, We're swamped, come and deliver sandwiches. [Laughter] If I was in town, yes, I was put to work and loved it.

**I guess I'm not too familiar with it. Is it a delivery place or can you carry out from there or dine in?**

Oh, no, no, it's fully a sandwich, deli—

**But you also did deliveries for them downtown.**

And we did deliveries, and we delivered to most of the lawyers or at least their secretaries, most of the government people and at least their secretaries, most of the—

**So you had good connections.**

We had very good connections. And my mother was just well known and famous downtown as Rita, and the two of them had a dynamic that my father and mother, Rita



and Sam, had this wonderful dynamic with people, and a great loyal, strong customer base, many of whom became my first customers when I did real estate.

**So what eventually brought you to Las Vegas?**

Well, my parents ended up here. I was already traveling the country in the trucking industry. My parents had gone to L.A., they came to Las Vegas, and of course I was already coming to Las Vegas on a regular basis as part of my trucking business, but now my parents were here and then it became the place that we always tried to get to, and ask for loads or ask for shipments that would actually take us to Vegas or through Vegas, and we fell in love with Vegas, like so many people did. So I really first started coming here in '75 in the trucking business, '77 when my parents got here, and actually moved here and followed them in 1985 after a fire at our house in Columbus, Ohio.

**Do you have siblings?**

I have three brothers and a sister. There's five of us altogether. We're all still very close and all very family-oriented, fun people. We enjoy each other's company, for the most part.

**Do they live in the region?**

My sister and my one brother is here, and one brother is still left in Columbus, Ohio, and no matter what we say or do we haven't been able to get him to leave there yet, and my other brother left twenty years ago and went to Georgia for a while, and Florida for a while, and then landed in Austin, Texas, and has a very successful, fun, and interesting business as a professional photographer in Austin, Texas. And that's them. And my parents retired five years in '99, and then we lost my father, God, it seems like yesterday but I believe in January of 2002. Yes, January of 2002 we lost my father, and my mother



is still here and just an amazing woman that should be interviewed by lots of people, because she's got stories to tell and she's got a philosophy on life that's just amazing.

So that's how I got to be in Las Vegas is that, when, after the fire and OK, where do we live? Well, we got friends in Portland and we got friends in Seattle and we got friends in Dallas and we got my parents in Las Vegas and where do we want to move to, and I'm never going to live where it snows again, and back up, thirty-year-olds coming to a new city, go to where the parents are, seemed like a good choice at the time, and certainly nobody could have said it then and nobody could say it now but if you want to go to the land of opportunity Las Vegas is a real good place to get to.

**So tell me what it was like. You said you started coming out here in 1975. What was it like? What was the city like when you first came out?**

Well, I know that in '77 my parents bought their house at the edge of town.

**Which was what at that time?**

At Decatur [Avenue] and Edna [Avenue]. Which is halfway between Desert Inn [Road] and Sahara [Avenue] is where Edna is, and Decatur was far out. I know my eighteen-year-old brother and I got on his dirt bike on two different occasions. I was twenty-one and he was eighteen. And we rode one time from my parents' back yard clear through the desert, across the sod farms that were on both sides of Rainbow [Boulevard], and rode all the way to Red Rock, undisturbed through raw desert, from Decatur Road [Avenue], in about 1977 it would've been. And then, the other trip, he said, I know a place where I can get beer, and we rode out the old [Highway] 93, which is now Rancho [Drive], and we rode and we rode, and I thought he took me all the way to Reno. And on a dirt bike, with no helmets, in the middle of the night, to go to, I think it was called the Roadhouse,



which is still there on Rancho, approximately where the Santa Fe [Station Hotel and Casino] is right now, where Rainbow crosses what is now Rancho. I think it was the Roadhouse. I could look it up. But anyway, we rode all the way out there to go get him a beer.

**Which seemed like forever, with nothing but desert.**

On a dirt bike it was. On a dirt bike and nothing but deserts and there was nothing after Twin Lakes, and that's where the Santa Fe is right now, and I remember even when they built the Santa Fe, saying, Who in their right mind would build something way out in the middle of nowhere? But it's not the middle of nowhere anymore, it's still suburban but there's a whole lot of Vegas that goes on way past that.

**What was the Strip like when you got here? Did you spend much time checking it out?**

A little bit, but it was the Stardust and the El Rancho and Caesars [Palace]. It was nothing [to] what it is today, and there was no Bellagio, there was no Wynn [Las Vegas], there was nothing that Steve Wynn had done, there was nothing that the MGM had done. The old MGM, which is Bally's, where the fire was, I mean we went there. Those were the kind of places that we went to. And there was miles of gap between things.

**Unbelievable.**

And it is. And we've watched all that grow and change. And it's so funny, as a real estate agent who's out in the field every day, still astounded every day, where did that building come from, where did that building go, where did this neighborhood come from, where did this part of town, where did this road come from, where did this freeway come from, where did this bridge come from, when did they open this, when did they expand that,



when did they widen that, I haven't been here in a month and there's a whole building that wasn't here. It happens still to me, to this day, every day.

**And you've seen a lot of change.**

And I've seen it all. I can't remember it all, but I've seen it all.

**So how and when did you transition into real estate?**

Well, I knew that my back and my knees weren't going to [last], and I was done with the driving part of trucking. I still enjoyed many of the business aspects of it and the nineteen different hats that I had to wear, because people just think of a truck driver as a truck driver but I was also, you know, the scheduler and the mechanic and the truck driver and the truck loader and the truck unloader and the flat fixer and, what do I do with myself for the weekend and where do we hang out and find and make yourself a party or an event.

**So a jack-of-all-trades trucker.**

I enjoyed every bit of that jack-of-all-trades, change hats every five minutes. And we were doing all that scheduling and all that doing and all that on pay phones in truck stops. We didn't have cell phones. How we ever did it, I don't know, but we did. The trucking business actually continued on well after I got my real estate license. And my partner J.J. actually continued driving the truck during those years. And a part of our story that actually led us into real estate, was that when we actually came to Las Vegas in 1985, we wanted to buy some rental property and we wanted a garage. In reality, I came to Las Vegas looking for Dan Tanna's *Vegas* TV show loft building that I could drive my car right into the living room, and I have still never found it to this day, and I have been



looking for it for twenty-two years that I've been here in Las Vegas. And that's what I want to see get built, here in Vegas, is that kind of loft living.

**So they were really ahead of their time when they made that show, with that concept.**

Oh, yes. But it had an influence on my fantasy of Las Vegas, and I came here looking for that building. What I ended up with, was thirteen units of apartments on Stewart Avenue, between Tenth [Street] and Eleventh [Street], about five blocks due east of City Hall.

