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ORAL INTERVIEW

of

LEE HENRY LISBY

Edited by

Elizabeth Nelson Patrick
and
Rita O'Brien

Transcribed for the project
Black Experience in Southern Nevada
Donated Tapes Collection, James R. Dickinson Library
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
June, 1978

ABSTRACT

LEE HENRY LISBY, 1902-

Mr. Lisby, born in Louisiana, is a retired saw mill worker, truck driver, construction laborer, and hotel porter. He narrates his experiences in Las Vegas from 1942 to 1975. He was a union man.

Mr. Lisby tells of living conditions in Las Vegas in the forties when he first came to the city. His first housing was an old Army hospital tent, and then he built a house. He explains how he coped with the extreme heat, sand storms, and unpaved streets.

Mr. Lisby, though a poor man, relates how through hard work and good investment of his limited funds he was able to accrue property and came to own several apartment units.

Mr. Lisby tells of his early attempts to receive an education in Louisiana. All his ten children graduated from high school in Las Vegas; several of them attended college; and a daughter graduated from Howard University.

Mr. Lisby, an infrequent gambler because of his family responsibilities, mentions the Last Frontier, El Rancho, the Red Rooster, and Club Bingo. He says Blacks were not allowed in those clubs and were limited to finding entertainment on the Westside at the Cotton Club, Harlem Club, and El Morocco.

Collectors: Glen E. Davis
July 10, 1975

Rita O'Brien
April 10, 1978

Elizabeth Patrick
May 10, 1978

INTRODUCTION

Lee Henry Lisby is a Black man who came to southern Nevada for the first time in 1942. He is one of a number of young Black men who came to Nevada from Tallulah, Louisiana, in the early forties to find work and opportunity. After earning a stake, he originally planned to return to his home in Louisiana to live permanently. He found the money he earned in Las Vegas in 1942 was soon spent in Louisiana, and he returned to Las Vegas again in 1943. Returning to Louisiana a second time, he again soon depleted his savings. With no good job prospects in Louisiana, and at the urging of his wife who wanted a warmer winter climate, the Lisbys and their five children made a permanent move to Las Vegas in 1944.

Although a very poor man with limited education, Mr. Lisby, by his hard work, sense of responsibility, willingness to learn, and skill in investment with his small capital came to own property: two homes in Las Vegas; several apartment units in Las Vegas; and an acre home site in Tallulah, Louisiana. Today in retirement, he has a large, very comfortable home on the Westside. His children have had opportunities their father never dreamed of. All ten of them have graduated from Las Vegas High School; several of them have attended college, and a daughter is a graduate of Howard University.

At seventy-six Mr. Lisby is a tall, straight, handsome man; his physique and large, calloused hands give positive evidence of the life of hard manual labor that has been his, and his observations are a reflection of that experience. Descriptions of his personal experience on the trip from Tallulah and his life in the tent on his arrival in Las Vegas are interesting vignettes of the Black experience in Las Vegas. Researchers should compare his observations with others of the time.

Mr. Lisby was a most cooperative participant in the project, and he and Mrs. Lisby were gracious hosts in their home where the interviews took place. Mr. Lisby participated in three interviews. The first of these, a class project in Nevada history, was conducted by student Glen Ette Davis on July 10, 1975. After transcription of the tape, to elucidate certain details, two more interviews were made by project editors Rita O'Brien (April 10, 1978) and Elizabeth Patrick (May 10, 1978). Those interviews have been incorporated in the transcript at the appropriate places. A picture of Mr. Lisby accompanies the transcript.

Differences in the tape and transcription of the interview occur because the typed version has been edited for easier reading. Repetitions and false starts have been eliminated. In some instances, a word or phrase has been added for clarity or correction and enclosed in brackets. There are omissions in the transcript which occurred when the speaker turned from the microphone, was interrupted, or had a lapse of memory.

Mr. Lisby's interview is part of a series of interviews in the Donated Tapes Collection of the James R. Dickinson Library of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The transcription and editing of the interview have been supported in part by a grant to Dickinson Library administered by the U. S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare through the Nevada State Library; Project Director, Harold H. J. Erickson; Assistant Director, Anna Dean Kepper. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education and no official endorsement by the U. S. Office of Education should be inferred.

A copy of the transcript will be available at the West Las Vegas Branch of the Clark County Library District and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York. A bibliography of Black Experience in Southern Nevada will be distributed statewide.

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Elizabeth Nelson Patrick
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1978



Davis: Mr. Lisby, were you born here in Southern Nevada?

Lisby: No, I wasn't.

Davis: What state were you born in?

Lisby: Louisiana.

Davis: What did you do when you were in Louisiana? How long did you live there?

Lisby: Well, I lived there all my days. I farmed until I got to a certain age and I started timber working. Saw mills.

Davis: In what city was that?

Lisby: That was Tallulah, Louisiana.

Davis: How long did you work in the saw mills?

Lisby: Well, the whole total I must have put in close to thirty years there, out and in. When they was down, I was off; when they was working, I was working. But it didn't run steady all week.

Davis: What year did you leave Louisiana and come out to Nevada?

Lisby: In 1942, about the twentieth of September.

Davis: When you came to Nevada, did you come directly to Las Vegas?

Lisby: Directly to Las Vegas.

Davis: How was Las Vegas when you moved here? What was the town like?

Lisby: It was cold. You had to sleep on the ground on a piece of newspaper or be where somebody lived. No place to rent.

David: What were the people like? Were there a lot of Blacks here?

Lisby: Oh yeah, it was thousands of Blacks here and nowhere to sleep.

Davis: What did you do? Where did you live when you first came here?

Lisby: Well, when I first live here, I got a room in a GI hospital tent. Suppose to be forty feet long and fourteen feet wide and they had little one-man cots lined up on both sides. No heater, no cooler, nothing, winter and summer.

Davis: How long did you live in that GI tent?

Lisby: Well, I lived in there until it burned down. Must been part of two years.

[Mr. Lisby further described tent living to Rita O'Brien]

Lisby: I stayed in a tent owned by Roy Lucas. He's from Phoenix, Arizona. He charged us \$7.00 a man a week and that included board. He had a little cafe right by in a house trailer. They'd have a meal call and out we'd go. There were no medicine cabinets in there, just an orange crate aside your cot and a sack underneath. You could leave your wallet and watch on there and nobody would steal. Once there was a bad bunch that come in and stayed ahwile. One of them stole my jumper. He worked in it, washed it and gave it back to me. No harm. That tent, I think I was in it eleven months. It finally burned down. I wasn't in it at the time. When I came back, it was gone. The stakes that used to tie the canvas down was rotted--made good tinder. And it was so dry. So they held the side of the tent down with piles of rocks. If you dropped a cigarette or a candle, it couldn't roll out. It would just lay there and catch. I think what happened was some cigar caught on that rotted stakes. I came with ten men, but only three stayed.

Elijah Robinson. He was in the tent with me. Now he's sick in the Old Folks' Home in Las Vegas. [April 1978]

Dave Simon. He's an apartment owner in Las Vegas.

Reverend M. G. Gilbert. He was a preacher here in Las Vegas.

Speed Robinson. Now he owned the car and he was doing fine running folks back and forth both ways from Las Vegas to Tallulah. He made that run regular. I'd see him ever so often. And he made himself a bundle. Five fellows a trip at fifty dollars a head, why that's \$250.00 a trip. He's still in Tallulah.

O'Brien: Mr. Lisby, how did you come to work in Las Vegas?

