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An Interview with Jim Marsh

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

University Libraries

University of Nevada Las Vegas

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June 5th, 2012
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee D. White

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Preface

Jim Marsh born in Denver, Colorado. Father was the chief for the Colorado Patrol. Mother lived in Nebraska. Jim split time in both places while growing up. He was a service member of the Army and once getting out of the service he started his work with his father at a Ford dealership.

Jim went on to work and own dealerships in several different areas, Colorado, California, New Mexico, and Washington states before arriving in Las Vegas, NV in 1971. Once arriving in Las Vegas Marsh purchased a dealership called American Auto Mart.

Around 1976 Jim Marsh bought the Santa Fe Saloon along with the twenty lots surrounding it for 12,500. This was his first experience in the gaming industry. Marsh was the only dealership in the world for 25 years to have a gaming license in a new-car dealership.

Marsh discovered interest in Belmont when there was a lone resident Rose Walter. The two bartered and Jim gained land in Belmont and went on to build a bar and church for the town. Marsh eventually went on to own the Skyline Casino.

Jim Marsh founded the Nevada Auto Auction in 1987 on Las Vegas Boulevard South. Eventually sold it and used the investment to build the Longstreet Casino. Marsh was also a member of business organizations, Better Business Bureau and The Red Cross. Marsh has been a member of the Salvation Army Advisory Board for at least 25 years.

Tonopah is another location that Marsh has invested in. After leasing the gaming at the Mizpah Hotel to later buying the Valley Bank building and moving the gaming from Mizpah. It is still successful today. He also purchased the Tonopah Station House which is a hotel, bar, and restaurant; along with owning the grocery store Scolari's next-door. Tonopah has proved to be a very good investment for Jim Marsh.

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Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



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Jim Marsh 6-5-2012
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This is Claytee White and I'm with Mr. Jim Marsh. Today is June 5th, 2012, and we're in his office at the corner of Sahara and Eastern.

So how are you today?

Very good, Claytee.

Thank you so much for having me in. Tell me a little bit about your early life, where you grew up and what that was like.

Well, I was born in Denver, Colorado. My father was the chief of the Colorado Highway Patrol at that time. My parents were separated when I was about five. My mother moved to Nebraska and my father stayed in Denver. So I spent my time back and forth. I went usually ten months in Nebraska, then two months in Colorado every year.

And how did you get from there to Las Vegas? I think you were in the state of Washington at one point?

Well, I was working for my father. World War II he went in the service and he was a provost marshal for the Army Air Corps. When he got out of service, he spent another year with the highway patrol then he bought into a Ford dealership in Denver. So after I got out of the service, I worked for my father for a period of five or six years and then I went to work for Pontiac division as a so-called district manager and I traveled southern Colorado, northern New Mexico. Then I got transferred to California. I lived in the San Joaquin Valley for three years and a year and a half in the Bay Area. Then I quit and I got offered the Pontiac dealership in a little town called Longview, Washington. So I was there for five years.

Why cars? Because of your father?

Yeah, pretty much because my father.

And what about this business keeping you involved today? What do you still like about

it?

Well, of course, the thing about any business, you like the activity about it and hopefully you make some money doing it.

Any siblings?

I've got a daughter, Stacey. She will be 51, 52—I get in trouble by not knowing the age—in October, yes.

It's okay. Sometimes I have a problem with my own age.

So after Longview, why Las Vegas?

You know, it just so happened I had sold my dealership in Longview and I was going to go to Seattle, Washington. In Seattle, Washington, Boeing had a—their business was terrible.

There was a severe recession in Seattle and I had made a proposal to buy a Pontiac dealership in downtown Seattle. The economy got so bad that businesses were closing. The billboard said, "The last person to leave Seattle, please turn off the lights." And I said this is heresy to try to do this.

So there I was sitting in Longview. I sold my business and I didn't know what to do and I happened to read an ad in the automotive news about a little AMC Jeep dealership that was for sale. It didn't say where; it just said the Southwest. So I answered the ad and it just so happens that the fellow who was working for American Motors at that time was a friend of mine who had worked for Pontiac and he said the dealership was in Las Vegas and would I like to meet him here and then review it. And I did. That was in 1971. That's how I happened to move to Las Vegas.

Had you ever been to Las Vegas prior to that?

I had been out several times just for kind of weekend excursions.

Okay, great. So 1971, what are some of your first memories of Las Vegas?

Well, the memories of Las Vegas, I stayed in a little motel called the Holiday Motel, which is on Las Vegas Boulevard just north of Sahara. In fact, I think it's still there today. It's not the same name on it. But I stayed there and I remember it cost me seven dollars a night except on the weekends and they wanted to raise it to nine. Every week I'd have a fight with the manager, who turned out to be a good friend of mine, whether I was going to pay seven or nine dollars a night. So that was one of my early memories.

The dealership that was at 1715 East Fremont and originally had been owned by a fellow by the name of Herb Biddulph, who was a very successful man. He sold it to a couple of gentlemen that are maybe a little bit Mafia connected by the name of Franto and Mazolla and they ran it for two years and it was called American Auto Mart. They virtually ran it into the ground and the doors were about to close. I ended up renegotiating the leases and opening it. Apparently their reputation wasn't too good. I'm driving here down on I think it was Casino Center with a car from my dealership in Washington and I had a dealer plate on it. A police officer stopped me and questioned the dealer plate. I told him what I was doing; that I was in the process of buying the American Auto Mart. He kind of looked at me, shook his head, and said, "Well, good luck," and got on his motorcycle and drove off. So I kind of got an idea at that time that maybe he was trying to tell me something that I kind of suspected, but he kind of drove it home that I had kind of a can of worms on my hands.

How did you turn it around?

It was kind of unusual. I bought the—they call it the hard assets. I did not buy the corporation. The financial statements of the corporation showed they had a profit the year before of like fifteen hundred dollars. So when I got ready to open, Franto told me, he said,

“Why don't you buy the corporation?” I said, “Well, why would I want to do that?” He said, “Well, because we had a big tax loss carry forward.” They lost a hundred and 50, \$60,000 the year before. I said, “Well, that can't be; I've got this financial statement that shows you just barely in the black.” He looked at me and laughed and he said, “Oh, Marsh, that's the one we sent to the bank; that's not the real financial statement.” So with that, my heart kind of jumped up in my throat and I thought *my god, what have you gotten yourself into here?*

So you just purchased the hard assets and stuck with that decision?

