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An Interview with Arne Rosencrantz

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Recorded interviews, transcripts, archival photos and a website comprising the Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood project have been made possible through support from the University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries. The project was the initiative of Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm who taught at UNLV and lived in the John S. Park neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized there was a special place in the neighborhood where people were successful, religious, socially and economically. This place, which was the John S. Park had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was a historic neighborhood and pathogen. The project was the initiative of Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm and an archive of UNLV and UNLV Libraries. The project was the initiative of Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm and an archive of UNLV and UNLV Libraries. The project was the initiative of Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm and an archive of UNLV and UNLV Libraries.

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

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

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Interview with Arne Rosencrantz

February 9, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee White

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Preface

Arne Rosencrantz remembers living on Beverly Way from 1954 to 1970. Like so many others from that era, he attended Fifth Street School, John S. Park Elementary School, John C. Fremont Middle School and graduated from Las Vegas High School. As a Jew, he was in a small minority, but fondly recalls growing up in the dense Mormon population of John S. Park Neighborhood.

As a youngster, life in Las Vegas was filled with fun. The desert provided opportunity to hunt lizards and rabbits. Kids walked to school without concern. They played ball and found the Strip casinos welcoming to locals. He tells how the social issue of segregation of the 1960s did not affect him personally, but how local movie theatre owner Lloyd Katz fought to make his Huntridge and Fremont theatres integrated.

He also reminisces about his father opening Hollywood Furniture and later Garrett's Furniture, which Arne operated until retiring in 2001. During the interview, he lists other furniture companies and the strong assortment of other retailers and restaurants that served the neighborhood.

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This is Claytee White. It is February 9th, 2010, and I am in the home of Arne Rosencrantz. I'm interviewing him this morning in his home in the Summerlin area of the city. So how are you today?

I'm fine, thank you, Claytee.

Great. I want you to tell me a little about your childhood, where you grew up, your parents, what they did for a living.

I was born in Longview, Washington, a small town about eighty miles north of Portland, Oregon. Don't have very much memory of that. I moved to Portland, Oregon when I was two years old and left there when I was four. My early memory is of a really indistinct Portland, although I think I have a lot of memories of it because it was our summer vacation every year. We moved to Las Vegas when I was four, and we drove from Las Vegas to Portland every summer, and we spent a lot of time there; so my memories are probably past my first four years. But I have great memories of Las Vegas and growing up here.

Where did you move [to] when you first moved to Las Vegas?

We moved to the west Charleston [Boulevard] area, and I think we were in a rented home for about a year. My father [George Rosencrantz] was a professional musician (he was a violinist), and as he got a little older, work became harder to get (as his hair got gray). He played through the [Great] Depression into about the Forties. But as he was getting older, he wasn't working the same as he did earlier. So he decided he'd go back to Portland and

start a little business. He did that and that's where he met my mother [Betty Rosencrantz]. They got married and moved to Longview because that was sort of an up-and-coming town and there were more opportunities there. He lived there probably about six years. My older sister [Rhoda Rosencrantz Sherman] was born there. She lives in Los Angeles [California] now. She spent four or five years there; she's four years older than I am. And I spent the two years in Longview.

We moved to Las Vegas when I was four, and he opened a furniture store [Hollywood Furniture] here. Along with that, he played at the Sahara Hotel [and Casino] in the orchestra. Whenever they had a singer and they needed a violinist, they used my father, which he enjoyed very much. He did it for several years. My sister and I and my mother enjoyed it too because we got to see all the entertainers who were there during those years.

Who are some of the people that you remember seeing?

Oh, Donald O'Connor. Victor Borge. I think he played with him. I'll have to think about the people who played the Sahara. We saw shows all over. In those days, Las Vegas was a place where you could go and be entertained very inexpensively in the Fifties. A lot of the shows were free, or [you purchased] just a Coke or a drink. A very interesting time. Certainly different than today.

And children could go in the showrooms with no problem.

No problems. None that I can remember. Of course they never took me anywhere that I probably shouldn't have been, but no, there were no problems. We went to a lot of shows. Dinner shows, where they served dinner and then you got to see an act. It was very good. It was a very nice way to live.

