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An Interview with
Jerushia McDonald Hylton
and Suzilene McDonald

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

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Table of Contents

The two McDonald sisters tell of the five McDonald children growing up on Madison Street on the Westside. However, early on they attended St. Peter's Catholic School in Henderson. Protected by their parents, aware that they looked "different" than others. Talk about they differed from each other; parents as owners of restaurant at the Cove; father (Earl) also a musician and had Flash Electric; mother (Mary McDonald Hendricks) a seamstress and also worked for Nevada Power; Aunt and uncle (Whittaker) had businesses in the neighborhood.....1 – 11

Occasionally worked at the Cove with dad; began singing as the *MacPhees* in local talent shows; recall being the youngest (elementary school age) act to ever open for the Checkmates; performed popular cover songs. Transferred to Jo MacKey Elementary School where they were excellent students, participated in drill and marching band. Talk about Helldorado Days, the tradition, full community involvement and such.....12 – 23

Talk more about Mom's Kitchen, the restaurant at the Cove; also mention other businesses such as Harrison House, Jackson Barbershop, Johnny's Meat Market. Other neighborhood communities mentioned include Berkley Square and Bonanza Village. Classroom memories and discipline experiences. Mentions the Lamb family, Sheriff Lamb, Binions, Moodys, Bishop C.C. Cox, Hannah Brown, among a long list of other community members24 – 33

Recall when their father worked at the Nevada Test Site; remember more as an entrepreneur and musician; mother as an entrepreneur, too. Father played sax at jam sessions at Town Tavern, El Morocco. Mention Sammy Davis Jr., Lionel Hampton, Billy Eckstine; when father quit playing. Talk about when they personally got started in show business; becoming first black Miss North Las Vegas; auditions for Folies Bergère; traveled with Ebony Fashion Fair for a year. Remember the prejudice within Las Vegas at the time.....34 – 41

Talk about publicity received during early years of their careers; work with Sly Stone; mentoring by Anita Mann, Bob Rafelson; performed in Australia with Damita Jo and Billy Eckstine; Suzi's introduction to Giorgio Moroder by Marisa Berenson and did an album that went platinum, tells how she became "Suzi Lane". Jerushia tells her early food service work path on the Strip; how she liked costumes and details of working Bacchanal at Casesars; then becomes first ring girl at professional boxing matches which changed her life.....42 – 52

Suzi talks about after her accident, going to New York, career restarting as Lane Bryant's first black large-size model. Recall how Sinatra, Sammy Davis, etc were given special treatment, service. Mention contact with Diana Ross and other celebrities; experience of being among mob people. Importance of union membership; changes in treatment of blacks on Strip; Vegas history from their perspective and friendship with

Bill Cosby. Modeling career remembrances; first large-size black models for Lane Bryant clothing stores, catalog models, forerunners in the industry.....Pages 53 – 68

Talk about becoming Pat Cuington as photographer and model; being first large size models for Ford Modeling Agency; lived in New York City different lengths of time. Recall getting reigniting singing careers; in 1988 produced show called Come Share Our Love; funny story about flushing toilet during performance. Jerushia tells of coming back to Las Vegas; Suzi remains in New York modeling. Observations of race and changes in Las Vegas and Westside. Explain foundation started by Jerushia called Hands of Comfort..... Page 69 – 90

Preface

Jerushia McDonald Hylton and Suzilene McDonald grew up on Las Vegas' Westside. It was a family of five children with entrepreneurial parents who worked hard to provide for their family. Dad was also a highly regarded saxophone player in the community.

The musical talent ran in the family, as did beauty. Both Jerushia and Suzilene enjoyed life as entertainers and also as successful fashion models in magazine and catalogues. Their careers took them to the far reaches of the world and introduced them to a celebrity-studded experience.

In recent years Jerushia founded the Hands of Comfort Foundation in Las Vegas, which involves Suzi and other family members. Hands of Comfort's mission is to assist those dealing with trauma or crisis in their lives.

This is Claytee White. It is September 23rd, 2011. We are here in the northwestern part of the city. I'm with two of the McDonald sisters.

So I want you two to give your name and to spell your first names for me.

Suzilienne, S-U-Z-I-L-I-E-N-E; McDonald, M-C-D-O-N-A-L-D.

Wonderful. And Suzilienne, do people call you by that name, or can I shorten it?

They call me Suzi. I take the first four letters of Suzilienne, S-U-Z-I.

And you're fine with that?

Oh, yes.

I can call you Suzi?

Oh, absolutely.

Okay. So here's what we're going to do. We're going to get started now. We're going to start -- who would like to go first? Great.

You want me to start first? Okay.

Okay. And I want you to start with your early life. Just tell me what it was like growing up in Las Vegas and some of your earliest memories.

Okay. Well, this is Jerushia. Being the third child of five siblings, first of all, was very interesting. Growing up in Vegas, wow, on the Westside -- we started off on Monroe from what I remember and then Madison. Anyway, growing up it was like the Wild, Wild West for me. First of all, it was a very small community and back then everybody was so close-knit within the community, as well as with our families. Everybody was known by their last name. We knew each family by their last name. Everybody respected each other in the community, even the law enforcement. Everything was so different. We could leave our doors open.

But anyway, being the third sibling was quite interesting. I was always trying to find my identity among all these beautiful sandy-haired, light-eyed girls in my family—smart, I mean a lot of book sense, where I wasn't as smart as they were. You know, I was the creative one. Can I say that? Not to put a damper on it. So I was always creating stuff. And they'll tell you I was always creating stuff, always provoking my family in making them laugh and act crazy, whatever. And the same holds true in the community. I was always somewhere that no one knew where I was. I was always in somebody's house or where I should not have been. I was the daring one. If my mother told me to not to do something, I would do it, okay? But I was always very creative. Most people always called me little Richard Pryor, and even today people think I'm comical. I was the daring one. I was the one that would do what other people wouldn't do; again, trying to find myself from the time I was a little girl.

I remember one time my mother and father were together at the time and we were all going to Catholic school. But because I was slower at Saint Peter's, my mother had to pull me out of Saint Peter's and put me into a private school, which is Las Vegas Day School, which is a big school now right there on Jones and Desert Inn. And the school was small then. I knew all the stars that lived here at that time was going there and I was the only black kid. I remember my mother dressed me to wear a certain outfit. She made all of our clothes. We never had store-bought clothes, and I always desired to wear store-bought clothes because that seemed like that's what everybody was wearing, not really realizing that everybody was desiring to have what I had.

So what I ended up doing is my mom sent me out to school and she left a little early. So before the bus came, I went over somebody's house. Again, I was always at

somebody's house eating or wearing their clothes. And I ended up going over there and changing my clothes, left mine there, changed my hair, made a bow, a big old bow, put on makeup, and went to school, not realizing that we were having pictures that day -- oh, yes, I did. I did not think that my mother was going to see the pictures. So, of course, when the pictures came mother was shocked and I had all this makeup on and a big bow.

How old were you?

I had to be like in the third -- no.

She was like seven or eight.

Yeah. Somewhere like that, yeah. And I had on heels with stockings. I had on socks when I left home. So anyway, and I'll never forget the family was Gelinda and Belinda. They had moved here from the South. I thought they were like "the" thing. You know, they had a potato in the window. You know, how all southerners had potatoes and they grew the plants? My mom didn't have any of those things because she was a diva. So I'm thinking, ooh, I want a potato in the window and I want to be like them, right? My mother was having a fit. So anyway, I go over there. I wanted to wear their clothes and everything. They wore mine.

So end up the picture day came back and, of course, my mother saw the clothes and everything I had on. I got my butt whipped that day. So that's one of many incidents I've had.

How long were you in the Day School?

I think three years. No, not that long. I was only there a year until my mother couldn't afford it again. My mother and father went through a divorce, and at that time we were placed at Jo MacKey, which was culture shock.

In what way?

Culture shock because, even though living in the community, being in a mixed environment going to school, a certain level of education, you know, it was just different even though it was the same community, but it wasn't the community I was in. Like Regal Estates was over here, and we were right there in the heart of the Westside. So culture shock. The kids were different. They looked different to me. I looked different to them. We were like a foreigner because we were the only kids at that time that had sandy hair and light eyes. And we spoke different. You know, we spoke different. It doesn't mean that we were better, but our language was different from going to private school, you see.

So we ended up having to go there. We had wonderful teachers; Mrs. Wilson, the Wilson family and the Halls, just amazing teachers. But it was a time for all of us, or especially for me to learn to adjust. So I decided—because I was scared to death at this school. First of all, the kids fought every day. I didn't come from that environment, not even living on Madison. So here I am trying to be Miss Personality to make sure nobody kick my butt, okay? And that's what I said because I was trying to keep everybody laughing. But it seemed like it drew more attention to me. I didn't realize that I just should've kept it on the down low, not say nothing, right? Anyway, so it caused me a lot of problems, a lot of challenges. First of all, I was the tallest in school and I had this funny looking hair and these eyes, so it drew a lot of attention. So I had a lot of incidents at school that happened. Wow.

Tell me about some of those creative outlets that you found.

The creative outlets. When I got to Jo MacKey I was in the drill team, the choir. I think you guys did pretty much the band. I wasn't into playing instruments. I wanted to sing. I

wanted to act and dance. So at Jo MacKey, drill team, drama, a lot of drama, and I would always sing.

So that's what I did from the time of Jo MacKey all the way up. I discovered an outlet of creativity, to not only discover who I am but to discover the beauty of being creative within an area that is so small and isolated but also suppressed, you see.

Suzi, the same question. Tell me about the early life and explain to me the difference in how you saw your childhood growing up on the Westside.

Well, a lot of it is the same so far as education. My mother used to drive us all the way to Henderson to go to Saint Peter's every morning, to Catholic school. She even would take two other children with us that were our god brothers and sisters. But while she was playing and doing her thing, I was the one that was in the tree. In front of our house on 418 Madison, or on the side of it -- what you call it, side, back? -- because, you know, it was an alley. So who knew? But there was Hamburger Heaven across the street, Second Baptist Church. But right there was these big, huge—they used to call them pussy willows. We used to get a whipping with these things. I remember them. They were like rubber-band-spanking objects. But anyway, I would go up in the trees because—you're not from here—we had the Brown Derby and the Town Tavern, and on any given night they were performing out there.

Ruben's Supper Club.

Yeah, Ruben's Supper Club. Regardless to whether or not it was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; Vegas is twenty-four-seven. They say if you can make it in New York -- New York's twenty-four -- we lived there, it's not. But being in Vegas if it wasn't -- and with us going to Catholic school, we had to go to Catholic Church in the

morning and that's at seven. That was with my dad. She talked about confusion.

Saint James?

Yes, Saint James Catholic Church. And then we would come back and my mother would tell us to go across the street to the Second Baptist church. So you're at this one church that's all staunch and the hands and you bow and you stand up. I had my confirmation and the priest was drunk, so he slapped me pretty well. But we went through all of that. And then right after you'd leave the Catholic Church, you'd go home, I think we'd have breakfast, then we'd have to go to Second Baptist. And then at night we would go over to the Pentecostal church with Bishop C.C. Cox. So it was like a 24-hour party for me. It was all these amazing voices. First we'd go to the church that just sounds like—to me I used to call it grocery store music. Then you go to basically like the discos for disco music and the blues and jazz and stuff from the Derby and all these different places. So you have all these sounds where we were living. But then you had the church. You had Second Baptist that had amazing harmonies. The Pentecostals down the street, they would get down. So we would just be amazed because we really didn't get to go out growing up. My sister Paula did, but we didn't. So a lot of that was like to us they were getting down. In other words, there was this conglomerate of all this different music.

Then again, with my father being a saxophone player when we were growing up, he played with like the Duke Ellington, Billy Eckstine, Damita Jo, Sammy Davis Junior. So these are people that could perform on the Strip, but they couldn't live on the Strip. So they would perform at these different -- well, like we said, the Moulin Rouge, the Town Tavern. Town Tavern was happening.

So my thoughts of growing up were basically the same as hers. We were very

different. Now, I was even more different because she was light skinned with the pretty gold hair and the pretty eyes. I was dark skinned with this funny colored hair and the light eyes. Matter of fact, I used to tell them, I said, "We weren't allowed to look in the mirror because we were told that would make you conceited."

Yeah. Yeah.

So as we grew up and went into the professional world, I could put makeup on perfect, but it was like putting it on a blank canvas. I never saw myself in the mirror. So I really never knew what we looked like and why people were so angry. What were they angry about? We were invisible.

Or how did they see us because we couldn't see ourselves?

Yeah. We weren't allowed to. Again, it's from their southern background, my father being from the Mississippi area, you know, don't be conceited.

So to be able to grow up and hear all this music -- but the faces -- the only face I can ever -- if I talk about anybody -- and we always talk about it -- his name was Tin Shot. There was an alley between our house, okay. It was our house, then there was like this alley, this dirt road, and then there were these trees that I used to always like to be in. Well, he would come down. My dad always had a bunch of wood there because he did a lot of electrical work and he would build things. Matter of fact, he built our house that was on 418 Madison. We used to be in a trailer until they finished that house. Well, the wood that was out there, he would take it and put dirt on it and he would start tapping. And even when I say it sitting here right now, I can see him gathering all of us up and he would put that sand on there and the way he would put the sand on and he would test it with his feet and to hear his feet roll across that sand. Kids would come from

everywhere. We would go, "Tin Shot, Tin Shot." And when we started saying that, he would take this smile -- he always had on a suit. He never looked dirty or nothing. He would pop his collar and he would pull his suit and he would lean over and he would start to dance for us.

And tell us stories.

And tell us stories. Oh, we would just flip, turn, do whatever. We were doing so much he probably was cracking up himself. But to me I think he was very entertained by that.

So again, speaking what Jerushia just said, it was so rich in community, so rich with music, with dance, we didn't know we were poor. We really didn't know. We had no clue. Again, we're going to Catholic school, living in the hood. So that was confusing because you'd go to school with all these people and you're talking very proper. Then you come home and they're fighting and they're beating each other up and having sex on the steps outside of our bedroom window. I mean, you know, it was confusing and, yet, that was everything that Vegas was all about that we knew about. We got it coming from every area, again my mother being from Texas, her being the valedictorian, growing up very elite. I mean really, she was out of her realm as well. So she was trying to build us to be what she was this atmosphere that we had something to work with as we grew up.

Can I add something to that?

Yes, please.

Also, mother was originally from Arkansas and then she was given away to the first person that came to her house, which was an educator and a church lady, because her mother was so young when she had her. So she raised her in Houston and my mother was educated during that time when our people weren't being educated. But what my

mother did for us -- she was always a visionary -- even though we were raised on the Westside, we ate with china. We had china in a one-bedroom duplex with five kids, mom and dad, slept on a Riviera couch in the living room, and we would have china. Now, other kids were drinking out of cans. I wanted to drink out of the can because it would taste better to me, you see. But we had silver. Everything had to be laid out a certain way. So it just didn't fit what it looked like in the community, what was going on in this one-bedroom duplex. It's still there today.

Wow. Give me your parents' names.

Mary McDonald, and now she's Hendricks. My father is Earl McDonald.