Yes, because I didn't want the liability of the corporation and I'm sure there was a lot of it.

Okay. So did you find that doing business here was completely different from

Longview or other places?

Yeah. Even in those days it was much more restrictive. The licensing and so forth was much more difficult than it had been up there and it is much more difficult today.

I thought it was going to be the opposite.

No, no. This is one of the—even today to get a dealer's license it takes forever, extensive background checks and so forth. And even in those days it was much more difficult than what I was used to.

And it's probably because of our reputation?

I think it's just because Las Vegas was a bigger town. They had probably more scams operating here and they were more protective. I remember when I went down to get the license they wanted a reference. I said, well, I'm here; I'm a thousand miles away. They said, well, who do you know up there we can call? So I said, well, the police chief up there is a friend of mine. His name was Chief White. So we got on the phone and called him. The officer that was doing the investigation said, “We've got a fellow down here by the name of

Jim Marsh here. Do you know him?" Chief White said, "Oh, yeah, we know him." He said, "So what can you tell us about him?" He said, "Oh, we ran him out of town, so we don't want anything to do with him; I'd put the cuffs on him quick."

So I'm sitting there listening to all this and he's throwing me under the bus. Finally after a few minutes he got to laughing and this, that and the other. So it turned out to be, thank goodness, a big practical joke. It was kind of cute.

Great, great. Tell me what the entertainment was like here in the early seventies, the Strip, the nightlife, downtown and on the Strip.

Well, the Strip, of course, didn't have the mega hotels they do today. The Sands and the Dunes and some of those, the Riviera, the Sahara—they're all nice hotels at that time. They had the big-name entertainers out there. The Sahara had their Casbar Lounge. The entertainers, for nothing that you could watch, ended up being big stars, the Mary Kaye Trio for one, which I happen to remember. A lot of the other names elude me right now. But you could just sit in the lounge and these entertainers would rotate throughout the night. The dinner shows were just exactly that. They were like nine dollars, ten dollars, twelve dollars and you not only got a show, but you got two drinks and they served you dinner. They haven't served dinner shows for probably thirty years since then.

One of the fellows at this dealership that I bought that came to work for me is a fellow by the name of Jim Rossi. Jim Rossi worked for me until he was 92 years old, which was about three years ago. When I first came to town, Jimmy was—I would say his family, let me put it this way, knew their way around pretty well and I think they maybe had a few underworld connections. I think Jimmy knew every pit boss, every valet parker in town. There wasn't anyplace that Jimmy couldn't go that they didn't know him and he got

first-class treatment. I think for the first month I think I went out to dinner with Jimmy two or three times a week, and his wife, and I don't think Jimmy ever spent a dime for a meal. He had connections all over town.

Is he still here?

He's still here.

Does he still have a good memory?

He has a good memory. He has a good memory. Jimmy was kind of a legend around town and to this day still is.

We would love to talk to him.

Yeah. We'll see if we can.

Great. That sounds wonderful.

Tell me about the business community. What kinds of organizations did you join in the beginning?

Well, I was here for about two years and I felt like a fish out of water. I really didn't feel like I fit in with the community. I don't think that's unusual when people come to Las Vegas. But after two years, things kind of started to meld and I started to get involved. I belonged to the Chamber of Commerce. I ran for political office in '76. That was the year there wasn't one Republican elected from Clark County. It was right after Watergate. So my political career was rather short lived.

The political community then, like you go back on the pictures of the members of the board of the Chamber of Commerce and you knew everybody. They were the Harley Harmons of the world, the Ed Fikes, Berlin Millers, Mahlon Gates from the Test Site. I don't have the list right now, but every person that was on those boards and committees you knew

them pretty much on a first-name basis. The town has changed so much that today it is mostly corporate. You don't find very many private business owners on that chamber board like you used to.

Was Howard Hughes very influential during those early years that you were here?

Howard Hughes had just left town before I got here. I never had any direct contact with him or this, that and the other. I knew several people that were very close to Howard. They all had nothing but great respect for Howard Hughes. The stories that they told and so forth...this gentleman had a mind like a steel trap and he had some idiosyncrasies, but I guess we all do. One of the gentlemen that I know, Brooks, Bob Brooks, he knew Howard Hughes very well from Beverly Hills. Bob Brooks tells this story. In fact, I think they roomed together years ago. Howard Hughes never carried any money. And Bob how do I want to say it was the Brown Derby in Beverly Hills and Howard came in one night for dinner. And Bob had I think it was a Rolls-Royce or Pierce-Arrow, expensive car. Howard Hughes said, "I want to buy that car from you." So they negotiated a price. Howard didn't pay for it. He said, "I'll have a check for you from Hughes Tool." In a week or two, here comes a check from Hughes Tool. But Howard never carried any money with him to speak of. Like I say, I always had a great deal of respect for Howard Hughes.

Where did you live, what part of the city?

I lived off what they call Vegas Verdes in a little starter house out there. I'm still in today. It's between West Sahara and West Oakey, just behind the Spanish Oaks. The neighborhood has kind of gone down from what it was when I first came here. But to me it's still a very convenient location, so I stay there.

So is it convenient for the other location of your business in Centennial Hills?

It's centrally located and I spend most of my time out at Centennial Hills, but I also have the Skyline Casino in Henderson. So my house is about halfway between. And then this office is also about halfway between and this used to be a McDonalds restaurant here. In fact, where you're sitting is the drive-in and that was the pick-up window right there. What I did when I bought the building, I just enclosed this and made it into my office.

Wow. I want to know more about the different areas of the city. Were you familiar at all with the John S. Park area?

No.

Scotch 80s?

I am familiar with Scotch 80s.

What was the reputation of those areas, an area like that at the time?

Well, the Scotch 80s was a very upscale neighborhood and to probably a lesser extent still is today. But Scotch 80s and Rancho Circle were probably the two elite areas here in town.

Rancho Circle was developed by a fellow by the name of Bob Kaltenborn. Have you come across that name?

Ah, yes. Yes.

And Bob was a friend of mine. He married Pop Simon's widow.

I didn't know that.