**So a little bit different than what was on the TV show.**

A little bit different than the [TV show]. And what we inherited with those apartments, because we bought the apartment but we inherited ten little old ladies.

**So we were talking about, you came out here looking for the cool kind of futuristic loft space that was on the TV show—**

That still doesn't exist today, no matter how hard we try to build it.

**But we're getting there. But what you got instead was?**

What I got instead was thirteen apartments, all little one-bedroom apartments, on Stewart Avenue between Tenth and Eleventh. They're still there. They've just been repainted, they've just been re-fenced. It's the one piece of real estate that I regret ever having sold.

But we lived there for eight years, and when we moved in, we inherited ten little old ladies, who lived there on their fixed-income budgets, and, with few exceptions, were pretty much all estranged from their children, for whatever reason, and their grandchildren. But it was a very interesting diverse mix of ladies because there was this little black lady named Dorinda who was thirty years a hotel maid at, oh God I don't remember, I believe at the Stardust. And worked there for thirty years, and retired, and



she had \$112 a month pension from Culinary [Union], and she had \$512 a month Social Security income. And there was Eunice, who had lived at the other end of the building, closer to us, and Eunice was on about \$700 a month fixed income, and they were paying us \$275 a month rent for these little one-bedroom apartments. And these rundown, slummy, scummy places that we proceeded to start to fix up and clean up and make their lives better.

And all of these people immediately fell in love with Psyche, who was the mixed-breed Border Collie dog that had traveled the whole country with us and had a million miles under her belt and had never had a leash on in ten years of traveling the country in a tractor-trailer truck, and never was on a leash. And Psyche came to live with us at these apartments and of course the truck was gone, and back on weekends, and at that point that we did that, we ended up doing a whole West Coast route for Allied Van Lines, and J.J. and I were taking turns as to who went out for a week, and then one of us was here for a week and one went for a week and then we traded places for a week and did our route, hauling antiques and computers and always trade shows every week in and out of Las Vegas. Had a great time, it was a great setup for us.

And we proceeded to fix these apartments up and get them clean. And there were ten people there. And the first person who we rented to was a gentleman named Paul McGregor. He only just passed away this last year. And Paul McGregor was a professional poker dealer, and very, very famous in the limited poker world, which is nothing like the poker world today. But there was a poker world and a whole series of the Doyle Brunsons and the sixties, seventies, eighties professional poker players and the old world series and Paul was well known in all of those circles, and he was one of our first



neighbors that we hired into. He was six-foot-nine, 450 pounds, an enormous, enormous man. Very, very interesting. Stayed friends with him all through the years.

But we stayed in those apartments till all the little old ladies had died off. And we actually paid for their funerals and we actually took care of their estates and we actually called their children who could've cared less, and we don't understand how these wonderful ladies could've been estranged from their children. But I know they knew to the penny every month, every one of them, how much bingo money they had left over. And they had a little community there, and many of them didn't even hardly know each other, till we got there, but we all became family.

And then Psyche, we had to put dog doors in four of the ladies' apartments, because Psyche spent her day visiting each and every one of them, traveling back and forth, up and down the row of apartments. And Dorinda and Eunice on the two opposite ends became the neighborhood watch because nobody could even come close to either end of the property that everybody's phones didn't go buzz. And a great deal of every day was spent deciding on what they were going to cook Psyche for breakfast or dinner. And Psyche ate way better than we did.

But that was some of our early life in Las Vegas. And it was a great setup. And four blocks away was my parents' sandwich shop, at Seventh and Carson. And we would run over and deliver sandwiches. I'd be hungry at midnight, I had a key, I would just go in and raid my dad's icebox. He never knew where that pastrami went. But we kept ourselves fed out of my folks' sandwich shop and we kept the little old ladies and we cashed their checks and we took them to the bank and we took them to the grocery and we took them to their doctors, you know, and Eunice drove way longer than she should



have but she did a lot of the chauffeuring and we had to do a lot of that after we actually had to take the car away from her and she didn't talk to us for three weeks, but we weren't ever going to be the one that had to come and identify her body or who she took out with her, and we had to do that. She was eighty-four years old. Lived another three years after the car.

**So, I mean, that's such a great story, and one of the things that Las Vegas is accused of often is lacking community, lacking neighborhoods. Do you think that that's true or do you think that that experience that you guys had would happen today, in the current Las Vegas?**

I know that every community needs a leader, and a personality, and a group of people to follow that personality. And it doesn't matter whether it's a whole city following a mayor, or one wacko crazy gay guy with a whole bunch of little old ladies in a thirteen-unit apartment building, or, in reality what I'm doing right now, or the world that my mother built around her little sandwich shop downtown, of a community of downtown workers who had a place to go for lunch, where they were greeted by name and were introduced to whoever else was in the building at the time, and it created a whole different world, it created job opportunities for people, because people moved around because of contacts they made at a sandwich shop downtown. Those kind of communities is what the whole world has always run on, and no, they're very wrong about that. And what we have done is hidden in the suburbs, behind our block walls and our gates, and that reputation is [community today].

But we've had a downtown community here for years and years and years and years. And when I finally sold the apartments in 1995 and moved into the house that



we're sitting in today, which is an amazing Mid-Century Modern post-and-beam construction, beamed ceilings, on a pie-shaped lot at the end of one of the few cul-de-sacs downtown, and I moved out of one really scummy part of town into what was also a scummy part of town, even in 1995, what I'm out selling right now as the cool place to live, was covered in graffiti and covered in junked cars and eight out of ten homes were rentals, and the other two were original owners who hadn't moved out yet but wanted to. They wanted to flee, and for whatever their reason was, they didn't, but everybody else had.

And it was a period of time when we had new construction homes all over the valley in a huge circle, only still five, six, seven, eight miles out, without the kind of traffic, at the point when Las Vegas hadn't even turned to a million yet, nevertheless about to turn to two million. And at that point in time you could actually live in the furthest house out, the same way my mother did in 1975, at Decatur, you could live in the furthest house out in 1995 and that only took you out to Durango [Drive].

**That is still amazing, because in twelve years, I mean that's a very short time for what's happened here in Las Vegas.**

It is. No, there is no city in the world that is literally a brand-new city. When I say I live in an old house in Las Vegas, it was built in 1950s.

**Yeah, I was going to ask you when this was built.**

This house was built in 1954.

**OK, with so many other houses in different parts of the country are built at the turn of the century—**



Oh! But people who grew up in St. Louis and Columbus, and J.J. and I cut our teeth on an 1894 farmhouse in Columbus, Ohio, that we bought when we were twenty-one-year-olds.