I want you to take me to Jackson Street. I want you to tell me if you can remember what was located where. So as you start maybe at D Street and go on over to wherever the businesses were that you remember. Can you remember enough to tell me what was on those blocks where all the activities were?

Okay. Well, you started with D Street. D Street heading north after Bonanza we had the community store. There was a church there. We had the community store, the church, and the Brown Derby. Then we had Mr. Jackson's barbershop, which is still there today, the same little shopping area. We had Ms. Sparks' beauty salon, which was my best friend Colette's mother. It's still there. Colette's back here. Ms. Sparks owned that whole little center right there on D Street. Yes, it's still there today where Native Son used to be.

She owned that. Ms. Sparks lived right behind the Jackson barbershop, but she was a visionary. She was the one doing pretty much everybody's hair. On the corner of it was another club and I can't remember the name of that club where the mosque is now.

To the left of that heading to Jackson Street, right on the corner on the right-hand side would be the Cove Hotel. Cove Hotel, which I know a lot of people had their little controversy, but Dad owned the restaurant part of the Cove. As a child I thought he owned the whole thing. Across the street from that you had the beauty shop and the beauty supply house. We had everything in our community we needed. We didn't have to leave the community.

Aunt Saphronia had that beauty salon.

Huh?

Aunt Saphronia had that beauty salon.

That's right. Aunt Saphronia had a beauty shop right there and she owned a restaurant. Aunt Saphronia and Uncle Joe, they had that restaurant that was right there. It was like a little diner. You remember that?

Oh, yeah.

Just in the middle of the beauty supply. So my Aunt Saphronia, the Whittakers, they owned the little diner right there, and her husband, Joe Whittaker. Then right across the street was a service station. Well, he started off at that service station right across the street on Jackson. It's still there now. I think a lot of bikers are there. That was my Uncle Joe Whittaker's service station.

So is that at E?

Yes.

Jackson and E.

Yes. And connected to that --

The dry cleaning was there, too, right across the street.

Oh, yeah, it was a dry cleaner. Mother was doing alterations and stuff there. But right next to that gas station my Aunt Saphronia and Uncle Joe Whittaker owned the ice cream shop. Remember? We had banana splits, floats. They owned like four businesses right there.

Did you work in any of the businesses, family-owned businesses?

Yes.

You did?

We did. We worked with Dad in the restaurant. Remember he would have us come in?

Oh. At the Cove.

On the counter.

Yeah, at the Cove.

Yes.

We worked at the Cove. I thought you were talking about --

That's the only one I remember that we were allowed to. We were too young, as far as in the ice cream shop and the beauty shop, no.

Tell me about working in the restaurant. What kind of food? And what did it look like inside the Cove?

I remember they had these amazing booths when you walked through the front door. It had a couple [of entrances], an entrance on Jackson and the one on D. But my mother never believed in us going in nobody's back door. So my mother and my father would make us go through the front door and you walked through the front door, which had over to the right when you walked through the door is where you could register for the hotel because it had a hotel and everything. It had the registration area and you walked

straight back and it was the restaurant. It had the counter.

I have a lot of good memories there, but then it was like sometimes you would see uproars, too. But to work there was -- first of all, we were glad just to get out of the house. And our dad having ownership somewhere was like really awesome, too. Again, both of our parents were entrepreneurs. My mother worked for Nevada Power, but before that she designed clothes for various shows on the Strip. She was the seamstress and then she would repair them or whatever. And then my father being a musician, they always had that entrepreneur lifestyle. My father really -- I don't know very many places. I think he only worked at the Test Site.

Well, he had his own business --

Right.

-- right there by the house on Madison, his office.

Right. And that was Flash Electric. So with them being entrepreneurs, they really didn't want us working for anybody.

Also during that time Mom was starting to—we used to all sing together. We were the *MacPhees*. But before we were the *MacPhees*, we would always sing at home and practice harmonies. My father really didn't want us in the business because he had seen what it takes to get there. He didn't want us to go through the struggles that come with the business. But because of who they were, it was in us from our birth. I mean I cannot ever remember not singing or dancing. And this one over here, Jerushia, she was always the one that was even more dramatic than the rest of us.

One funny story I have to tell. We were on 418 Madison. And she loved Marilyn Monroe, halleluiah Lord. She loved Marilyn Monroe.

But they didn't play any of our music or anything at that time. We didn't have a radio station. Go ahead.

Right. She would wrap her hair up. So we had a table, the chest of drawers with our clothes in it that was in front of the window. And she would sit on that window and she'd prop her leg and she'd lean all back. And she fell through the plate glass window.

Oh, a window ledge. That's right.

I was like, oh, my god, they're going to kill you. I don't even remember what happened. I don't even think you got in trouble.

I would just sit out there and sing, sing "Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high." I was escaping my environment.

But being at the Cove Hotel, again, we were owners. So we were in our hay, because, again, here we are young girls. We own a restaurant and you putting the thing down and taking people's orders. I think about it. We were really proud. We were real bossy little girls.

Well, we lived kind of -- you know, Mom and Dad pretty much isolated us. They tried to protect us in the community. We couldn't visit other kids. We couldn't play with anybody. I would slip and play with people. Mom said, "You've got five brothers and sisters; you guys play with each other. I don't need a bunch of other people's kids." So I always did the opposite. But again, that's where the creativity was used. When we would sit down for dinner, we would all begin to communicate, but we would begin to laugh and talk and make jokes. Like the Jackson Five, we would get up and we would begin to start singing as a group because we were called the McDonald Sisters first and then the MacPhees. And that ended up leading us into talent shows and different things.

Where did the name MacPhee come from?

McDonald Phee -- my mother. My mom.

Wow. So tell me what kinds of songs you sang and what kinds of places.

Oh, boy.

Well, first of all, again, we only had KENO radio, which only played a very few selective black music like Diana Ross or Stevie Wonder. So, of course, that's the only thing we heard. So we sang Diana Ross "Up the Ladder to the Roof" until the Jackson Five came in. Right?

Right. But, then again, you've got to remember we used to go to Aunt Saphronia's house, and it was exciting for her to have --

I didn't sing black music, though.

No. Yeah, you didn't. Yeah, we couldn't sing a lot of those songs because my mother was not having it. I did sing some of Aretha Franklin's songs -- "Chain, Chain, Chain"; "Respect." I can't remember the name of that club. It was way over on Carey. I don't remember the name. It was near Aunt Saphronia's house.

Songs that we sang, though.

Yeah. Well, the songs that we used to sing were basically -- it had to do with the groups. So 95 percent of the time --

It was just the Supremes or the Jackson Five. That's it.

Yeah. Basically.

And you would sing those songs. What kinds of jobs would you get?

Well, believe it or not, I think we were the youngest act that ever opened for the Checkmates at the Las Vegas Hilton.

When it first opened in the lounge, we opened up with them, as soon as it opened. We were their opening act. But we sang and did venues on the Westside in talent shows, Bob Bailey, Dr. West, house parties. The elite parties, we were allowed to sing and we were allowed to dance. We performed in schools -- Rancho, Valley -- some of the events --

J.D. Smith.

Yeah, J.D. Smith. As well as beauty contests. A lot of things.

Tell me about the Hilton.

The Las Vegas Hilton?

Tell me about being the opening act for the Checkmates. How old were you?

Oh, god, I think I was about nine.

It was high school.

No. We were young.

I mean elementary.

Yeah, we were in elementary school. So I can approximate about -- it was Maria, Jerushia. So it was about eight, nine, ten.

So who was in the group?

First, the youngest one was Maria, Maria McDonald. The second one was Jerushia McDonald. The third was myself, Suzilene McDonald, Suzi. And my oldest sister, she decided she wasn't doing it because every time she got out there she couldn't do it. She didn't like being in front of the stage that way. She's more corporate and she just wasn't there. So the three of us did it. But the funniest part about it --

And our brother. He was the drummer.

Yeah, and my brother, Jeff, he was the drummer. But this one, Jerushia again, she was

amazing. We would rehearse and we knew exactly what we were supposed to do. And we would do the show as the opening act, but opening night she did not want the curtain to come down. So we're on stage singing and dancing. As the curtain goes down, Jerushia proceeds to go to the floor. So Maria and I are looking like, okay, just leave the show going; keep the show going because we don't know what she's going to do. She got on the floor and then she had a major attitude because the people did not recognize her and want her autograph.

But the reason -- what happened is the curtains were going down -- you know how you close it and you're supposed to be in?

Yes.

And I don't know. Did I hold the curtain up?

Yes, you did.

Everybody was laughing.

So how long was your engagement?

We did that whole first run of theirs.

I think they were there like a month. As long as they were there, we opened up.

Really? And they let you come back after that?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They thought it was adorable.

Oh, they loved it. They loved it. The Checkmates with Sweet Louie and Sonny Charles.

Well, Sweet Louie was our cousin.

We were always with them. Matter of fact, we used to sing with them at Doolittle.

Exactly.

Before they made it big, the Checkmates and Sonny Charles and Sweet Louie -- they

*always were right there -- we always were a part of their group, joining forces with them.
But we went on the Westside wherever they would allow young kids to play there.*

That is wonderful. What great stories.

**Anything else about school? I know about the Catholic school and then
about the school. Did you have anything else to say about the school, Suzi?**

Well, the school -- and I wrote her name down. Her name was Mrs. McCraney. Was that
the lady's name that was of the drill team?

And your cousin.

Yeah. She's our cousin we found out later. But anyway, for me when we transitioned
from Catholic school, we went to Jo MacKey. We went before Jerushia did. I was
already there.

Yeah, we did, Jerushia. I've always been a little older than you. Remember that.
That's okay. Just a year, but whatever.

But when we went to Jo MacKey, again, we were taught to excel and really we
became overachievers. I'll never forget that I was their first drum major. I remember
marching in that band. Again, remember we never did get to do that stuff. So it was 199
degrees it felt like and we had to wear those boots. My feet were on fire.

That was Ms. Suggs, too. She was a teacher.

Mrs. Suggs, yeah. My back -- well, she didn't make me do it, but she said when you are
leading this band you've got to lead. I'm hearing my mother with this heavy long metal
stick to lead the band as the majorette. And I felt myself leaning so far back. I have
some of the pictures. I have to find them. I would have my back in almost like a U.

Like the black colleges, how they march.

Yeah. And we had never seen it, so it was just a natural thing to do. But then we did the parade. And Jerushia's always the one that keeps everybody going.

Now, is this the Helldorado Parade?

Yes.

So tell me about Helldorado.

Oh, my god, that was the hottest thing we ever did.

Ooh.

Because, again, coming from Catholic school, we didn't do all that stuff. Here it is we are now thrown into the total community. We're in the drill team. I was playing a clarinet in class, but I was the drum major for the band. Jerushia was in the drill team. I felt like I was going to faint, but I dared not. Again, I better not embarrass my family. But I look back -- and Jerushia, remember you fainted? You fainted on the --

No, I don't remember that.

I don't know if you really fainted or you just were tired because you ended up on the float.

My feet were burning. The streets were so hot.

Yes. Oh, my god.

We had marching boots on, so they were pretty thick. But I remember it was just so hot it was burning your feet. And Ms. Suggs would come with that stick and say, "Get those legs up."

Yes. Yes.

Like high-steppers. You were taught to march like a horse.

Okay, yes.

What do you call that? Your legs had to go up, up, up. So she would get that stick and make sure we are up and our heads are up. Oh, my god. But anyway, it was so hot. But we always looked forward to Helldorado. It was a time as African community, the black community that we could shine, where people could actually see our talent and not just within our own community because, again, it was segregated. Vegas was bad, very prejudiced. So this was a time for us to show out and compete with other schools, especially schools -- we didn't have that many on the Westside, but we were competing with the white schools. And we were loving it, you know what I mean, because now we are no longer segregated; we are one; and we're going to show out and we're going to win.

And we did.

What kinds of contests did they have during Helldorado? You won what?

They had the Miss Helldorado. That was when I was in junior high school by that time.

Paula won that. She competed with -- I have a picture of that one.

No. That wasn't --

That was Miss Helldorado. Paula won one year. She was like the first black -- yes -- young lady to win Miss Helldorado. That's why she had the cowboy hat on.

She was Miss Eldorado.

Miss Eldorado. That's the same thing.

But she said -- which one did you say?

Yes. Helldorado.

There was another one.

Helldorado and Eldorado is really the same one. We're just pronouncing it wrong. We

only had one huge parade and JC, which was in North Las Vegas. It wasn't as big. So they had beauty contests to lead up to the parade. Then you get to be on the float and, you know, the eyes on you.

So to determine who would get on to the float they had those things leading up to it?

Exactly.

I see.

And that was the Eldorado. But Miss Helldorado I won.

Wait. Now, what is Eldorado?

Eldorado I think was -- I'm not really sure which one was which.

Eldorado is a school. Helldorado is actually the parade.

Yes. Helldorado, the Elks started it.

Right.

Okay. That's what I'm talking about. It used to be a three-day parade --

Yes.

Leading up to that.

So that's the one I'm talking about.

I'll have to find out exactly. I'll get you the piece on it. The one that I was in -- no. I was Miss North Las Vegas. You're right.

Yes. Right. Yes.

She was Helldorado. You're right.

Yes. I want to ask you about Miss North Las Vegas in just a few minutes. So do you remember the Helldorado activities, three days of them?

Oh, my goodness, yes.

Yes.

So explain to me what would happen and if the black community participated all three days? How was the whole week?

Okay. Those three days you had carnivals. You had a lot of rides and stuff that we didn't see very often in the community. You had a time of -- it was just excitement. You looked forward to that because there wasn't nothing in Vegas to do. It was like cowboys, Indians and us. I always say that. There wasn't that many people here. So for them to bring the circus and the carnival, you anticipated that because it is the only time that there were activities for kids. There wasn't anything here to do. So it was an all-day thing, and night, inside the Cashman Field and outside. So it was like a festival. You had booths and stuff going on, on the inside and out. It was just all this energy leading up to the parade. Now, you had the Helldorado with the cowboys and -- what do you call that?

The rodeo.

Rodeo. All of those things leading up. So there was a lot of anticipation of excitement. But it was just because we didn't have any excitement like that. The closest excitement was the jazz and the blues in our community and the fighting. But it had nothing to do with kids because there was nothing for us to do. So, yes, we loved it.

Wonderful. Those are the kinds of scenes I want to see.

The other thing about the Helldorado/Eldorado time is that that was the one time especially -- again, remember we're going from being really diverse and going to school with blacks and white, really being only a few of us blacks there -- but that was the only time that every race, creed or color will come to one place for a common goal and that was for your children to enjoy and to celebrate. So that made it really exciting.

So why could we integrate that one week, but couldn't do it any other time?

Well, because it was Helldorado. Now, we don't even know what it meant, first of all.

We didn't research that. We don't know. But it was a time that we were allowed to integrate and come together to celebrate some type -- what do you want to call it? It was a holiday. But we didn't know nothing about it. And to this day I can't say why it was other than celebrating Las Vegas.

Well, I think it was a way of celebrating Las Vegas and to raise money.

Well, of course.