Yeah. I think her name was Peggy. Bob was a big man. I think he had a crippled leg if I remember right. He always walked with a limp. But we're going to lunch one day and they're just breaking ground on the Fashion Show. We went out to the Sands for lunch. Bob looked over and he said, "You know, it just shows you how sometimes a guy can be so wrong." He says, "That 40 acres where the Fashion Show is," he says, "I owned that at one

time.” This may not be completely accurate, but it's going to be close. He said it was in an estate and it was left to the daughter, I think, or the son in the estate and they put it up for sale and my partner and myself bought it for \$10,000 and we got wind that her brother was going to try to crack the estate, try to challenge the estate, so we thought what we'd do is just go ahead and turn a quick profit. So he says we sold that 40 acres for I think it was 12 or 14 thousand. He says we made—I forget—two or \$4,000. He said we thought we were just the smartest guys in town. He said, “Boy, does that show you how dumb we were, huh?”

Oh, that's a great story.

Kaltenborn also developed the Huntridge area down there, among other things.

So that's right on the other side of John S. Park.

Is it?

Yes. How did you get involved in the gaming industry?

I've always liked rural Nevada. There was a fellow here in town I knew by the name of Jim Grobin and Jim was a very colorful individual. He used to have like a little shop down there by the Showboat hotel and I got to know Jim. He ended up in Goldfield, Nevada. He had a bar up there by the name of the Santa Fe Saloon. When I would travel up there, I would always stop in and see Jim and his cronies. One day about 1976□77, Jim called and he says, “I need some help.” He says, “The sheriff pulled my liquor license off the wall and I'm out of money.” He says, “I need somebody to buy this.” He said, “I'll get the liquor license back.” But he said, “I need to have somebody buy it and then I'll lease it back from them when I get my liquor license back.”

So I bought the Santa Fe Saloon and the twenty lots that surround it for I think it was \$12,500. First, I leased it out to a couple. Then when they left I decided to operate it myself.

So I got a gaming license there. That was my first experience in the gaming business. I still have it today as one of the places that Mike O'Callaghan used to hang out when he was the governor.

But then the other thing was I bought an antique slot machine one time and I decided I wanted to put it in the dealership right over there on Eastern. I didn't know you couldn't have a slot machine in a dealership. So I just put in my application and I had to go in front of the county commission and the Gaming Control Board.

To have one slot machine in your business?

Uh—huh. Lo and behold, I hired Louis Wiener—does that name ring a bell?

Yes, the attorney.

—to be my attorney. We went in front of the county commission and their eyes kind of bugged out and they finally say, well, okay, we're going to okay your license. So I got a gaming license. They said, now, you've got to restrict it to antique machines. I said okay. So I was the only gaming license in a dealership in the world for 25 years to have a gaming license in a new—car dealership. I no more could do it today than fly.

So was Goldfield the first gaming license?

Goldfield was the first one and the dealership was the second one.

So how difficult was it at that time to get that first gaming license in Goldfield?

It wasn't all that difficult. As you know, there is two different types of licenses, restricted and unrestricted. The restricted is the one where they limit you to fifteen machines or less. It's getting more difficult today. But at that time as long as you had a clean record and the financial wherewithal to justify it, you could usually get a gaming license.

So why is it more difficult today?

Because of the Dotty's regulations that they put into effect. I'm opening a bar in Goldfield that does not comply with new regulations and I was the first one to apply for a variance and receive the variance since those Dotty's regulations went into effect.

Wow. Okay. Tell me about Belmont.

Belmont is a little old mining town that was started back in the 1860s and originally it was the county seat of Nye County. Here again, early in the thirties National Geographic Magazine had a story about the other Nevada and on the cover of that was a picture of a lady who was probably in her mid to late seventies, maybe eighties by the name of Rose Walter. She was the lone resident of Belmont, Nevada. My curiosity was tweaked, so one weekend I drove up to Belmont. And where she lived was some old stone house that was the headquarters for the Combination Mining Company. I just knocked on the door and introduced myself. We had a little conversation. She said, "Would you like to come in and have a cup of coffee?" And I did. So I got acquainted with Rose.

In 1974, I think it was, we were out of gas. If you remember right, you couldn't get gas.

The lines, uh-huh.

I had stopped up to see her one day, one weekend. She said, "Jimmy, I've got this old Ford truck and it's just using too much gas." She said, "I need one of those little Datsun trucks." At that time Datsun was the only manufacturer that had the little, mini trucks. I said, "Well, Rose, I've got one on the lot." Then she says, "Well, I can make payments, but I don't have enough money for the down payment." So I said, "Well, Rose, you've got some lots here in town." She says, "Yeah." I said, "Well, maybe we can trade in a lot for the down payment on that truck." So she got out this map of the lots in Belmont and she put it on her kitchen

table. I said, "How about this lot here?" So she said, "That's fine." So she deeded me that lot and I made the \$700 down payment so she could get this Datsun truck. So that's kind of how I got started in Belmont.

Now, she was the lone person living in the Belmont area?

She was the lone person living in Belmont at that time, year round, uh-huh.

And so it has grown since that point?

Well, I call it Poor Man's Mount Charleston. Yes, it has grown. There are probably 25 or 30 residents up there now. Some of the people live in houses that originally were there. Some of them have built new places. Most of them have built new places. But the thing about Belmont as opposed to Mount Charleston, nobody is close to anybody. Rather than having a neighbor right next door to you, your neighbor maybe is two or 300 yards away. So each place kind of has its own personality and so forth. Being that it's between seven and 8,000 feet elevation, it's much cooler in the summertime up there. I talked to my brother. He called this morning. He spends the summers up there. They actually had a freeze last night. But that's how I got my involvement in Belmont.

And you built a church there?

I built a church there. Originally there was a Catholic church. Before Belmont fell into disrepair. Manhattan, Nevada is the next canyon over. It's about 12 miles away. The residents of Manhattan came over and dismembered the church in Belmont and took it to Manhattan and reconstructed it there. That church to this day is still there. But Belmont didn't have a church. So I got this piece of property there that I had bought at a county sale. I went over and I took the measurements off that original church and had it rebuilt there in Belmont. It's been very well received. Until recently when the pastor got very sick there was

a traveling pastor. Ken Curtis did services twice a month, had a lot of marriages there, a lot of weddings, some funerals. But it's served a purpose very well.

