

AN INTERVIEW WITH AL LEVY

An Oral History Conducted by Cheryl Caples

February 23, 1979

and

An Oral History Conducted by Martha Zehnder

March 8, 1981

The Southern Nevada Jewish Community
Digital Heritage Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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The informant is Al Levy. The date is February the 23rd, 1979, at eleven a.m. The place is 400 Stewart Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. The collector is Cheryl Capers, 2166 Bartawood Drive), Las Vegas, Nevada. The project is Local History, an Oral Interview with a Pioneer Nevadan.

Mr. Levy, how long have you been in Las Vegas?

I've lived here since 1943.

Where was your family originally from?

My family came here from Los Angeles.

Was there any specific reason?

Yes. My dad came here to be a general manager of a grocery store.

Was it successful?

The store was very successful. It was on 15th and Fremont, called Clark Market at the time. Then it eventually became Foodland and it just burned down last year, I saw.

At that time what was the population of Las Vegas?

I have been told that the population in 1943 was approximately seven thousand people in the county and it was quite a different community at that time.

At that time what were some of Las Vegas's bigger resources other than gambling?

Well, of course, you have to remember I was just a tot at that time. But Nellis Air Force Base was a very big item if I remember correctly. It was during World War II. And Basic Magnesium was very important at that time. Tourism was probably even third on the list.

What schools did you attend while you were here?

I attended Las Vegas Grammar School, which is, of course, where the federal building and the county courthouse annex is, and Las Vegas High School.

Do you have any fond memories of Las Vegas High?

Oh, sure we did. We used to have a lot of fun. Of course, at that time there was only one high school in the valley, in this area. We used to have big fights with the Henderson High School and the Boulder City High School on the football field, as well as in other sporting events, just the rivalry of the two schools.

We used to have a place here, which is right down the street from the City Hall, called the Wildcat Lair. As you remember, Las Vegas is called the Wildcats, their theme. They had a teenage club here called the Wildcat Lair. I'll never forget you used to be able to go there for a quarter. They'd have a live band and you'd be able to dance and they'd always have some entertainer, like Vic Damone or somebody would come from the Strip between shows and entertain the kids. I'll never forget those days. It was a lot of fun.

Was there anything in your schooling that helped you become a commissioner? Were you involved in that type of a thing back then?

Well, in high school I was very active within the school. I wasn't any student body president or anything of that nature, but I was very active in the school activities. I know I never missed a sporting event. I think you can count them on my hand of all the basketball or football games I ever missed, even though I played football. I never missed a game. The town rallied around the school. We used to have big crowds for our football games and basketball games. The whole town, that was the activity, like the UNLV basketball team is today.

Did you attend the university here or did you go out of state or did you go to college?

I went to college. There was no university here, young lady.

Oh.

No, I went to college. I went to University of Southern California. That was probably not only

the closest school, but it was the school in Los Angeles that I enjoyed going to and I graduated from there with a degree in business.

How did the lifestyle change between going from a small town like this to going to a big city?

Well, that's the very thing. I'll never forget my first year at the university. USC played Notre Dame. And in the Coliseum that day there was over a hundred thousand people to see the game. This was in 1951. And I'll never forget looking around and saying, "The crowd is three times the whole population of Las Vegas," which at that time was around thirty thousand plus people. And so it was quite a change. It was a change. I mean you can take your choice of being a big fish in a little pond or a little fish in a big pond. As soon as I got through with my schooling—I found my wife at the university; we got married—and as soon as I graduated I did come back to Las Vegas and raise my family.

Do you remember any of the openings of hotels, like some of the earlier ones?

Well, I remember when I was a kid Sunday evenings the local community would either go—and there were only two hotels at the time; that was the Last Frontier or the El Rancho. We would go to one of those hotels on a Sunday evening and see the floor show and have dinner. It was a big treat. A lot of locals were there. That was the only two hotels that were open at the time. Then there, of course, came the Flamingo, which I wasn't allowed to go around too many of the hotels except to maybe swim in the swimming pool on a day when it was hot. Because there were very few homes here with swimming pools.

Did the hotels at that time cater mostly to tourists or they had an openings to the public?

The locals used to participate in the hotels probably more so then than they do today because the prices were considerably less and they used to go to them. They didn't know who to cater to. I

think the hotels catered to anybody who had three dollars in their pocket.