The Elks started it to raise money because I think people had to pay to -- if you didn't have your beard or if you had a beard or whatever.

And be a part of the parade or the carnival. All of that, you did have to pay for that.

Exactly.

Each group, even though we were on the Westside, each school or participants had to pay a fee to be in that parade.

Exactly.

That's it. So you're right.

That was the one time, too, that in the black community and other communities every school, everybody participated -- putting your hands on to build those floats, helping getting those uniforms together, fixing and making tosses for the booths.

Yes. Everybody working together. It was powerful.

Everybody worked together even down to selling chicken dinners to make sure we had everything we were supposed to have.

Oh, the mothers helped.

Yes. Everybody.

The kids' mothers. A lot of single parents. But it was people in the community that had dads. Everybody worked together. There was a pride in it. At the same time, it was a time for us as the Westside to really show Vegas who we are, you know, we are a powerful people, a community of people that come together when it's time and really to honor Vegas, even though Vegas wasn't honoring us.

Well, I really appreciate that. I love that you two are talking together because my transcriber can distinguish voices. So this will be good.

Good. Good.

You said a name of a teacher early, Mrs. Sudds. How do you spell that?

Suggs, S-U-G-G-S.

Thank you.

And Ms. McCraney. Was that her name, Jerushia, Ms. McCraney? What was her name?

Oh, shucks.

Ms. Suggs was the actual music teacher. That was a Mr. McCraney helping her.

But what was the lady's name, the tall lady that we ended up finding out was her family?

That's what I'm saying. That was a parent just helping her. And I can't remember her name now. I forgot.

That's fine. By the time I have these transcribed, you get them back, if you remember that name, just put it in for me.

The Cove later on became the Carver House. Why was that name changed and what happened?

The Carver House?

Uh-huh.

Oh, no, no, no. You know what it was? It was the Cove, but the hotel part was the Carver House. It was still one in the same. It was separate owners. The Carver House was the hotel area, the registration and hotel area. The Cove was the restaurant and the bar area. If you think about it mentally, really it was like a cove. It was like this cocoon for them to go in. So that was the difference, yeah, because I was trying to figure out -- yeah, that is. That's what it was. It was called the Carver House.

And they talked a lot about Moulin Rouge, but the Cove and the Town Tavern, El Morocco, the Elks Lodge, Ruben's Supper Club -- I mean I know that was the last monument that we had, the Moulin Rouge, but we've had so many. Matter of fact, everybody came to the Westside because it was like being in Harlem renaissance. There was so much talent there.

Jerushia, was it Mom's Kitchen?

Mom's Kitchen was the restaurant. That's the one you forgot to tell.

I mean Bill Cosby, Sammy Davis Junior --

Oh, everybody.

-- Sinatra, all of them had come to that same restaurant.

And Sammy and all of them lived -- I'm sorry to interrupt you.

No. Please tell me.

The Pearson House that's over there now, that's where a lot of the black stars -- Little Richard, Sammy Davis Junior --

You said Pearson House? Now, I've heard of Mrs. Harrison's place, Mrs. Shaw's place, but I've never heard of Pearson.

I think it's the Pearson House. It's still there, but now it's a group home. I think what's her name just bought that?

The Harrison's house.

Harrison, yes. I mean all of the entertainers went there. I remember Little Richard being at the Jackson Barbershop.

Yes. Getting his hair, getting it pompadour-ed.

Yeah. Stan Armstrong's cousin, O.J. Simpson worked at the meat market -- that's right -- the meat market that was right on Jackson Street. Johnny's Meat Market? It was a meat market. We had a market just for meat.

So where on Jackson Street was the market?

It was on D Street.

So Jackson and D?

Yeah. Right next to before you get to Jackson Barbershop. It was in between right there.

Okay, great. Great. Your memory starts which year? What year were you in the first grade?

Oh, Lord. Let me see. Fifty-five. Oh, I was six.

You have to do the math there.

Sixty-one.

And you are two years younger?

One.

She's really 11 months.

Younger?

Uh-huh.

Three of us are 11 months younger than each other.

Okay, good. So your memories start around that time?

Really our memories go back further than that. What we're telling you when we talk about 418 Madison, we hadn't even started school. So I could say that we're talking about around three, four, five, you know, those ages because we weren't even in school when Ms. Adda was baby-sitting us, when my mother and father went to school.

That's Monroe, too. We lived on Monroe. So I think some of that --

Yeah. So we were young.

Ms. Liza Maye baby-sitting us when they had back houses, no bathrooms.

Hannah Brown.

I want to know about Hannah Brown. What do you mean by back houses?

It was amazing. We didn't have it. We had a back house, but I didn't realize it. I was very young. I used to play in it. Remember? It was a house that had a bathroom in it, a little shack. But other people had back houses, but it was outside where they had a shower curtain to block off the wind. So you go from the kitchen -- remember when Liza May and all them baby-sat us? You had to go through their kitchen, these wooden floors -- everything was wooden -- and right there it was a shower curtain, but you was outside.

So, yeah, I forgot about that.

Yes. So when -- Berkley Square -- people started moving out because other houses were being built, you were little girls then. As you began to grow -- so you already remember Berkley Square where the doctors lived.

Yeah. Dr. West and --

That was Bonanza Village. It's Bonanza Village.

Bonanza Village is the one across the street.

You're just getting it mixed up.

Berkley Square is the one that's right there at Owens and --

Martin Luther King?

Yeah. There is even a sign now because it's a historic part of the city now.

Oh, I know where you're talking about. Yeah, okay.

So Freeman and Wyatt.

Yes, I remember.

Okay. Those streets over there, that little area is Berkley Square. And across Martin Luther King in the gated community is Bonanza Village.

I got you now. They're catty-corner to each other.

Yes. Exactly. So I want to know about more of the people in the community, community leaders, people who were always around that you remember that are very, very memorable. You told me about Tin Shot. I want you to tell me about more characters in the community, more community leaders, just people you remember.

Me, I sometimes draw a blank until she says one. Jerushia says one, and then they come back. One person that had a lot of impact on me is Mr. Fitzgerald.

Yes.

He was a man that as our principal at our school at Jo MacKey, this man was so intuitive to each one of the kids, as many kids as was at that school.

Yes.

This is my perfect example. I started working in the office. He told me he wanted to keep me busy because I got bored. I mean we went from Catholic school and we were so far ahead of the students that were basically in our class that he had me working in the office. My handwriting would start out and the D would go left and -- if I'm writing the word "dress," D would go left, the R straight up, the E is going right. He made me sit down and taught me the reason I was doing it was because I was bored and I was being creative. He said, "That's your creative side." He said, "So your dancing with your alphabet, but nobody has to understand that." He was the person that started me to noticing to start -- I'm trying to remember if he said it was my right brain; that he was going to get my right brain to measure up to my left brain. Mr. Fitzgerald was a huge impact on my life.

But then at Jo MacKey, again coming from Catholic school, Mr. Hall and Mrs. Hall.

And Mrs. Hall's mother. Mrs. Wilson, her husband was a local pastor. Reverend Wilson.

Yeah, I'll get to that part. But Mr. and Mrs. Hall, they were my president and my first lady because they cared so much. Now, I'm going to tell you he would whip our behinds, Lord have mercy, Jesus. He whipped us. But you know what? He would whip your butt and then turn around and love you up. He didn't allow that disrespect in the classroom. You better not talk. And if you raise your hand, you wait and then he would acknowledge you. But the reason he did that is not only to keep the discipline in the room, he didn't want the same children to always give the answer to where other children were not able to exercise their own mind.

And I remember one day I was so bored and he said, "Ms. McDonald, I'm going

to call you Ms. McDonald," he said, "because obviously you're the woman of the room today." He said, "Today it seems like you finished your work before everybody else did. So since you have diarrhea of the mouth, and constipation of the brain." He said, "Obviously you didn't remember after you finish your work to sit quietly. I'm going to hit you at one end that's going to make that other side kind of seize and then it will stimulate you for the rest of the day to obey and not distract my class."

And then you had Mrs. Hall, his wife, that she was into that diction just like Mary T, my mother. She had us that when you enunciate, she said, "You don't say 'pronunciate,' it's 'e-nunc.'" You know what I mean? So these people – they were my Obama and my Michelle.

That's right.

That was that in elementary. Then you had Mrs. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson, her husband was a minister. She was a coddler. She would coddle us. At that time, even when I think about it, we would go from Mrs. Wilson's class to Mr. Hall's class to Mrs. Hall's class. It was like having homeroom and all that in elementary school. So they were preparing us for a very educational background. They were preparing us to go into junior high and high school and already know how to transition from classroom to classroom, personality to personality.

It forced us to stretch.

Yeah.

I think because they brought their education from the South, you know, that black colleges were important, they imparted that to us. They provoked in us to dream bigger. Be more than what you think you can be. They were some of the best teachers in my life,

even going to private school, the Wilson family, Mr. Hall and all of them, but also the Williams sisters, the two twins.

Oh, yes.

It was like the first black teachers. They were the youngest of them all, the Williams sisters. Then you had Mr. Hershall Williams. Well-dressed, clean-cut, always smelled good, that side smile, and yet authoritative. I think he's deceased now.

Oh, yeah.

Phenomenal. I mean Mrs. Hicks. They disciplined us with love. We could go to their house. We could eat. They took us into their bosoms. Every teacher at Jo MacKey was phenomenal and Mr. Fitzgerald was the principal at the time, and his wife. They both were phenomenal. As we said in our community, it takes a village to raise a child. They were our village. They took us under their arms and they walked us not only through our education, they made sure if you didn't have money to eat -- there was no kids left behind nor hungry. You know how they have that saying "no child left behind?" We didn't have a child left behind because they made sure you ate because they lived in the community, too, right across the street. So they made sure everybody in the community knew we could go knock on the door at Mr. and Mrs. Hall's house. I stayed with Ms. Wilson in the summertime, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, because she just took me under her wing to work with me because I was slower than other kids. So she personally allowed me to live in her house in the summer to tutor me but also to nurture me and love me. It was like that with everybody in that community in Regal Estates and Valley View and in the community where we lived. Everybody loved on each other. But those were some of the most phenomenal teachers. I call them unsung heroes. They've never been honored, and

that's something I want to do before I leave this Earth, real soon. I want to honor those black teachers, educators, what they did for us.

Wonderful. Who were some of the community leaders other than schoolteachers?

You know, that's a good question. I'm like my sister I go blank. I only know about the Lambs. Sheriff Lamb and their family ran Vegas.

Tell me about the Lambs.

They were cowboys. They loved my father. They treated my father good. The Binions, I remember them. But again, it still was isolated. It still was segregated, very prejudice here. You still did not cross the railroad tracks. Can I tell you that, okay? As far as leaders at that time I'm going to say -- if anybody, the first black policeman, the Moodys, the Moodys. I don't really remember any leaders. Do you know who the leaders were? It was the pastors.

Bishop C.C. Cox.

Yeah, Bishop Cox at Church of God and Christ. It was pastor from Second Baptist.

What is his name? It was only a few churches, but they were our leaders.

So do you remember Woodrow Wilson?

Yes.

Yes.

And the Hoggards?

Yes.

Yes. Hoggards' son went to Jo MacKey. Woodrow Wilson, yes, I do.

Woodrow Wilson's wife was Mrs. Wilson, our teacher.

No. That's a different one. Woodrow Wilson -- there's two different. Mr. Wilson was

True Love Baptist Church. Who she's talking about is politician.

Woodrow Wilson is a politician. He was the first black person in the assembly.

If you would see him, you would remember him.

I'd have to see his face. Oh yes, now I remember him.

Hannah Brown, who is now --

Tell me about Hannah.

Well, we grew up -- again, we were living on 418 Madison across from Hamburger Heaven, Second Baptist Church. Hannah and her mother, they lived right around the corner from Hamburger Heaven.

And KK.

KK. Hannah's daughter. Ms. Liza, Hannah's mother. They were all very close to -- again, we were raising a community. But my mother didn't let but certain people watch us. So Hannah and Ms. Liza were our family. Hannah, I mean she used to carry Paula around. That was before she even thought about having children. So Paula was her baby, and her mother watched us. Hannah is amazing. She's still the same person I can ever remember. I mean for her to be running Delta Airlines, running McCarran Airport, Continental Airlines --

Always an overachiever.

She always was an overachiever, too. I realize the people that my mother sent us around, and my father, they were the people that were overachievers, too. So there was always that stimulation to achieve.

It had a lot to do with classes, too. That's why we went to Catholic Church, too. It was about class and parents looked at where they wanted you to go. So they laid a foundation

and they put us -- my mother didn't allow us with everybody. The only ones that we could be around is some of my dad's family, aunt Saphronia and uncle Joe and all them. But then we had Dr. West and his wife, Dottie West; Ann and Bob Bailey, Kim and all of them. Everybody kind of was in that same -- Dr. McMillan. The elite they were called, the crème de la crème. The Wrights -- Larry, Lonnie, and all them. There were certain people -- Benny Thrower.

That's it. Benny Rose.

All of the -- Benny Rose. There were certain families that my mother would let us come together, the adults being in one room and the kids are in another room. But we couldn't be with everybody. So our leaders, going back to what you asked, our leaders were the ministers of our community at that time.

Wonderful.

A.J. Thompson is another one. Yes.

Your father at one point worked at the Nevada Test Site.

That's correct.

What kinds of stories did he tell you about the Test Site?

My dad never talked about his work.

He never did talk about it. It was like a code. They couldn't talk about it. It's like being in the military. That's one thing I don't remember him talking about, the Test Site. I more or less remember Dad as an entrepreneur and a musician. I know he worked there, but that's all I know.

Yeah. Never knew any information about it. Even the things that we hear now that are coming out, never. I mean even some people that we knew even today that have worked

up there -- it's a code of silence.

I don't think he liked it, personally, and I think he did it just to take care of us. Our father was an entrepreneur. His mother was an entrepreneur. They owned businesses here and other places. But he wasn't happy and I think that's why he didn't talk about it. We would see Daddy smile when he saw us with his kids. He loved his children. He loved his kids. Even though he didn't agree with us on careers, I could see him blush every time he would see us on TV or watch us dancing or singing, even at the cost of not liking it. But his love was for his community. One thing -- I always think about it -- dad loved his community. He loved his people. He wasn't as outspoken as I am, not outwardly. He just loved being with his people and mixing and mingling. He hung out at the Town Tavern and then playing and being at the Elks Lodge, music, all of that was part of the rhythm of who he is, the thread of what made him, and also made us.

So did he ever talk about the jam sessions that he played in?

Oh, yeah.

What did he tell you about those?

Well, I remember the Town Tavern. Really growing up, as I think about it now, I had a love-hate for the Town Tavern because my father loved being there and in order to see my father we had to go there, and that used to make me mad because I wanted him to be more with us. But at the Town Tavern -- as a matter of fact, I worked in Australia with Damita Jo and I worked with Billy Eckstine, and I'm sitting in the room with the two of them, and Damita Jo is telling all about this man. She said, "You're from Las Vegas?" And she's talking about this man and, oh, he used to make my heart stop; and when he played that saxophone, he knew how to take those notes and he would ride it up and he

would just go all the way.