What gave you that idea?

Well, I just thought the little town needed a church. For it to be a successful town, you need a church and a bar.

That's very good. Yes.

The town has a bar, so I just added the church.

That's great. I love it. Why the interest in rural Nevada?

I don't know.

Living in Las Vegas.

Yeah. I just enjoyed getting out. I enjoy Nevada history. I guess I'm fascinated by it. I was probably born a hundred years too late. I was probably a miner in a previous life.

Right. What kinds of minerals did they mine in the Belmont area?

It was primarily silver.

You own a place here on Boulder Highway?

Skyline Casino.

And how long have you had that one?

It will be nine years next month.

What is the story behind that?

Well, it was a local casino. It was owned by John Kish. John was a very philanthropic person here, particularly in the Henderson area, very active in the Boys and Girls Club. His father had owned it originally and prior to that it was a bar. It's probably 40 years, 45 years old and it started off as a bar. It was successful. They kept expanding on it, expanding on it.

And John Kish talked on and off about selling the bar. Every time he'd get close to it, he decided not. It was kind of his baby and he really didn't need the money.

One day I was talking with one of my broker friends. I'm trying to think who it was. But anyway, he said I've got the Skyline listed. David Atwell. I don't know if you know David or not, but he's a broker here in town. So anyway, it was probably the easiest deal that you've ever seen. He said, "Let's go out and talk to John." We got in the car. It was he and a fellow by the name of Guy Deiro, who is also a broker. So we got in the car and went out and talked to John. I had known John before. He showed me through the place. Told me what he wanted for it. We negotiated for a few minutes. Shook hands on it. Had his attorney draw up the agreement. The next day we signed it. Six months later I took over, the first of July. Probably the quickest deal, easiest deal, casino property that has ever happened in the state of Nevada. Like I say, the agreement that was drawn was fair. I got licensed in six months for that, which was record time. Got financed on it, which Selma Bartlett—I don't know if you remember Selma Bartlett.

Oh, yes.

She handled the financing on it. Like I say, it went very, very well. It's been a good investment for me. We just spent about eight, 900,000 renovating it. It looks beautiful. Great. I want to see that because when I saw the Skyline, I just couldn't picture the Skyline. Yeah. It's primarily locals. We have about 400 machines, a great restaurant, music on the weekends. We have the Dummkopfs. Remember the Dummkopfs, Claytee? It was a German band that played up at Mount Charleston for years. They used to be with Mickey Finn. They used to play with Mickey Finn when he played here in town. So like I say, it's kind of a locals' place.

Is John Kish still in Henderson?

No. John Kish unfortunately died. I said, "John, why you want to sell this?" He said, "Well, I want to retire." John was five years younger than I am. It didn't make sense for me to be buying it if he's going to retire. But John was a very heavy smoker. I've never seen anybody chain smoke as much he did. Obviously it got to him prematurely. But I think maybe he knew it was going to get to him and decided it was time to get out.

The reason I'm asking is because I'm helping several entities in the Henderson area.

The Henderson Historical Society and the Henderson Libraries, they're doing an oral history project of Henderson. So I'm helping whenever I hear a Henderson name that I know should be interviewed.

His partner, his name is Jack—I forget what Jack's name is. But he's still around and I could get it for you. He's probably one you might want to interview, very interesting guy.

Fantastic. So I'm helping them learn how to do oral interviews, the whole thing.

Super.

So we're looking forward to that being a wonderful project for them.

In an interview that you did—let me see if I can find it. You did an interview and you said something about you must have had brain damage when you made a certain investment. And I thought that was a little funny. Let me see if I can find it.

Probably the Longstreet.

I think that was it. So why did you think that was a bad investment?

Well, I started the Nevada Auto Auction here in 1987 out on Las Vegas Boulevard South. I had it for five years and it was very successful. I sold out to a couple of gentleman in the car business and I took the money and I built what they call the Longstreet Casino. It's right on

the way to Death Valley. It was kind of a dream of mine to do that because any point there's a California-Nevada border there's usually a casino close to it. So this is one of the only places in Nevada that didn't have a casino on it. So anyway, I built a very nice property. But it's been a challenge. Amargosa Valley has not—in fact, it's regressed. We're still in business and we hope to be. But for the investment it has not been one of my better investment; I'll put it that way. Beautiful place. I named it after a fellow by the name of Jack Longstreet, who was a very interesting guy and pioneer here in Nevada. If you ever get the chance, read the book on Jack Longstreet.

I should know that name. I mean I taught Nevada History at one time.

Sally—I can never pronounce her last name—Zanjani from Reno, UNR, she wrote the history of Jack Longstreet. It's a fascinating book. He was about six-foot-four, had one ear missing, was an early entrepreneur, tougher than nails. But lots of Jack Longstreet stories. Like I say, he got in several gun battles and he killed a couple of people. This Alice Lorigan who I knew who used to live in Belmont, she remembers Jack Longstreet coming in with his wagon to get supplies in Belmont. And she just loved him. She said he'd always pat the kids on the head and buy them candy. She thought he was great. So like I say, I've kind of followed—this is our local cat here. We got him when he was about that big [demonstrating] out from underneath one of the cars. Now he signs the checks.

Beautiful.

But anyway, that's the story. When I say I must have had brain damage, this applies to that.

Okay, great. I'm interested in business organizations. I know that you have been involved in the Better Business Bureau.

Yes.

How did that happen? And tell me what that organization is like. I know that people call up when they've had bad service at a business. So tell me more about it.

The Better Business Bureau, it's kind of a paper tiger in a way and it's got no authority to do anything, but it just kind of reports on and gives recommendations and so forth. It's an organization that tries to rate businesses as to ethical procedures and so forth. I've been on that board many, many years. I don't know how many. We've had a few changes of the management there. In fact, I'm interviewing Thursday for a new director here. We'll see what happens there. It's got about I think 15 to 18 employees. They do primarily recordkeeping reports and consumer alerts and that type thing.

And you find that with all the other things that we have today where you can call a television station and they will go out and do investigations for you—so the Better Business Bureau is still very valuable?