Where did you go to school?

When I lived in west Charleston, I think I was five that year, and I went to Fifth Street School, which is now gone, except I think it's a museum. I was there for my kindergarten year. Don't have too many memories of the school. I do remember being in the school but I don't remember individual things that happened. But it was nice. And I remember I had to take the bus there. It was about a half-hour drive or a twenty-minute drive to get there. One day I was late and I missed the bus and my mother was so upset. I was walking home, I was five years old, [and] she was very angry with me. That was one of my distinct memories of going to school at Fifth Street.

After that one year of renting a home, we moved to a really nice neighborhood in central Las Vegas at the time, which would be Beverly Way. We lived in that home from 1954 to about 1970. [That] was in the John S. Park [Elementary] School area.

What was the name of the neighborhood?

They didn't call it John S. Park. I don't think they really had names for neighborhoods. They did for some but I don't think for that one. Beverly Way is on the corner basically between Fifth Street and Sixth Street off of Oakey [Boulevard].

So yes, you were in that neighborhood, definitely. Did you continue to walk to school from there?

Yes. Oh yes, I was able to walk from my home to John S. Park [Elementary School]. My memory is I did it probably from the time I was in first grade. There were a lot of children in our neighborhood, a lot of kids that I grew up with, so we walked together. In those days, you know, people weren't worried about that. I had free rein. I remember living in the neighborhood and going trick-or-treating when I was a young boy, and our

parents never really had to go with us, and I came back with bags of candy. It was the greatest thing. We started early and ended late. There was never any fear of being out, in those days in Las Vegas. It was a very safe place, and a really good place and neighborhood to grow up in.

What kind of recreation do you remember you and the other kids having?

We were very interested in sports in our neighborhood, lots of sports, especially baseball and basketball. I played Little League baseball, which I do have this picture of, too.

[Displaying photograph] This is from probably sixth or seventh grade. The team was the Horseshoe Club, sponsored by Joe W. Brown who was running it for Benny Binion when Benny Binion was in prison, I believe. Joe Brown liked the youth of Las Vegas and he built a baseball field for us where the Las Vegas Hilton [Hotel and Casino] is now. There was a racetrack there at the time. This team, the Horseshoe Club, had its own baseball field to play on, and we got to practice there. We didn't use it for games but it was a practice facility and it was really very nice. I think this team went undefeated for three years. We were coached by Leo Kirkendall. He was the police chief at the time. He was an ex-FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] agent, I believe. He liked coaching children and that's what he did.

So we played a lot of baseball. We also played a lot of basketball, and then the typical dodge ball and those kinds of things that kids played. I thought about that when I pulled this picture out the other night, Claytee, that it's different now. My kids are in their thirties, so it's a little bit different. But kids, when I was young in Las Vegas, were outside, and they weren't at the computer, they weren't at the cell phone, they weren't at their desks. We were outside doing things. I don't remember staying inside. We didn't

have television when I first moved to Beverly Way in the John S. Park area. I had probably one of the first televisions in Las Vegas. My father was in the furniture business when he moved here, as well as being an orchestra leader. We had one of the first TVs. When we turned the TV on, the pattern would be on. I think it was there for six months before we ever got a picture, before anything ever happened.

I was in a great neighborhood with lots of kids and we had a wonderful, wonderful time. Same children from the time I was in first grade all through high school. They pretty much were there the whole time.

Do you remember any of your close friends?

Oh yes. I wrote the names of the parents down, but if you want the children....

Both. I want both.

Mr. and Mrs. Phil Spencer. He owned an appliance parts store, I believe. Their family was Darrell and Barbara and Christine. I don't believe any of them live in Las Vegas anymore. Darrell is an English professor now in the Midwest. He would love to come back to Las Vegas.

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts and their daughter Sheila and I think there was a son as well. They owned Roberts Roof and Floor [Inc.], which is still one of the oldest businesses in town. I don't believe they own it anymore.