There's another interesting part of the story here, and I know I want this recorded for posterity, is that J.J. and I have just finished thirty-two years together and we're both only fifty-three years old now. And we've been together for thirty-two years, and I picked him up hitchhiking in the truck. And we've been together ever since. And you asked about building community. We have built a community around ourselves and a family around ourselves, with our own peripheral families as part of the bigger family, but we have built our family, wherever we've been and whatever circumstances we were in, and so do most of the people that we know, have built their own little families and their own little communities. I mean I'm very proud that we're a gay couple that have been together thirty-two years, since 1975. It's an amazing thing. But it's not amazing that we have lots of friends who have been together thirty years, and twenty-five years, but they're mostly sixty-and-seventy-year-old men, and women, and they mostly got together when they were forty because that's what always happened was, in reality, gay people finally settled down at thirty or thirty-five or forty, and very, very often stayed with their same partner for the next twenty, thirty, forty years, probably even at a similar rate, as the straight couples who got together and stayed together, like my parents who, you know, my father died when they were already married fifty-four years. Would've come up on sixty years this year. It's not an unusual occurrence.

And community, and neighborhood and bonding and friendships, is what makes the whole world move around. And I wish some of our governments would get an idea of



that because we could behave that way with other countries, too. And we often don't, and they often don't, and it turns into wars and it turns into ugly and it turns into bad reputations and it turns into failed children and failed relationships and foreclosed houses and homeless populations, when it doesn't work. But it is the model that's real for America. It is what we're supposed to be.

**I think it's a great model.**

And when it doesn't work, it turns into homelessness and it turns into prison cells and it turns into all kinds of things that it doesn't have to be, and it turns into bitter divorces and screwed-up kids. But when it works, it works beautifully. And every marriage that comes together is supposed to be that. It's supposed to be people joining together for mutual benefit. Not only for the benefit of themselves, but in my world, in my way of thinking, to come together for the improvement of the world around them. And I don't have any influence over Iraq or influence over Russia or influence over George Bush, but I do have influence over the small world that I've built for myself. And I wake up every morning saying, I'm making my world a better place. And I don't want to be here anymore when I have to wake up and say, I'm contributing to making it a worse place. That's when I don't want to be here anymore.

**That is a great attitude.**

And as long as I can do that every day.

**We need more.**

And I try. I preach it, I teach it, you know. I mean I'm an atheist, I'm a Libertarian. I'm not doing it from any moral thing, from any religious coming and goings. It has nothing to do with all of that. It has to do with humanity, and who I believe humans are and what



we were really meant to be here on Earth, which is, small groups of people coming together and those small groups combining with other groups and those groups combining with other groups to make bigger groups, and that's what creates society.

**And really that's what different neighborhoods and different communities are: groups of people coming together.**

It is. But it has to start in each person's individual life. Because it's funny, there's an old, old joke, I think my dad told it to me when I was a little kid, about the two barbers cutting hair and one guy in one barber's chair is saying, I'm new to town and everybody's mean and nasty and ugly to me and everybody's unfriendly and nobody will—OK? And in the very same next chair over the guy is saying, I'm new to town and everybody is fabulous. They wave, they say hello, they smile, they've offered to do things for me. And the barber looks at the two of them and says, Well, what kind of place did you come from? And the guy with the great experience said, Well, where I came from was just like that. And the guy that said, No, the world is an ugly place, said, Everywhere I've ever lived has been just like that. It doesn't have to do with the place, it has to do with the person, is the moral of the story.

So, anyway, you just heard my philosophy of life.

**I think it's a great philosophy though because, again, and I don't know if this is reflective of people or not but, being around a lot of people, you hear a lot of different people's take on Las Vegas, and Las Vegas is unlike any other city.**

I've been susceptible, and this city can chew you up and spit you out, and if you're susceptible to the bad habits of the world, man, this isn't really a good place to be, no



matter how much opportunity there is, because all those bad habits are, and I can speak from experience on it.

**Yeah. Yeah. No, I just think it's interesting to hear and I feel like part of what makes the John S. Park Neighborhood—**

Oh, we got back to the subject.

**Well, but I think it actually ties in because I think one of the unique features of this neighborhood and feedback that we've gotten from other people and one of the reasons why I think this is an interesting project, is because a lot of folks in the neighborhood embody a lot of aspects of that philosophy that you have, and I think that's a great thing. To me it's unique when you can get a whole neighborhood or community to do that.**

And I want them to be a whole neighborhood and a whole community. And I remember, when I moved in here in '95, when I moved from the apartments to Eighth Place in 1995, what we had was ten houses in a row and then the nice one where we found the little old lady who still lived there whose husband and her built the house in 1950 or 1956 or 1958, whose kids were raised and went to John S. Park Elementary and went to [John C.]

Fremont Middle [Junior High] School or maybe to Bishop Gorman High School, who walked to work downtown, that ran into all their friends at Lovett's. You know, in 1950 when these homes were built, Sahara was the end of town. These were the first properties built south of Charleston. The very first house literally built south of Charleston, that became part of this neighborhood, is still there. It's 1938, just before World War II. It's on Fifth Place, second house, Joe Scheinemann and his wife Kate, it's Kate's house.

Nineteen thirty-eight.



**That's fascinating. I didn't know that. That's great.**

Yeah. Wagon wheel and all. On Fifth Place, is the second or third house south of Park Paseo. Was built out in the desert, in the middle of nowhere. And the airport was where the Sahara Hotel was. McCarran [International Airport] didn't get built until the sixties. We started in 1942, during the war, building housing for the newly-opened Nellis Air Force Base, which was *way* out of town, up against the mountains, way out there. But we had to house those airmen. And that's who Huntridge was being built for. That was the first new wave of growth in Las Vegas. It predated the gaming wave of the Strip. It certainly predated the eighties to the 2005-7 boom, that took us from five hundred to two million. But it was the first big new influx of people, were the military people. And lots of the people, who are still in this neighborhood today who are the original owners, came here because of World War II.

**Right, they were building houses with funds from the military, is that right?**

Well, the Huntridge cottages were only \$2,600 to \$3,000. They were two-bedroom, one-bath, 850-or-895-square-foot houses. Two-bedroom, one-bath, on big, giant lots, these little boxes sitting on these big lots. And there were no fences built. I mean the developer just built a house and you figure out with your neighbor where your land was, where your line was. And there are fences all through Huntridge that aren't built on the property lines. But they're all pretty grandfathered in right now with lifelong easements and nobody I think ever could win a dispute over it now. But, that's why neighborhoods like John S. Park have block walls and stockade fences and chain-link fences and every kind of fence in the world. And even where I grew up (I was born in '54), my parents bought our house in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio in 1957 on my dad's G.I. bill, for \$11,000,



and they moved out of a \$35.00-a-month three-bedroom apartment, into an \$111.00-a-month mortgage payment, on a three-bedroom, two-bath house in the suburbs, in 1957 when I was three years old, and my dad and the three other fathers nearby, and there were like twenty-seven children contiguous to our house, with no fences between them, we built an entire baseball diamond, an entire football field, and everybody's yard stayed open to everybody for years and years and years. All we had to do to go to our friends' houses [was] go through the back yards. But that's what Huntridge looked like back then. No fences. Eventually they all got fenced in and they all got whatever. A lot of them got fenced in with four-foot walls and three-foot walls, and not eight-foot, six-foot, stockade fences, you know, barricade yourself in and never meet a neighbor, and I can't go to the mailbox, somebody else is there right now, which, you know, is my opinion of the suburbs. But we saw mail delivery door-to-door here. That's the kind of world that [we had]. And now there's a lot of people, myself included, who want back into that world, because that was the world of our childhoods.