Yeah. They do not do that investigative reporting type thing. But what they will do, they will rate the businesses as to the number of complaints. All businesses are going to have complaints. Just because a business gets complaints doesn't mean it's a bad business. Where they will rate somebody negatively is if they have complaints and they don't give a satisfactory answer. Then all the whistles and bells and the alarms go off. As long as a business has a legitimate answer as to why their side of the story is, usually it gets resolved. They also have an arbitration□type thing that if a business wants to arbitrate with a customer they can do that and that's a valuable service as opposed to going to court.

Tell me about the Red Cross.

The Red Cross is like so many other organizations in town; they're all hurting for money. But the Red Cross, they teach life□saving. They have classes on swimming, CPR. They

assist fire victims and so forth in disasters. It's a worldwide organization. Each community has its own chapter. I'm not currently on the board. I was probably the longest serving member on the board. You're only supposed to serve like six years and I think I was on it for 24 years. Then finally they got wise and threw me off.

That name sort of jumped out at me when I saw it in one of the articles that I read about you. I'm interviewing Ann Meyers right now.

I know Ann Meyers.

Okay. I thought you would. One of the things when she told me the story about leaving Yugoslavia, escaping from the concentration camp and crossing the border, the first thing that they did is they were taken into a Red Cross hospital and nursed back to health.

I didn't know that.

So when I saw that I said, *wow, what a connection.*

It is. Is she active or anything anymore? I haven't seen her for a long time.

She does a lot of ballroom dancing.

Does she?

Uh-huh. She still has her properties at Tahoe and right now she's in Tahoe opening her houses for the summer. So yeah, she's still very, very active.

She's tougher than nails.

Oh, she is. She is just amazing. I just love talking to her. She has some great stories to tell.

And the Salvation Army Advisory Board. People recommend you to different boards?

They do. I'm usually not smart enough to get off of them. But I've been on that for probably 25 years also.

That's great. That's wonderful. When you served in the army, were we in the Korean Conflict at that time?

It was right after the Korean War.

After, okay. So tell me about your military service.

It was something less than spectacular. I was in the army for two years. I was in Charleston, South Carolina. They had that army depot down there where the army had all their floating boats. The army actually has more floating equipment, at least at that time, than the navy did. That was kind of interesting. Then I went to Fort Polk. They made me the colonel's orderly. If that wasn't a farce. But one of the things I remember about it is the Citadel, College, which is in Charleston. Dwight Eisenhower came down there when he was president and they had a ceremony for him at the Citadel stadium, the parade grounds. So they had the cadets from Citadel with their honor guard. Then they had the marines, the navy, and I was one of the honor guards for the army and for President Eisenhower. Here are all these Citadel cadets that are just sharper than could be and then myself and three other army guys that were stumbling around there. It was kind of like from one extreme to the other. But we got through it. It was kind of fun.

That's great. Tell me about the first car you ever owned.

The first car I ever owned was a 1940 Ford that my dad got me. At that time they had wage control, wage and price controls, and the government controlled what you could sell a car for. At that time the top price you could get out of '40 Ford was \$343.

Was that because of the war?

No. It was because of inflation. My first car was a '40 Ford. Like I said, it sold for \$343 when I sold it.

Wow, how times have changed. How did you get involved in such creative commercials for your dealerships?

One day one of the advertising guys that I knew suggested that my daughter and I do it. So I asked Stacey, "Would you do it?" No, she was very reluctant to it at first. When we got around to filming the first day, Stacey said, "Dad, I didn't sleep at all last night." She said, "I was so worried about doing that commercial." So that's how we did it. When she got married and she had her little son, then we started bringing him aboard and so forth. That's kind of how we got started on that.

What is your favorite?

Well, I think the most memorable one was the one where—well, we did a series one time on Stacey getting married, but then we also had a series of one where—now, this was true—we were being audited by the IRS. It was a year-long audit. We'd have them coming in and taking the furniture out. So they finally got through with the audit and they put me in a barrel with a couple of straps and Stacey says, "Well, how did the audit end up, Dad?" And I said, "Oh, just fine, Stacey." And I'm standing there in this barrel. The phone started ringing off the hook on that one.

Oh, that's great. That was good. What are some of your favorite stories about Las Vegas? You know a lot of people, so some of the Las Vegas favorites.

I'll tell you there's a fellow that I wish you could—I don't know if you've ever interview him, but his name is Billy Parker. Billy was married to Barbara Binion and he has more stories that you can shake a stick at. But one of the stories that he tells me that he was dealing

downtown. And Howard Hughes, in his younger days, came in and cashed a check. He knew Billy and they talked back and forth. A week or two later the pit boss came over to Billy and said, "Billy, that check that you okayed the other day, it bounced." He said, "Who was it?" He said, "It's Howard Hughes."

Anyway, to make a long story short, they put it back in about two or three times before the check went through. Billy Parker said, "You know, Marsh, that's about the dumbest thing I've ever done." He said, "If I would have put the \$20 in and kept that NSF check of Howard Hughes, it would be worth a fortune today."

That's right. Yes. That's a good one.

So that's kind of a cute story. I have some friends of mine that are into the paranormal type thing. A couple of years ago in the dead of winter—you know where Howard Hughes' cottage is? Behind Channel 8?

Oh, yes. Okay.

That's where Howard Hughes used to live. They came in there on a cold winter night and I went with them and they did all the things and the stuff that was going on that I couldn't explain. One of the things they do, they put a glass plate out there and they cover it with, like, talcum powder. All the sudden, you look at it and here is like an "S" in it or a number on it. They kept coming up with the name Walter. It didn't ring a bell.

The next night I happened to go to a Christmas party and Steve and Eydie Gormé were there. And I was telling them about this story and about how the name Walter kept coming up on there. They said, "Well, that's Walter Kane; he was Howard Hughes' very close friend and his entertainment director." So I thought that was kind of interesting.

One of the stories—I was the employees association, which is "officed" right across

the street here, and this is back in the seventies or something and I was the president of it. We hired a director to run it for us. This guy—what's his name? I'll think of it in a minute. But big guy, looked like a sumo wrestler. He started doing things. He started letting people go. He started—Mike Webster was his name. So I called Mike over and I said, "Mike, you're getting out of control. I don't want you to make any more personnel changes. I don't want you doing any more contracts unless I know about it."