Lisby: A little fellow, about four foot eleven--I can't remember his name--used to work at the saw mill in Tallulah with me. When the mill closed down, his new boss, a White fellow, told him how easy the work was and how high the pay was on defense sites. This boss--I can't remember his name either--traveled all over the country looking at these defense projects. This new boss told him that men at Henderson, Nevada, made ten dollars a day. Do you have any idea how much ten dollars was in those days? That's fifty a week. Why, compared to the mill, we thought nobody could make that. But this little guy worked at the ore plant in Henderson and he had over a thousand dollars when he came back to Tallulah. Well, we thought he stole it. And someone else say, "He gambled for it. He just got lucky!" But we finally agreed that this little fellow didn't know how to steal or gamble that well. And he went back out west again. And he wrote

us and told us he was still making fifty dollars a week. We said we didn't believe him. So he sent us a fifty dollar bill in the mail. And why then we believed him.

Well, I couldn't find no work that paid like that in Louisiana, so I said to myself, "If this little guy can make that much, me, tall and strong as I am, I should be able to make even better! So we went out, twelve of us from the saw mill in two '36 Chevrolets. A fellow named Speed Robinson drove six of us, the car I was in. And oh, did he drive!

Sometime we have trouble getting gas in Texas. It was during the war, but he always did get some and we'd travel on. We each gave him fifty dollars to drive us out. It was better than train fare, and we had a good time. One fellow, all he did was hop out and get some peach brandy. And we'd eat and get back in again and directly he'd get to telling stories, and singing, and then he'd fall asleep. Each time he'd close his eyes, why I'd sneak that old bottle from his hip pocket, have a nip, and pass it around. And we'd leave him about a swallow. Then he'd wake up and find us singing and telling stories. Why he'd have to stop and get him some more. And don't you know, after that, he got him two peach brandies.

Davis: Were you ever in the service before you moved here?

Lisby: Service? No, I wasn't.

Davis: When you left the GI building did you start your own home?

Lisby: Yeah, I bought a little, small shack. It was about run-down. And I drug it over and bought land, and I drug it over on my lot. And I stayed there until I built a house.

- Davis: While you were building your house, did you work here in Las Vegas?
- Lisby: Oh, yeah, I was working at the MacNeil Ore Plant.
- Davis: MacNeil Oil Plant?
- Lisby: Ore plant. That's where they make the ore up north of Henderson, going toward the lake. I know you see those building sitting there now.
- Davis: What did your job consist of? What did you have to do?
- Lisby: Oh, I was just a laborer.
- Davis: Did you drive any machinery or anything like that?
- Lisby: No, I was working there just picking up the ore that falls off the belt. They had to fire it with sulphur.
- Davis: What other type of people worked at the ore plant?
- Lisby: Well, all kinds: Blacks, Mexican, Whites. A very strong, stout, White woman by the name of Cooks worked at metaling and smutting at the MacNeil Ore Plant. She wore overalls like all the rest and she never begged for a helping hand. She was tall and strong. Her husband was in the service and she was working while he was away.
- Davis: Were there any Chinese people that worked there?
- Lisby: I don't remember. I don't remember seeing any Chinese people.
- Davis: Do you remember any names of the people that owned the company?
- Lisby: Oh, that was just a company (garbled) making ore.
- Davis: Do you remember how long you worked there in that ore plant?
- Lisby: Near as I can get at it, must have been about five or six months.
- Davis: And when you left there, where did you go? You still had your

Davis: home that you were starting?

Lisby: I was building on the home all the time.

Davis: Then where did you go?

Lisby: The next job I got after that was for Home Lumber.

Davis: And how long did you stay there?

Lisby: I stayed there five years and two months.

Davis: How many times have you moved while you were here in Las Vegas?

Lisby: Let me see, it must have been three times. I moved out of the tent and that little home I was living in until I built mine; I moved from there. I stayed there from '44 to '68. I moved from there in '68 here.

Davis: Was your family with you when you first came to Las Vegas?

Lisby: No, my family wasn't with me; nobody was with me.

Davis: How many years was it before the rest of your family joined you?

Lisby: The next year. I came here in '42 and moved my family here in '44.

Davis: Did you have any children?

Lisby: I had five children when I came here and I had five born here.

Davis: Were they school age? Did they attend school here?

Lisby: Two of them was school age when they first came here.

Davis: Can you remember what school they went to?

Lisby: Westside School.

Davis: Elementary? It was Westside Elementary?

Lisby: On Washington and D, between D and B on Washington.

Davis: Was it just torn down?

Lisby: It's still down there.

- Davis: Westside Elementary? Is it still called Westside Elementary?
- Lisby: Oh, it's used for different things; I guess it will be called the same.
- Davis: Let's go back to when you were working and you left the lumber company. Where did you work then?
- Lisby: Well, I worked at construction.
- Davis: Was it out of the city or did you work building houses?
- Lisby: Yea, building houses all around in the city.
- Davis: They were residential? Did you work on any other building, the hotels or anything like that, or was it just residential?
- Lisby: I hauled lumber to the Desert Inn, Flamingo, Last Frontier, Thunderbird.
- Davis: Can you remember what year that was started?
- Lisby: (Garbled) in '45, somewhere along in March or April.
- Davis: Was the Strip there when they started that?
- Lisby: Well, this wasn't on the Strip. Wasn't but two hotels there; that was the Last Frontier and the El Rancho and another little place, wasn't too large, called the Red Rooster.
- Davis: Were they big buildings and fancy like they are now, or were they just plain old . . . ?
- Lisby: El Rancho? No. That was just a little run down building with a casino--no great big building whatever. Just a one-story building.
- Davis: Was it popular? Did they have a casino? Was there a lot of gambling?
- Lisby: Yeah, a casino. Well, I gambled on the Strip--Last Frontier and El Rancho.

Davis: When you were still at hauling lumber, what other hotels were going up?

Lisby: Well, Desert Inn and Flamingo. Thunderbird and Sahara was called Club Bingo--they was going. Club Bingo, that was Sahara.

Davis: Have you noticed a great deal of change in the way the hotels are run now from what they were when you were helping getting them started?

Lisby: Oh, yeah. At that time it wasn't no union. And they claimed about \$7.00 a shift was all you could make. I never worked there, but most people ran about \$7.00 a shift. But most of them said they made more money. People give them more, and you could pick up more.

Davis: With the tips?

Lisby: Tips, yeah.

Davis: Was there a lot of tourists? Were they coming in as soon as the hotels were built?

Lisby: They was coming in all the time. They had just completed the dam. Most peoples come to look at the Boulder Dam, and they stop down at the hotels for (garbled).

Davis: The hotels just started springing up, or was it slow when they started building?

Lisby: Well, a lot of them started, but it took them a good while to complete it.

Davis: Was you engaged in church activities?

Lisby: Well, a little, but not like as much as I used to.

Davis: Can you remember any special people that visited Las Vegas? Like, have there been any presidents come or anybody like that that you can remember?

- Lisby: No, I don't remember. I believe President Kennedy was about the only president to come here often. You could get to see him close like anybody else.
- Davis: What about gambling? Was it considered a recreational activity for you and your family, or did you engage in any at all?
- Lisby: Oh, no, it wasn't. It wasn't nowhere on the Strip, downtown. (Garbled) you could take was on this Westside.
- Davis: They didn't allow Blacks in any other casinos?
- Lisby: You could only go in and cash a check.
- Davis: What was some of the clubs that the Blacks had on the Westside? Did they have any close to the downtown area where the others were?
- Lisby: No, they had the El Morocco, the old El Morocco, and the Cotton Club; [that's] about all here. Well, the Harlem [Club] was here, back in '42 and '43, and after that they put in the El Morocco and the Cotton Club.
- Davis: Were you a member of any type of social clubs or organizations that may have sone something for the city?
- Lisby: No, I wasn't.
- Davis: What about any Black organizations? Did they have something like the NAACP for Blacks that would help them get jobs?
- Lisby: Well, they had, but they didn't make much out of it. Back in the time when I first came here, you could go get any jobs like laboring. You could be sent out three times a day; [there] there was just that much work going, but after a while, the work shut off.
- Davis: Were you here during World War II?

Lisby: Yeah.

Davis: Can you remember how the city was? Was it affected by the war in any way? Like, for food or things? Was there hard times?