And I said, "Wow, okay. What is his last name?"

She said, "His name was Earl."

I said, "McDonald?" And I stopped and I dialed the phone from Australia. I said, "I have a phone call for you, hold on one minute." I passed the phone. And they went on and on and on.

So he would do the jam sessions like, again, we talked about the a lot of the stars that would come from the Strip. They'd come to Town Tavern. He'd play with them.

That was the El Morocco, baby.

Okay. El Morocco. Well, the jam sessions, she has a little more of it than I do I guess.

I'm not sure. I wasn't really detailed in that area. But again, the jam sessions they used to have with the top musicians downtown. When Sammy Davis Junior, his eye got injured, that was my father and all those people that were jamming that got him to the hospital.

One of the issues when we sat down and talked with Sammy one time, he was like, "Why is it that the black community doesn't come out and share and come out and see me?" I explained to him that's where you got your eye hurt, you got hurt there, but you never gave back.

I thought he got hurt in a car accident.

He got hurt in a car accident, but I'm saying these are the people that nurtured him when he stayed in that house.

But you said his eye, and he didn't get his eye hurt here.

No, no, no. I'm saying his injuries that took place upon him, the people that took care of him when he would leave that Strip and come to the Westside --

I see what you're saying.

Any of the injury that he had -- well, I'll just go from what I remember. You can tell the rest of that. My example to him was you never came back. You took from the community and you never gave back. So those jam sessions and things that they had, it's just like being in New York. You can go in a hole and you'll get a Wynton Marsalis, you'll get a Branford Marsalis --

Marsalises, they weren't here.

No, no, no. I'm using that as an example of the jam sessions are the same as being in New York City.

Yes.

Oh, Lionel Hampton, all of these people that they played with on the Westside that -- I mean but the thing that came down from that is my father, that was his love. I mean that's where he and my mother first met, her seeing him playing the saxophone and that whole thing. So the jam sessions were huge from what I understand from not being there but, again, associating that with seeing the same things done in New York.

I think he also played -- if I remember correctly, he mentioned Dexter Gordon. I'm not really sure. But I know he may have jammed a little bit at the Moulin Rouge with some of them. I'm not real sure. But mainly, you know, we were talking about Daddy -- you know, you met him. He talked just a little bit of stuff. He kind of just observed after he got out of that. I think after he stopped playing a part of dad died. Yeah. I think after he stopped playing -- he used to say to us, I remember him saying, "If I hadn't put my girl talking," talking about his saxophone, he said, "I'd have never married and you guys would have never been born," because he loved it so much. He said, "I had to make a

choice to take care of you kids." I think it was a part of him losing a big part of himself.

I remember one thing, too, for years I always told my dad -- I kept trying to buy him a sax. It makes me sad. One day when I lived in New York I bought my dad a saxophone and I came back here to give it to him, but he said no, and he said, "Because the day that I laid that down, I had to lay it down." That was something that really hurt. I mean I understood what he was doing as a dad. But the thing that hurt so much is that I wanted to give him back something that he had given up for us. And he never would take it back. He said, "Because I can't go back from whence I came, from there." I said, "If nothing else, hang it on the wall." But the fact is still the part that kind of hurts is that he did have to give it up.

Yeah.

I mean it was for us. But that's why I think that we still do our career the way that we do. We keep trying to keep that legacy going because I know he put so much into it. He really wanted it, but he also wanted to be responsible.

Of course. So Suzi, if you will start after high school, you began to get more into show business.

Yeah.

And you ran for Miss North Las Vegas?

That was still in high school.

Oh, that was still in high school. Tell me about that.

I was rebellious to an extent, too, if they said I couldn't do it, especially society. My rebellion was more towards society. If they said a black girl couldn't do something that is when I went after it. I can't remember the year, but I do have a newspaper clipping that I

can actually look back at now and I'll get that for you. But they said that no black girl could be in the Miss North Las Vegas contest, and I did, and I did win. As a matter of fact, it came down to -- they had to make sure there was a black and a white in the front seat of the car, driving me because they didn't want just a white driver driving me in that car. I remember that.

Also, from there after school I -- matter of fact, Jerushia again. They were having auditions at the Folies Bergère at the Tropicana hotel. They had never had a black girl in that show because they wanted the bodies to look the same. And, of course, you know, we're not built like most of the white body types. She told me about the audition right after she had --

I was working there. I was cashiering backstage in the showroom.

Yes. And she called me and she said, "You should come down here and audition." They had never had a black girl. So again, here I go. I went down there. As a matter of fact, I was the first black girl to ever be a showgirl for the Tropicana hotel.

Folies Bergère.

Yeah, Folies Bergère.

Wow. So do you have a photograph of that?

As a matter of fact, they said it's in the archives at the UNLV and I've been trying to get the information to gather it.

At UNLV?

Yeah. Because the Folies Bergère closed. So all of the archive has been shifted to the University of Nevada.

See, that's what we thought. We were going to check because of the history of the

Tropicana hotel. Folies was like that big --

I don't think they've given away the papers yet.

Well, we'll have to look for it. We have to seek it out.

Well, I did check -- one of the young ladies at the University of Nevada said that they have them in an archive, but you're not allowed to touch archives, something about the archives there.

She would know because that's where she is.

So now, are you talking about at UNLV?

Uh-huh.

So if we have them they are right there where I work in Special Collections where you were the other day.

If they took a picture of her.

Oh, they did. There was a picture of me coming down the stairs, some pictures coming down the stairs on the side.

Because I have one in my phone of the Folies Bergère and there's no black women on there at all.

Okay. So we'll check that.

And then from there I just basically -- well, all of us, we basically -- I did the Ebony Fashion Fair. I was the second girl from Vegas. The first was LaVaughn Griffin.

So did you do any of the other shows on the Strip?

No. After that I started traveling. That was Australia and everywhere.

So tell me about the Ebony Fashion Fair. What were some of the places that you traveled?

Oh, my god. With the Ebony Fashion Fair we did the continental U.S. and Puerto Rico and we did some of the Caribbean Islands—Jamaica, Bahamas. They've always had it there. So basically, all of the continental U.S. That means, again, Puerto Rico and all of that. But then we did the Caribbean, as well, Bahamas. Let's see. We did Bahamas. We did Jamaica. Oh, I can't think of the other one. Bermuda.

So was that just one year with the fashion?

Oh, yes. That was enough. That was enough. That bus was amazing. Audrey Smaltz was the commentator then. I was the youngest girl that ever was in the Ebony Fashion Fair, again. She like kind of took me under her wing. She actually governed my career during that time.

I wanted to add something real quick because you hit that, you didn't stay on JC. When you won the beauty contest for the JC fair, which was the Miss North Las Vegas JC Fair, okay, I wanted to say real quick for the record that it was not allowed for black girls to be in this contest. It was prohibited.

Suzi, you got in it and you don't realize the impact that it had on that area of North Las Vegas because North Las Vegas was made up of skinheads. It was very prejudice. So for you to win that, that was totally against the rules of North Las Vegas. So you kind of hit it kind of quick. But that's why they had to have the two girls in the front and you were sitting on the back of the convertible car. You had a picture of that somewhere.

Yeah. I have it.

But you have to look at the time of where we were and why and that needs to be documented. That's a big success.

Tell me about the reputation of North Las Vegas at that time.

Oh, my god. It was totally prejudice.

Very prejudice.

Give me what you heard or an example of what you mean.

Okay. From Owens all the way -- like if you go from Eastern on down, you were known for dealing with skinheads or Nazis. You did not really cross. Just like the Westside when I was growing up, you didn't go into -- what's that project area?

Herbert Gerson.

Herbert Gerson. So the same thing, as we were the first blacks to move out of the Westside and live on Owens across from Rancho. But we knew that you did not cross Eastern into those homes over there and even further east because all that was Nazi territory and Mormons. At that time Mormons weren't receiving black people in their churches. So you were prohibited to go in those places and you would be subject to assaults and attacks in North Las Vegas. It was very prejudice.

Okay. So that's what you mean by that atmosphere.

So Jerushia, tell me a little about your career. We know a little about Suzi and how she got started in her career with the Ebony Fashion Fair and all of that.

So tell me after high school what happened with you?

Okay. I think it wouldn't be fair for me to start yet, if you don't mind. The reason, Suzi forgot that she also was a disco queen. She was the first disco queen in the 70s. After she had her dance career, she went into L.A. She got discovered as a disco queen.

During the time of Donna Summers, she had a famous -- album, Suzi Lane "OohLaLa".

Hit number 2 harmony with Giorgio Moroder broke my album at the Cannes Festival in

France, another first because this is a huge festival for film; no other album in the history of recording has been done. Thanks Giorgio Moroder. My friend Bob Rafelson introduced me to Marisa Berenson, Baroness of France; introduced me to Giorgio Moroder. There was another first for me. An international Disco Queen. My album was re-issued March 1, 2012. Another first.

So tell me about the dancing. So after the Ebony Fashion Fair, just give me a sort of --

My sister Paula McDonald sent me to Ebony Fashion Fair through Lionel Hampton. After the Ebony Fashion Fair, as a matter of fact, I had a lot of the centerfolds and the articles done on me.

For?

Well, just being from Las Vegas. They said from Las Vegas and you get to do articles and things like that on it.

Jet magazine you did.

Ebony, Jet. Here's my producer over here, my PR person.

Good. Good. Yes.

I was doing it then.

When I got back from the Ebony Fashion Fair, I'll never forget I got a phone call from Ebony, Mrs. Johnson's office. They had just done an article that featured Sly Stone.

What they did is they had called me at home and they linked me up. They did like a conference call, which we didn't even have conference calls I didn't think back then. But Chicago was way ahead and it was Sly on the other line with them. They said, "Do you mind speaking to him?" and the whole bit. And I spoke with him and he said he wanted

me to perform with him. I didn't really believe him because we used to always play jokes on each other even after you left the fashion show. Like the different people, we would play jokes on each other. It ended up I ended up working with him for quite a while.

And tell me working with him meaning that you did what?

Sly is and was such a genius. He taught me to just sing. He had a lot of hurts, but he would still create. Full of drugs or not, he was a creator.

Same background; as a dancer with him. As a matter of fact, on one of his albums he talks about a green-eyed monster girl. I can't remember what year that is, but that was me. From there I just had like this ball take place of auditions. I never had any training. I auditioned for Anita Mann. Anita Mann is huge. She's like the one that actually established -- what I should do.—She has a show at the Luxor now. She has been a mentor because she saw what no one said I could do, and pulled it out of me.

And we're still friends today. Anita Mann auditioned me for a show that was going to be traveling Asia. I did all of Japan with her. From there I did AMF Sportswear. She choreographed that. But after that it just became a transition for me to do various things. I went to Australia with the last show, the one I just talked about with Damita Jo and Billy Eckstine. I came back.

When I was with Ebony Fashion Fair, a man that's a producer, a huge producer, his name is Bob Rafelson. He produced "Stay Hungry, Brubaker, Postman Only Rings Twice." Well, my bus-mate at the time was Fran Cooper, who is a top makeup artist even today with all the top stars. So when I got to L.A., me being the youngest, she was the other one that was taking me around and kind of teaching me the ropes. After the fashion show in LA, she took me over to meet Bob Rafelson. When I met him he became

like a surrogate father in the entertainment field.

So I had gone to Australia, performed there with Damita Jo and with Billy Eckstine, came back, and I was exhausted because that was the route -- coming from Australia you would stop in L.A. and then continue on -- well, you come from Australia to Hawaii. By the time you get to L.A. from that flight, I mean I was dead. So I told Bob when I called him from Hawaii, I said, "I want to just stay in L.A. and go to sleep. I just want to sleep." So when I got to his house I was completely jet lagged and crazy.

Bob was the type of man you never knew who was going to show up at his house or who was going to be there, and he was having just a get-together. He said, "You go ahead and go to sleep. I'm going to tell you later on there's going to be a few friends here."

Well, he didn't say what time they were coming, and I got to be such a little girl with him. He had a stairwell that's a winding one, and I always used to love to see Shirley Temple do that. You know, again, here we go. So I had taken my hair and I had stretched my hair all over my head like the Statue of Liberty. I had on one of his socks and a platform shoe because at the time it was disco platforms and I had on one of his boots and a pair of pantyhose. I just looked a mess. I came sliding down his stairwell singing "I'm Every Woman" by Chaka Khan at the top of my voice, because he would allow me to be that little girl. I could be whatever I wanted to be, and he never said anything negative. He would tell me if I was off key, playing or whatever.

I get to the end of that stairwell, here is Marisa Berenson, who is the baroness of France; here is Elliott Gould, who is Barbra Streisand's husband; Susan Sarandon. When I got to the end of the stairs, came off, my eyes closed, at the top of my voice I was

singing for Bob, these are the people that are sitting there when I opened my eyes. So everybody's applauding and everything. I'm embarrassed, but I wouldn't, couldn't, stop. I didn't stop because I didn't want it to look like [I made a mistake]. An idiot, haha.

Well, two days later I left Los Angeles and I came back to Vegas. When I got to Vegas, Bob called me and said, "You are not going to believe who wants to meet you."

And I said, "Who?"

He said, "Marisa Berenson, who is really, really the baroness of France, she wants to introduce you to Giorgio Moroder."

I'm not going to lie to you. I didn't know who he was. "Who is Giorgio Moroder?"

He said, "Donna Summers."

I was like, "Oh, okay." I said, "Bob, stop playing with me."

He said, "Well, in two hours. You just need to throw yourself together. You don't even need no clothes. Throw yourself together. They're going to have a limo pick you up."

I thought he was playing again because he's a practical joker. Two hours later -- I did at least have enough sense to get ready because I do know he might show up -- there was a limousine outside of the house. I was flown to LA. I went to the Beverly Hills Hotel. Met with Marisa. No. When I got off a private plane, the private plane of Marisa, when I got off the plane, they were waiting for me in a limousine, took me to the Beverly Hills Hotel, she did. She said nothing the whole ride. She just said, "Darling, let me handle it." We got to the Beverly Hills Hotel, went in, had dinner. About an hour and a half after that, still jet lagged from Australia, went in the studio, sang a couple of licks of

a song and then did some ad-libbing and that's how my disco career began.

Within like two months I completed a total album. Matter of fact, I had sung so much I got nodes on my vocal cords. He got me one of the best vocal cord coaches, who is Seth Riggs. I mean he does Stevie [Wonder]; he does everybody. He got rid of the nodes, which are like little polyps all over your vocal cords that can turn into cancer. He got rid of them through vocal training. Then I completed my album along with the Waters who did the background of all my albums. As a matter of fact, the Waters -- I can't remember her first name. But one of the Water sisters showed me how to do the ad-libs [She sang them; then he had me sing over them saying she would double me.] ...because I mean I didn't know what I was getting myself into. I have pictures of that, now, finally.

Oh, wonderful.

And my album went platinum. Needless to say, I came back home to see my family, and my sister Jerushia had a whole disco party going. I'm still delirious.