It wasn't 30 minutes later then the secretary who worked for him came over, Helen Jones. I said, "What are you doing?" That's when my office was right in that building behind us there. She says, "Well, I just got fired." I said, "What do you mean you got fired?" She says, "Mike Webster just fired me." I said, *holy cow, I just told him...* "So I'm on the streets."

Anyway, I said, "Let's go back and do a background check on this guy." This guy, everything he had told us was false. He said he was from Alaska. He said he worked for the Teamsters. He said he had a college degree, but he had no college degree. The references that we had checked on him were all phony plants. He had somebody that would pick up the phone and say, you know, Alaska State College. It was no more Alaska State College than a fly. And come to find out we got a friend of mine who was in the FBI and he ran an FBI check and this guy had a record as long as your arm.

The next day we went over there and he had shaved his head. He was completely bald. He must have weighed like 350 pounds. He was a huge man. So I called the directors together and I said, "Guys, we've got to do something." And I was the young whippersnapper on the block; these guys were 20 years my senior and been around forever. They said, "Don't worry, Marsh, we'll back you up."

So we get in this little conference room. I said, "Mike, I'm going to let you go; get your keys and get out of here." I'm like this [demonstrating]. I'm looking over my shoulder and there's nobody behind me. Then all of a sudden they're sitting on their hands. He looks at me and he says, "Marsh, I'm going to have your balls." And I think he literally meant it.

Believe me, I got home not that night, the next night. The neighbor's door had been kicked down. Yeah. I would open the hood of the car before I'd start it. But this guy had a record and he was out for blood. I mean his record was everything from heroin to check-kiting to possession of drugs, stolen goods, assault on officers. And the FBI guy said this is one of the most dangerous profiles you can have. He says most criminals have a profile of robbing cars or banks. He said this guy is all over the board; you don't know what he's going to be doing next. He went to the paper and gave the paper a big article about how we had defamed him and how he was going to—oh, I mean, it was all over town. So that was one of the stories that I remember.

The other one is when—were you here when—who was the mobster that was—culinary guy?

Oh, Bramlet.

Bramlet. During the Al Bramlet days they had all the union problems. One night over here I had a Jeep Cherokee stolen from the lot. It ended up behind the Starboard Tack over here and the whole back of it was loaded with high-powered explosives. The detonator did not go off, but it was scheduled to blow up the Starboard Tack and that would have taken out half my dealership behind it. That was in the days of Al Bramlet. I think it was Bramlet that did that.

Hanley.

Ed Hanley was involved, yeah. It was a Hanley□Bramlet type thing. But they stole the Jeep that they used to do that. It came off my lot. So that was a little nerve□racking there for a little while.

That was kind of close. What is the Employees Association?

The Employees Association was an organization that was started many, many years ago prior to my time. It was primarily to represent the businesses in negotiations with the unions. It still exists to this day; however, to a much lesser extent.

Interesting. One of your other out□of□town ventures is in Tonopah. Tell me a little about Tonopah. I heard that you go to Tonopah often for parades and their celebrations.

They have a parade once a year, yeah, and I usually go. Also, they have a parade in Belmont. Let me get back to the parade in Belmont a minute.

So there are enough people now for a parade?

Fourth of July they have a parade and they get up to two or 300 people in the little town of Belmont. This one year—I keep two mules up there. I don't anymore, but I used to. So I decided that I was going to try to win. They give you judging, you know, first or second. So I went down to Williams Costume and I bought a pair of flesh□colored leotards and I got a blond wig and a bunch of makeup. I went to Belmont. I was dating Senator Tiffany at the time. So we put these leotards on. I got a long cigarette holder with a cigarette on it, a pair of glasses, rouge. I rode through town as Lady Godiva.

And you didn't win?

I did win. I did win.

Oh, good. That's wonderful.

Those people in that town to this day are still talking about Lady Godiva.

I love it. So do they still give prizes for the parade in Belmont?

Yeah. But they've never had anything to top that.

Would you do it again?

Oh, sure.

Yeah. That's Jim Butler Days they have up there.

That's it. She said they're not going to do it until July 28th this time.

Good. When I first started in Tonopah, I leased the gaming at the Mizpah Hotel and I was there for three years. That's when Bill Allison owned the hotel. Then the Valley Bank had their standalone building there. When they closed down, I bought the building where the Valley Bank had been and I moved the gaming from the Mizpah down there. And it's still there to this day. It's been pretty successful.

Then there's a complex there called the Tonopah Station House. I bought that about eight or nine years ago and still have that. That's a hotel and a bar and restaurant. Then I own Scolari's, the grocery store next door to it. So that's been a pretty good investment there.

The one I'm building now is kind of cute. There is a motel there called the Silver Queen. I don't know if you ever saw it. But anyway, it was on two levels. One was on grade level with the highway and the other was built on a mining tailing stop, which is probably 30, 40 feet above the grade level. But years ago they tore the one down in front and they left this crappy old motel up there on this hill. I bought it and I turned it into a monthly, weekly rental thing for transient workers. But in front of this thing, right on the edge was a swimming pool, which hadn't been used for years. So I took out the swimming pool and I'm

building a bar in the meantime, I name my properties after usually mining areas. So I named it Humbug after the Humbug Mining District in Colorado. So I'm building this bar in front and it's called the Bug Bar. We're going to try to have it open by the first of July. I think it's going to be very, very unique. It's probably about the size of this office here, not very big. It's got a big 32-foot deck out in front. I'm going to have a band playing and barbequing. Inside we've got a fireplace and I'm putting a few antiques around and so forth. So I'm kind of looking forward to that. That is a beautiful view, if there is such a thing in Tonopah, overlooking the street and the Mizpah.

How do you keep up with everything, especially when they're so far apart?

I've had good employees—I've had some not so good by and large, it's trying to find good people. By and large, I've done fairly well, but not a hundred percent. I've had some embezzlement the last few years on the restricted areas. The unrestricted for Gaming Control you've got enough checks and balances. But the in little one-horse towns, where you just have one person, you're kind of vulnerable. It seems like the pattern is single women, booze and video poker. That is a combination that is—the big thing is I think they get hooked on video poker. And women, I don't know if you've read about it, are much more susceptible to video poker than men.