One of my best friends was Bill [William] Griffiths, who's the dentist in Portland that I talked about. His father owned a pharmacy, the first pharmacy at the original Landmark Hotel [and Casino]. They had a retail plaza at the base of the Landmark and Mr. Griffiths owned a pharmacy there.

Herb Jones was a partner in [the law firm of] Jones, Jones, and Vargas [actually Jones & Jones, then Jones, Jones, Close & Brown. The merger with the Vargas law firm did not occur until the 1990s] and his brother [Clifford A. Jones] was the lieutenant governor of Nevada [1947-54]. He had a great family, five or six children who are almost all still in town except for the daughter (who I was very good friends with) who was unfortunately killed in an accident coming back from college one year; that was really hard for them. The Jones house was a house that everybody went to in the neighborhood. They had a lot of children and they were very welcoming to the whole neighborhood, so we were there a lot.

There were the Knollers: they called him Doc Knoller. I think he was a chiropractor who didn't work as a chiropractor but owned a shoe store in town called Las Vegas Bootery, which was the place for guys to go for shoes. It was a men's shoe store downtown. It was not any bigger than this little room that we're in right now. He sold so many shoes, it was unbelievable. His son's name was Randy [Knoller]. Randy is still in town.

There were the Singers: Ed [Edward] Singer was a hairdresser, and he owned the hairdressing salon at the Sahara Hotel. His daughter's name was Shari. He was a Holocaust survivor, I believe. He came from Romania, I believe is where Mr. Singer was from.

There were the Warren Rollins family. The Rollinses had a large family as well. They were LDS [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. He owned the camera store at the original Vegas Village, actually. He had a camera store and [did film] developing.

My dad's really good friends were Harry and Kay Wallerstein who lived just up the block from us. Harry owned a furniture store as well [Tineh Furniture], and Kay was very involved in the Jewish community. They were wonderful people. He was my dad's best friend here in Las Vegas.

Max Goot, which is maybe a name that you've heard of, he was a furniture store owner also. He was partners with Harry Wallerstein [in Tineh Furniture in downtown Las Vegas] at one time. They had two children, Steven and Joel. Joel still lives here in town and Stephen lives in Atlanta [Georgia].

Hank and Barbara Greenspun lived in our neighborhood a little later on in the years. They had four children, so we were all friends.

Phil [Philip] Engel, who owned a CPA company, he and his wife Adele had two or three children.

My interesting neighbor was Chester Simms. Chester Simms was the casino manager at the Flamingo Hotel [and Casino] for many, many years. His son was Doug [Douglas E. Simms, president of the SIMMS Foundation] and his sister was Dawn. They were great neighbors. They only lived next door to us for a year, but after that year, or two maybe, then they moved to Sixth Street. They built a house on Sixth Street and they were there for years.

The Petersen family from Westward Ho [Hotel and Casino]: Faye Petersen, Dean Petersen, and Murray Petersen all lived in the neighborhood. Murray Petersen, who was much younger than my father, loved my father. They were in the real estate business, not in the hotel business at the time. My dad had made him a loan and Murray confided to my father about every detail of his business. He absolutely loved my father. He was a real

idol to me. He was a real man's kind of man. He could do everything. He was a real nice-looking man. He was the brains of the family. He got electrocuted on his boat in the early Sixties and passed away. So Faye and Dean ran that business by themselves, and moved into hotels as you know, with the Westward Ho. So they were very, very interesting people and we were very good friends with them.

And then in the neighborhood on Sixth Street, the person that I remember was Bill [William J.] Moore. He was the original owner of the [Last] Frontier [Hotel and Casino] and the Showboat Hotel [and Casino]. He had two daughters and a son who I still am in contact with. The son lives here and the daughters live in Arizona.

The Woodbury family, where Bruce [Woodbury] grew up. Now Bruce is a couple of years older than me. Certainly when you're in eighth grade and he's a sophomore, you probably didn't say anymore than hello, but we've become friends since.

The Urga family (Bill Urga) lived in the neighborhood, real close to John S. Park [Elementary School], actually even closer than I did.