Lisby: No, it wasn't.

Davis: No? The city just went on the way it usually . . .

Lisby: Some kind of job was for you all the time.

Davis: And it didn't seem to be affected at all?

Lisby: After the war was over, the times--things got tight.

Davis: After the war?

Lisby: After the war was over.

Davis: In what ways? Was it hard to find work then or buy things or what?

Lisby: It was because they was letting people out of the service and the serviceman would pick up the job.

Davis: They tended to hire the service people first?

Lisby: Yeah.

Davis: During the war, can you remember any blackouts or anything that happened to the city because of it?

Lisby: No, I never (garbled). The only blackouts they have like a couple of big hail storms. Right now, once in a while lights go out.

Davis: But nothing because of the war?

Lisby: No, I don't remember.

Davis: What about the testing? Was the Test Site . . .

Lisby: The Test Site never started until the fifties. 1954. Must have been about in the fifties before the Test Site started.

- Davis: Can you remember how they were testing the bombs? They started testing above ground, didn't they?
- Lisby: They were above ground, yeah.
- Davis: How did that affect the city?
- Lisby: Well, the first one was shot broke glasses, wrecked some buildings.
- Davis: Can you remember how long they tested above ground?
- Lisby: No, I don't exactly remember, but it must have been several years before they got this underground testing.
- Davis: When they started testing underground, you really couldn't tell? Did it affect it at all?
- Lisby: No, didn't make much vibration.
- Davis: Did the city get any trembles?
- Lisby: Well, there used to be a little shake. Somebody would know what time that they'd shoot and you'd be looking for it; you could find it. But if you wasn't thinking about it, whenever something happened some time that day, you still didn't know what it was.
- Davis: What changes have you noticed in Las Vegas since you first arrived? Can you compare it to the way it was when you first got here to the way it is now? What big changes have occurred?
- Lisby: When I first bought property, the taxes were around just a few dollars per year. But I know since I've been here, I've paid a dollar twenty-five or so a day.
- Davis: What other changes, besides taxes, in the economy?
- Lisby: On the Westside where I live, I think I must have lived there fourteen years before we got blacktop.

Davis: Well, how was the streets made?

Lisby: Just a little drain on each side. Come a big rain, you'd park the car and the next morning you were stuck. (laughter)
Out on the street, what we called the street, if it rained like that the other day, why you was all the way stuck.

Davis: Was the road packed with rocks or just sand?

Lisby: Just rocks just graded out level. That's all they had.
Graded out and a little drain on each side.

Davis: How were the houses on the Westside?

Lisby: Cold, on the Westside. People were building out there. People been here a long time; they'd never had nothing but old adobe houses built out of this clay mud. A lot of them was on the Westside.

Davis: Can you describe the first type of place that you lived in when you came? What was it? An adobe house?

Lisby: Oh, no, it was called clear redwood siding.

Davis: What about the weather here? How was it when you first came?

Lisby: It was hot. I was out in all that heat. Lay down and sleep awhile and get up and get wet; get in a tub of water; get wet in July and August. That's the kind of sleeping I'd do when I was working nights, sleep in the day.

Davis: They didn't have any type of coolers?

Lisby: No type of coolers. No coolers.

Davis: What about the fans? Did they help?

Lisby: Oh, a shoe box top or hat bot top was about all the fans I can remember.

Davis: (Laughter) What about the weather in general? Did you have

- Davis: a lot of sand storms or rains?
- Lisby: Plenty of sand storms. That knocked a lot of people out of work. Sometimes we'd get working outside and we'd [miss] some days like three days or two and a half days a week.
- Davis: It was just that bad to keep you from going out?
- Lisby: You couldn't see and there was no lawns put in to put down dirt or nothing. Just everything was desert all the way across.
- Davis: What about the rain? Was it less than it is now? How long would it go without you ever seeing rain?
- Lisby: You'd have rain (garbled) in the summer.
- Davis: And snow?
- Lisby: Not too many snows. We had a snow in '48 and they claim they had one in '30, but that was before I came here. No.
- Davis: What about Mount Charleston? Was it sort of excluded? Was it popular like it is now? Had people lived up there that you know of?
- Lisby: Well, it didn't have as good a road up there then at that time as they got now. It's been sort of fixed now.
- Davis: But did people do a lot of traveling up there?
- Lisby: You could go there, but there wasn't a whole lot of traveling up there.
- Davis: We were talking about the weather here and you mentioned the rain. Were there ever any major floods?
- Lisby: All the floods they had here. We had three since I've been here. We had one in '56 (pause) and one in '60; I don't remember if it was '62 or '63.

- Davis: Did it do as much damage then as they do now?
- Lisby: No, they didn't do as much damage, but all the underpasses was closed.
- Davis: Were those the only places that really were affected by the floods, the underpasses? Did any other hotels or anything get flooded out?
- Lisby: No hotels were flooded out. Might wash up the street (garbled) somewhere out like in Paradise Valley or different places where it is low, but like the hotels, never seen that.
- Davis: Have you noticed any difference in the climate? What type of heat? Is it as dry now as it was then?
- Lisby: Well, I don't think it is because now you have more lawns planted and there's more flowers and trees now. That's cut down some of the heat.
- Davis: What about the animals and insects here? I've just recently seen flies around. What about when you were here?
- Lisby: Well, there's been flies here. There's one thing I do know. We had mosquitoes here after it started putting swamp coolers in and kept water standing in them all the time. That's what started the mosquitoes.
- Davis: What about butterflies?
- Lisby: No, butterflies. Need a lot of flowers (garbled).
- Davis: Do you remember any major fires that may have happened in the city?
- Lisby: Fires?
- Davis: Yes. Did any of the hotels ever burn?
- Lisby: No, I don't remember no hotels burning. Just say the resident

Lisby: home. I know a few got burned out of their homes when I first came. I don't remember no hotels.

Davis: Any major fires that you know? Take them a long time to get out?

Lisby: No, (garbled) what they call the forest fires up in Mount Charleston; they have them then.

Davis: Do you feel that there's a big change in your career field now to what it was when you first came here?

Lisby: Oh, yeah, a whole lot of them. When I first came here I was paying about (garbled) \$2.75 or \$2.90 for water. Water now runs up into \$40.00.

Davis: What about where you worked? Has the situation changed? Where do you work now?

Lisby: I'm a porter down at a hotel now.

Davis: You feel that the work situation is better now than it was? How long have you been there?

Lisby: Well, I've been there close to ten years. No, it's getting worser every day; the way I see it at the Desert Inn.

Davis: What about the social changes in Las Vegas, in the population, in the type of jobs that people hold? When you first came here, what type of jobs did most of the Black people have?

Lisby: Well, most of them had construction work; some was teaching school, but not too many. Jobs have really picked up. I mean decent jobs have really picked up one hundred percent since I've been here.

Davis: Have you noticed a lot of different nationalities that have moved here since you first came?

Lisby: Oh, yeah.

Davis: Mr. Lisby, what were the basic means of transportation when you first came here to Las Vegas?

Lisby: What do you mean?

Davis: The ways of getting about. The ways the people came into this town . . .

Lisby: Well, most came in by cars, trains.

Davis: When people first came to the city, was that the basic way they came in?

Lisby: Train or bus, yeah.

Davis: Where were most of the people coming from? What other states?

Lisby: Well, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi--all Southern states-- Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee. I worked with them from all those different places.

Davis: In talking to those people, can you tell me what you feel was their reason for coming to Las Vegas?

Lisby: Well, a whole lot of them people was in debt and they wasn't making enough money to pay nothing on their debts. All they was doing was paying interest on them and not one, but hundreds of them came here and got money and went back and paid off his debts.

Davis: So we can say that the town was sort of a gold mine for them. They just came in to work and . . .