And that money temptation, they can't resist it. And they will take money thinking they're going to pay it back and it never happens. In fact, I'm supposed to go to Lincoln County two weeks from now for a preliminary trial on this one lady.

Oh, that's sad.

But the bar we have in Pioche originally was a Wells Fargo Express office. In the back of the bar is the walk-in safe where they used to keep the cash and bullion and so forth. So we

use it as a liquor storage now. But it's one of the tourist things; we show people the old Wells Fargo safe. It's got a big, thick door about that thick [demonstrating].

I saw one similar to that down at the Mob Museum. The old post office used to have that kind of a safe.

Yep. When I first came to town I had a post office box down there.

At one time they were going to try to find families that had kept those post office boxes from the beginning up until the time the post office closed, but I don't know if they ever did that or not.

I don't know either. In retrospect, I wish I would have kept mine. Then I moved over to the Huntridge Station and then they closed that. But anyway, they moved them around a little bit. But it's kind of interesting.

Yeah. This is an interesting town. I love it.

The last place is Goldfield. What kind of interest have you had in the Goldfield area?

Well, I told you about the Santa Fe Saloon that I have over there.

Yes, you did.

Since then we've built a little eight-unit motel there. We're the only lodging in town. One of the old mine frames—not the frames, but the head frames from one of the mines, we moved that in. It was bound to be destructed. Then we moved it in and put it next to the bar to preserve that part of the history of it.

At the county sale here a few years ago I bought the old property up the wash that used to be the Brewery and the Nixon Building, which used to be the combination mining company office of George Wingfield and George Nixon.

Fantastic.

At one time that was the twelfth wealthiest corporation in America. It's a three-story building. George Wingfield, the top story was his apartment and he lived in that until he got married and then he bought a house there. But on the bottom floor was the bank and a cashier and then the second floor was the attorney and the mapping engineers and then the third floor was where George lived.

Amazing. Earlier you said something about a piece of property where transient workers could live. Do we have a recurrence of mining in several of those areas?

No. Then that's the Humbug that I was telling you about. That's what I was sprinkling on. With the price of gold being where it is, there's a lot of drilling activity up there. Then this Crescent Solar Project that is under construction now.

Okay, great. I think I have exhausted the questions that I wanted to ask you. What do you see as the future of Las Vegas; now that we're coming out of this recession, how do you see this town?

I think it's going to take us a long time to climb back up. I'm not sure we're ever going to get back to our glory days again. And it's probably not all bad.

Okay. And so when you say glory days again, to the level of visitors or construction?

Construction, the housing boom and land values. I think it's going to be a long time. I'm not sure we'll ever get back to where we were before. But that's probably not all bad. If we can kind of level it out, that'll be fine. The boom and bust is probably not a good scenario to have. I remember for years, and you probably remember too so well, "Las Vegas is recession proof." You don't hear that anymore.

No. That's right.

And we've been hit very hard.

There have been lots and lots of innovations downtown, new businesses just all kinds of things, music center. Where do you see downtown Las Vegas?

I think that downtown is going to kind of continue to come back. Obviously with Zappos down there, it gives it a huge boost. Like I say, some of the hotels are—I think some of them are still struggling and probably will continue to. But it certainly is a lot better than it was a few years ago. I stay and refer a lot of my friends to the Golden Nugget down there. It's a beautiful property.

Oh, yeah. It's wonderful.

Beautiful property. I remember when they built the Union Plaza. That was the year I got here. That was a very successful little hotel. One of the criticisms I have—they'll take a successful hotel like the Union Plaza and they think, well, bigger is better and they will go in and change it. And they added rooms. When they first built that hotel, the floor of that hotel was so nice. They had the Omaha Restaurant back there. I don't know if you remember. But it was right down kind of behind the bandstand there and they had the nice coffee shop. But once they started changing that—like I say, bigger is not always better. Once they did that, it's never been the same. Never has the personality. Same thing happened with the Showboat over here. They started changing that. The original floor plans—like in the Union Plaza they put the check-in desk up on the second floor. Well, that's a no-no in any hotel/casino. You want that check-in desk right there where you can see the casino floor and you want people to have to walk through the casino to get to their rooms. That wasn't the way it was there.

So have you been to Oscar's?

I have.

And how do you like it?

I like it. It wasn't out of the world, but I thought it was fine. I enjoyed it. I don't think I'd go back real soon. The acoustics I think leave a lot to be desired. But it was very nice. No, I like Oscar's.

Like I say, the Golden Nugget is probably the great one downtown. Binions, I remember years ago they had a little casino downtown there. What's the husband's name that married—was it Becky Binion? Behnen, Nick Behnen. Does that ring a bell?

Yes.

They had Benny's safe. It was in the bottom of the Binion Hotel. It came from the Cortez Mine up around Elko. Somehow or other, they had problems with that safe and they sent it to a locksmith to fix it. Nobody ever paid for getting it fixed. So they put it in a public auction at I think the Tropicana Hotel. It was from the Cortez Mine. That was the fellow who was a friend of Benny Binion's who was an old legend here in town and his name eludes me. But he and Benny were like this [demonstrating]. He ran the place when Benny went to prison. But that was a safe that he brought from the Cortez Mine.

But anyway, it was like a lien sale on this safe. I wanted it. I thought that would be neat to have. It was big, about six-foot safe. And this Nick Behnen was in there and he was letting everybody know he was going to buy that safe come hell or high water. Well, that's the dumbest thing you can do at auction is to tell somebody that everybody on the floor just bids him up. So I didn't care what I was bidding. I just kept bidding. And he ended up paying like \$30,000 for that safe, which was probably worth five.

Oh, wow. That's good.

So that's kind of a cute story.

Yes, it is. What have you seen in race relations here in Las Vegas? Especially owning casinos, and you started owning them back in the seventies.

I really have not experienced anything in that. Of course, being the smaller properties, like I say, I really have little or no experience with it. Of course, rural Nevada there's no such thing as—

Exactly.

But at the Skyline there, we've got quite a few black clientele and they're great clientele.

And by the time you purchased that, integration was all over the city by that time.

Yeah. So probably no evidence of it.

No. I never really had any experience with that.

Wonderful. Any closing remarks?

No. I appreciate you coming down.