It's very interesting because I have a partner in this business in the VeryVintageVegas that we're doing, which is really a marketing and promotion campaign for selling real estate, no bones about it. It's what funds our passion for old homes and old history and old neighborhoods, and we love it and we're enjoying it and we're passionate about what we're doing and we're getting out of bed every day. But where that comes from really is from my childhood.

**Well, and it sounds like it's how you were raised, it's exactly what you grew up with, your parents instilled that in you.**



We're getting a lot of baby boomers coming back into the John S. Park and surroundings, because it reminds them of the neighborhoods they grew up in, in whatever city they grew up in, and a very, very few of them, because I actually met the guy that was born here in Vegas (that was a joke), *the* guy, and I met him. I was very fortunate. But I feel like that some days. I really do feel like that some days. We *all* came from somewhere else. And some of us came from Mexico and some of us, our grandparents came from Russia, and some of us came from St. Louis or Chicago but their grandparents came from somewhere. And Vegas, if it could be anything, and if it really has a—and I think it really actually does, is there really is actually a good melting pot of a subset of America.

Everybody's from somewhere else. And if they were born here, I don't ever meet any sixty-year-olds that were born here, or seventy-year-olds anymore that were born here. I'm meeting twenty-year-olds now that were born here. And occasionally a forty-year-old that was born here. Rarely a sixty-year-old or a seventy-year-old that was born here. But some of their parents came as soldiers. Some of their parents came to work in the casino industry in the fifties. And everybody came from somewhere.

And that's one of the beauties that I love about VeryVintageVegas. I call it VeryVintageVegas, that's my marketing, I'm going to do it. But the John S. Park Neighborhood, it's bigger than John S. Park, mind you, what I'm talking about is VeryVintageVegas. Essentially I've had to cut it off. I mean, where does it stop? In my point of view it stops in 1970. If it was here in 1970, it's in VintageVegas. Because that's when the real second wave of the boom started, and then the third wave after '85. From '70 to '85 it took us to get from the half-a-million to a million, or a half-a-million to



three-quarters of a million, and then '85 to '95 took us to over a million, and now to almost two million.

**It's unbelievable, really.**

Exactly. And one of the important reasons why you're doing this is that nobody knows how this came to be here. And, you know, my history only goes back to '85 when I got to Vegas, but '77 when I started visiting Vegas.

**Well, enough to see some significant changes.**

"Significant" is such a mild word, for what we're talking about.

**Well, I guess I'm curious as to what made you do the transition into real estate. How long have you been doing that?**

Well, I knew that I wasn't ever going to drive trucks anymore, and I knew that J.J. wasn't going to drive forever either, and eventually we were going to have to phase out of that and we needed a new business. And I ran away from college to be a truck driver, is one of my old jokes, you know, just to make my mother mad. OK, one day I quit college and ran away and became a truck driver. I was supposed to have been a doctor or a lawyer, I guess. So I said to myself, well, let's see, the only thing I really love is real estate. I mean I'm so enjoying being a landlord. We bought and sold a couple of other properties. J.J. and I cut our bones, like I said, on a 1894 farmhouse about three-quarters of a mile from downtown Columbus, Ohio, that was cut into eight studio apartments, and we restored it back, and we bought it for \$21,000, and we put our life savings of about \$9,000 into it, and a whole year of constant, full-time work, and we sold it for \$32,000 and lost our butts on it, when all was said and done, but we learned how to sweat pipes and we learned how to hang drywall and we learned how to finish cement and we learned how to hang a



picture straight and how to put a blind up, and we cut our teeth on that house, and we were only two years ahead of ourselves, because it resold two years later for \$80,000, after about nine other people, based on what we did, about nine other people redid some other houses on the same street, that were built later after the farm stopped being a farm, but this was the original farmhouse. And eventually it got cut into streets, to make new subdivisions, in 1910 or '20. But after those 1910-or-'20 houses got done by a couple other gay couples, by the way, we had already sold out and moved on, and those houses today are all over a million dollars. Well over a million dollars.

**So you definitely had the foresight.**

I've always had this vision. I have always been a downtown person. I cannot imagine myself in the suburbs. Absolutely cannot. And, you know, I'm so glad I'm doing this because the stuff that's popping out, that we actually were handpicked by the Smithsonian as two of the best special shipping, special product drivers in the country, to move the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian House from the Smithsonian. I mean I mentioned this before, but I hadn't even thought of that story in twenty years, until I sat down and I said it today. Suddenly it's shocking me. Oh, my God. And that's when I fell in love with Mid-Century Modern, was the Usonian House. We didn't have Mid-Century Modern. We do, now that I understand that the ranch house that my parents bought in 1957 was actually a continuation of Mid-Century Modern. But, I didn't know that, really actually until recently. What my concept of Mid-Century Modern, the post-and-beam and the open space and wide, big, long walls of windows opening into gardens and the outdoors coming in and the indoors going out, that love came really from that Usonian House.



**And from being around and working with all of that. Yeah. So it was just inevitable, that you would take this path.**

It was inevitable. So how did I get into real estate? It was the passion. And I'm still passionate about it today. Through all the ups and downs and the pros and the cons, and real estate is by no way, shape, or form an easy business, and anybody that thinks it is should talk to all the hundreds of thousands of people who've gotten real estate licenses over the last twenty years, and didn't succeed in real estate, should ask those people what kind of a business it is to be in real estate, and to survive and thrive in it.