Lisby: Lots of people had never seen a fifty dollar bill that would come to Las Vegas. 'Course, I (garbled) myself. The first week I made, I drew thirty-seven dollars. A man give me some twenties, some tens. Next week I made a whole week and thought he'd give me a twenty and a five. He gave me a fifty and a five, so I had to go back to him. (laughter) Told him

Lisby: he made a mistake. He says fifty, but I'm calling this a fifty and a twenty. That's the second one [fifty dollar bill] I seen in my life.

Davis: Did many of them stay here in Las Vegas or they just sort of worked and moved on?

Lisby: A good many of them left and come back. You got the tape on?

Davis: Yeah, yeah. (There was a recorder malfunction.)

Lisby: Well, I was one of them. I came three times: in '42, '44, and '46. And I would go home for Christmas and come back again. I said I first came here in '42, and I stayed until I made \$500. I thought that was a pile of money, but after a few months, it began to dwindle so fast, and I came back again. Must have been '43.

The second time I came back to Louisiana I had over a thousand dollars. I thought that would do me, but I went to Las Vegas again in '44. The tent was gone. I walked and walked all through West Las Vegas, and there was no place to stay.

So some fellow had a gyp-lap shack. Since he was going off to California, he sold it to me for fifty dollars. A little two room thing. I had bought two lots; I drug it over to my lots so when the next time I came back I would have a place to stay. In '46, when I came back for the last time, I had my wife and family with me.

When most people gets a hundred dollars, they got a stake of money. So we get three or four hundred dollars, you got enough money to spend. When they leave and spend that down low and see they didn't quite have enough, they'd come back to make them another stake.

Davis: And leave again?

Lisby: Yeah.

Davis: Some people would just drift in? What year can you say that people started coming to stay here in Las Vegas?

Lisby: Well, back in '45 and '46, A good many people said they was gone, [that] they wouldn't have to come back [but] they was always back here.

Davis: Back to the transportation here in Las Vegas, can you remember when the airport was built?

Lisby: Well, they had a little small one. Out here McCarran Field was called Alamo and after this, McCarran Field. They [made] a decent place out of it. It's been constructed several times since then.

Davis: Can you remember the type of people that used the airport? Was it just for the business or was it tourists coming in to the airport?

Lisby: Well, yeah, they had tourists coming in from Los Angeles and other places, but it was a little small outfit.

Davis: You have any other remarks that you would like to make?

Lisby: Well, no, I don't have none.

Davis: I thank you very much for your assistance.

Lisby: You're welcome.

[Mr. Lisby was interviewed a third time by Elizabeth Patrick in order to clarify statements made in previous interviews. Ed.]

Patrick: Mr. Lisby, you have spoken to us previously about living in tents when you first came to Las Vegas in 1942. I'd like a little more information about those tent accommodations. Did women live in the tent city?

Lisby: No. Well, there were two women lived in front end. Help, you know. Cook for a kind of boadin' house like. Had a little shack for a boadin' house, but . . .

Patrick: Bone house?

Lisby: Boadin' house. That's where he served lunch.

Patrick: Oh, boarding house. There was a tent for lunches and that kind . . .

Lisby: No, he had a little, small cabin built for serving lunches.

Patrick: Now that was Roy Lucas. Was he a Black man?

Lisby: Yes, ma'am.

Patrick: He was. Had he been here long?

Lisby: Well, he came here from Phoenix to set up this outfit. He and his wife and another woman lived in the front of the tent, but he had a little, small shack where they do the cooking and serving.

Patrick: When they served, they served in this kind of dining room? Was that in the shack?

Lisby: A real small shack, something like twelve by fourteen [feet]. You could feed something like eight or ten people.

Patrick: At a time? At tables?

- Lisby: Tables. They had tables in there.
- Patrick: Not like a bar that you go into or a counter?
- Lisby: No, he just had a table and benches around it.
- Patrick: Then, the only women who lived there then were Mr. Lucas' wife . . .
- Lisby: And his help.
- Patrick: So the fellows who came here to work originally then did not bring any families with them?
- Lisby: Wasn't no families.
- Patrick: What kind of sanitary facilities did you have?
- Lisby: Well, they didn't have nothing but what you call one of these sanitary toilets, but they just have a old . . .
- Patrick: Just like an old outhouse?
- Lisby: It was a outhouse, but they had a old four foot kind of a [unintelligible] feeling, four foot in the ground is what it was. Just a outhouse.
- Patrick: And everybody used that?
- Lisby: Everybody used that.
- Patrick: Then what about bathing facilities?
- Lisby: Well, you get you a tin tub if you could find one.
- Patrick: You get what?
- Lisby: A tin, a regular zinc tub.
- Patrick: Ohhh! A tin tub?
- Lisby: A tin tub. I guess I call it the name that you call it. It's number two, number three tub. Small tub.
- Patrick: And where did you put that?
- Lisby: Set that right out in the tent.

Patrick: in the tent that you lived in?

Lisby: The part we lived in.

Patrick: Did you buy that? Was that part of the tent?

Lisby: Well, that was part of the tent.

Patrick: So the tent . . .

Lisby: If somebody was washing, taking in washing with the wash-board, you could borrow the tub and take a bath. That was the only way.

Patrick: So it wasn't part of the tent. It was something that you borrowed and brought in.

Lisby: Borrowed and brought in, use it, and take it back when you get through.

Patrick: Where did you get your water?

Lisby: Oh, they had a hydrant.

Patrick: A hydrant outside the tent?

Lisby: Outside the tent.

Patrick: I bet you had to take it . . .

Lisby: You could heat your water.

Patrick: Oh, I was going to say, was it cold?

Lisby: Well, in the summer you needed cold water.

Patrick: Was it so that all of you could take baths pretty often?
I mean it was a lot of work to haul water to heat it up.

Lisby: Well, you see, at that time, there's so many men on one shift that some might go to work at nine at night and get off at certain time the next morning and some in the day. See, they all wouldn't ride on one shift, so it would be three different shifts with three different crews . . .

Patrick: Pretty hot work in the hot summer time, too.

Lisby: Ohhh. I would come home and lay down. It was so hot I would get a tub of water and get in and get wet and lay down. By the time I'd get hot, I'd get up and take another bath. Just wet everything I had on and get back in the bed.

Patrick: And lay there in your wet clothes?

Lisby: Lay down and when it gets hot, you wake up again. I did that several times.

Patrick: And wet your clothes down?

Lisby: You didn't have nothing but old sleepers. Just wet the whole works. You never out the wet, sweating.

Patrick: So you kept that tub pretty busy?

Lisby: Sure.

Patrick: You did your own laundry?

Lisby: No. Not exactly. Wasn't no laundry around at that time. Once in a while you could find a lady who lived in these shacks somewhere who would take in a pair of overalls or a pair of khakis. Wasn't no way to carry them way downtown to the cleaners.

Patrick: Your shirts. How did you iron those?

Lisby: Well, wash them out and set on them.

Patrick: (laughter) Now, how do you do that? That's a pretty good idea.

Lisby: You know how you fold your shirts? Just fold it just like you done ironed it and set on it. (laughter)

Patrick: And that would smooth it out?

Lisby: That would smooth it. Take the wrinkles out of it. Probably put some more in another way, but (garbled) (laughter).

Patrick: Sounds like a good idea. Learn something every day. So you didn't have any clothesline then, or that kind of facility?

✓ Lisby: Oh, no, you just put them on a rack, prop, and hang up in the tent somewhere.

Patrick: You say you heated water for your baths in the winter time? How did you heat water?

Lisby: Well, get a bonfire just outside.

Patrick: And what did you do? Have a bucket hanging there?

Lisby: Had a bucket, a five gallon can.

Patrick: Lot of work, wasn't it?

Lisby: That's what they had to do to get a bath. Wasn't no place, toilets, baths.

Patrick: If you built bonfires like that, were there other tents around?

Lisby: Yes. Tents wasn't close together, but most of them was little wood shacks built out of that gyp lap I was telling you about.