Back at that time were there any community gatherings where everybody got together or any particular influential group?

Oh, the Elks' Helldorado was a big thing in those days. I mean, boy, you just had to wear those western clothes or you got thrown in the hoosegow and they didn't care who you were or what time of day or when. They'd come right into your store and grab you right out of there and take you down to Second and Fremont and throw you in the jail. My dad, after he had managed this market, turned around and went in partners and had a grocery store at Second and Carson Street right across from the courthouse. Everything was revolving, of course, around downtown Las Vegas. The Helldorado was a big activity in those days.

What types of events did they have going on?

Well, they had the big parade. They used to have two parades. They had the Old-Timers' Parade and they had the beautiful float parade on Sunday. Every hotel and every business really got behind it. It's just a shame that the town has outgrown this event. But they used to have that and the rodeos and some of these things that they're still intending to do, but it just doesn't have the big support it used to have.

Did they have a lot of recreational places as in parks and things like that here?

No, no. As I said before, there were very few swimming pools in homes. Well, there just weren't any. I could count them on my hand. There were three places as kids we used to ride our bicycles and go swimming. One place was the old Mermaid Pool at Fifth and Fremont—or Las Vegas Boulevard, excuse me, and Fremont Street, right where Bob Baskin had his restaurant and Lou Bertha's Furniture was, there was a swimming place called the Mermaid. And then after that closed up, there was a swimming pool down here where the Elks Club is now, in that area. I

can't remember the name of that one. But there was public swimming there. Of course, then we used to ride our bicycles to Twin Lakes, which for a kid was quite a ride. We'd go swimming at Twin Lakes. That was the three swimming pools unless we were lucky to go to one of the hotels from time to time and swim, as I said, at the Flamingo or something of that nature.

Were there any particular hobbies? Did people get in groups and go rock hunting or anything like that? Was there a popular hobby at that time?

No, not that I can remember. Of course, you've got to remember that I was just a small guy myself in those days and I don't remember that. I remember the first Pee Wee Baseball team or organized baseball team, a league going here. When I was about the fifth or sixth grade, a sergeant out at the air base, a man by the name of Bob Boyd—I'll never forget him—came and organized a bunch of leagues. Of course, we played baseball in the summertime and then he organized the football leagues in the wintertime. This is before all the programs that you have today.

Is there any outstanding event that you think contributed mostly to the growth of Las Vegas?

Event? Just I imagine when the legislature passed gambling.

And then (divorce), right?

Well, mostly (inaudible/14:22). I think that's our big one.

I see. What do you think the future of Las Vegas is going to be?

I think Las Vegas is just warming up. This is definitely a young man's community and anybody with a little ambition and get-out-and-go will do very well here. Las Vegas is just going. The national studies show that everybody's going to be having more leisure time, and because of that they're going to have time to go places. One of the reasons people don't come to Las Vegas

more today is because they don't have free time to do it; they're too busy. With more leisure time Vegas is just going to really go crazy. Now they've deregulated the price of airplanes and that's cut the price of airplanes and you can see the increase in people flying. I remember at one time only the rich flew. Well, that's not the case anymore. Anybody can fly and everybody is flying. I think you're going to see a big—that airport is going to be the biggest thing to ever happen to Vegas and I'd like to make a comment on that.

I'd like to congratulate our officials with the foresight who haven't taken the position that cities make airports; they have taken the position that airports make cities. And they have kept abreast with our airport and it's been a big factor in our growth here.

Do you think your children have...do you think Las Vegas was a good place for them to grow up?

Oh, I definitely think this has been a great place for them to grow up. It still has that small town-ness and I think that's nice. They have received a good education here. They've made their best friends here. They were all born and raised here, of course. Now two of them are at different universities and my third will be joining one of them soon at Arizona State. I think they have a good home, yes.

[End of recorded interview]

Being interviewed is Al Levy by Martha Zender. The date is March eighth, 1981. The place is 4220 South Maryland, Las Vegas, Nevada.

When did you come to Las Vegas originally?

My family came here in 1943.

What brought you and your family here and where did you come from?