So, that's how I came to be in real estate. And I moved into this house in 1995, in a neighborhood that was run down, 80 percent rental, junk cars, graffiti everywhere, amazingly cool houses, and I had to start telling people, Move down here with me, we can change this, we can bring this back, we can put this over again. If you don't believe me, go to Capitol Hill in Denver and see it. If you don't believe me, go to Georgetown in Washington, D.C. If you don't believe me, go to Oak Lawn in Dallas, and go to Cedar Heights or whatever it's called in Houston. If you don't believe me, go to downtown St. Louis, if you don't believe me. Those regentrifications started in the late Eighties. San Francisco actually started when the hippies said, Hey, wait a minute. I don't want to be poor forever. San Francisco started in the Sixties, with the hippies who hung around and the gay people who flooded in. But you want to see what we can make of this, go to those other cities. They're ten and twenty years ahead of what we can be here. And it's the gay guys who bought into it with me. That's why, and that's how it happened. And I became the second gay realtor in Las Vegas. But now I'm not the gay realtor. Now I'm the VintageVegas realtor. I just wanted to make that clear.



**OK, so I have a bunch of questions, actually. Were you familiar with the neighborhood or what kind of reputation did this neighborhood have in '85 when you moved here? Did you even consider it as a place?**

Oh, I was aware of it. In '85 it was still a pretty nice place.

**And when did it start to take on the—**

When the big '85 boom happened and everybody moved to the suburbs, which were only six and eight and ten miles away. The new houses were at Rainbow and Lake Mead [Boulevard]. Summerlin was just starting to be thought of. The first home in Summerlin, I think in 1988, was at Lake Mead and Buffalo [Drive]. The first Summerlin homes, and that was far out, way out there, and yet you could jump on the 95 [U.S. 95] and be back downtown in six minutes. I haven't heard anybody do that lately.

**I was going to say, not anymore.**

OK. And if you live eight more miles further out in the far end of Summerlin, believe me, it's not even as convenient as somebody might claim that Rainbow and Buffalo is, you know, and Charleston. So I was aware of these neighborhoods, and I was aware of the west side neighborhoods, and really when I was ready to buy a house and sell the apartments, really the only places that I seriously could have considered were still my four favorite neighborhoods, which are Glen Heather, McNeil [Estates], John S. Park area, what I call downtown, and Paradise Palms, behind the Boulevard Mall. [These] were the only four areas that I would've ever considered owning a home in.

**And so you chose this area.**

And I chose it because I found this amazing, amazing house, that was amazingly badly decorated, and had been jerry-rigged for years and years and years by very



unprofessional, do-it-yourselfers, playing with the electric and playing with the plumbing and playing with the roofing and playing with and painting the windows.

**So you had a lot of work to do on it.**

And it's still not done, and it may never be done, and it doesn't matter. I enjoy coming home to this house every day, still to this day, from the first days I laid eyes on it and knew that this was it.

**So tell me, in '95, I mean you talk about this a little bit but I guess what was it like when you arrived and what it's like today, what was it like politically and socially, culturally and that type of thing? Do you have a recollection?**

There was no community. There was no involvement in government or involvement in politics. You know, all the buzz was about Summerlin, all the buzz was about the suburbs, brand-new houses for \$89,000 and it was only \$600 a month on a mortgage. And nobody wanted to live here, let's go live in a brand-new house. And people couldn't sell these, except for maybe to a landlord. And they rented them out and they moved to the suburbs. And that's who was here right now, and there was no sense of community. Eight out of the ten were rentals, and rentals to people who just moved here to get a job. That hump, that I saw it changing from rental to owner-occupied, I think when we hit the majority, was really about 2000, is when we broke that hump.

**Right. Started to shift over to where it is today.**

Right. The hump that we're breaking right now is that even the people who are still landlords who are right now though some of the worst houses, and some of the people who are suddenly starting to realize that, gee, we're in a house, that if we make it prettier it's worth more money, and they're suddenly getting it. And we're breaking that hump



now. On the VeryVintageVegas.com website I've done posts before about the pockets, and it used to be a ten-home pocket of bad, and then a nice one. And eventually it became a five-home pocket of bad, and then a nice one. And now it's a five-home pocket of good, and then the bad one, that's still the rental, or still, you know, somebody that just doesn't get it, and could care less and still thinks it's their right to repair cars for a living in their driveway. And those are few and far between now. And even then, the city stopped the car repair in the driveway.

**Yeah. Yeah, it seems like there are some neighborhood ordinances that are in effect.**

Well, there's a group of us who actually drive the poor Neighborhood Response people crazy, and especially about the graffiti. Graffiti is not allowed to be in place for more than twelve hours in anywhere that I drive regularly because I call it in the moment it's seen and so do at least a dozen of my other friends' clients. I mean it's a routine thing, and it's gone by the end of the day or certainly by the end of the next day. And the kids are frustrated with it, their art just keeps disappearing, but as long as we stay on top of it, we get one kid comes through and tags the same tag in six spots, that night, it's gone the next day, we don't see anymore in that area for a couple of weeks and then one other kid comes through and puts some marks on the walls, and then we paint it out. But only because the entire Neighborhood Response program, which is an amazing organization for what they actually accomplish, for as short-handed as they are and as short-budgeted as they always are, it's a complaint-driven system. They'll drive by that same graffiti day after day after day till somebody complains about it.

**So is there actually a group of people that are part of a Neighborhood Response program, or is this the neighborhood association?**



Oh, it's people who are now involved in the neighborhood, because a couple of neighbors became the neighborhood association. The neighborhood associations became the community. The community became part of the downtown society. That's what I was talking about, but it started with one guy willing to go over and talk to his neighbor, and say, What can we do to make our lives better for each other? And everywhere that that happened, and it's always still happening in lots and lots of places and lots and lots of houses and lots and lots of driveways, over the fences of lots of back yards, it's happening still today and always has happened and always will happen and that's what makes America America. As long as everybody wants the same thing, which is a safer, better neighborhood with better property values, and better-behaved neighbors, whether they're tenants or not. All we want is well-behaved neighbors.

**Right. And respectful people. I agree. So, I guess we've talked about changes that you've witnessed in the neighborhood.**

Well, not only changes that I've witnessed but changes that I've helped to drive. And I'll take credit for a great deal of that. I mean the Southridge Neighborhood Association, I founded it. But six other people simultaneously founded Marycrest and Huntridge and Huntridge East and Circle [Park] East and Beverly Green and John S. Park. But I didn't think of it. John S. Park did it first, and I did it second. I'll give them credit. They were first.

**So talk about the different neighborhood boundaries real quick.**

Well, John S. Park essentially exists north of Oakey [Boulevard], as a structured neighborhood association. For this purpose of this oral history, you're using the word "John S. Park" but you're expanding way beyond that in all the neighborhoods that I'm



about to talk about. But John S. Park is a structured neighborhood association with a president. No dues, no homeowners' association fees, just about twenty or thirty really active people and a whole bunch of other people who are really glad there's twenty or thirty that are doing it. And a whole bunch of people who have no idea and don't care and could care less. And that's north of Oakey to Charleston, and essentially from Las Vegas Boulevard to Ninth Street. And that's John S. Park Neighborhood. And it was the earliest suburb of Las Vegas. It started really in 1938, or '37. I guess I could do some more actual historical research. I'll leave that to real historians.