Patrick: I wonder about having an open fire with the winds that we have. Wouldn't it cause fires in a tent city?

Lisby: Yeah, it would. That one caught afire, and it got burned up.

Patrick: I noticed in going over your interview that you mentioned that you came back and the tent was burned down. Now where had you been?

Lisby: Oh, I went back to Louisiana.

Patrick: So, in the meantime, the tent had burned down. It wasn't smoldering?

Lisby: No. It wasn't something like you went to work that morning and came back that night.

Patrick: I see.

Lisby: After everybody started building those little shacks, the tents just about went out.

Patrick: Mr. Lucas went out of business?

Lisby: Well, what Mr. Lucas done, he made his money and he sold out. He went back to Phoenix. He sold his tent to another man.

Patrick: Did he have just one tent?

Lisby: Yes, one tent. It was supposed to have been a G.I. (garbled) it was forty by fourteen feet.

Patrick: It was a big one, wasn't it?

Lisby: It was forty feet long and fourteen feet wide.

Patrick: Who did Mr. Lucas sell out to? Do you remember?

Lisby: He sold out to a fella by the name of Spates, Blaney Spates.

Patrick: Can you spell that for me?

Lisby: S-P-A-T-E-S.

Patrick: B-L-A-N-E-Y. Blaney Spates?

Lisby: Yeah, that's close.

Patrick: Does he still live here?

Lisby: He passed years ago and his brother passed this year. Obie Spates. He passed this year. F

Patrick: You don't have any pictures of that time do you?

Lisby: Oh, no, no, ma'am. Some people might, some people might come across town and take it about so many rounds, but we didn't have time for nothing like that.

Patrick: You said that you had money when you went back to Louisiana, five hundred dollars and a thousand dollars and . . .

Lisby: First time I went back I had five hundred and that run out soooo quick. (garbled) I said what I need was a thousand dollars and I come back and got me a thousand dollars.

- Patrick: Now that's what I want to ask you about. What did you do when you went back home? You said your money ran out. Did you get a job when you got back?
- Lisby: I didn't work for money. I didn't do nothing but hunt, and I had built a home before I came here and I [was] just working around finishing up, like painting.
- Patrick: And you went hunting?
- Lisby: Hunting. I believe I left here before Christmas and I didn't come back until March the next year.
- Patrick: So you didn't even look for work. You had enough to . . .
- Lisby: I had enough around the house to do.
- Patrick: So, you earned enough money to fix up your house and everything back in Tallulah, and then you came back here again to earn some more money?
- Lisby: Come back to earn some more money.
- Patrick: You didn't have any intentions then probably of living here permanently, did you?
- Lisby: I didn't. But where I bought land and didn't care what kind of little place I be living in, when I go up to Louisiana and come back peoples you done rented it [rented] it to somebody else and I be out. So that's what started me to buying land. I just said, "I'm gonna build me a house so when I come back, I can come in my own house. (garbled)
- Patrick: So Las Vegas to you was kind of like money in the bank, wasn't it? It was some place to come and earn money and . . .
- Lisby: Sure, sure. That was what I was planning on.
- Patrick: It was opportunity, uh?

Lisby: Sure. My family wanted to come here and look around so I got them here to look around, and they're still look ing around.

Patrick: You liked it right off?

Lisby: Sure, my wife liked it. No snow . . .

Patrick: You didn't have any snow in Louisiana, did you?

Lisby: Ooooh! Don't tell me!

Patrick: Oh! Mr. Lisby! Really?

Lisby: I've been so cold in Louisiana--you could lay down a ten dollar bill and the only way I could pick it up was take four hands!

Patrick: It was cold, but you didn't have any snow, did you? You were talking about cold.

Lisby: Well, we had snow. But the most we had there was rain and all that freeze on wires and trees would just collapse.

Patrick: It was cold?

Lisby: Cold!

Patrick: So she wanted to come up here because of the . . .

Lisby: She talked the sun shined here all winter. I didn't think it was true myself, except I came narrator shows high boots with these cut of shoes I used to wear in Louisiana. Here, I can wear low quarters all winter.

Patrick: Those are boots, aren't they? Lace boots.

Lisby: Lace boots.

Patrick: How did you hear about Las Vegas?

Lisby: There was a friend of mine left town.

Patrick: Who was he?

Lisby: Jack Clay. He left town and he was gone about a week. He must started working to make it a full week, and he sent his wife fifty dollars. I said to myself, "Now he must be gambling or making money might fast." Then the next week he sent her fifty dollars. I said, "Now he making some kind of money." He didn't sent her no money then until he makes the next two weeks; he sent her \$150. He had two kids and he told her to pack the kids up and get on her way. I said, "I'm going to see what he's doing." So that's when I came out here. Steve Robertson--other words there was twelve men, two cars, twelve men. That bunch shut the mill down. Was all expert men; men like oilers; Robert was a oiler; Steve was a block setter; (garbled).

Patrick: You just put them out of business?

Lisby: Yes, we put them out of business. So that's when I got confused over. I made two weeks the first pay I made and the man paid me thirty some dollars and the next week I made a full week and cashed the check and he give me fifty dollar bill and two ones, and I called the fifty dollar bill a five. I called him back. I said, "You made a mistake here, Mister." He said, "Fifty." That was the second fifty dollar bill I seen in my life.

Patrick: What had happened? Did he make a mistake?

Lisby: No, I made the mistake. I called a fifty dollar bill a five dollar bill.

Patrick: I see. (laughter)

Lisby: Now that was the second fifty dollar bill I seen in my life.

- Patrick: This man who left Tallulah the first time, how did he come to leave? Do you know? Did anybody else go West?
- Lisby: Three men come here to him, but they didn't tell nobody anything, just the few people (garbled). One of them lives here now--two of them here now.
- Patrick: What are their names?
- Lisby: One of them is Martin Archie. Now, the next one is Cicero Scott. And the next one is Oscar Mathis.
- Patrick: Oscar Mathis.
- Lisby: He lives in Oakland now.
- Patrick: Oh, he's not here?
- Lisby: He's not here.
- Patrick: Does Scott live here?
- Lisby: Scott lives here. 219 Madison.
- Patrick: But how did those fellows know where to go? Did you guys just pick up and leave and go looking for work?
- Lisby: Well, I tell you, most of the people come to the big timber operation in Arizona. They come from Louisiana to cut timber. And by them being close here to Las Vegas, you know, different ones going back and forward, that's when they got stuck on Las Vegas.
- Patrick: Did the timber companies advertise in Tallulah for help? Do you know anything about that? I'm just curious how those fellows knew where to go.
- Lisby: Well, you know, people just travel around and made one week and they're gone.
- Patrick: I just wondered if there was a big recruitment or something

Patrick: in Tallulah since so many of you men left there.

Lisby: Well, there just wasn't no work in Tallulah.

Patrick: Word of mouth, uh?

Lisby: Well, just wasn't no work to be found. I had five in family and twenty-two dollars a week--that was scale labor. That was working at that [band] saw sixteen inches wide and sixty foot long when you cut it.

Patrick: So you left for better opportunities?

Lisby: Better opportunities.

Patrick: Would you describe what a gyp-lap shack was? What does that term mean?

Lisby: A gyp lap is just like sheetrock, but it was black on both sides, and you know sheetrock got different color. That other is black on both sides, but it went together like this right here, kind of like [Mr. Libsy demonstrated by lapping one hand over the other to show how the building material was placed so that no cracks were left on the surface.] Setting like that the water run off each side; that's why they call it gyp-lap. They made it at the sheet rock--same sheet rock deal, But instead of being four foot, sheet rock now is four foot by eight foot and ten and twelve foot, but eight foot was the standard. But this [gyp-lap] here is two foot by eight.

Patrick: So you put those pieces together?

Lisby: Put them together. Keep the wind out and keep the water from coming in.

Patrick: You said you moved your shack from one place to another? Did

Patrick: you take it down completely?