Well, we came from Los Angeles and I was just, of course, a child. My dad came here to open

up a grocery store. He was the general manager. It was called at the time Clark Market at 15th and Fremont Street. They also had another store in Henderson. I came, as I said, as a child and entered grammar school, Fifth Street Grammar School, which is at Las Vegas Boulevard and about Carson where the federal building is today.

At that time when you came how do you remember the development of the city as compared to today?

Well, there was no development of the city. You could count the stoplights on one hand and the casinos. It was basically Fremont Street and, of course, there was the old section of the downtown Las Vegas. My family moved into the brand-new area called Mayfair addition, which was around 15th and Fremont Street, in that area. That was a big new development in the town; that and they had just started Huntridge, which was at Charleston and Maryland Parkway.

Was there any part of the Strip there at that time?

Yes, there were two hotels and it was the El Rancho and the Last Frontier. The El Rancho, of course, burned down and never was replaced, which is at Las Vegas Boulevard and Sahara. And then the Last Frontier is where the Frontier Hotel is today. And that was it.

What has your education been? And maybe if you can tell me a little bit of your education here in Las Vegas particularly.

Sure. As I said, I went to Fifth Street Grammar School. At that time that was the only grammar school. There was no junior high schools here. You went to grammar school through the eighth grade and then you went to high school from ninth through twelfth. The only grammar school, as I said, was Fifth Street Grammar School, and I went through the eighth grade there.

I'll never forget in those days I would be in the eight one, eight two, eight three and eight four or eight five sections. Eight one section were the smarter kids. Eight two, eight three, eight

four and eight five. I bluffed my way through quite a bit and was in the eight one. I was in the one section until they finally caught on and moved me back to the two section.

But then I went to Las Vegas High School. Of course that was the only high school here in Las Vegas. It wasn't until about a year after I graduated when Rancho opened. But when I graduated from high school, there was only one.

Where was this high school?

Well, it's where Las Vegas High is today at Seventh and Bridger. I'll never forget when they built that school I think they almost ran the Board of Education out because the school was built for seven hundred students. They said, "Where the hell are you going to get seven hundred students for Vegas High School?" It was quite a dramatic thing at the time.

Where did your education go? Did you further your education after high school?

I sure did. I graduated Vegas High School and went to University of Southern California and got a degree in business there and then came back to work with my dad in a grocery store. After he had left as manager of the store, he went in partners and bought a grocery store and bought his partners out. He at one time had three grocery stores here in town. They were all independents. I came back to work with him in the stores, which I was doing all the time I was going to college. I would come home in the summertime or when I was in high school, every spare moment I had was to help him in the grocery stores. So when I got through with college, I came back. I was married at the time. I came back to Las Vegas to help him in the stores and did that for about almost ten years. One day I just got tired of it and left and went into the real estate business.

What have your positions been since you've changed to the real estate business?

Well, we started Levy Realty Company almost fifteen years ago. We had a little office on

Paradise Road, only three people with me. Now we've grown to seven offices with approximately eighty associates. We developed one of the larger firms in Las Vegas during that time. And even before that when I was in the grocery business, I was always very active in the community. I sat on a lot of boards. I was the president of JCs. I was president of the Las Vegas Board of Realtors. I was with the YMC, many, many organizations. And now I was appointed and have been elected to the City Commission for the City of Las Vegas.

At the time you started your real estate company, was it rough starting? Was property very high? Have you seen a lot of developments as far as that has gone?

Well, property, of course, at that time was high as it is today. But the prices will continue to rise. There's an old saying, "God created land and they just don't make it anymore." Because of the demand for it as our population continues to grow, there will always be higher prices of land and buying land in this community has always been and always will be a very, very good investment. I've been hearing a lot of people because I put them in properties and they eventually sold; they made a lot of money.

Can you maybe talk about some of the major developments that you have seen take place within the city since you've been here?

Well, of course, most of our major developments in construction have been in the hotel business, which is our number-one business in Las Vegas, our tourist industry. As I said, when I first came here we had the little El Rancho Vegas and the Last Frontier Hotel, which I think between the two of them probably didn't have four hundred, five hundred rooms. And there was the El Cortez downtown. We were a very sleepy community with a lot of potential. Then, of course, the Flamingo came and then it started. Like I say, when I came here I bet you there wasn't a total of fifteen hundred rooms in our whole community. Now we're at close to fifty thousand rooms.