I don't know if you've heard of Chuck Minker or not. I think Mr. Minker was a manager of some sort at the Stardust Hotel [and Casino]. He had three very, very bright sons: Allen [judge and journalist], Jeff [Jeffrey], and Chuck. Chuck was the youngest. Chuck stayed in town; the other two brothers didn't. Chuck became the head of the Nevada Athletic Board [Nevada State Board of Athletic Trainers, or NSBAT]; he was the executive director and very well thought of. He unfortunately passed away at a relatively early age from lung cancer. The guy had never smoked a cigarette, never did anything besides take care of himself. Very unfortunate. He lived in our neighborhood.

I'm looking at this connection with the Las Vegas Strip [Las Vegas Boulevard]. This is amazing. I didn't realize that there was such a [connection]. You've talked about the Stardust, the Westward Ho, and so many others. You've done a fantastic job. I really appreciate that so much. Who were some of your best friends?

Well, Darrell Spencer [and] Bill Griffiths. Neither of those two men live here anymore. Craig Rollins, from the Vegas Village stores: he was a very good friend. I think those were probably three of my best friends. And Buzz Shaffer lived in the John S. Park district too. Mrs. [Joan] Shaffer is still living; she's got to be in her nineties, I believe. Her husband [Leonard Shaffer] was affiliated with the Dunes Hotel [and Casino]. Buzzy lives here and is in real estate now.

Did your mother ever work outside the home?

She worked a little with my father at the furniture store, but not really.

I'm surprised at the number of furniture stores here early on.

Yes, well, it was a small community and we didn't have a lot of furniture stores. When my dad got here, he thought they ought to organize a little association, so he was the organizer of an association and they all became friends. My father had Hollywood Furniture; he probably opened that in 1953, and he sold it to his partner in 1957 or '58. He opened a store in Henderson [Nevada] which he ran until he had a heart attack in 1961, when the doctors told him he needed to retire because he wouldn't be able to work again. He was in the hospital with a heart attack for six weeks in those days. He sold his business to McMahan's [Furniture] and retired for about a year or so, and opened Garrett's Furniture, which is the store that I worked at with him, in 1961, at the age of sixty-one, I believe he was, which was pretty old to open a new business. I'm impressed

as I think about it now. Garrett's Furniture in 2000 was the oldest furniture store [in Las Vegas]. So we were the newest furniture store in 1961 and the oldest furniture store when we quit in 2000.

How many locations are there?

Well, when I started with my father in 1969, we were on Main Street in a store there that we leased from Dr. Coatlands, who was a city commissioner who lived in our neighborhood as well. I don't know if you've heard about Dr. Coatlands. A very interesting city commissioner for a couple of years. I don't think [he was] real popular but he was a very interesting man.

My dad leased the building from him and then in 1969 we moved to the location downtown on Fremont Street and Maryland Parkway, which was a beautiful building owned by the Franklin brothers who came to Las Vegas [and] worked on the Hoover Dam. They came from Georgia on a freight train. (I think we gave you that name, a lady that you should interview, the son-in-law, George Cox. [They have] a lot of information about them.)

So we were in that location, then we had a fire and in 1983 we decided not to release the building and moved to our own building which we built on Tropicana [Road] in 1984. My father had retired by then. I was operating the businesses. We opened another furniture store on Tropicana down the street. It was exclusively a Thomasville and Drexel Heritage store. And then we had a warehouse store. So we had three locations at one time. I retired from that business in 2001, after forty years.

So what did you retire to?

Well, for the first couple of years, I sold my real estate that I owned, and decided I liked the real estate business and I got a real estate license and then I went to work at R.L. Moore and Associates, a commercial real estate company in town, and I worked for Rob [Robert L. Moore] for a few years until he sold his business. Now, with economic conditions the way they are and the real estate business being the way it is, I'm back to sort of being retired again.

OK, good. When did you move out of the [John S. Park] community?

Well, I moved out when I was young. Let's see. I lived there until 1970, I think. I went away for college, [and then] I came back and went to Nevada Southern University [NSU] [now the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, or UNLV]. I left in about 1970. I bought my own condominium in 1970. So I was there from 1954 to 1970.