Lisby: No, ma'am. I put two four-by-fours and drug it.

Patrick: Underneath? The two-by-fours underneath it?

Lisby: Four-by-four under the bottom and drug it.

Patrick: The whole thing?

Lisby: Just like a skid, ma'am.

Patrick: Yes, on a skid.

Lisby: Just run the skid through under it and trucked that chain on it and dragged over different places.

Patrick: You had a truck?

Lisby: Well, I didn't have a truck, but a guy here hauled and moved.

Patrick: Did you pay him for it?

Lisby: Oh, yeah, he charged ten dollars to move it. Something like a couple of blocks.

Patrick: How big was this shack in feet? Can you remember?

Lisby: The front one was twelve by twelve and the back one was about twelve by eight, but still you could run the skids through under the whole bunch.

Patrick: You had two rooms then?

Lisby: Two rooms.

Patrick: If it was made of this gyp-lap, did it have a wooden siding on it or anything?

Lisby: The gyp-lap was on the side; that's what the side was.

Patrick: That's all it was? And it was black. Wasn't that hot in the summer time with the sun on it?

Lisby: Oh, sure, it was hot.

Patrick: Yes, I'll bet. And that's where you brought your family?

Lisby: No, ma'am. I tore that down and built a house.

Patrick: That was just for yourself?

Lisby: Just for myself.

Patrick: You said you bought your lots. Can you remember how much you paid?

Lisby: I paid \$225. A corner lot was \$250 and the little lot was \$200. Most people buy one, but I was buying two and the man let me have both of them for \$425.

Patrick: How big were the lots?

Lisby: Fifty by a hundred and forty.

Patrick: Each one of them was fifty by a hundred and forty?

Lisby: Each one of them.

Patrick: Where were they located?

Lisby: Down on B and Madison. The highway goes over them now.

Patrick: Well, you got to be a land owner in a hurry. Did you pay cash for them, Mr. Lisby?

Lisby: Not exactly cash. I paid something like \$250 down, so much a month--eighty every month; sometimes I make two payments. I paid it off in two or three payments.

Patrick: You paid those payments off in a hurry.

Lisby: Well, I paid it off in a hurry because I wanted to start building on it. I didn't want to build on it and have to pay for it.

Patrick: Did you buy the land from an individual or from a realty company?

Lisby: From a realty company. O. L. Allen, two brothers in real estate.

Patrick: Were they Black men?

Lisby: No, ma'am, they was White. Third Street, right off of Third Street.

Patrick: Did you have to pay interest on the money that was outstanding?

Lisby: (garbled) I wasn't but a year paying that off. (garbled) I paid that off in about three payments.

Patrick: That's pretty fast. You paid it off from money that you earned working? You didn't get a bank loan?

Lisby: No bank loan. I would get off one job and go on another building them new shacks.

Patrick: You mean after work in the evening?

Lisby: After work. When you're on the graveyard shift, you get off in the morning.

Patrick: What's the graveyard shift? What hours?

Lisby: That's the last shift at night. One shift would go to work at eight in the morning and work eight to four; and another one would go on 1:30, that's the graveyard shift. We'd get off just before day the next morning. So that gave you a chance to work all day.

Patrick: So you'd work all night then at the company?

Lisby: Yes.

Patrick: Then you came home in the morning?

Lisby: Worked so long in the morning.

Patrick: You worked building these shacks with somebody else?

Lisby: Building these shacks.

Patrick: You really had two jobs, didn't you?

Lisby: Yeah. That was the only recreation I had. Sometimes it

- Lisby: was too hot to try and sleep; I just go to work.
- Patrick: Did you earn very much money from that?
- Lisby: Well, building one of them small shacks I used to get \$55.
- Patrick: Did you provide the materials?
- Lisby: Most of the time I did. If they paid for the materials I used, they pay \$55.
- Patrick: The \$55 was for your labor?
- Lisby: For my labor.
- Patrick: Were a lot of people buying those shacks and living in them?
- Lisby: Oh, I couldn't catch up with them.
- Patrick: Had a good business then? Did many Black people that you knew buy land.
- Lisby: Yes, ma'am. Curtis did, but he didn't pay it right off. Some bought when lots was \$75. Some wait 'til it was \$100 and I waited 'til it was \$225. And some waited 'til it was \$1,500.
- Patrick: You got in on the ground floor, but some people got in even before you. You owned land in Tallulah, didn't you?
- Lisby: Yes, ma'am. I still own it.
- Patrick: You still own the same property?
- Lisby: One acre. My house is built on one acre.
- Patrick: You have a house in Tallulah?
- Lisby: Oh, it's gone down now. My brother lived in it from '43 'til past of '65 (garbled). He didn't do no repairing or nothing on it.
- Patrick: So, it's just really the land you have?
- Lisby: Back in Louisiana we move out of a house and leave somebody in it and in a year or two it (garbled).

- Patrick: Do you suppose you'll ever go back there to live?
- Lisby: Well, I don't think so. I may, but you can't tell what will happen. You go back to that land and you got used to the sunshine and you go back there where you got to wear a coat and rubber boots. I don't see how I could enjoy it. No way you could wear your shoes shined.
- Patrick: Why are you hanging onto this land?
- Lisby: Where?
- Patrick: In Louisiana.
- Lisby: Lot of people want it, but they don't want to pay the price. I paid three hundred dollars for the acre, and they figure if I make two or three dollars I done made money.
- Patrick: So you're going to hang on to it 'til it gets . . .
- Lisby: I'm going to hang on to it.
- Patrick: But you don't have any plans to move back. Did any of the rest of your family own land in Louisiana?
- Lisby: Well, my brother did. All of my sisters and brothers owned land.
- Patrick: So it's kind of a really a family tradition, isn't it?
- Lisby: Close together.
- Patrick: You said that you worked at the ore company for six months-- that's in another interview. Why did you leave?
- Lisby: The ore company. Magnesium Ore. Well, that shut down. They had notices to close down. The job was over.
- Patrick: Then you went to Home Lumber?
- Lisby: I went to Home Lumber then.
- Patrick: And you worked there for about five years?

Lisby: Five years and two months.

Patrick: Why did you leave there?

Lisby: Well, a change in management. (garbled) Everybody got a man he want to work in. The man I was working for they changed him; he was holding me. So, after they changed him, that told me to get out.

Patrick: Kind of company policy?

Lisby: Yes.

Patrick: How many other Black men worked at Home Lumber at the time?

Lisby: There was Mose Harvey, Walter Burk, Nathaniel Wheeler; them was steady ones. Of course, once in awhile they get kind of slow, they pick up another one. But they worked there steady.

Patrick: What did they do?

Lisby: Well, they was stacking lumber, unloading car boxes, cement, roofing, stacking lumber in the yards.

Patrick: About three men?

Lisby: They had several Whites, too.

Patrick: And you drove a truck?

Lisby: I was a truck driver.

Patrick: Was your boss a Black man or a White man?

Lisby: Oh, he was a White.

Patrick: He was a White man.

Lisby: He's in town now. Henry Abercrombie. I go by to see him sometime.

Patrick: Is he retired?

Lisby: He retired.

Patrick: You said you were in construction after leaving Home Lumber

Patrick: and that you hauled lumber for a construction company to sites. Is that what you did for the company, hauling lumber? Did you ever build for them?

Lisby: I didn't build. If they needed something right away and they didn't have time to wait for them to deliver, I'd go pick it up. In the construction company what I worked was like digging a ditch, putting in fill for laying a house like putting in the blow sand before they poured the cement. That's what I was for this construction company.

Patrick: How many laborers would you say there were?

Lisby: There was about three altogether.

Patrick: Three Black men?

Lisby: No, three White, one Black man (garbled).

Patrick: And they did that same type of work that you did?

Lisby: They did the same kind of work.

Patrick: But no other Black men?

Lisby: Well, they didn't do exactly the same kind of work. Some of them (garbled), but I was just a laborer.