I did. I produced the release of her album at Paul Anka's "Jubilation" at the time, right after one of the biggest fight bouts with Muhammad Ali. But, Su, you forgot. She premiered in "Solid Gold." Do you remember some of the places --

I did "Dance Fever, Solid Gold." The person that broke my album (Mr. Frankie Crocker) in New York City -- well, the first thing, speaking of prejudice again, when my album came out, it was going to be Suzi McDonald. The Irish got it and saw this black girl on the front. They pulled my whole album—I had two different covers. They pulled my whole album back. They wanted it to be Suzilene, but we couldn't because we had Cheryl Lynn and that would have been confusion in going into the stores to actually to buy

the album. So they took my first name -- well, I came up with it -- took out an "I" and an "L" -- no -- took out two I's and added an A and made it Suzi Lane instead. So that happened there as well. I was on my way.

I was with Elektra/Asylum, Sérgio Mendes, Dee Dee Bridgewater. Gosh, I mean I was just immediately thrown in with all of these people right after I signed my contract. It was a whirlwind. But I'm going to turn it over to my PR people because Jerushia remembers stuff. I'm not really that detailed in it because everything was such a whoosh for me and I just do. I don't think. I don't agree with thinking about everything because when you think about it you get so detailed for me -- I can get very detailed because I'm really black and white.

I think a lot of it is because sometimes it's harder to talk about yourself than it is to talk about someone else.

That's a possibility.

So what are some of the other things that you remember about her career? And then I want you to tell me about your own.

Well, aside from I always admired the fact that she traveled all the time. She was eating sushi before it was famous to eat sushi. She brought it to my house. I'm like, I am not eating that. But she always traveled and she took chances, just went around the world performing and doing things that she wasn't trained to do. She had no professional training as a singer, a dancer.

I mean she was the second black cheerleader at Valley High School. I mean she was always like the first. She was always a trailblazer, one of the first black dancers at the Folies Bergère. Hallelujah Hollywood hadn't even come in yet, and that's the cast

that was all blacks. So she was always one that would take a chance. I was always the forerunner to go, Hey, you need to go over here, because I desired to do those things, but I wasn't a dancer. I'd fall over my toes and I knew that.

Anyway, from there her career as a recording artist, disco queen, you know, I watched that evolve and go from, like I said, "Solid Gold." I don't know if you did "Soul Train" or not.

No.

But I just watched how her career was moving around. It started off as a singer, then model, then singer again, and then to go back into modeling, which we'll talk about that. Yeah, she was in New York, but she came into modeling after her career and everything was over. We brought her into New York as a full-figure model.

Well, no. I was in a car accident. That's why. I was working on my second album. I came home. Because before I would travel a lot, I always came home to see my sisters, brother, dad and my mother. I was in the car with my oldest sister and a guy came out of the desert on Las Vegas Boulevard out in North Las Vegas and he hit the car and my face went through the windshield. So all the right side of my face was torn off. I could not go out or anything. So that's when that happened. That's when I came away from my career.

So as the journey begins -- and I call it a journey because everything has a journey in life -- at that time Suzi was already in New York. I was working at Caesars Palace. My career basically started when at 16 I found myself pregnant. I can't tell you about the career without telling you that part. I was pregnant at 16 with my beautiful daughter, Patrina, my only child, which provoked and caused me to have to have a career to get in

the workforce to take care of my child. So really my job started at the Stardust hotel as a bus girl and then the Landmark hotel as a bus girl, then went into waitressing. That led me to the Riviera hotel as a waitress. Last but not least, then I landed at -- oh, I was at the Tropicana, too, worked the Tropicana behind the Folies Bergère as a cashier. But my last hotel was Caesars Palace, Caesar's World at the time. The president was Perlman. I started off as a bus girl, then a food waitress because I wasn't old enough.

So when did you go to Caesars Palace, do you remember?

I think it was the early 70s.

Okay, good.

Yeah, it was the early 70s. So I started there. Once I think I turned 17 I was able to be a food waitress. Perlman and Harry Wald and there was another one, I had favor with Caesar's World. God blessed me in that place. The doors opened for me. The sky was the limit. So I end up going from bus girl/food waitress into becoming -- I think I went into the Spanish Steps. It was a gourmet restaurant and no blacks were in any gourmet restaurants at the time. You could be room service waiters, but you could not be in a gourmet restaurant. So at the time it was offered to me if I would like to go in and be a waitress there.

Is that because the tips were so good or why was that?

Well, first of all, to me that looked like a step up from the coffee shop.

No, no, no. Why didn't they allow blacks --

Yeah, the tips. You dealt with a different caliber of people. You dealt with a lot of entertainers especially at Caesars. During that time not every black could go into Caesars. It was run by the Mafia, most of the Strip. So not everybody was able to come

in there. So everybody wanted to work in the French Quarters and one of the gourmet restaurants. So it was offered to me to go to Spanish Steps and I took it with Harry Wald and Perlman and there was one other guy. I can't think of his name.

I think his name starts with an S.

I forgot it. He was really the one that made sure blacks had an opportunity to move up in Caesar's World. I can't even remember his name right now, a Jewish guy.

So I ended up working at Spanish Steps. I was a food waitress, made really good money. Then I moved up. I could have went as a captain. I then was asked by Perlman and Harry Wald if I wanted to be the first black baccarat dealer, female, which I did not take. I know it was crazy. They were like, What? I am like, I am too hyper; I don't like being behind a box; I will go crazy; you'll fire me because I'll be on top of the table like Charo. I remember saying that. And they were like, Okay, what do you want to do, Jerushia?

I said, Okay, I want to go in the Bacchanal, which was a seven-course Roman feast. There were no blacks. I always looked to see. No blacks nowhere. We already had black baccarat dealers, no females, but I wasn't interested for whatever reason. I always looked at the costume. Now, you've got to go back. As a child I was always dreaming.

Yes. Yes.

You know, Marilyn Monroe, and I was singing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." So that led me over to the Bacchanal. The Bacchanal was a seven-course meal. You would see Frank Sinatra, Stallone and his wife. You would see so many people that you just don't see. That was my reasoning, also, for going. And we wore a belly-dancing outfit. So I'm

the first black girl. Yeah. And I got a picture somewhere with that, too, not the whole thing, just my face.

I get the job. It was so phenomenal because not only was it an elegant and beautiful job to have -- the costumes, I always loved the costumes -- but then it was a technique of how they had these urns, these wine bottles that were really long and it had a holder. You put it on the back of the shoulder like wine girls like in the Bible days. They had to teach us how to pour that without wasting it because it was so heavy and to learn the different wines and what goes where. So it was teaching me another level because I'm a eagle. I always was seeing where I wanted to go. So if I learn all these different wines and what it goes with, then when I get there I'm not a foreigner.

Yes.

So I learned that and then I learned -- we had to serve fruit, like we got here, cheese and crackers and everything. In the beginning the people would come in and we would massage them, all of the wine sommeliers, and we would tell stories, as we'd take the grapes. We had a technique of putting it in our mouth. And they have champagne. We put it in there first and we take it out in our mouth and blow it into the man's mouth. Yeah, it was all technique. The whole thing about the Bacchanal, it was the massage and the treatment that the men got from coming into this Roman feast. So I did that for a long time.

Then they asked me did I want to be a captain. I said, no, I'm ready to get out of here, Dorothy, ready to click-click, and ready to move; I've conquered this. So, "Jerushia, where you want to go now?"

I'm like, Huh, I think I'll go over to -- I think I'll be a cocktail waitress. I like

those uniforms. I wanted to wear the cone and the goddess uniforms. I just loved the goddess uniform. I became a goddess. From being a goddess, that opened doors. I got to meet Sinatra. He blocked me in my room. He blocked me coming out of the goddess room because they did your makeup. Just like a professional model, we had makeup artists. They did our hair. All we did is we would stand up. They would do our nails and feet. Everything was done.

So anyway, coming out of the goddess room to go downstairs to the floor, I run right into Frank Sinatra. I'll never forget. He obviously had spoken to Perlman, which even gave me more favor and it opened other doors. We looked up and the president at the time, Perlman, came and asked me, "Jerushia, we're going to have a big fight here with Muhammad Ali and Earnie Shavers. Would you like to be a ring girl?"

I was like, Ooh, yeah, I get to wear the costume. I get to see all the celebrities. Ooh, I'm charged. I am so charged.

He said, "Okay, well, Don King saw you and he asked for you specifically to be a ring girl. We have never had a black ring girl before in our life."

That opened the door for me to start working all of the major bouts from Muhammad Ali, Earnie Shavers, Sugar Ray Leonard, Tommy Hearns, Spinks, Roberto Durán. I mean I worked all the bouts, all of them. And if you go back and see any of the old films, you'll see a blond-haired, tall lady with braids up -- I always wore braids and had them up -- working the bouts. That allowed me to go to some of the most fabulous parties and social life. I love being a socialite, okay? And I got to travel with them. I got to go places. I mean I lived. Matter of fact, I was even engaged at one time to Muhammad Ali. I was supposed to marry him, but that's a whole other story. But it just

allowed me to be in the mix of people that I felt I'm a part this; this is who I am. And I really felt that way. So the wine sommelier and all of my expertise in that was preparing me now to rub shoulders with these people. In the midst of it I was also rubbing shoulders with the Mafia. That's a whole other story.

So tell me -- okay. So I want to go there.

That's what I said we're going to cut that one.

After your accident, Suzi, what happened?

I had been like a hermit for like two years because of the heat and the damage to my face.

But your face is so perfect now. It's beautiful.

Thank you.

So how did you heal it?

To be perfectly honest with you, it was nothing but God, my mom, my sister Paula, and this one over here, Jerushia, praying for me; help me, Lord, that this actually is here because I was supposed to have plastic surgery. It had gone so far down into the different levels in my face. But after that was over Jerushia and Maria, now, had moved to New York. I had lived in New York prior.

Maria?

Maria is the youngest sister, baby sister. While I was in New York, she came to New York to start modeling. But after the accident Jerushia came -- you came to stay with Maria. And when she came to stay with Maria, I wasn't there. After the car accident they called and told me to come and I went ahead to New York. When I got there we lived on 20th between Broadway and Parker at the Gramercy area. Jerushia was doing a shooting with Phyllis Cuington for Essence magazine.

I never worked for black magazines. They never hired me.

Well, who were you working for you asked me to bring your wigs?

Probably Vogue. Remember I wasn't working for -- unfortunately. But anyway, go ahead. Tell your story.

She was working for one of the magazines. I don't know. And she asked me to come around and bring her wigs, her many wigs. You needed some wigs and something. So anyway, I came around there and I brought her whatever she asked for. Then I got a booking and my career took off again. So again, it was her. It was Jerushia again.

That was a shoot, yeah, because I wanted her to see you get you back into modeling.

Right. And it was Essence, right, Essence magazine?

I don't know. I just remember I was on set and I had you come so she could meet you, the photographer that was about to open an agency.

So that's how it happened. And it just took off again. My career took off. I was always the one -- I did catalogs, like I was the catalog queen.

And commercials.

Yeah, and commercials. I was the first black, again, to get a contract with Lane Bryant, which they didn't want large size and they didn't want any blacks. But I ended up signing the first contract.

What do you mean they didn't want large size? Isn't Lane Bryant --

Not contract. Yes, the first contracted, first black, first large size.

Oh, I see.

No, not contract. I got signed before -- at the time -- what is her name, the red-head girl?

What was her name?

I'm sorry?

One of the young ladies that was the runner-up to the black --

You're talking about Wanda Getty.

Wanda Getty was in Miss America the year that Vanessa Williams won. Well, I got my contract signed before her. So that's another first big stamp. I was the first one to get contracted by Hanes in a large-size market because, again, large-size, they were still trying to hide the large size. I made more money as a large-size model than I did as a small model. I was the first one to get my contract with Lane Bryant. I had like four or five contracts going at the same time. But I was more catalog.

Jerushia was more commercial. She was the one that was high fashion. Like she was the first black large-size on Vogue. She's the first Black Vogue large-size model to be on the cover.

We really broke the market.

Yeah.

In reality, when I got to New York, I wasn't looking for a career. Like I said, I'll go back to Caesars Palace after I did everything I could do; Dorothy did everything she could do. I didn't want to be in the hotels any more. I wouldn't even come into work. God gave me such favor even though I was just a wild child. I was wild. I ain't going to lie to anybody. No, Jerushia. Wow. She needed to be around all those big stars. Again, there it is, the mob and everybody. And I didn't even know and I was just like --

So tell me what it was like once you got to know Frank Sinatra and other people with connections? What was that like and how were you treated?

Well, first of all, you know, it was amazing how people treated them. I was like, Wow.

So tell me what you mean. Give me an example of how they were treated.

Just how people -- I mean the way they got treated everywhere they went, the hotels. It was just the way people looked like they were scared of them. They had this power.

So was it fear or respect?

Both.

Yeah, I think it was a combination of both and the fact that a star of Sinatra's caliber, or even Sammy would be in their presence serving them. I would just watch people and I thought they're just regular people, you know. I felt that I was just like them. I just hadn't got my turn to be on the stage yet, you know.

Yes. Good.

Like Diana Ross, I used to be with her all the time. She would personally take me backstage and go to her house here in Vegas at the time that Caesars would give her. But I had rubbed shoulders with so many of the people that came through Caesars Palace. After I got to see how powerful they appeared to be, I got to see really behind the veil or behind the mask of that whole world of who they really were, and it wasn't a pretty picture.

Do you want to tell me?

They were some of the most hurting people I had ever met in my life. I didn't realize that -- I used to call myself Miss -- what is it? I was always smiling; bring in the clowns; I was Jerushia. So everybody liked to be around me because I kept everybody laughing. But once you get away from the crowd and you really get to know them, be it Muhammad Ali, be it Frank Sinatra, be it --

Sammy.

Sammy Davis Junior, Bill Cosby and all of them -- Bill Cosby was a little different than the rest of them. But being around them -- Tom Jones -- you get to see when all the lights are off and all the crowd is gone -- these people are hurting. They were some of the most miserable people I had ever met in my life. I was like, Ooh, I don't think I want that, because I got to see beyond the illusion of, yes, you can control people; they jump when you tell them to do this, boom, boom, boom; but then they were just looking for somebody to listen to them so they could take off the mask of entertainment and go back to that original little boy or girl who they really are. Diana Ross, the same thing. And for some reason they trusted to share with me and tell me stuff. It was just amazing when I look back on my life they shared their gut and I never told any of their stuff.

I think it's wonderful. I think that kind of trust is unusual. That's wonderful.

What was it like behind the scenes with people who really controlled Las Vegas, with the mob?

Ooh. It was -- and I was young. It was deep. I mean going to shows with them, going to restaurants, them closing it down, watching them control everything. I mean waitresses, waiters and everybody in gourmet restaurants, they'd shut it down. I remember and I can't -- this was -- what's his name? Spilotro? What's his name?

Spilotro.