We didn't call it the John S. Park district; we called it the John S. Park [Elementary] School. But I would say a lot of activities were at John S. Park. It's not built like schools today. It had a very big field alongside of it. We were there after school, we were there on Saturdays, we were there all the time, playing. They had basketball courts outside; it didn't have any inside courts. It was the place to go. The school was sort of laid out similar. I think the buildings were even older than they are today. I mean they were really old buildings at the time. I think they've remodeled. I mean it was quite a school because, as you know, a lot of Las Vegans went to John S. Park.

Amazing. Tell me about the religious influences in the community. You mentioned that there was a Mormon family.

There were a lot of Mormon families in our neighborhood. A lot of the ones I mentioned were LDS. In my particular neighborhood, especially when I was younger, I was the only

Jewish boy growing up in that neighborhood that I can think of, and my friends were all LDS. The only difference was that I was busy on Saturday mornings and they were busy on Sundays. Other than that, I had a wonderful time and a great relationship. The families were all very good. I had the only swimming pool in the neighborhood too, so now that made a big difference. I had a lot of friends because of the swimming pool, especially in the summertime. [Laughter]

The LDS had a ward right next to John S. Park. That also was obviously a very busy place because a lot of the children who went to John S. Park were LDS. The population in the early days seemed to me to be very heavily LDS.

There was St. Anne [Catholic Church and Elementary School] where a lot of kids went to school. I didn't know too many of those kids. It wasn't too far away from me but I knew more LDS kids. The Catholics were a big influence, and the Mormons.

The Jewish population in those days was very small. We had the one synagogue. It was on Carson [Avenue] and Fremont Street, down in that area, when I was growing up. It was a small facility. So I don't think there were a lot of Jews. There weren't a lot of affiliated Jews, but there were a lot of Jews in the gaming industry in those days. Most of them worked for whoever they were back East. They were the people who ran the hotels.

Did you hear that the LDS church [in the neighborhood] was taken down probably about a month ago?

Oh, the one next to John S. Park? No, I did not know that. I haven't driven by in a few years, so no. I'm sorry to hear that. Are they going to rebuild?

No. They haven't decided yet what to do with the property. It was closed for a period of time, and then they took the building down completely; so there is a vacant area there.

As an aside, I was probably in second or third grade and I was late coming home from school, and my dad said, Where have you been?

And I said, I went to Primary.

My dad said, What's Primary?

And I said, Well, it's at the church right next door to school, and all my friends are going, so I went to Primary, and they were happy to have me. They were very nice.

And he said, Well, I don't think it's a good idea that you go to Primary anymore. And that was my last time at Primary. But I mean the influence was very [strong]. I think that the Mormon Church did a really good job and they still do of placing their places that are convenient for their kids to go to church, and they go on a daily [basis]: they go to Primary, they go to Seminary, so they're busy, and they do a really excellent job of getting their kids to where they want them to be.

And the family: the family having Family Nights and all of that. I just love that.

Yes, it's very nice. My experience was great. I must tell you that as a little boy, you know, I went to John S. Park from first grade to sixth grade, which was 1954 to 1959. Ruby [S.] Thomas was the principal, and I'm sure you've heard of Miss Thomas; there's a school named after her [Ruby S. Thomas Elementary School]. I do remember her and I remember some of my teachers. They were really very special. I have my report cards but I'm not going to show them to you. [Laughter]

That's fantastic. You shared those two photographs with me. When you have those done, we would love to have those.

I certainly will. In those days, Claytee, it was a great, friendly neighborhood. There weren't any fences in the neighborhood. We had to have a fence around our house because there was a pool, but typically you could walk from Beverly Way to Sixth Street just walking across the side yards, so there weren't any fences. You know, it's interesting, I just went back to Kansas City in October, and in a lot of their areas they don't have fences either, and I like the look of that, not having fences. Of course the lots were a little larger in those days, although our house was a very small house on Beverly Way. But it's just a nice neighborhood.