So you can see what's grown there.

We've had a lot of residential development and a lot of, of course, office space and commercial shopping centers. Shopping...you couldn't shop almost in Las Vegas when my family first moved here. There were very few decent stores. I remember Ronzone's, which is now Diamonds, was downtown. JCPenney's and Sears and Roebuck were downtown on Fremont Street. I think there was one elevator. There was only one building three stories tall when I first came here and that was the Sears and Roebuck Building at Seventh and Fremont, which is owned by Centel now and is right across from the El Cortez.

There have been so many changes. I remember when Sahara was called San Francisco and Tropicana was Bond Road and Paradise was the old L.A. Highway. Paradise Road was the original highway to Los Angeles.

The growth here has just been sensational, unbelievable. When I went to college in 1951, I'll never forget going to a football game. Notre Dame was playing USC in the Coliseum and they had over a hundred thousand people there. I always remember commenting to myself, "That's more than three times the population of my whole community." It was unbelievable. But it's just warming up. With the potential of the MX missile coming into our valley and just the ordinary growth that we're going to have, we'll be a million people very shortly, both in my lifetime and yours.

You mentioned to me about the stores. I think you were referring to mainly clothing stores.

Well, yeah, your retail stores, yeah.

Do you also (confidence) like in grocery stores and supermarkets and food stores?

No, because the grocery stores could get almost any groceries they needed from California. We

at the time were a member of a co-op of grocery stores. What we would do is we would order from Los Angeles and they would bring it up once or twice a week in their trucks. So if you wanted a specific item, we would order it for you. We had no problem getting groceries up here. We had all that. Of course, the only difference in our prices from Northern California was the fact that we had to charge the freight, which everything is charged up here. As you know, there's very few things manufactured in our community. So almost everything that is done here has to be freighted in. Just working towards that, getting the right price on freight.

What has happened with your father's grocery store now? Is it still in operation?

Well, the first store that my dad owned was called the Market Spot; it was at Second and Carson Street right across the street from the courthouse. That store is now where the Golden Nugget parking lot is; it's that high-rise parking garage right across the street. At the time I think there were three or four major grocery stores in the community. One was, of course, the Market Spot. Across the street was a Safeway. Where the Golden Nugget main entrance is into the hotel section; that's where the Safeway was. Then, of course, there was a grocery store, as I indicated before that my dad originally came here with, which was at 15th and Fremont, called Clark Market. There was a grocery at Eighth and Fremont called Food Center, which we eventually purchased. That was about it. There was no chains here except for Safeway.

We worked very hard. The family put in seven days a week and many, many hours and not much vacation time. We gave a lot of credit to the railroaders. We used to have a lot of the old railroaders shopping at our store. As I said, my dad would give them an awful lot of credit and then they would pay every two weeks when they got paid. We used to know everybody by name. It was a real lot of fun here.

I remember growing up there weren't very many swimming pools. No one had a

swimming pool in their backyard. So where we used to swim at—there were a couple of places we swam at. We used to swim at Fifth and Fremont. Las Vegas Boulevard and Fremont there was a place called the Mermaid. In those days—you might not even know what the word *polio* is. In those days there was a real fright of the parents of their children getting polio, which was a very contagious disease that would come out during the summertime. Of course, it was a crippling disease. They cured it I think in the '50s. As I said, you and my children don't even really understand the scary or the feeling of having polio. But in those days it was serious. We used to call that Polio Palace because of the fact that it was a very contagious disease that could infest at the Mermaid Pool. And then if we got ambitious, we would ride our bikes, which was quite a haul in those days, out to Twin Lakes. Twin Lakes had a great big swimming pool that we would go swim at. Once in a while if things were really right, we would go out to the El Rancho or Frontier or when the Flamingo was built and swim in their pools, but that wasn't very often. That was it. As I said, I don't remember any of my friends except maybe the Binions having a swimming pool in Las Vegas. No one had a swimming pool in their backyard as it is today.

Do you remember as a child going out of the city with your friends or with your family, like going into other parts of the Nevada, to Reno or Lake Tahoe?