And next to it going east is what's called Circle Park East, named after Circle Park in the middle of Huntridge, but it's really the Huntridge neighborhood on the west side of Maryland Parkway, and it's Circle Park West.

Continuing west, still north of Oakey, is the actual Huntridge Neighborhood Association, which is Huntridge east of Maryland Parkway, which then bumps into Marycrest. [Marycrest] is a neighborhood association, which then runs into Crestwood Neighborhood Association, which Crestwood Elementary [School] is in the middle of.

And then we drop south of Oakey and there isn't one there, and then there's, I can't think of the name of it, but Fifteenth Street and Fourteenth [Street] and Bonita [Avenue]. That's Marycrest, on the east side of Maryland, from Maryland Parkway east to about Seventeenth Street. And they're the ones who instigated the monuments sign at the corner of Maryland Parkway and Oakey, as part of the creation of the neighborhood associations and using some block grant money that was available from the city is where we got the monument marker, and an easement from the neighbor [for] the big stone monument that says Huntridge to the left and Marycrest to the right. That's where that



came from, was from the neighborhood associations that got started up essentially around 2000, and really took on its momentum.

And then continuing on west again, when you cross Maryland Parkway you get into the Southridge Neighborhood Association, which is Oakey to Sahara, and Maryland Parkway to Las Vegas Boulevard, as I founded it, I believe in 2000, in response to just as John S. Park got founded and in response to Bob Stupak's plan to build the Titanic. Ours got really started and gained its momentum and grew because of the Stratosphere's plan to build the roller coaster across Las Vegas Boulevard. There was a catalyzing event that brought the neighbors together. Even though we were starting to see little pockets of neighbors doing things, now those little pockets of neighbors formed together to become the neighborhood associations. Exactly my theme of community that we're talking about.

And then, the Southridge got divided in half, and became Beverly Green from Sixth Street to Las Vegas Boulevard, and from Sixth Street to Maryland Parkway stayed Southridge.

So those are essentially our neighborhood associations, in and around the John S. Park Neighborhood. And as far as I'm concerned, John S. Park is the first one with historic designation, the first one to be there, so therefore the first one with historic designation, the first one to start a neighborhood association, but it's just the beginning stages of what turned into a couple of square miles, that you could still walk to downtown, maybe not in the afternoon in July, but you certainly could still in the morning. And that goes from essentially Las Vegas Boulevard to Eastern [Avenue], and Charleston to Sahara. So two square miles.



And then of course on the north side of Charleston is not my area of expertise, certainly, but that's become Lawyer's Row, and that was the 1920s and '30s suburb of Las Vegas that was the first thing built outside of the original town site. And we're losing too many of those homes right now. Not my area of expertise, and I'm not a commercial real estate agent, but I know that we're losing pieces of that history, for the sake of office buildings.

**As they're developed into multi-use business.**

Right. And now we're losing the closest other interesting adjacent land, which became the Arts District. See, because if you understand the waves of what's happened here in VintageVegas, I have to explain this, is that the gay guys came first, and they started coming in the early Nineties, back into the neighborhood, and there were gay guys here before I got in here. Some of them I sold into it while I still lived in the apartments. But I started talking it up in 1990 actually, when I got my real estate license. Come on, guys, let's change this. And then in '95 it really got a lot, and then in 2000 came the second wave. And the second wave were the artists and the musicians and the UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas] professors and occasionally a young lawyer or a young doctor or a young somebody that wanted to be close to a hospital, wanted to be close to whatever, and they became the second wave. And those people, and their friends, are who created the Arts District. Those people became the Wes Isbets and the Arts Factory and the Naomi Aaronsons and Cindy Funkhouser, and that's where those people came into all this from. Cindy was here earlier but she was selling antiques. It was a dream. But suddenly she had cooperation. Oh, no, there's lots of early settlers in the regentrification of VintageVegas, some of whom I don't even know, and I've only heard stories about



them. Some of them I know very well and some of them know about me. And that's cool. But we've all come together as a variety of different communities.

**So you mentioned that the first wave was sort of gay men moving down to this area.**

**I mean I think that's one unique factor of this neighborhood.**

But they cleaned it up enough, for the artists and the musicians to risk it. It's always what happens. It's happened in exactly that way in every city in America. In the closest residential housing to the downtown, in every city in America.

**So I guess I'm just curious about the neighborhood itself. Was it inclusive or was there intolerance of difference, or was it an issue? I mean you've been a gay man living in this neighborhood for twelve years now. Has it ever been an issue?**

No. No. And it wasn't. And it really has not been. Even though you weren't allowed to be gay and work on the Strip (if I wanted to discuss this from a gay point of view) till about 1995. You weren't allowed to be gay and work on the Strip. The Strip was built by gay guys, putting on shows and decorating hotels and playing music and dancing in the shows, and every fifth table at every casino [there] was a gay guy there but you weren't allowed to be gay. And the minute you were outed, you were fired. Till about 1995, somewhere right in there. Talk to Dennis McBride if you want that history. He's the expert on it. He's one of the major historians of Las Vegas, with a special emphasis on the gay community.

But it's always been a real tolerant city because it's always had the reputation of, you come here to make your own way. You live and let live. Everybody's got a story and everybody's got a past and whether they're telling it or not, they got one. And in all the years that I've lived in Vegas and in that I've done real estate in Vegas, I only have ever



had two stories, and I never even knew the people that were truly involved, but where the stories actually made the press of somebody being really harassed in their housing, by neighbors. And one was in an apartment complex and one was where they were renters in a townhouse community. And other than that, I don't have any stories to tell. And I'm proud and happy about that. I am thrilled to death to be able to say that. It's important that it's said that way.

Las Vegas has always been cool. And the people that lived and worked here knew that we [the gay population] were a hugely, hugely, monumentally integral part of building this city. And it's not really the history until the 1990s of this neighborhood and the John S. Park, but it is about Las Vegas in general.

**So, not to take off on this tangent, I think, but I am curious and I think it is an interesting part of this history, what were your impressions or what are your impressions of the gay community here, of the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] community in general in Las Vegas?**

It's finally come together, too, in the same way that I'm talking about. My block and my neighborhood and my district and my society and our gay society here has come together, too. I have a personal prejudice, that I will state, is that a whole lot of that changed, I think, when the Mormon influence in the city got diluted by the new million people that showed up, who weren't Mormons. And their power and influence got diluted. Now, I'm sure that there is still power and influence, but it got dramatically diluted. And any kind of overt prejudices or any kind of whatever just kind of went away. And not that there aren't incidences, you know, stupid teenagers throwing bottles at two people down by the Fruit Loop or something like that. I mean those things do still happen. It's always going



to exist. But overall in general, especially in housing, which is my area of expertise, it's not been an issue here in Las Vegas. And I'm sorry, you go back to the Liberaces. It's always been here and it built this town.