I have to say this. One of the people who lived in our neighborhood was Art Lurie. I don't know if anybody has ever talked about Art Lurie, but Art Lurie was the general manager of a grocery, Market Town, which was on Oakey and Las Vegas Boulevard. It was owned by the Adelsons. [Irwin] Molasky [and Merv] Adelson was the connection. Adelsons owned it. They were in the grocery business in California, I believe. Art became the manager. He was on the Nevada Athletic Board and he owned Wonder World [Discount] Liquors. He had a lot of different businesses. I think Art is in his nineties, but he's pretty sharp mentally and if you haven't done an interview with him, you should. When I was maybe thirteen or fourteen years old, Art hired me at the grocery store to be a box boy. The grocery store was only four blocks from my home. Not only did he hire me but he hired every kid that ever came to him and asked him for a job. So I would get twelve hours a week and somebody else would get twenty. It was amazing. Ron Lurie, who was his son, who was the mayor, he worked at the grocery store

as a produce manager for a number of years when I was there. My point is, he was just one of the kind of people who cared about kids and he was very interested in athletics, especially boxing, and a great guy. He did live in the neighborhood as well. We should get an interview from him.

OK, that's good. I like it that you're talking about all the businesses, and some of the businesses were right there in the neighborhood.

Right. The ones I've talked about so far really were. There were a lot of businesses that kids in high school [patronized or worked at]. There was a drugstore next to Market Town on Fifth [Street] and Oakey called White Cross Drugstore. The Myers Market next door was Market Town; Market Town has changed names several times. That and White Cross Drugs was connected and of course when I was a box boy I remember going in there. I'd work from eight to midnight when I was fourteen years old. But it was so safe. I'd walk home at twelve o'clock midnight. In that neighborhood [now], you wouldn't do that anymore, but you certainly could in those days. So it was very interesting.

But I was sort of reminiscing about some of the businesses that I remember. Some were in that neighborhood. Luv-It [Frozen] Custard which is still there. It came later, but it was there when I still lived there, so I remember that. There was a deli. Now, I don't know where the district [ends]. Where does the John S. Park district extend to?

Wow, it's really Charleston, back to I guess Oakey; and then that's First Street, [it] ends, so that's Fifth Street, and really over to almost Maryland Parkway, so that's it. But what we're doing is we're talking to people around the whole neighborhood, even the Huntridge area, all the other areas around as well. But it's

John S. Park that became [a historic district] on the [National Register of Historic Places].

So what other businesses were you [familiar with]?

Well, there weren't so many in the neighborhood because it was pretty much a residential neighborhood, but I remember the important names in Las Vegas which were Ronzone's, which everybody went to. There was a men's store that was owned by the Hansens. It was a men's store called Allen and Hansen. That was downtown. Most of the businesses were downtown. There was a store called Knight and Squire. A lot of the kids went to a store called the Fox Shop, which is an old store and I only remember that because I looked through a yearbook and saw that. I wouldn't have remembered that. It was a men's store. There was a store downtown called the Outdoorsman which was the main sporting goods store for Las Vegas, where all the schools bought all their team uniforms and things like that, and all the Little Leagues that there were, baseball teams and football teams, bought most of their stuff at the Outdoorsman. It was a really good store to go to. A lot of these stores had young people working in them, high school kids mostly.

There was the Blue Onion, which was a drive-in. There was a drive-in called the Tip Top. It was on Charleston and Las Vegas Boulevard, right outside of the John S. Park, and that was a very popular drive-in and kids used to cruise through there at night. It was the place to cruise, that and Fremont Street.

And by "drive-in," you mean that you got served in your car?

You could get served in your car at both of those, the Tip Top and the Blue Onion. A&W Root Beer, which was on Charleston and Maryland Parkway, [was] very popular. Those

were some of the restaurants I ate at. Fong's Garden was a place that my parents took me almost every Sunday night to dinner.

Wonderful. What was Fong's Garden like?