Well, I really enjoyed this. We love to talk to people who have had different experiences in Nevada. And you've had them not just in Las Vegas but all over the state. So this is just wonderful.

One of the things in one of this is—I put a bus trip together every year called the Hacks and Tracks. I charter a bus and I send out invitations to a couple hundred people. I know that there's only like ten or fifteen percent that respond. So if I want twenty people, I'll send out two hundred invitations. But anyway, I put this bus trip together and we go different places.

Three years ago I had this bus—most of these people have never been out of Las Vegas. The first night we stayed in Tonopah. Then I'm taking them up through Monitor Valley and there's a phenomena up there. Monitor Valley is this big, wide valley and there is

a crater in the middle of the valley. It's called Diana's Punch Bowl. I wanted to take them there because you can get up on this crater and you look down and here is this steaming water at the bottom of this crater.

Well, I've got this bus out in the middle of the valley and to go to the crater you take a side road. I say a road; it's just a track. So I told the bus driver, I said, "I think this is where we turn off." So we turned off. We got off the road maybe a hundred yards and I realized that, "No, I said, "I'm a mile short; we've got to go back to the main road."

So this fifty-seven passenger bus—the trail kind of curved around and came right back to the main road. Here is this little wash. The front wheels went over it. The back wheels go over this thing and all the sudden the bus goes [demonstrating]. The overhang of that bus is like 12 feet long. And we are hung up. We have no tools, no nothing. So we're out there trying to dig out the back of this bus and that's not working.

Finally a guy comes down the road, first vehicle in an hour, with a pickup truck. He's looking at this bus hung up in the middle of the desert and he thinks we're all nuts. So he comes over and I happen to know him. He's got a shovel in there. We're trying it. That doesn't work. So he says, "Well, let me hook on to it." He's got a four-wheel drive truck. We hooked onto that bus. It didn't budge it. I'm thinking, *Oh, my god, what the hell are we going to do?* He said, "Well, if you want to, you can borrow my truck."

So I borrowed his truck and I went back 20 miles to the closest farmhouse, ranch house, and the rancher wasn't home, but thank goodness he left the house open. He had a mobile radio that I could call into Tonopah. So I got a hold of Tonopah and they sent this big 18-wheel wrecker out to try to get us out.

Well, by the time I get back to the bus, it's starting to get dark and it's starting to get

cold. I'm sure I've got 50 screaming people that are hysterical. I'm thinking, *What in the world?* I get back there I've got 50 partying people. They're having the time of their lives. They are telling stories and singing. I'm the only one hysterical.

But this whole trip and we finally got them out and we were supposed to be in Eureka by six and we got out of there at eleven. But this whole trip, I took them there and I took them to the Eureka Opera House. We charter the Nevada Northern Railroad. We do that. We take them through the prison. We bring them back through Ely. We take them through Pioche. We show them the charcoal kilns. We take them to the courthouse. All those things. Nobody remembers it. All they remember about it is getting stuck. And not that that wasn't bad enough, but somebody made a cartoon of Marsh four-wheeling. They've got this cartoon of the bus and all these people looking out the windows, without a wrecker. They published it in the paper, oh. I think my bus trip will go down in history.

That's great. So do you still do that bus trip?

Yeah. I just got back two weeks ago.

So you do it in May?

Yeah, lots of times in May.

I want to be on your mailing list.

I've got your card. I'll put you on it.

Fantastic. I would love to be on the mailing list because I've been to Ely, Elko, and lots of other smaller towns, but there's so many that I have missed.

Well, next year I'm either going to take you up through that route again—this year we went over to Bodie, California. Have you ever been to Bodie?

No.

Oh. It's a California state park. We went to Beatty and I showed them the new brothel up there. Brothel is always a stop. And the women like it more than the men.

I know. I went to a brothel in Ely.

I took them to the brothel. Then we took them to Goldfield and we took them to the Goldfield Hotel, the Nixon Building, the firehouse and the Santa Fe Saloon. We took them up to a friend of mine is really creative—a mining camp out in the desert. We took them out there. We had hors d'oeuvres. We took them back to the Santa Fe and let them spend their money. We stayed in Tonopah. The next day I took them out to Campbell□Kelly Forge, which is a foundry from back in the heydays. It's like a museum in itself. It's really fascinating. Then we took them out to Crescent Dunes Solar, showed them the new solar plant. We took them over to Bodie, California and showed them around there. We stayed that night in June Lake. Then we came on down to Bishop and I took them to Laws Railroad Museum, which is really fascinating, then down to Lone Pine to see Jim Rogers Movie Museum. Then we crossed Death Valley and spent the night in Longstreet. Then the next night I took them over to Armagosa Opera House.

And next year I'm either going to go up through Tonopah—we usually go through Tonopah just because it's a good stop and then up through Belmont and Monitor Valley and Eureka. And then I'm going to go to Ely and we're charter—the highlight is always chartering that train, the wine□and□cheese thing out in the desert. That's fun. Then we come down through Pioche and show them the courthouse and this, that and the other. Have you seen that cowboy's dream, the house, the lodge that Mrs. Frias built in memory of her husband there?

No.

Remember Charlie Frias, the taxicab guy?

Yes, but I don't—

She built this. It looks like something would be in Jackson Hole. It's the most beautiful lodge. It's right off Highway 93. Only has five guest rooms. Charge \$500 a night for a guest room.

But you don't stay there?

We don't stay there. But it is just one beautiful, beautiful—yeah. Leathers, hardwoods, 30-foot ceilings with fireplaces. Oh, it's immaculate.

So she uses it for corporate functions, maybe?

I don't think so. I think it was just a tribute to her husband who always wanted something like that. Either I'm going to do that or I guess I'm going to do it in September and take you back to Colorado and the Four Corners area. Have you ever been on the Durango-Silverton Railroad?

No.

Oh, you'll love that. And through Ouray and Telluride and Silverton.

Oh, no, none of that. But you spend every night in a hotel somewhere?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, we're not camping out.

Okay, good. I grew up on a farm. I don't camp out.

Where did you grow up?

Ahoskie, North Carolina. So I don't camp out.

No. I'll make sure we get you on the list.

Please do. I would love that. Well, this has been wonderful.

Good. My pleasure.

Thank you so very much.

Thanks for coming in.

Oh, yes.

[End of recorded interview]

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