I got a picture, but I got rid of it because it was scaring me in New York. I was at something at the Stardust. We were at this Lido de Paris or one of those Vegas shows and we had dinner and everything. That's when we had dinner shows. I was sitting with two of the biggest Mafia people in the world. I didn't know they were Mafia people. Again, I just wanted to be treated like a queen. I don't care who you are, you're going to

treat me like a queen, you know. There were two. One of their wives was there. Two ladies were there. They dressed me in costumes and gowns. I'm just feeling top-of-the-world, right? We don't wait in line. Honey, as soon as we came in, everybody had to move out the way, boom. We were in the best booth. But I remember sitting there and there were two ladies that were a part. I could feel their spirit. I could feel the evilness. I can't even explain it. They would look. They just had this deep look. But at the same time I loved the attention. I loved the treatment of how I was treated. But to see how people were controlled.

But this is what I was going to say. We were at one of the biggest gourmet restaurants. They shut it down. I watched them throw cocaine over the whole table. A lot of the names, big names, you know, that the mob taking cocaine in straws. And they only had certain waiters and captains that could be in there, and here I am sitting in the midst of it and watching how uncouth they are. All these supposed to be classy people, blowing their nose on the napkins and on the tablecloth. It turned me off. But we're supposed to have this fabulous meal. But the whole table, after the meal was gone, it became a table of cocaine like I've never seen before. And I have really never seen cocaine until that time. It was like watching "The Godfather," for real. But that was before "The Godfather" came out I was a part of that scene. I was the young girl in the midst of it all.

How did you sit there and not participate?

First of all, they offered it, but they didn't force it. And that was during the time at Caesars – was at its best -- that was during the time a lot of people, pit bosses and dealers and everybody, was getting hit, boom, boom, boom. Oh, the mob was coming

down and it was like people that -- because everybody was masking. The dealers were really mob people. See, a lot of people don't realize it. The pit bosses -- and I'm not going to say some of their names because I'm not going to do that -- they were all pit bosses, they were all mob people. I would be in a room, in a suite, and I would see them come in. I can't say names because one of them may be still living. But they had the guns on them, but they were masking as pit bosses and dealers and had guns. But during that time they were getting popped. It was on the news in the employees' parking lot. Pop, pop, pop, pop. I was starting to have bad dreams because I was in the midst of it. I wasn't doing nothing, but still I was in the midst of that spirit. It scared me. It really scared me because people were -- they were getting popped. I mean every day it was just intensifying. So even though it was a lot of glitter and all that I couldn't sleep after a while because even though I wasn't directly know, I knew what I sensed in my spirit. So I began to pull myself away more and I wanted to get away from the Strip and all that came with it that every young girl gets lured into because of the glitz and the glamour and the money.

So did you ever hear about the good things that those mob families did in Las Vegas, either of you?

Well, the good things for me, looking back as an employee of the hotels and the union -- the union was strong -- they protected us. What's happening now on the Strip, it would never happen with gangs busting in and robbing the tables and the cages. You couldn't even get on the Strip because, first of all, if you weren't somebody connected, you had no business being on the Strip. The black entertainment had to go through the back door. So what make you think just because you could come in the door? It's people that lived in

Vegas that could not go to the Strip, black families. So that way they protected us. And if they liked you they'll do anything in the world for you, anything. I have seen them not only with me but some other people, like Clarence, he was a waiter for a long time, they had favor with him. There were certain blacks that they loved and they would move them right up, with the baccarat dealers and all that. You began to see certain people, they would move up. Now, I don't know what they did to go there. I just know for me they didn't do anything. But the fact of the matter, they ended up being the ones to go and say, "Huh-uh, put this person here; go put that person there."

One thing she said -- you were asking about the mob, too. Again, even if you look at the way people dress coming to Vegas now, we didn't have that then. She remembers the part when black people couldn't come in. I don't know. I never saw that part and I guess it's because of the way we were raised that we didn't really experience that part. I don't know no place that we couldn't go.

Well, you left Vegas. See, I worked in the casinos from the time I was 16.

Yeah. But I'm just saying even with the whole thing with the mob action -- and we knew. Everybody knew, knew that they were running Las Vegas. Everything that you see now -- when you spoke of the unions -- everything that was run, it was run like a business and it was also run very classy. Since then, like she said --

The control. And it's still there. When you look at Vegas being with Ralph Lamb, all of that was connected. Everything was interconnected. Vegas was run by the mob, not just the Strip.

Well, it's established on the mob, anyway. That's how Vegas started.

Just like New York. Yeah, it was just like New York. So again, it had its good parts, but

it had its bad parts. We count it so strange now when we hear about in our community with the gangs, but in reality I got to see all that as being a part of the circle from Vegas to New York.

Just the gangsters --

There were killings and shootings.

But it was like now they call them gangs on the Westside and all of that, but that was the same thing, they just had suits.

Yeah. Because after I left Caesars Palace -- I decided to take a leave of absence, to get back on what you're saying. I decided I was very bored. I had worked on the pool before I left as a cocktail waitress. I wanted to work the pool because of the costumes. That's when I had an opportunity to actually meet Bill Cosby. He adopted our whole family because he had four girls, one boy at the time, and we are four girls. He adopted us as his own. He mentored me and Camille in a different way than he mentored Su. He mentored Su like a father in the business. He became a very good friend.

But anyway, I worked the pool and I did that. After a while I just got bored. I did everything I could do in Las Vegas that anyone could possibly dream of. I was looking for myself. That middle child again was looking for her identity. So I ended up -- Perlman came and said, "Jerushia, you haven't been at work. I don't want to fire you, babe. What's up? What's going on?"

I was like, "I don't know; I want to do something."

And I remember Mr. Chang was another one. He said, "I tell you what. Take a leave of absence. Go find yourself. See what you want to do."

End up leaving. The first thing I did was register to go to beauty school because I

always loved doing hair and makeup and stuff. I was doing it. It was almost time to graduate, and Mr. Chang had offered to actually open me a salon, yeah, before I graduated. I was like, You know what? I can do this when I get old. I'm going to New York. I just said I'm going to New York. I packed my daughter up and I left with a one-way ticket.

When I got to New York -- it reminds me of Zsa Zsa Gabor. I'm not lying. I did this like a country girl. I didn't even think I was country till I got to New York and everybody was looking at me strange. I got to New York after I got off the plane, hit Manhattan. I hit the streets and I said, "New York, you're mine." People were looking at me all strange and stuff. And I'm like, Yes, it's mine; you watch. I'm going to tell you something. It happened, though. And I ended up coming to New York.

It was so funny because I would go on bookings with my sister Maria and she had a fashion show at Macy's. I'll never forget it. I'm sitting there just enjoying the whole show. I forgot that I said on the plane, "Something good going to happen to me. My purpose is going to be in New York, watch, when I get there." Forgot all about it. So Maria did the fashion show. And it was beautiful. I had never seen a fashion show like this and I was just in awe of New York, period. After it was over Ms. Carolyn Moss came to me, which was a fashion director at Macy's, and she asked Maria, "Who is that girl?"

She said, "That's my sister."

She said, "Is she modeling?"

She was like, "Oh, no, she's just visiting. She's supposed to be going back to Vegas, but she's looking to see what she wants to do here."

She said, "Well, I'm interested in her. She has an interesting look."

So my sister told me, she said, "Here give her my card, if she wants to model or whatever. I'd love to use her for Macy's." My sister gave me the card.

And I'm like, "Oh, girl, I don't want all that." I had totally forgot what I had said. I'm like, I don't want to do all that modeling; it's so fake; and blah, blah, blah.

Then all of a sudden she said, "You're so crazy. Jerushia, do you know how long I've been struggling for a career? You come and the door is open." Literally she was mad at me about it. She was like, "You are crazy. Do you know the money you can make?"

Well, I had a mentality of a work-class person. That's a whole different mind-set and I didn't realize it. So until she kept bothering me -- I finally -- she said, "Take this car and go see this lady."

I went to see her. I'll never forget that Friday as soon as I went to see her she put me in front of a camera. I had never worked in front of a camera before. I had been a waitress. I was a server. I was a servant. I had never -- even though I love people serving me, right?

Yes.

I had never, ever been the celebrity like I was around. But again, I was prepared. So when I got there they put me in front of the camera. Make a long story short, they did a number of shoots on me. I look up, it was in the Post, New York Post. Yeah. I didn't even have an agency. So afterwards they were getting so many calls, she called me and she said, "Jerushia, come see me. I want to put you in the next edition." She said, "We're getting so many calls. People are interested. But we're not an agency. We saw something in you," she said, "but we can't handle the calls that are coming in. Here's

some names. You go see some of these people at agencies and tell them I sent you, and here's all your pictures." They knew me before I got in. Amazing.

So I ended up -- I could've gone with Wilhelmina. I could've gone to Ford at that time. I chose a little agency called Plus Models. Pat Swift was the founder of that. I chose it because I was in this big world that I had never been in before being launched into a big career with the mentality of an employee. So I chose to go with a smaller agency so I could grow with this lady. That was a launching pad, aside from Macy's, began to open doors. This woman loved me. She believed in me and she was out there promoting me because she was promoting herself. So if I make it, she's going to make it, you see.

Wonderful.

And that's how it happened. So I was working a lot. At that time Plus Models was not a big thing, so it was up to me to change the world, the way they think, and that's something I love to do. So they were putting pads everybody, because I was a size ten then. Yeah, Plus Models were just on the scene. So they really wanted you to be like a five-six star.

Oh.

Yeah, at that time. We fought for now. The way it is now we fought for. But I'll tell you about that. But they still had to pad me because I was still small from being a cocktail waitress. So anyway, they would pad me and they had the little fat bows, you know, and the muumuus. I was like, I am not going to be wearing this fat muumuu stuff. They were like, Well, we're paying you. I said, "I don't care. I'm not doing it." So a couple of jobs I said I know what I'm going to do, strategic in my mind. Okay, when they get me in front

of the camera, I'm going to wear it, but I'm going to strike a pose. And this is so true. So they put me on the camera. They were like okay. The cameraman, he's shooting. He's like, "Okay, Jerushia, you ready?" I'm like, Uh-huh. He said, "Now, smile big." And I would give a very editorial look, something like Iman. I figured if they could do it, I could do it.

Or Beverly Johnson or Naomi Sims.

Beverly wasn't even very editorial. But more like an Iman or Munya from Paris. I'm like, I'm like them. He was like, "Oh, no, you can't do that." And then I'll give him one smile. So I kept giving him a little bit of what they wanted, but I gave him what I wanted. And the reason I was doing that is because I wanted them to see plus-size models in a different perspective. Because, first of all, I'm not a fat girl; and neither am I a fat, jolly girl. I am an elegant woman. That's what I wanted to show.

So as we did that I lost some jobs. They were like, She's rebellious; we're not hiring her. Then I brought Suzi in. She got what I didn't get. So it ended up as we kept going along, I lost some jobs. It's all right. I don't care because I'm not doing that.

I never wore a muumuu, either.

I looked up, I started getting -- I started taking pictures with one of the first black plus-size models that was a photographer. She started shooting nothing but plus size, Phyllis Cuington that's in Texas now with her husband Terry. She decided to get out the business and then get behind the camera to show us in a whole different perspective. Her first client was Essence magazine. So I look up, they take me to Phyllis Cuington with Fran Cooper. Fran Cooper was the top black makeup artist in the business. And they put me in front -- and they did something to me. I mean the flower, the garden came alive

and I'm like, Whoa. She was like, "Jerushia, just be you, don't smile." They put the music on and I just started in vogue, in vogue, and moving, boom, boom, boom.

I looked up, before I knew it doors began to open when the pictures came out of editorial work. Next, Vogue magazine is knocking on the door. I got a three-year contract three times a year with Vogue magazine, just three girls. One was a brunette, Irene, and another blonde, Carolyn. We always worked together. We both were tall, but it was a brunette, a blond and myself. So we worked for Vogue magazine for three years. It was the first time they had ever allowed plus-size models to be in their book. But we had to be editorial, which was perfect for me. So that began to shape the market. It began to change the market.

Then we look up, the catalog was where the money was, and it still is today. People think that magazines are it. Magazines don't pay an abundant amount of money. It's those newspaper ads and catalogs. That's where you make your bulk of the money.

Now, Suzi come in because I'm like, I'm not doing that; I don't care how much money they're paying me I'm not going to look like a fat girl and neither was I a cheerleader either. You were. I'd bring in Suzi. Suzi would get the job. I look up and she's surpassing me. She's working every day. I'm about to get mad. She's working every day and going on fabulous trips. I went on fabulous trips, too, but she surpassed me, which is cool. I was like, I want that over here. I don't care about that over there. So I said as long as it's a McDonald, you've got one part and, I've got my part over here, okay? So she was working catalogue and again, like I said, I was doing Vogue magazine editorial.

I was doing some stuff because with Christie Brinkley and somebody else I had an

offer to go to Russia. It was their first time opening the market up. I don't know if Tyra Banks was in it then. But I think it was Iman. There were a number of certain people they requested, and I was in that number to come in and do a fashion show in Russia. Christie Brinkley was real big at that time. So it was a lot of quality stuff I got even though it wasn't quantity. But I was looking ahead to setting a legacy or opening doors for other people.

So anyway, then I looked up, I'm not getting the jobs. They're not hiring me. Okay. Essence didn't want to hire me because they said I wasn't black enough. I'm still trying to find Jerushia. They wanted me to wear my hair natural like I wear it now. I was wearing 50 jillion wigs at that time. So I did the editorial shootings; she got the big contract job. Because of her dark beautiful color, they identified her race. They said, "Jerushia, Black America can't relate to you." And I said, "Well, neither can I. Welcome aboard."

AT this time, I'm still in discovery. I'm still trying to find Jerushia. So Suzi ended up getting the job. And Maria, my sister, she worked and did Essence and Ebony. But I was still doing Vogue magazine. I'm doing Russia. I'm going to Europe. Whatever.

So I ended up looking around and some of the places that I knew the market needed to go with plus-size models in order for us to really make a mark like we are seeing today, I had my eyes open. Okay. Lane Bryant, you're only hiring skinny girls? Watch this. I'm getting ready to write a letter because I learned the power of the pen by being on TV and listening to what they said we were on Phil Donahue Show. Oprah Winfrey, I did. They flew me out on Oprah Winfrey to Chicago. I've done a lot of things. Regis and Kathie Lee.

Maybe not a lot of things, but a lot of quality things. So I ended up writing a letter to Lane Bryant in regards to the small models that they were hiring because at that time they would not touch plus-size models. They wanted the thin girls. They hated plus size. I wrote a letter and I told them that I was the president of Women with a Vision, which I wasn't lying, and that we are an international group and if we do not see change in your magazine in this coming year -- now, remember it was almost holiday -- I said I will send this letter all over and we will petition you, Lane Bryant, for not using plus-size models, which the market you're selling your product to.

Well, they started doing it. They sent me a letter that said thank you. I'll never forget it. 1988. Lane Bryant gets ready the first large-size model contract. Suzi gets the contract. I was like well done, thank you very much. It's so funny because they were just here recently and they remembered me and they remembered her. So again, I realize looking back at my life that I am a forerunner, a trailblazer, paving the way for others. It wasn't meant for me to stay there. It was only meant for me to make a mark for others to come after me. I did that in 1990s. I think I stayed in New York maybe ten, 12 years. That opened the door for Phil Donahue, Good Morning America, Good Morning L.A., Oprah Winfrey, --

Regis and Kathie Lee.