Not very often. When you traveled here in those days there was no air-conditioning in your cars. Even going to Los Angeles, there wasn't a freeway and it was about a twelve-hour trip and you could only go at certain hours of the day. You wouldn't dare drive in the summertime and leave here at nine o'clock in the morning. You just wouldn't do it because your car wouldn't make it. So you didn't do that much traveling. But when you did you leave late at night or you'd make it so that you'd go in the coolest part of the day. Of course, I didn't do much traveling when I was a

kid.

I remember my first experience with Reno or the rest of the state was at the high school basketball playoffs. So we would have and we still have today the State Championships. Most of the time it was held in Reno because they had the only decent gymnasium to have it at. Once in a while, they'd have it down south here. Now, of course, every other year it's down here or up there. But I'll never forget going to that.

Also, I went to Boys State. I was able to through the American Legion program. I met a lot of guys from Reno and I am still friendly with some of those guys.

Where was that held?

That at that time was held at the University of Nevada dorms and in their facilities. I don't know where it is held today. My son went a few years ago. He was able to go to Boys State. I forgot to—I guess it's still held at the university up there.

When you traveled, like when you went to college and so on, would you travel mainly by car or what form of transportation would you use?

Well, we would travel mostly by car. Once in a while on emergencies I'd fly for...I think it was about fifteen dollars round-trip, back and forth. Then I remember taking the train from time to time. Of course, that was about a twelve-, fourteen-hour trip when I was going to college because it would stop. From Los Angeles to Las Vegas it would make, oh, twelve or fourteen stops. I know you don't think there are fourteen places in between, but there really basically are, the milk run they would call it. It would take so long. It was a very unenjoyable trip.

But, of course, by the time I got to college they started putting air-conditioning in cars and the freeway was being worked on and worked on. Eventually, of course, we got a complete freeway and it's a four-and-a-half-, five-hour drive now, no big deal.

Do you remember like in the olden days—

Watch it.

—taking advantage of the Strip and different entertainment down there or playing in the casinos, even as a child watching other people play?

Sure. Gaming was never fascinating to me and it still isn't. I'm very bored by gaming. So I personally...the gaming aspect of it never really got around that much. But seeing the floor shows, I remember we used to have a teenage club here. As I said, there was only one high school. It was called the Wildcat Lair and every Friday and Saturday night they would have a dance there. That was a place where the fellows would go and bum money from everybody and end up at the drive-in. Or we sometimes if we had a date, we'd go out to a floor show. I know many a time I'd go out there with a date to see Vic Damone or The Weavers or somebody with seventy-five cents in my pocket and we'd have two Cokes and two bits for the waitress and everybody was happy. We did that many a night, had a reservation to see one of those shows, Friday and Saturdays. It was always available for us. We had a lot of fun in those days. As I said, the teenage club.

I remember we used to enjoy Helldorado. It used to be a community event. They used to have the old jail where if you didn't wear whiskers or have one of these buttons, the Elks would throw you in this jail. They'd go right in your place of business and pull you right out of there and throw you in this hoosegow they'd have, all in fun and raising money. They used to have three or four parades and they were comparable to the Rose Parade. The beauty parade, the one they called the Beauty Parade. They'd have a Children's Parade, which we'd always be involved in. Then they had the Old Timers' Parade, which was horses; you were allowed no cars, really a great parade. Then they'd have what they called the Beauty Parade where all the hotels and main

businesses in the community would sponsor these beautiful floats. They were, as I said, comparable to the Rose Parade as it is today, not as long, but it was beautiful.

Where was that held? Was that on the Strip, Las Vegas Boulevard?

No. It was held downtown. It was always down Fremont Street. Then the Helldorado grounds was at Las Vegas Boulevard and Bonanza. Las Vegas Boulevard in those days was called Fifth Street, by the way, not Las Vegas Boulevard. Sometimes through this interview I might mention, I'll say, Fifth Street rather than Las Vegas Boulevard, but that's all the same, the Strip.

Do you remember that changing? How did that change occur?

I think it was Chamber of Commerce got the idea. They also changed Second Street to Casino Center. Those streets were all changed chamberwise, I guess, or the downtown merchants just to get a little fancier as we went on. I remember those parades vividly. We used to have a lot of fun with the parades and Helldorado. Everybody wore western. You just wore it, period, that was it. Everybody got into the Helldorado celebration. It was a lot of fun.