Patrick: You were a laborer. Was it hard to get that job?

Lisby: Oh, no. I never was fired. When one job go out, somebody meet me next day and tell me where to go or tell somebody that I was coming.

Patrick: You had a good reputation then.

Lisby: Uh-huh.

Patrick: How did you get the job at the construction company? That same way? From your reputation?

Lisby: Well, the way I got the construction job, I was delivering lumber out there so they all know me all around.

Patrick: From Home Lumber?

Lisby: From Home Lumber. I know them all before I got off from Home Lumber.

Patrick: What was the name of that construction company?

Lisby: Plumlich and Gillette. Gillette was connected with the Gillette razor blades.

Patrick: Are they still here in town?

Lisby: Oh, no, ma'am. They moved to California. They transferred to different cities to get jobs.

Patrick: Was it a housing project you were working on?

Lisby: Housing project.

Patrick: Did you ever work on the Strip in any of those construction projects?

Lisby: I hauled lumber on the Strip, but I never worked on construction.

Patrick: Were there labor unions where you worked?

Lisby: I was in the Teamsters' Union.

Patrick: You were a Teamster? How long were you a Teamster?

Lisby: Well, I was a Teamster from back in '45, about the last of '45 (long pause) up until '60--until I retired I was a Teamster.

Patrick: So you were a Teamster all that time?

Lisby: I was a Teamster.

Patrick: So then you had pretty good wage scale?

Lisby: Well, there wasn't no wage scale that I can remember.

Patrick: But you were a union laborer.

Lisby: The first that I got in was when I first started driving. It wasn't no union then in the lumber yard, but later on it got a union and I think the wages went \$1.37 an hour.

Patrick: In the union?

Lisby: In the union.

Patrick: What had they been before, do you remember?

Lisby: Well, before they got the union, I think they was ninety cents.

Patrick: Did you think that getting in the union was worthwhile?

Lisby: Well, I didn't think that the union would amount to very much at first. At the time the labor was at the lumber yards and the Teamsters was there, and after you finally got to know what to load and unload and different things, you was told you better get into the union. I think I got in for \$8.

Patrick: Oh, as a laborer you were in a union?

Lisby: I was in the labor union.

Patrick: What union was that, Mr. Lisby?

Lisby: Just a regular labor union.

Patrick: Remember its name?

Lisby: AFL Union.

Patrick: So you belong then to two unions? Was it the AFL or the CIO?

Lisby: AFL Union. That was the union you belonged to when you worked for the plant. It was all labor.

Patrick: At MacNeil?

Lisby: At MacNeil.

Patrick: All right. So at MacNeil Ore you belonged to a union and that was the AFL? Was there a CIO Union there?

Lisby: Well, it was CIO, but they didn't take over very much.

Patrick: But did you belong to the AFL?

Lisby: Yeah, the first one I joined.

Patrick: Then you belonged to the Teamsters Union?

- Lisby: Yeah, I had to get into the Teamsters to drive a truck.
- Patrick: And then did you belong to another union when you were in construction?
- Lisby: No, I quit all the construction and went to the hotel and had to get into the Culinary [Union].
- Patrick: And when you went to the hotel, then you were in the Culinary Union?
- Lisby: Yeah.
- Patrick: Now, as a Black man did you have any difficulty getting into any of these unions?
- Lisby: No, I didn't. To get into the Teamsters, you see, I was already driving a truck without the union so they were glad to get you. When you were driving, you didn't have no trouble getting in.
- Patrick: When you joined the union, did it affect the hours that you worked any; did you have any shorter days?
- Lisby: Oh, no. In this state here they have always had eight hours.
- Patrick: Did joining the union benefit you in any great way?
- Lisby: Well, yes, it did.
- Patrick: How?
- Lisby: Well, you was protected more by driving a truck, and the union, when they'd be scabbing, would hit pretty hard and would appeal to all union men.
- Patrick: Was physical protection what you are talking about?
- Lisby: Yes, that's right.
- Patrick: You say it didn't affect the hours you worked because you always worked an eight-hour day.

Lisby: Always eight hours. What the union done--I was making ninety cents and after I got into the union I made \$1.37.

Patrick: So it did help financially, didn't it?

Lisby: Yes.

Patrick: Are you on union pensions now in your retirement?

Lisby: Well, the Teamsters (garbled) all the money was gone with when I retired.

Patrick: How's that?

Lisby: The little money I can draw out as long as I was in it--I don't get but \$47 a month out of the Teamsters.

Patrick: But you do have some pension benefits.

Lisby: Um-hum.

Patrick: What about your AFL experience?

Lisby: None of that. I dropped that after I got into the Teamsters.

Patrick: So you don't get anything from that. In your last interview talking about your job--let's see, what hotel was that that you worked at?

Lisby: Desert Inn.

Patrick: The Desert Inn. You said every day your "job got worser" up there. What did you mean by that? Remember? Maybe I'm just pulling this out of the sky and it's hard for you to remember. I think they were asking you about working conditions and you said they got "worsen" every day. What did you mean?

Lisby: Well, I never said that. All I can remember about that is that different floormen put this on me to get a little more work out of me. After you get a certain age--you know they got young people over old folks and there's always somebody

- Lisby: wants to get a little more out [of] a older man than would a young one. Used to always come by me; wants to get a little more out of old man than the young ones.
- Patrick: Trying to get rid of you, do you think?
- Lisby: Well, I think so.
- Patrick: What were your duties up there at the Desert Inn?
- Lisby: Well, I was a porter. That means cleaning the cafe, vacuuming the floors, and mopping.
- Patrick: Was your experience pretty good there? Did you enjoy your work?
- Lisby: Well, part of it. Some days I'd be happy; some days I'd be angry.
- Patrick: Why?
- Lisby: Well, they put me most trying to get a little more work out of me.
- Patrick: Back to the early days here. I'm going to ask you about leisure time. It doesn't sound like you had very much time for leisure when you first came here, but what did Black people do for fun after their work hours were over?
- Lisby: Well, most of them go swimming out to the lake, drinking parties, and go to the clubs, the gambling houses.
- Patrick: Did you garden then? You were telling me earlier today that you liked to garden.
- Lisby: Oh, I didn't have no garden. Over on Madison where I moved, I didn't have no garden; I had two lots, but I had an apartment house on them. I could have had a garden, but I had an apartment house.

Patrick: You had an apartment house?

Lisby: An apartment house.

Patrick: How many apartments did you have?

Lisby: Several.

Patrick: You owned them?

Lisby: I did.

Patrick: Well, you managed pretty well, didn't you, from when you first came here with almost nothing to owning an apartment house? How long did you have an apartment house?

Lisby: I had an apartment house from March in '50 until '68 when the highways closed them out.

Patrick: That's over on that land you were telling me about that you bought when you first came here?

Lisby: When I first came here.

Patrick: And the freeway is taking it over? Did you make a pretty good settlement with the state?

Lisby: No, ma'am. Wouldn't hardly put a foot in there for another one from what they would give, as high as things is from what they was when I built it.

Patrick: Did you have a car when you first came here?

Lisby: Back in the 50s, I bought a old GMC pickup from one of them cars on the job.

Patrick: That's from Home Lumber.

Lisby: No, that was after I started construction.

Patrick: So you bought a used car?

Lisby: I think it was a '39 GMC pickup.

Patrick: Did you pay cash for it?

Lisby: Yes, ma'am.

Patrick: You don't mess around with banks, do you? (laughter)

Lisby: Well, he and I was working together and I caught keno. He then wanted three-fifty for it. And I hit keno, he said, "Now I'm going to make you buy my truck." I said, "What you want now?" He said, "Give me two hundred dollars."

Patrick: You hit keno?

Lisby: I hit keno.

Patrick: Do you--how much did you . . .

Lisby: Oh, I didn't make a bunch. Only \$375.