What else? It was so many shows. Sometimes I was like, Ooh, this is too much. It's going so fast I can't breathe. I can't breathe. But I got to meet so many people that I would have never had the opportunity to meet if I had never walked in those doors. After a while I really didn't even want to do it anymore because --

She's right. She didn't. Jerushia would say: Just give it to somebody else.

And I didn't like people touching me anymore. Stop touching me. Yeah. You were a product while working as a model I learned. You're just a product. You're not your own. You're a mannequin. They don't care how well you speak. Shut up. We do your hair. We do what we want. After a while I said, "No, you don't. You will not touch me anymore and you will not do many hair." That's why I got a wig. I was so sensitive in my spirit I couldn't take it anymore. So from all of that I ended up moving away from modeling -- I had a breakdown. I had a breakdown.

You missed one part.

Just so many people over my body. I couldn't take it anymore.

We ended up being the first, both of us, the first large-size models to go to Ford Modeling Agency. They handpicked us.

Oh, really?

Yeah. I went to Ford Plus-Size Model. We went to Ford. I started with Pat Swift; then I went to Cuington, the lady that was the first black plus-size model that did photography, very well-known photographer right now. Then we went to Eileen Ford. They didn't even want plus-size models, but they saw that we were making money. So, yes, we were. I forgot about that because I wasn't really that interested in them, anyway.

How long were the two of you at Ford?

When did you come back here?

I came back Fourth of July weekend 1998.

When she came back in '98, I stayed. So I guess that was about 2000 -- I was there until 2005.

Yeah. I don't know if you were there -- either way.

Yeah. I stayed a lot longer than you.

So for me, I felt like that that part of my life was done. It was time for another level even though I was resistant. I loved New York. It embraced me. It loved me a lot better than Las Vegas did, really, in certain ways.

It sounds like Las Vegas loved you, also.

Las Vegas did. My community was the hardest. I'm going to be honest with you.

Okay. Okay.

Again -- wait a minute. Again, even when we went away and worked in New York, when we did the all these first, I don't know, we did a cover or something for Essence and they said black girls don't have eyes like us?

I don't even remember.

I have the magazine.

We did a show in New York. I don't want to forget that. Before I left New York in 1988 -- the Lord had put on my spirit that the McDonald Sisters needed to reunite one more time.

It was so funny. I produced the show. I told them and they were like, "We're not doing it."

No. I was in Australia. I was away. I'm working on my second album.

Not where we did, "Take Our Love," Suzi.

Yes. I was, Jerushia.

You were a fashion model with Plus-Size Model.

But I had been singing as well because remember I was away, came back, and you had a show booked, and I had to get my musicians -- my keyboard player to do lead sheets, practice to put the whole show together.

Yeah. But I'm saying you were at --

She put a whole show together and didn't tell us.

Yeah. I was always a producer at heart. I ended up getting the venue up in the village at Greene Street and the whole vision of it. The show sold out. At that time Phyllis Hyman passed away and Jennifer Holliday (Dream Girls)—we were all together. I told her what God told me to do, and she said, "I'll help co-produce it with you." So she took us to her studio and everything. She did the background. She made sure we were all on harmony. We did Greene Street. Las Vegas Girls take New York by Storm, Take Our Love.

"Come Share Our Love."

"Come Share Our Love."

Oh, wow.

And so what I did is created -- we took them back. We told them about Vegas and telling them people think, everybody's a showgirl from Las Vegas, blah blah, into the present. So we did that show, Come Share Our Love. I mean everybody in the market was there. That place was packed. Brought my mom to New York, my Aunt Margie from Vegas for the show. Broadway, Jennifer Holliday, Patti LaBelle. Who else was there? Phyllis Hyman top models male and female, my daughter Patricia and Maria's son Jabbar. It was so many people I was scared to come out on the stage.

She did.

Because we each had a part. Like we sang together, but we wanted everybody to know we are the McDonald Sisters, but we want introduce to you to the fact that we are also individuals. We all have different styles and everything. So each one of us sang. I put it where each one of them did their little thing. Maria did a monologue of Song of

Solomon. Suzi did "Jazzy Blue." Then I came out doing gospel. Oh, yes, Suzi. I know she wants to say something so bad.

Go ahead, Suzi. Go ahead. Yes?

Go ahead, Suzi, tell her the story.

Oh, Lord. She got out there and got so nervous --

I was nervous, nervous, nervous.

She was just -- she lost it.

Stage fright. I got scared. You want to tell the story?

No. You get to tell your own story.

So anyway, I was so scared. It was almost time for me to come on. I even lined up sponsors to provide our clothes and everything. We didn't have to do nothing but just show up, show out. I don't know who was on the stage at the time. Maria?

Maria's on stage doing a very profound monologue -- and it's quiet, just like this, and it's silent.

She has a tense monologue. The Song of Solomon.

She started out, "Kiss me," and all of a sudden she took a pause to let the monologue build to a moment..

She said, "Look not upon me because my skin is black."

No. And then she said, "Kiss me." And as soon as she said, "Kiss me," Jerushia flushed the toilet from backstage. It was so loud it seemed almost perfect timing, it was almost comic. No one knew what to do. Was it time to laugh? What?

They had a toilet in the bathroom in near the curtain entrance backstage. I kept going to the bathroom. I was so nervous I couldn't stop. I didn't know that it was close to the

engineer and they could hear the flushing of the toilet. Everybody looking around. I was so embarrassed I didn't know what to do.

But she always has these moments—she always creates these moments where you're not sure what to feel. I can't even say what it is. It's totally hilarious. But she was in the middle of this serious monologue and she had her moment from backstage. I'll never forget she had her hand like kiss my—and as soon as she said, "Kiss my lips," the toilet flushes. She opened her eyes. And everybody started laughing. And I was like, Oh, my god, because in New York even though it's a beautiful venue, the stage is here and it's not real deep. The toilet was right there at the curtain entrance to the stage. I was like, Oh, my god.

It's like a cabaret venue. It was a cabaret performance.

Then she didn't want to come out by herself. Remember, you wanted me to come out with you. I had to sing with you, Jerushia.

Oh, my goodness.

I don't remember that.

Yes. I have the video. Don't worry about it. She wouldn't sing by herself. Her nerves. You got so nervous.

I was nervous.

You didn't want to go out by yourself, as you usually do even now.

I mean, hey.

You put me in a position to have to come out and sing with you.

After that I left New York. After that and then there were other things that caused me to end up having a breakdown to get a breakthrough in my life, I say. My sisters brought

me back to Vegas in 1988, Fourth of July weekend. I knew it was time for me to leave, but I didn't want to leave. So a lot of the breakdown came from resisting what my spirit was leading me to do. And I found myself back here in Vegas, ooh, wow, back at my mom's house starting all over again, to discover why I'm back here again. So thus is born. That's how I remember when the vision came about.

I don't even know where you go from there.

I want to ask a question about Caesars Palace. Did you ever work with Dee Dee Cotton?

What's the name?

Dee Dee Cotton.

I know the name, but I don't think I worked with her then. Yes I do remember Dee Dee Cotton. I worked with Peggy.

Peggy Walker.

Peggy Walker.

The two of them both started in 1966.

Yeah. They were the first black. Irma was one, and Ruthie. They were the first four I think. I do remember Dee Dee.

So that's what I mean. But you remember those women?

Uh-huh. Yes.

So when she left in 1988 to come back to Las Vegas, did you remain in New York?

Yes.

So were you still modeling at that time?

I continued to model and do commercials and television. I actually did the "Bloops and

Blunder" tape for the NBA. Which became my best friend, her name is Leah Wilcox, I met her at a game it seemed she was having a problem with these guys and I told her she wasn't alone. Later I found they were playing. We became friends. And they were in the midst of producing "Bloops and Blunder" video. They wanted to add some girls. So I did some basic co-production on the "Bloops and Blunder" tape with Karl Malone and Darryl Dawkins in starring roles. So, yeah, I continued my career in the field of modeling. I still did really well with modeling and with the acting and things.

Wonderful. So what was Las Vegas like in 1988 when you came back? Do you remember how it had changed from when you left to coming back? What was that like?

I was amazed. Even though I came home after all the time. It had grown so much, freeways that I had never seen in Vegas. I welcomed it, though. It was just amazing how quick it had developed, homes that are built in areas that I remember as desert by Tule Springs, all of that, and up by Red Rock. There was none of that. That was all desert.

So what about the Westside? How had the Westside changed?

It had died. Where one part of the city was developing and prosperous, progressing, the Westside reminded me of a desert that had never been watered. It brought me to tears when I got there. Me and my dad were sitting outside the Town Tavern. We walked up and I kept saying, "Dad, what happened? Where's all the music? Where's all the life? Where are the people?" And I'm like, When did this happen?

I remember him saying they have a drug called crack cocaine and it is killing our people. And we're sitting there and we're in front of the Town Tavern and I watched my dad cry and I started crying. I said, "But why? What happened?" It's a ghost town. It

was a ghost town. And anybody you saw was probably high on drugs. Even though I had heard about drugs, the reality is when I came back home. I knew about it in New York. I would see certain things.

When I came home the reality of crack cocaine and what it did to our community. And then I began to remember him telling me about all the deaths from drugs, sitting out in front of Jackson Street telling me some of the prominent people that died, like Keith Hoggard, from the drugs. He started naming people's kids that I went to school with. He's like, Yeah. He said, "It's a devil in town that have killed our people." And dad loved our people so much. I had never seen him weep before in my life. So he's weeping. I'm starting to weep. He said, "It's just dead. There's no more life here." And he died. A part of him died from that I could see it on him.

So in addition to when integration really happened and blacks were able to go anyplace they wanted to go, so in addition to that, them leaving to go to other businesses, in addition to that we see the drugs, also?

With us moving out, the enemy moved in because we took our black dollars elsewhere. We took our talent; we took our life, our spirituality. The foundation of who we were as a people from our ancestors, from the slaves. We took it out, but in reality it died before we ever left, the community ever left, the heart of our community. So once you take the heart of the community, then the community dies.

And Suzi, do you see it the same way? Is that what you thought? When you came back again, what did you see?

Well, I never really wanted to come back. Once I left Las Vegas I could never really live in Las Vegas long. I love the weather; I love Las Vegas. But whenever I would come

back the disturbance was that instead of us, as they say, moving on up, we moved up and we became a weaker people. All the people that had scuffled and fought for us to have and be where we were, we let them down. I mean I can say that every time I've ever come back to this community I always. I came back in and out of Vegas. I always came back to the Westside thinking that we would finally be accepted and what we had we could turn around and share. But it became like a boomerang; that you would go into the community and what you would spew out to help, it would come back and slap you in the face. So it got to a point for me, I can speak personally, that when I came back and I saw the deterioration, I didn't know what else I could do except just go and be an example there.

See, Jerushia has always been the community person, and Paula. They go in there and they'll sit with the people and things like that. Again, that wasn't my gift. My gift is not to sit there with you. I come and I bring the music. I come and I'll bring the praise dance, and I'll come and I'll bring a song. But my part of it was I was never be the one to sit where I wasn't wanted. I was supposed to come and pull people out to want to grow go.

So when you said it was like a boomerang, can you think of any examples where you felt that you had put something out there and it came back to you in a negative way?

Well, the first girl that ever did Ebony Fashion Fair here in Las Vegas is Laval Griffin. We went to Catholic school with her at Saint Peter's. And when I finally got to go to the Ebony Fashion Fair, I saw that as my being the second there should be a next one and a next one and a next one. In Ebony Fashion Fair when I came back here I thought that -- maybe my misconception was that there would be a lot of girls that would want to hear

how to do it and because I had done it -- we have never been the type of girls that would take the information and hold it. I wanted to send some of the girls out. Years later Jerushia's daughter Patrina went to Ebony Fashion Fair. Matter of fact, Maria started a fashion company here. Some of the girls that I grew up with, I told them about how to get started and that while I was working, I'd take their pictures or whatever to my gang. It wasn't that it was a boomerang that smacked me in the face. My reality of it became clear, it wasn't their dream. That was my dream for them to do.

I don't really know -- I mean I really don't -- I'm trying to think of how I can really say this and not be mean. If you're never accepted in your community, then what you bring can turn around and be a decay to you and bring you down. I get sad. And that was not what I wanted it to be. Even now, today, I want to be able to show people how to go where we've been and do better than I did, you know, because it's out there. Vegas has so much talent here. But because the stars are made when they get here, they don't see the diamonds in the desert that we are right here. So that is why with us -- I mean we left here to go and make it and then come back and be able to share that. The Westside, to be perfectly honest with you, I mean I never even sung or performed in Las Vegas except for the one thing that Jerushia did, which is a travesty, because I'm born here, when they broke my album and you (Jerushia) did the big PR party for me, outside of that nothing. And I didn't sing that night. It is a travesty that I'm born and raised here, I've been around the world, and there's nothing that I cannot do that's not entertaining. I got my daddy in me. I got my momma. I got my sisters. I'm saying to you the things that I have to offer, Vegas has never embraced that. (Vegas had Lionel Hollins and others yet Vegas never honors its own. Why? It saddens me because other cities do.)

I'm working on a project now that I'm going to take it out and bring it back in. I know that that's timing. It's all timing, again.

I think a lot of that, what you're saying, has a lot to do with being rejected, because I have it, too -- the fears of our childhood, rejection and not being accepted, and even watching our mother and our dad even though dad's heart loved the community; he loved the people, some of the things that he dealt with among our own people, things that he wanted to see or to improve. You know, I think a part of that kind of made us pull back, too, because it's like you don't want to share your pearls and then they throw them back at you.

So I'm learning at this age that I am now -- 56 years of age. So long as we accept ourselves, at least we gave. That's all we could do and people know what we've done. It's not that we're bragging to do that. But what I'm looking at now when I look at West Las Vegas, I think of the story in the Bible, Moses and the rod -- and I know you know that story -- Moses's rod, can it blossom in the desert? And I would say, yes, it can blossom in the desert because for people like ourselves willing. It doesn't matter what our age is. I mean I look at what's her name from Moulin Rouge?

Sarann Knight

Sarann, yeah. She's 90 something years old. The woman is still going. If you have a vision and you have the passion and that vision is -- it's like an attic. You can't sleep. It's saying you've got to give it, you've got to give it, you've got to give some water, you've got to pour some wine in the desert so that Moses's rod gave water and everything can begin to blossom in the desert.

Jesse. Whatever. I'm talking about can the desert blossom? I may be saying the

scripture wrong right now. I don't want to get caught up in that. But as much as the fact is, as desert is there I have the belief that it can live again. But it's going to take people to become selfless and willing to have vision.

So you think the Westside can live again? Now, I'm not talking about -- I know that around the Westside it's blooming. I see Nevada Partners. I see Gritz Cafe and that area. But I'm talking about the --

Jackson Street.

-- the heart of the Westside, Jackson Street and D and E; that little area.

I believe it can.

You have a vision for that area?

I believe it can live again, but I don't believe that you go back to something.