Well, for me it was very exotic because it had the Asian influence. It was very nice and the people were nice. I don't know if it was the only Chinese restaurant in town but I think it was the best, and it certainly had the best reputation. And it was busy. Mr. Fong made a lot of money. I went to school with one of the Fong sons, I think just at Fifth Street School, because I think then we separated, but I have seen him in the past. I think he's taken over for Mr. Fong and runs that business.

Where did you go to high school?

I went to high school at Las Vegas High School.

And did most of the kids walk there as well?

Mm hmm. I went to John C. Fremont [Middle School] for a couple of years, from seventh to ninth grade because it was a middle school. When I went to Las Vegas [High School], I was a little younger [and] I didn't have a [driver's] license, so I walked or had somebody give me a ride, but it certainly wasn't a problem walking. Most of the kids in the neighborhood either walked or if they had a car they got to drive. I didn't get a car until I was a senior.

Poor thing. [Laughing] I'm just always amazed at the people who came out of John S. Park: community leaders and politicians. How do you account for that?

Well, you know, there weren't a lot of schools in that time. I say the same thing about Las Vegas High School. We have so many people who went to Las Vegas High School, people from all over and areas that I didn't know. Kids grew up around the school, maybe

on the other side of it, but in the Huntridge and the Las Vegas High School district, I'm not sure what they called that, the downtown area, there were so many homes down there. So I think, just by the fact that there weren't a lot of schools in those days. And the John S. Park area was a very good area, and I think parents were interested in their kids and in their schooling and their education. Like I said, I thought the teachers were great at John S. Park and John C. Fremont and Las Vegas High School. I had great experiences. Did you ever get to talk to Mr. Theriot at Las Vegas High School?

Yes, I did.

He was a teacher.

OK, good. He was also a Rotarian, and we did a group of interviews about the early Rotarians here.

Describe to me the house on Beverly Way that you grew up in.

It was a three-bedroom home. It was a really nice home. It was built by a contractor, then he couldn't afford to move into it, so he had to put it up for sale. My dad and mother loved the house. They liked the location. It had lathe-and-plaster walls; it wasn't made with drywall. It was really a nice house. It was a small house. It was maybe fifteen-or-sixteen hundred [square] feet. It had a nice-sized back yard. A little kitchenette, a little dining room. Two bathrooms. My sister and I shared a bathroom, mostly her. [Laughter] She wasn't home too long; she was four years older. It was a nice home. My wife and I have this little cottage in Laguna Beach [California] now which is about a thousand square feet, really small, maybe a little less, and it has two bedrooms, and we added a bathroom so now it has two but it had one for a long time. It's interesting how we can live in a lot smaller space even than we think we need.

That's true. So did your parents put the pool in or did the contractor?

Yes, my parents put the pool in. I think my parents put the pool in by Ozzie Kraft, and they're still in business here in Las Vegas, and I think it was maybe the first pool that Ozzie Kraft did in Las Vegas. That's a memory and I'm pretty sure I'm right on that.

Did the community ever have any special community events like street fairs or anything like that as you were growing up?

Well, the only thing I can think of is the Helldorado parade, which was a really big thing in the Fifties when I grew up here. Really big. And that was pretty much a weeklong event. They did a bunch of parades. And there were other parades and things. I don't remember street fairs, that I don't remember, but the Helldorado parade was really important. It was important to locals and to tourists because people actually came [to Las Vegas for Helldorado].

I don't know if you know that the Helldorado parades are back.

Yes.

OK. Have you seen one?

No. I have not. I should but I have not. I know that the mayor [Oscar Goodman] was real instrumental in bringing those back.

What kind of changes did you see in the neighborhood from 1954 to 1970?

Well, you know, we started to get suburbs in the Seventies, although we didn't have Green Valley in the early Seventies and we didn't have Summerlin but people were moving out [of the neighborhood]. When I went to high school (I graduated in 1965), pretty much there wasn't a lot past Decatur [Boulevard]. Going south, there wasn't hardly anything either. When I grew up, right past Sahara [Avenue] which was San

Francisco Street, there was just dirt. There was no hotels; there was nothing. It was the desert. We used to go hunt for rabbits and lizards and that's what we did when I was in grade school and there was nothing there. We could walk across that street and there was just dirt.