Patrick: When did you get a family car?

Lisby: Get what?

Patrick: A family car, a car that you used for your--the whole . . .

Lisby: Oh, the first family car that I got was a '53 Ninety-eight Oldsmobile. I used the old truck for as long as . . .

Patrick: Load up the kids and go down to the lake, uh?

Lisby: Put four boards across the back and . . .

Patrick: Sounds like fun. When you first came to Las Vegas, was there much public transportation? Like buses?

Lisby: No, no. No traffic. No bus on the Westside. All you get is a taxi car--years before you got a bus.

Patrick: How did you manage then to get around?

Lisby: Walk or you could catch a ride, but at that time I didn't buy a car. People was good about picking you up. Lots of ladies would stop and pick you up. White ladies would pick you up just as quick as (pause) they could get to you.

Patrick: A neighborly kind of thing.

Lisby: That's right. If you was in the hot sun, they'd pick you up. But you know how things happen, they soon broke that up. (garbled) them out, throat-cutting.

Patrick: As cities grow bigger, I guess that happens.

Lisby: When a town gets larger. I talked to a man out to the B.M.I. plant. He's a young White guy about thirty-five, and he knows this town by heart. He says it's a good town and the best money, real estate. He says but when it gets a certain size, get away from it. When I bought the first land, I think my tax run about \$2 and something and that same land has went to a \$1.25 a day; in other words, \$112 every ninety days.

Patrick: You keep close tabs on that, don't you?

Lisby: Sure. It's like he said, the con men is going to ruin it. It ain't big enough for them, but when it get a certain size, they'll drop in, and I sure believe they here now.

Patrick: You mentioned that you won at keno. Did you like to gamble a lot?

Lisby: Just a little. I didn't have no money. See, when you buy food for the family I had, wasn't much left. And I always done my food first.

Patrick: You mentioned McCarran Airfield when it was being built and you called it by a name other than McCarran Airfield. What was that?

Lisby: Alamo Airport.

Patrick: Was that what it was called?

Lisby: That's what it was called when I was hauling lumber there.

Patrick: Before it became McCarran?

Lisby: That's right.

Patrick: Do you know how it got that name?

Lisby: I never did learn. It was for the man that built that. I believe it was McCarran. What was he, a Senator?

Patrick: There was a Senator McCarran. But it was called Alamo?

Lisby: That's what they told me at Home Lumber, the old Alamo Airport where the lumber would go. No (garbled) would send you out without giving you some kind of directions.

Patrick: And they sent you to the old Alamo Airport? All right. What about your education, Mr. Lisby?

Lisby: Well, I claim I stopped schooling in the third grade, just after I go in the third. But I went to night school two terms.

Patrick: In Tallulah?

Lisby: In Tallulah. The first time I got to go to night school I was done early and they was on the eight-hour system. I could go to work and get off at five o'clock and get right close to school. School was on the farm; it wasn't [but] about a block and a half. And soon as I got to going to school, they done away with the eight hours and put twelve hours on. So, before I knocked off work, the school was out.

Patrick: You mean you had to work twelve hours a day?

Lisby: Twelve hours a day.

Patrick: At the lumber mill?

Lisby: Yeah, it was at the lumber mill back in Louisiana.

Patrick: So then you didn't get to go to school?

Lisby: Didn't get to go to school no more.

Patrick: What did you study there?

Lisby: Well, what carried me through was multiply, division, adding.

Patrick: You sure learned pretty well for you to deal with taxes.

Lisby: Well, I'll tell what I've done. I got enough out of it to deliver lumber, and if they had to send some back, set it all down and give him a copy. A lot of times they'd call you up. Some fella done forgot what he had and there'd be a big argument in the office, and you got to send to get Lee or wait 'til Lee come in to straighten it out.

Patrick: So you were able to do that?

Lisby: And I was able to show it to him, yeah, that's right.

Patrick: How long did you go to night school?

Lisby: Well, I must have went about four, off and on, because back there, you know, it rains and storms so you can't go to school every night. I say I went about part of four months one [time] and about part of two months at the next after I married. 'Cause before I married, I went to night school. After I married, they set up another one. That's all I got, what little I got out of night school. At day school I was the oldest one. Took me and my Daddy trying to get the food.

Patrick: You were the oldest child?

Lisby: I was the oldest one.

Patrick: How many children in that family?

Lisby: Seven. Five boys and two girls.

Patrick: So when you were about ten or eleven you had to go to work.

Lisby: Sure. That's right.

Patrick: Your children then have had a lot more opportunities, haven't they?

Lisby: Oh, yeah. I was telling them the other day that I took care of twelve off a \$112 a week, and they (keno writers and dealers) making \$300 a week and can't eat. Something's wrong somewhere.

Patrick: That's what your children do? They work in casinos?

Lisby: Yeah. I have one son who works at the Four Queens, and one who is a dealer at the Golden Gate, and a Keno writer at the Tropicana. All my boys have good jobs. But the girls--I wouldn't give one girl for five boys. Looks like the girls show appreciation for these corns [callouses] on the front of my hand [palm], but the boys say I was stupid--that I didn't have to do that.

Patrick: Is that what they tell you now?

Lisby: That's what they say. You didn't get no schooling. You stupid. (laughter)

Patrick: Yeah, but you didn't have the opportunity that the boys had.

Lisby: Oh, no. My kids could borrow five or six hundred dollars quicker than I can borrow to get a set of tires.

Patrick: What do your daughters do, Mr. Lisby?

Lisby: My daughters are wonderful.

Patrick: What do they do?

Lisby: One been at the post office for fourteen, close to fifteen years.

Patrick: Here in Las Vegas?

Lisby: In Las Vegas. One's a probation officer; one's over at a man's store in Oakland; and one's over a ladies' store. Got people working for them.

Patrick: What kind of school opportunities did your daughters have?

- Lisby: Oh, they all finished high school. Lot of them went to college.
- Patrick: How nice. Here in Las Vegas?
- Lisby: Yeah, my baby just finished Howard University. She put four years in Howard. She come out with a good job--\$13,000 a year.
- Patrick: What is she doing?
- Lisby: One boy dealing at the Four Queens, he lacks so many hours of having four years in college.
- Patrick: What does your daughter do, the one who graduated from Howard?
- Lisby: I can't call that now, but she's not in one place. She's in Houston one week, next week in San Diego, and she's leaving now for back in Washington, D.C.
- Patrick: Who does she work for?
- Lisby: She working for the government.
- Patrick: Did your boys all graduate from high school?
- Lisby: All of them graduate from high school. Some got three years, some a year, whatever they wanted [of college].
- Patrick: A lot of opportunity.
- Lisby: When they said they had enough, I couldn't say, "Go ahead, you got enough." So that was it.
- Patrick: Was this night school that you went to in Tallulah a part of the public school system?
- Lisby: School system. Huey P. Long furnished books back in that time. Louisiana people could go pick up a good book. (garbled)
- Patrick: Did a lot of Black people take advantage?
- Lisby: Lots of Black people. I know people who couldn't write their

Lisby: name learn enough to open up a market and grocery store and cash checks.

Patrick: Education is pretty important, isn't it?

Lisby: I don't see how he [Tra Abbott, proprietor of the grocery store] did it to save my life. I went two miles to see was he going to make a mistake in cashing a check. I'd heard he'd done it--of course, he and I went to night school. When he'd write his name on the board, he'd start up, go (garbled), come down. He'd say that was his name. I couldn't see it, and the people just laughed at it. And the teacher teaching him told him, "Mr. Abbott, you know what you come after. Let them laugh. You get what you come after." And that man sure got it. Turned that book over there and find (garbled).

Patrick: So he managed the store?

Lisby: (laughter) And a filling station, market, grocery store, and the cafe.

Patrick: That all came out of night school, didn't it?

Lisby: That all come out of night school. Now they didn't tell me that. I was there with him. That just encouraged me to keep on a little longer.

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