Oh, no.

I never believe that what was then doesn't mean that you try to make it now because we have accelerated so much in technology and everything.

Exactly. So I want both of you -- so what do you see as the future of the heart of the Westside?

Oh, man. I would like to see -- and I said this before somewhere else -- I would first like to see the legacy of what was there, and then I would like to see jobs and development. Nevada Partners and all those things are great, but I'm sick of the welfare system and what they have done to our people. I would like to see mothers coming together and building homes and mentoring young girls and teenage mothers. I would like to see men that are able, that are strong-able men that have a foundation that will come in and strengthen boys, be surrogate fathers to them, begin to teach them to have visions and

dreams, not to work for nobody else. I don't believe this is the hour anymore for us to work for people. So we must teach them to have dreams and visions because those dreams and visions will begin to plant the seeds for the future of West Las Vegas and Jackson Street.

Yes.

I look forward to the heartbeat again. And when I say the heartbeat -- she talks about my father -- that the men of my father's caliber, I look to that heartbeat again, as you talked about the men that will. It may not be our generation, but we need to prepare the next generation to be the heartbeat, men that will pick up the slack again. We need our music back.

That's true.

And not degrading music. We need our music back. We need our Tin Shots that will get in the middle of the street and throw some dirt and let a child hear and see the movement of your feet can be music and that the heartbeat doesn't necessarily mean it's inside your body only. It can be from the bottom of your feet. I am more of the dance and the sing part of it. They say that a song, music can soothe the heart of a beast.

When it comes to crack cocaine and all these drugs now -- matter of fact, I just looked at a thing on the DeBarge family. The deterioration of that entire family that people don't even know. But one decided, the one that was married to Janet Jackson -- I just emailed it to you. But because of the music -- there's something in music, the beat of a drum that it's like if a person has a heart attack, they put that electricity on them and it pumps them back up and it gives them back life. I'm looking for those electrodes. I want to put those paddles together and put it back on the ground and watch it grow and wake

again.

I want to see us raise our own food on the Westside. Why is it that everybody wants the Westside, when they actually forced us to sell my dad's land? Because we have the richest land. If you look at Harlem, you look at Harlem you've got our ex-president living there. Okay. That's because there is a heartbeat, there is a fertile ground there. The Westside is fertile ground.

Two questions. Is either of you aware of what's happening with the Westside School?

No.

The last I heard they were going to reconstruct it or revamp -- whatever you call the word I'm looking for -- and that it was going to be a monument, basically.

Well, it's on the National Registry of Historic Places. And now they are having community meetings so that the community can decide what is going to happen to that. It will be renovated and it will have various uses depending upon what the neighborhood decides that it should be used for. With something like that -- and the plans are just beautiful -- you've seen the Fifth Street School downtown --

Yes.

-- and what they've done that that?

Yes.

Okay. So that's the model. So with something like that that's almost right there in the Westside, how do you see something like that as being able to bring back the heartbeat?

I think what Suzi said before. First of all, we are erythematic people. We are creative

people. The heartbeat will come back just by the fact of allowing her children to be creative, to express through the arts in various aspects -- dancing, singing -- as well as athletes; we are very athletic people -- and not smothering that talent. From that being developed, then it will begin to cause the community or the Westside to begin to thrive again because it's a rhythm. The rhythm is beginning to penetrate the earth. It's penetrating through our children. It's penetrating the earth. Then it will begin to yield to us. The earth will yield and open up so you can put new seed in there and it can produce. So I think it's a good thing.

I think it's an amazing thing, and I will venture to say that I will donate my time starting out. I think that every man should be paid for their good, for their works and what you know how to do, your talents. And the model that I would use is the one in New York. Strausberg, but it's in Harlem. As a matter of fact, I attended the school. They taught how to actually write music. We had to get up in front of top musicians and write a song, sharts, etc.. We teach you the theory. We teach you this. Now, okay, you write it out. They would actually come in and they would perform it and you've got to sing it. Bill Cosby's affiliated. Lionel Hampton was affiliated. He left money in his death. Wynton Marsalis. They played what was on the charts. (They held us to a high standard and charged us to do what would be out best.)

We actually had the "taking off the mask" from our Hands of Comfort Foundation. We had our "taking off the mask" in 2011. We went into Las Vegas Academy. We used those students and then we turned around and we gave them a donation. We believe in putting back into the children. I believe in putting into everybody, my senior citizens, all of that. (They hold great information.)

So what they're doing -- the talents that we have I would love to be able to put that in there. You said the National Registry. That's amazing. I would love to again see the model that they have in New York. Hopefully they are doing a little bit of research on that and different areas to bring that here. But that school, Stromberg, every recording piece, every instrument, the studios that were built that was built by Bill Cosby, everything that is in there is from someone that has already made it and they're passing the tong. So I agree with that. I don't know what I can do. Now that you've told me about it, I'll try to find out who and invest my time. My gift is children.

Also, the Westside is, as you know, the community is not the same community that we lived in even though it appears to look like it. It is now occupied by what I like the call the cast-outs. The cast-outs are Caucasian people. It's a melting pot. It's not the same community. Those things are still great, but it's now multifaceted. It was kind of multifaceted when we were kids, too, with the Indians and a few Mexicans and some Caucasian. But now it's different. You're going to see homeless people that were never there. To me it's reality. When you come into the community be it on the Westside or Harlem or if you go to any intercity, it all shows the people that have been cast out. So now the faces look different. So now what we had -- you can only take some of that. But you now have to incorporate some other stuff because it is now a tapestry, a quilt of every race. It's totally different. Every language is now there. Now it needs to be a multicultural community.

And I'll say again we're talking about the heartbeat (of the community). There is a beat that's on the ground that everybody understands. And if a person is already dead from drugs whether they're homeless, whether they're without a job, whatever the issue is, if

we can just get them to have a beat in their heart again, a pulse -- the hearts (that seemed to have failed will live again) because of what's going on. They want to blame it on Obama. That's not what is happening. He's trying to pull his feet out of a massive amount of poop. He doesn't even have boots high enough. But the people that actually laid that format of the destruction of trying (I say trying) to destroy America, well, the thing now is for everybody needs a heartbeat back. You need your heart strong to work a job, even, because not everybody to get the heart beating again. But if the heart is not beating strong, if the bows of the heart where the blood is to flow can't get to the core of the heart, if the arteries are blocked, we need those pallets to hit them and get something moving. We need the bloodlines to (be clear , function, with hope, trust again in our government in each; only then can we feel the heart beat.). And we're a part of that bloodline. We're the root. (A strong part of the roots, healthy roots, well-watered. Have you ever heard water moving? Then you will understand. Take time to listen to your own breath, your own heartbeat and the running water. That's the beginning without end.)

So a few minutes ago one of you said that you were forced to sell the property that you owned. So explain how you were forced.

First of all, this is another thing. Eminent domain is one of the biggest enemies of our community. I discovered it after dad's death. And I'm sure you were over there because you interviewed him. After his death and after the court and fighting to keep the property, we ended up losing the battle. But it wasn't the first time. This is the second time where my dad had a house. His father's (house) on Owens St. -- where it says "Entering West Las Vegas" on Owens, that was all my dad's property and across the street. So they forced his dad (to do it) the same way. (eminent domain) Then my

grandfather died from there, because the house was paid for. Most of the people that they go after with eminent domain, they're just citizen slaves that have paid off their houses.

So what did they want the property for?

Actually to widen the street.

New developments and widening the street. When I go over there now, that's what it is.

It's basically widening the street for buses.

Oh, okay. So we're back from New York and you've been here for years. Now, are you living here now?

I just recently moved back. (Temporarily. If my mother were not here I really think I will/would go away, unless things change.)

You recently moved back as well. So tell me what the two of you are doing now, anyway you want to tell me.

Okay. Well, this is Jerushia. What I'm doing now and my passion from God -- well, I say I've been impregnated, from coming back in 1988 Fourth of July weekend, with Women with a Vision after having a breakdown to get a breakthrough, learning what my purpose was for being here on this planet called Earth is to link women across the globe, to be those mentors I told you about, to build up arms of young women that are single moms, teenage moms like I was, also to bring awareness that we as a people, as black women, who we really are and how powerful we really are, and to know the legacy that lives within us, the blood, as my sister would say, that is pumping through our blood that we could rebuild the old places if we just come together. We can build homes for our children. We don't have to depend on the system or welfare. All of these things have

caused to enable us and to cause us to be slaves to them. So I really want to awaken the woman to make her realize truly who she is. She's a tree of life. She is the tree of life. And unless we come back together as the womb of the earth, the woman, and begin to come together, collaborate, not depending on anyone else but ourselves, and those legacies that was left by our ancestors when they had nothing, to give to a child, to rebuild our communities and homes and begin to share, strengthen each other's arms. That's what Women with a Vision is about.

Right now I'm looking to August 2013. I'm working on Africans' Cry Gathering. I have a mandate on my life for women, but it's for everybody. God is telling me that it's the hour for the slave descendants and the motherland to come together; that this is the hour. And it reflects the story of Joseph—when Joseph was sold into slavery and in the days of families when God brought his family to him. What happened in that time, he blessed his family. So I'm working on 2013, August 1st, in New York City, a seven-day cruise from Manhattan to Canada an atonement and healing and restorations among the Africans and African descendants. So that is something huge of healing and actually coming together. And then the following year I will do it in Africa.

Then I will take the programs that I have been given inspired by the Holy Spirit of rebuilding our communities and our homes and duplicate them and get a team of women willing-- I'm looking for an army of women that will deal with me, kind of like what President Carter's doing with Habitat for Humanities and begin to build in our communities like the Westside and other places and in a motherland where we work hand in hand together now, becoming like a Noah, an arc of covering for others. So that's my passion. That's what I'm living for until the day He calls me and says, Okay, Dorothy, it's

time to check out.

That's wonderful.

Suzi.

Right now I'm back in Vegas after being (in a process of) divorce. I'm back in Vegas. I came back to assist my niece, which is Jerushia's daughter after her husband actually committed suicide. I came back to basically be there and just be here for whatever she needed. She actually established this year Hands of Comfort Foundation (501c3). She put the paperwork in December 2009 and then we all left for Rome, Italy. I was going to Rome alone. I have a young lady (Julie Schoppa), that's like a daughter to me and her family that have adopted me and I was going spend the holiday there just to get away myself (due to the request for a divorce, paperwork went in May 2010 after 20 years.). I got ready to go, I looked up and she said, "You're not leaving me." So she and the kids all went. They didn't want to stay here in Vegas. So she put the paperwork up in December (for the organization), and we went away until after the first of January 2011, came back here, and it's been full force. When we got back in April -- that was January of 2011. April of 2011, we did what is called a "taking off of the mask." She and I worked day and night, along with her mother, Jerushia. It's called "taking off the mask." It was a masquerade ball, huge. We did it on the level of the way that we have been as performers. It was just bringing the information to let people know that this is available because one of the things that happened for her is at the time of his demise, his suicide, we called around to get the family help. And unless you're a drug addict, alcoholic or a gambler, Las Vegas -- not just Las Vegas. There was no response. We even called Reno. I've called some of everywhere. Even to today's date there was no assistance or return

call. But in that what we found out was God said it's not their job; it's yours. This happened to you. Nobody can really do this to the degree that you do it. So I have been working with her on the foundation. Jerushia is the entertainment developer. She develops any of the entertainment portion of it. She just recently put me as vice president of Hands of Comfort and also I do fundraising.

Outside of that I am in the midst -- my album that was put out with Giorgio Moroder years ago, they're getting ready to reissue my album. So I'm in the midst of putting together a show of my own to be able to do my gift because I have been an assistant to everybody and now is my time to launch myself back out.

Outside of that one of the things that -- like when you're talking about this school. My heartbeat is children. Jerushia makes jokes all the time and she tells me I should open up a nursery. If I were to open up a nursery -- and that's not something that I will not do -- but when I open it, it has to be on such a level because where children are concerned I don't seek -- I know that they're sponges. So they would be learning every language. Every day there's languages that they're learning, different languages. There would be dance, there would be singing because every child learns differently. And that would be my heartbeat; to make sure that every child has an opportunity to do whatever they can actually dream.

Working right now, also I have just established a travel vacation and concierge. It's called Dare to Dream. My reason for that is, again, here in Las Vegas because stars are already made and being here, a lot of people don't see that you can do so much more. Just travel one place and just the information from outside can help you grow.

So there's a conglomerate of things that I'm putting together now because, again,

I've been steeled for a while helping in other ways, in my marriage, and now in my family that now I'm getting ready to do the things that I dream for that I want to do here. Jerushia always reminds me I'm -- I remember as a little girl they said I would be an Esther. Now I'm going to walk in my position as Esther. There is a preparation that's taking place in the land right now. She's the forerunner and she gets in there and she and Paula get dirty. She told me I'm not the one to get dirty. Everybody has a part, you know.

Yeah. Listen, it's amazing because -- and I guess because I do radio. So if I'm out of line, let me know. And I'm listening to you and I think you don't realize the value of really what you have. It may not look like you're the forerunner, the trailblazer, but in reality to be a co-labor or someone to hold up someone's arm is very powerful. So I just want to encourage you as your sister that you don't have to look like you're doing a lot of things, but as long as it's your passion doing one thing because you're touching people's lives, as you said the heartbeat. It doesn't matter who spearheads it or who's the carrier of it, but you're the one helping to deliver it. You're one of the midwives. So it's powerful. That's when you really realize that I'm not here for myself, I'm here for a greater cause. It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a number of midwives to birth in visions. So I just want to leave that with you.

Well, this is wonderful.

That's awesome.

This is simply wonderful. In closing is there anything historical about Las Vegas, about the Westside that you remember that you'd like to say before we close? We talked about a lot of segments of Las Vegas history.

I always love Black History Month. I was thinking about that before you came and as how as kids we looked forward to wearing African garments. At the time, remember, African Imports was on Fremont Street. I know my whole family, we looked forward to wearing our afros and making sure they were perfect, in junior high school, and that our native garb or our garments reflected what we were trying to say. Those were moments in time that I believe as a community we shined. We stepped up to identify that I may be an American, but I'm first an African. You see what I mean? And to me that's just like whoa So I remember those days. You felt powerful. It's like "hung-a" with black power. You know, you just felt like you was a revolution, and even though I was in junior high school. But I remember. I would look at the kids and I would look at people when they had those garbs on and the regal-ness that we walked. It's like we woke up to who we are. And so those are the days. That's very memorable to me and Jackson Street and the families and the pillars of our community, the spiritual pillars, the forerunners, the jazz musicians. Everybody make up the rhythm, as my sister would say, of the spirit of who we are today and the legacy of something that looked dead that we'll always keep it alive, always keep it alive. She over there laughing at me.

Because she says it all. It's nothing left to say. You know, there's nothing else to say, but she'll say it.

Well, I thank both of you so much. This has been a wonderful experience.

Thank you.

If your mom decides one day that she'd like to talk and she's having a good day and you want to call me on the spur of the moment, if I'm available I will do it on the spur of the moment.

Wonderful.

So thank you so very much.

You're so welcome.

Thank you.