**And so do you think there's a relationship between the gay community and the John S. Park Neighborhood?**

There certainly is now. Our community center is on the edge of it. The bars and amenities and the new jazz club and the new this are all on the edge of the John S. Park Neighborhood now.

**Is that why the center is over in Commercial Center, or has been?**

That's where it was. It put it in the middle of town. Well, for the same reason geographically the middle of town, why this is so attractive to people. Why put the community center in Summerlin? Let's put the community center where the gay people live. And the gay people have traditionally lived in John S. Park and Paradise Township, which is the east side of the Strip [Las Vegas Boulevard] all the way down to the airport, and all the way out to Boulder Highway essentially. That fan of that triangle of Las Vegas Boulevard, Tropicana [Avenue], and back up Boulder Highway, to downtown, has been the quadrant or the corner of the town where the most gay people lived, all through the Fifties, Sixties, Seventies. Long before what we're talking about started. But that's where they lived because they worked on the Strip. The only bars in town were in that area because that's where they lived. There weren't any gay bars on the west side. The gay guys didn't live on the west side. The gay guys lived on the east side. And that's why the Fruit Loop is where it is, and the Red Barn, and talk to Dennis again on all that history. That was before my time, but, that's why. And, it is again.



Now, along with those other million-and-a-half people that showed up since 1970, is an incredible number of gay couples and gay people, who are still working on the Strip, but now they're doctors and they're lawyers and they're dentists and they're accountants and we have a whole gay Chamber of Commerce and they're real estate agents and they're teachers and they're a whole lot of other people besides blackjack dealers, or set designers or dancers or musicians. It's grown hugely. And still a great number of them are out in the suburbs being suburbanites. And they actually go to dinner at their straight-couple-across-the-street friends' houses. And there is no problem with that. And their kids are allowed over and they know that the gay people are the cool couple across the street. And if you go to any rundown city, any rundown neighborhood, it's probably the gay guys that moved in that's the first ones that cleaned up their yard again and started a new snowball. And that's going on in lots of the seventies and eighties neighborhoods. Now these houses are old and tired. But the newer houses to move to are now forty-five minutes or an hour to get to work. Further and further out.

So you see how all this dynamic just keeps waving through. But the rules never change. The rules never change of how neighborhoods go up and neighborhoods go down, of how areas of town become hot and how they become cold and how they become hot again. And it will always never change. Those are the location, location, location rules of real estate, and that's like gravity. You cannot deny them and you cannot say they don't exist.

[Frank Lloyd] Wright designed modular low-priced houses for the masses, called his Usonian homes. And they literally came and fit together like modular pieces as jigsaw puzzles. And you could put them together in literally any kind of a shape. And they never



were really mass-produced. But the entire house was dismantled, and loaded into one semi-truck, in pieces. And they were sandwiched panels of insulation on drywall panels, without your exterior stucco, and they snapped together. And you could build them anywhere, and they were designed to be built that way. And that's what the Usonian house was that I moved. And one of the few left, that was ever built. I wanted to say that about that. I mean it all went into one truck. And it was my truck.

**Which is amazing that you can take apart a whole house, put it into a truck, and move it, and reassemble it. That's very cool.**

And it was built on a concrete slab that would be poured in place, and then the parts were made to come in and snap together. It was. It was ingenious. And it was Frank Lloyd Wright. What could it be besides a genius? But really in the Fifties, at the same time he was developing it, is really when they took the auto industry and brought the factory to the job site, and created what we now have as our building technique of building houses. The assembly line was brought to the job site, and the graders came in and graded lot after lot and followed that next day by the concrete guys, and the graders were on to the next group, and the next day the concrete guys were on to the next group, and the next day the plumbers were there, and then the framers were there. And that's how we build houses now today, and really it actually ended up being a more efficient way to build at the time, than the Usonian house in a factory with trucking it in.

**Well, sure, the whole assembly line, mass production, standardization.**

And Huntridge, somebody please correct me if I'm wrong, in 1942 was one of the first tract houses built in America. It predates Levittown if I'm correct. [Note: Levittown, a suburb of New York City, was built between 1947 and 1951.] And Levittown is given



credit as where that kind of home production and those kind of massive numbers of homes being built all at one time [originated], that you could build 1,400 homes in a year.

**Well, you know, and it makes sense, too, if you're looking at Huntridge was one of the original locations where they had to house the GIs and the guys in the military, I mean if they're going to build those houses.**

But the first Huntridge house I found is in 1942 and the last one that I can find with a date on it from the tax assessor's office is 1951.

**So it was a very small period of time.**

It was over a period of eight years, and I believe there's like 1,400 homes. I'd have to do an exact count. I'm supposed to know that, actually. Sometimes I embarrass myself. But I should know that. But I'm actually not a historian. I'm just a Vintage Vegas guy. I'll leave that to the Dennis McBrides.

**So what do you think are some of the most significant events in the history of this neighborhood or these neighborhoods? Because they've got such an extensive history, for Las Vegas.**

Oh, boy. Actual significant events?

**Or maybe just since you've been here, even.**

The recreation of the Circle Park, and subsequently the closing of it. And I mean I went to meetings Tuesday nights for a year, helping to design and figure out how to build and how to raise the money and what we wanted.

**And what year did Circle Park come to fruition?**

The new redesigned and rebuilt one? I think we were doing that in 2002, 2003. Early 2000s is when people from all the different neighborhood associations volunteered, to go



meet every Tuesday night for a year. People like Casey Baker who was the architect who designed it and spearheaded the whole thing. It was just an amazing, fabulous job. And we created something really, really good. We ran into, of course, the politics and the sociology and the psychology and everything else of the homeless population, of which, you know, I'm not even going to venture an opinion on it but homelessness and what we're building here are not conducive to each other. And I'd much rather solve the homeless problem, than them being out in my back yard. Go out and be homeless if you want, you know, get out of here, but go somewhere else and do it. I'm not that kind of person. I'd much rather find a solution to the homeless problem. And I believe that only government can find that solution. So, you know, that's how I am. So Circle Park was a significant event.

And in terms of later years of the neighborhoods coming together, I think the most significant event was really the 1985 building boom, that really created our suburbs, and the Summerlins and the Green Valleys. The housing boom of '85 through 2005 was the most significant event that happened here. It took away the dynamic movement of the neighborhood and the income of the neighborhood and took it out to the suburbs, and left it as a low-rent district that became rundown and milked-out by the landlords, some of whom were the original owners, who moved out to the suburbs and rented their houses out and stopped caring about them, and were shocked five years later at how rundown and depressed their beautiful neighborhood in 1985 had become, even five years later. They were shocked when they actually came back to see what had happened. But that's because the middle class moved to the suburbs, and the poor working class moved in as renters. So that I think was the most significant event.