When was this held?

Well, it's still held as it is today in May, about three or four days in May. Of course, they'd build up to it. As I said, they'd have dances and the Elks would put it on. Most everybody in Las Vegas was an Elk, a very important organization. They start having on weekends before Helldorado, they start having these parties on Fremont Street and they'd block it off and have dances and everybody got with the program. It was really a community event. Of course, there wasn't television and there wasn't the power of the Strip as we know it is today. It was really a much smaller community.

When did you join the Elks?

I never joined the Elks.

Oh, you didn't?

No. My dad was an Elk, but I was never an Elk.

Did you belong to any organizations or what organizations (inaudible)?

Well, I'm a Mason and a Shriner. I've been in there over twenty-five years in that organization.

Of course, as I said, I'm on the Board of Realtors. I was on the YMCA board here and Boy Scouts. I've always been active with that Boy Scouting group.

You mentioned about the city commissioner.

Yes.

What other city positions have you held?

No. I sit on one of their boards, the citizen—the Solicitation Review Board, but that was for just about a year. No, I ran for office and was elected to city commission. It's been very rewarding and a lot of work. We sit on the health board and we sit on the police commission and a couple of boards like that. I'm involved with the Nevada Development Authority and the Chamber of Commerce. I'm very active in those organizations. Things are really coming along there. They're working very hard, particularly Nevada Development Authority, involved with the proposed MX (inaudible).

You spoke of yourself growing up as a child here. How did you view raising family in Las Vegas because you've raised a family here?

I sure have. I've raised four children here who are now either in college or out of college. I think it's a great place to raise a family. Las Vegas is—still we got a little hokey about it, which is nice. It still does have a little community spirit behind it. I've always felt it's a very nice community to raise a family.

The Strip to me is like a different world. I treat the Strip as if the Ford Motor Company

came here and opened up a plant. It is strictly a place of employment. I can't afford and do not go to see many shows. It's a special occasion for me to see a show. But if I came here as a tourist, I know I'd see a show. I just got back from Washington, D.C. and you see all the tourist sites if you've never seen them before, or wherever you go. Well, the Strip, of course, at a show there are tourists there. I think it's really a great tourist place. It's really a great place to come here and visit. But that's our factory. That hotel is our factory and employs so many people. We, of course, need more factories for more employment. That's how I treat the hotels and I think my kids have pretty much done the same. We have our normal life just like anybody else has if I lived here or if I lived in any other community.

I'm in the real estate business. We show homes and sell homes or properties just like anyplace else. The thing we have got going here, maybe because we're part of the Sunbelt of the United States, we've had great demands for continuous growth here in our community. That's probably made my business a lot better than some areas. But other than that Las Vegas is just like any place else.

As I said, you just don't go to the hotels, not that I want to stay away from them, but I mean it's just not my favorite place to go. Last night I went to the basketball game. I'm a big booster of the university, (inaudible) athletics. I'm on the booster club; I'm on the board of directors of that. I've always been a big pusher of the university. I love it. I'm sure it's going to continue to grow and be twenty, thirty thousand students within the next few years.

Would you like to tell me about some of the city leaders you've involved with?

Well, the first mayor I remember was Ernie Cragin, who owned the El Portal Theatre and also was involved with Cragin and Pike Insurance. Of course, in my day I remember he was a pretty good-size man and a very popular mayor and he was mayor for quite some time and did an

outstanding job. As I said, he had the El Portal Theatre downtown and you'd always see him there.

After him was C.D. Baker, who was also in the real estate business and was a land surveyor originally. We've had some good leadership within our community. C.D. was a very fine man.

And, of course, Mayor Gragson sat as mayor for sixteen years. I'll never forget the stories about him and his speech problem. As you might know, Mayor Gragson stutters. He's always had that problem; and, yet, he's distinguished and a very, very popular man to be mayor for sixteen years and have to run on your record and you have to make decisions, which we have to do every day and really affects the local people. To stay popular and be a mayor, it's quite a task. Of course, he did an outstanding job.

What I like about Nevada, Las Vegas is the fact when I talk to people who come to our community, they've never met their mayors. They've never met their governor. I'm sure that you've probably met Bob List or had an opportunity to. I know he's been at the university many a times, or whoever, Grant Sawyer or Mike O'Callaghan who were our governors. You get on a one-on-one name basis with them so easy. You don't find that in any community. You don't find that everybody knows Jerry Brown in California on a one-to-one basis, by first name. You'll never see them in the four years that they're governor. Here, you turn around and there they are, first name basis. It's very simple to know these people. I guess that's the one thing I like about it, about Nevada. They'll go knocking door to door. I know I do in my races. On the people who live in my district, I knock on their door and ask for their vote on a one-on-one basis. It's a first-name situation. It's really great.

What got you interested in campaigns when you were involved with the city to sit on the

council?

As I've said, I've always been involved in the community ever since I actually moved back after college. I was always involved through JCs and meeting people and I felt I could help and I think I have helped the community in the little over two years I've been on the board. It's a lot of time and every once in a while it's rewarding in the fact that you're able to do something, accomplish something such as breaking ground this spring for Cashman Field, the new complex that will be built there. I feel that I put a lot of effort out to get that accomplished and making this a better place to live or continuing to make this a great place to live. We've had a lot of problems, the money crunch and what's going to be in the future of money is going to keep us going quite some time. We're going to have that problem for a long time.

How do you feel the JCs and other organizations that you've been involved in have helped in creating Las Vegas to be a better city?

Well, the JCs...I don't know if you're very familiar with that organization. It's a young man's organization. In fact, when you're thirty-five they throw you out. It's probably one of the organizations that helped me the most. They do a lot of work. They have a lot of fun. Sometimes the public only sees the fun that they have, and the parties probably get as much notoriety as their work that they accomplish. But they work very hard. I've met some lasting friends through the organization. If it hadn't been for them, I'd still probably be at the grocery store working eight to six in the evening and not expanding myself. They helped me stand up and speak and fight for things that were right. They don't do it very classy, but you do learn. Once I was president of the JCs and got through that I felt that I could be president of almost any organization and it's proven that way. They gave me a lot of training. They showed me how to set up committees and set up myself that I can be the chairman of a thing and being able to

delegate authority rather than doing it all yourself. It was really a great organization to be part of.

Do you think it mainly helped you personally or can you see advantages that it was to the community as a whole?

Well, it helped me very, very much, as I said. Of course, the bottom line is that we were doing something for the community. In other words, whatever it may be, like building a park, they have a JC park down here. That was started I think when I was vice president of the organization. We decided we were going to build a city park and we raised funds to develop that park. It's the same way with whatever else they've done. I know that at one time we were very instrumental in getting a zoo started out at Tule Springs Park. Then a zoological committee within the community was formed and they took it over from us, which is fine. It's the way the JCs want to work. Of course, they went down. But they've done a lot of good works. They're the ones who caused the road to Mount Charleston to be paved. At the time they got out there and made sure that there was enough car count on that road to create the road to Mount Charleston to be paved. They've had some great projects over the years. As I talked about polio earlier, they were the ones that distributed the vaccine in this community. Knock on wood, there hasn't been any polio in the community since. They actually spent many a weekend just committing in giving those shots and they were getting it done. This community should be very grateful to them for that. I remember that.

Do you remember many of the children actually having polio or do you remember—

We would have our ways, yeah. I had some friends come down with polio, some not as drastic. I don't know if you remember; I'm sure you had them in history books, when you see them in the iron lungs. It was a very crippling disease for youngsters. It was actually a scary thing for

parents to think that your child could come down with it. I mean it was terrifying.

How were medical organizations in those days (inaudible) and so on in the community?

There weren't any. There were only GPs, general practitioners in those days. I remember my sister living here and actually went to Los Angeles to have her first child delivered because there wasn't the baby doctor or a woman's doctor here, not one, only general practice doctors. We only had Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital; that was the only hospital in the community. In the '50s the doctors started coming and I think right now we probably have a variety of doctors in this community as any place in the world. We've got a fine group of young doctors who come here. I'm really tickled about that.

So if you needed medical attention, you were pretty well referred to the Los Angeles area?

Any type of special things, yes. As I said, there were no specials here. There were no doctors to handle anything of high specialty at all, at all.

That's a long way to go.

Well, it was in those days. But I mean that was—in the '50s the doctors started to come, coming strong. As I said, today I think you can have anything done.