**So that really shaped and reshaped this neighborhood, it sounds like, and started it on the road. I mean, it sounds like it almost had declined before it could come back.**

It had to, and the decline had to finish up, and it's run its course now. The momentum is upward. The momentum is ownership, the momentum is historic preservation, the momentum is curb appeal. And that momentum is huge and strong. And we're suffering right now at the moment from the whole overall economy and the whole overall housing thing and the aftermath of the 2004-to-2005 historic run-up in prices on all of Las Vegas. It affected us equally here. But now we have a different dynamic here, than is happening out in the suburbs. We're not trying to get rid of our foreclosure houses here. We're not trying to get rid of that excess here. There are, granted, some foreclosures in the area but they were families who got trapped in bad loans, or who bit off more than they could chew, but they only bought the one house to live in. It's not people who bit off more than they could chew on three or four or five houses at the same time. Of builders who sold whole neighborhoods to investors, who kept outbidding each other, and then all moved tenants in. And then the tenants that were leaving here, as we were reselling and moving owners back into here, the tenants who left here moved to Summerlin, or Green Valley, because you could rent a two-or-three-year-old home or a one-year-old brand-new home, in Anthem for \$1,000 a month, for a 3,000-foot house, because the investor only cared that, OK, somebody's in it for a year, and I'll get it past the capital gain and I'm going to double my money anyway. And that's who all is in foreclosure out there. But that's the way our tenants were moving there. Interesting switch. And now we got people selling, and the last three sales of mine here have been people coming from the suburbs, back into downtown. And two before that, and this is only in the last two months, were people



moving within the neighborhood, one going from renter, had been in a house for a couple of years, to becoming an owner just down the street, and one family who sold and moved four blocks over into a better street. That's the dynamic of what's coming now.

**Yeah, it's an interesting influx.**

Anna's house is being bought by a couple coming from the suburbs, but she works at Charleston and Eastern. And he works in Summerlin but they live in Green Valley now and it's this terrible thing. But he'll be going opposite traffic to get to work in Summerlin, in the morning, and opposite the traffic coming home, and she's only eight blocks away.

**So people are definitely coming back downtown. I guess two things. First, what do you think about the historic designation of the actual John S. Park Neighborhood?**

I'm a fan of the fact that we have a historical designation. What I don't want is dictatorial boards telling people what to do with their houses. I'm not a fan of that whatsoever in the least, any more than I am a fan of eminent domain or any other governmental control of people's lives. I'm still a Libertarian. But to have historical designation, to be able to put "Historical Neighborhood" riders on top of all the streetposts, like they do in Phoenix, in all the neighborhoods, I'm all in favor of that. I'm all in favor of markers saying, "This is the beginning of" this neighborhood, and "This is the end of" this neighborhood, and "Welcome to Marycrest" and "Welcome to Huntridge" and "Welcome to VeryVintageVegas." I just did it on a big scale. But that's what I'm doing. That's all I'm doing. Nothing more than I'd really want to see on a little community. I really want people on corners to say, Hey, why don't we put out a bench, and a water fountain, like Tony did on Fifteenth Street, and let's make some little pocket parks, sixty square feet total, out of the corner of my lawn, and put a bench under it a tree, and if somebody's out



jogging they can sit down or come and get a drink. I'm all in favor of that kind of let's-make-something-really-cool-of-our-historic-neighborhoods. And take down the bus stops, the signs that say "No buses," which was really just to keep the tour buses from turning around and avoiding the traffic of Las Vegas Boulevard. Oh, there's two signs on Sixth Street and Oakey, and at Park Paseo, that say, "No limos or tour buses." They were actually stops on our history hunt that we just did. And those were to keep the buses actually from Industrial [Road], [which] were on their way home, to stop cutting through the neighborhood as a shortcut to avoid the traffic. It's not that they were bringing tourists a la Beverly Hills, come see where the stars live. But I'm telling people to take the [signs down], and I tell them, I want the tour buses back, to come look at [the neighborhood].

I absolutely cannot remember the name of the lady that got the first Nevada gaming license, and it was her house. But those are the kind of people whose homes, if we're going to tell the story, that the tour bus and the tour limousine can come by and say, This is where the lady that got the first gaming license in Las Vegas lived. This is where Jerry Lewis's cousin used to live. This was the house of the sports betting guy that just died, Jimmy the Greek's [Snyder] house on Sixth Street, OK, the Binion house on Sixth Street, this house and that house and the drummer Louis Prima's house on Beverly Green. And I don't know why we can't bring tour buses back again one day. That's what historic designation is about, is who used to live in these houses and what part did these houses and these neighborhoods play in creating the Las Vegas that you're here as a tourist to see?

**You think it had a significant role?**



Oh, it hugely had a significant role.

**Has there been a relationship between the Strip and this neighborhood at all, or the gaming industry and this area, do you think?**

Only that Bob Stupak lived there, that Ted Binion lived there, that Benny Binion lived there, that the lady next door's husband was one of the early owners of the Stardust and tells me stories, I mean before she passed away, and now we've just met somebody who was a friend of theirs in the Fifties, that lives over in Beverly Green, and that's one lady I want you to interview who had her own one-woman show on the Strip, named Elaine. There's people, and there's stories here. But they used to all play cards together, and the lady next door, Ricky's husband Scotty, was a minor owner in one of the casinos, and they all skimmed money and they all kept shoebox money, and shoebox money is where they came home with the cash and hid the money in their wives' shoeboxes on the top shelf of the closet, and it was called shoebox money, and the wives were allowed to dip whenever they needed to. And she staged a robbery in the house one day because he was a gambler and a really bad gambler, not even a good gambler, he was a bad gambler, and she stole all the money and staged a robbery, called Metro [Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department], did the whole thing, gave it to a stockbroker, and took the \$15,000 and when she died it was worth \$1.8 million. All she made was one stock purchase. She bought \$15,000 of AT&T [American Telephone and Telegraph] in 1959, and it was worth \$1.8 million in various splits and various mergers and various whatevers. And we bought her cat food for years, and made sure that she had groceries, because we thought she lived on an \$800-a-month-that-we-knew-of Social Security check. In a paid-up



house. And there was this stock account worth a \$1,800,000 that has never been accounted for by the lawyer who handled the estate. To my satisfaction. So, there you go.

**Well, I think we've pretty much wrapped up.**

I told a good story, I think.

**You tell a great story. So thank you so much for your time.**

OK.



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