After you were so-called kicked out of JCs, what organization did you participate in?

Well, after the JCs I took a little break and then I got involved with the Board of Realtors. As I said, I went through basically chairs there and was president in the early '70s, '70-74. I was involved, of course, in the Chamber of Commerce. I was a lot more active in the Shrine and Masonic Order at that time and involved in National Conference of Christians and Jews, just all the normal wards here, Lions Club and all that type of situation.

I was wondering if you'd like to tell me a little bit about your religious background and upbringing.

Yeah, I'd be more than happy to. I'm of a Jewish faith. When I first came here in the community, just like anything else, there were very few. In fact, I think they were like five or six Jewish kids in the whole school when I first came here. When you're thirteen years old, you have what they call bar mitzvahs for the males, which is a celebration after the boy has studied and so-called has become a man. Well, we didn't have anybody to teach us that and I had to go to Los Angeles. I went to Los Angeles for six weeks and I had my training down there because there was nobody here at all.

I really didn't know very much about my religion at all until I went to Los Angeles when I went to college. Religion was not a grouping here at all in those days. There were the Mormons kids. The Mormon religion was very heavy here. Everybody went to everybody's churches. The community was too small. Religion or the racial issues were not involved at all. We didn't do any bussing. We only had one school. So we didn't have to worry about high school bussing or Fifth Street Grammar School bussing because there was only one school. We didn't have any religious or racial problems at all.

So you didn't feel discriminated against?

We didn't. Nobody at all. My best friends...Richard Wells, who happened to be a good Mormon boy; Jim Pico, Jim was Catholic; and Sam Ward, he was I think a Methodist. I didn't really know; I didn't really care because—no. (Inaudible).

At the time that you were in grade school and also in high school, do you remember going to school with any black children?

Oh, sure. Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had a bunch of blacks in our school. Like I said, we didn't have that problem. Like when Ronald Reagan was saying he didn't realize there was a black problem, that's kind of how we looked at it. We only had one school and whoever the best man was for

anything or whatever they were doing, then that's who got it. I never felt—never treated as such.

Was there pretty well one residential area where everyone lived or were like a lot of people separated around the surrounding areas of the town, what you might call it today?

Well, we did and do have our black ghetto, the Westside area. From Bonanza north and from Main Street west was the black ghetto. But there were a lot of whites at that time living there as well as Mexicans. What we did and the Chicano area did have, they lived. But no, we didn't have—everybody just lived around downtown Las Vegas. Very little homes west of the tracks. Nothing southwest. Just a few people lived on West Charleston. Most of the people lived east. Except for Huntridge, which was the new district as I indicated before was started in the '50s—I mean '40s and where I lived on Mayfair, which was started in the '40s, everybody actually lived between that and downtown Vegas. From Charleston north and from I would say Maryland Parkway west, that was where everybody lived.

Getting back to your religion, you said you didn't know too much about it as a child. So there wasn't a synagogue in Las Vegas?

No, not until I got back in town they started one.

When you say back to town, is that when you came back—

When I came back after college, excuse me, which was in the mid '50s. That's when they actually had started a new building at Carson and 13th Street. They sold it to the Greek Church when they built the new one. At that time they finally got a full-time rabbi in. That's when the community was growing, as I said, in the '50s when the whole town was exploding in every direction. My son, of course, has gone through his religious training here when he was a kid.

When you say to the church—

Yeah, all the trainers, right.

Do you remember as a child your family, did you carry most of your religious devotions in the home?

My mother, of course, was very religious when we moved here and she would do some, yes.

Then, of course, during what we call our High Holidays, we would bring in a rabbi from Los Angeles who would conduct the services at the Elks Club or at some hall that we could obtain.

Of course, as I said, once a year we had this main High Holidays and all the people would come.

All the people on the Strip would be very active in it.

Besides the holidays, would you ever get together with any of the other Jewish families in the community?

Oh, sure. Yeah. It's a natural thing to be close to them and I had some friends. Of course, one of my closest, dearest friend today is a guy named Rudy Menison who lives in California and was a year ahead of me in school. We were very close and still are, always will be. We both went to USC together and were in the same fraternity. We've always been close.

Unless you have anything else to say...?

Whatever you'd like.

(Inaudible.)

[End of recorded interview]