What did you do with the rabbits and the lizards?

We didn't do anything. We never caught any and we never shot any. [Laughter] We had BB guns and never got any. But we went out hunting.

You haven't been back to that neighborhood recently, so I can't ask you how it has changed.

Well, I've been there in the last couple of years and it's interesting because it's selective, at least in my opinion. I was very disappointed in what our house looked like. My house had no shrubs and no lawn left and no trees. There was just nothing there. It looked very plain and not as well cared for as I would think. But I see that some of the houses in the neighborhood look fine. It just depends where you are.

I talked about the Engels who live on, I think, Bracken [Avenue] They still live in the neighborhood. They've been in that house for forty years, I think. I just saw him [Philip Engle] the other day. He's in his eighties.

And do you know Bob Coffin?

I do know Bob but not real well. I know he grew up in the neighborhood and still lives there.

When you think about it now, when you look back on it, what did the neighborhood mean to you?

I think the neighborhood gave me a good, solid background in family life, in education, in doing the right thing. A lot of the people were active in different organizations that I knew and that my parents knew. The people impressed me. I always wanted to be a good person and do the same kind of thing as those people did when growing up. So I think that it developed my character, that neighborhood, and I think it did for a lot of people. You look at somebody like Bruce Woodbury: all these years in politics and really never had anybody say anything bad about him. Everybody likes him. He's a good person. That's the kind of person that a lot of the people at Las Vegas High School strived to be, and the Las Vegas area just in general, when I was growing up here.

Well, I thank you so much. This was wonderful. Any other comments or anything else that you thought about along the way? You made some notes. Is there anything that we didn't [cover]?

I just wanted to make sure that I covered everything, and I think I did. One of my fond memories was to go to the Sahara Hotel and in those days the hotel sort of welcomed locals. We'd go to the pool on Saturday or my parents would take me on Sunday. They had the best snack bar with the best hamburgers. I will never forget that. It was fun to go to the hotel. I met some celebrities there. I remember meeting the star, and I can't think of his name now, but he was the star of *Rin Tin Tin*. I was in the same swimming pool as he was. So that was a great memory. And I know a lot of the families [in the neighborhood] were able to go there.

What about going to the movies?

Oh yes, we had limited movie theaters in those days. Lloyd and Edith Katz owned most of the theaters. They owned the Fremont and the Huntridge. The Huntridge is the one that

most of the kids from John S. Park went to. I went to Saturday morning matinees for a milk carton box top. I don't remember how much it was to get in but it was really inexpensive. So we went to the movies, a lot of matinees at the Huntridge. And then there was a theater downtown called the El Portal which was independently owned by somebody [else] rather than the Katzes. Movie theaters were limited until they built the Red Rock Theater on West Charleston, which got torn down. I think they built that probably in the late Sixties, I would say. It was at Charleston before Decatur. It had eleven theaters, so it was the only complex we had like that. It was built in the late Sixties, I believe. It's been gone for so long, I don't remember where it was. I just remember it was on Charleston.

So tell me what race relations were like in Las Vegas as you were growing up.

Well, you know, I didn't know that much about it as a little boy, but there was segregation in Las Vegas. My dad being a musician sort of talked about it. And growing up, most of the schools that I went to, like at John S. Park, I don't remember if there were any black children. I think there were some Hispanic kids and some Asian kids, but I don't remember any black children; so I didn't have a real feeling for their acceptance or non-acceptance. I mean, I didn't really have a problem as a Jewish kid and there weren't a lot of Jewish kids in my neighborhood and my schools either. I just remember hearing about what my parents talked about. I remember Lloyd Katz who was very instrumental in that and brought a lot of education to the community about not allowing black people on the Strip and staying in their hotels and fighting for that and for integration into his theaters. So I don't remember too much about that.

[00:45:00] I know that when I went to high school, there were black kids in the school. I don't remember there being any problem. They played sports with us. I had some friends that were black. Not that we socialized that much, but certainly school friends. So my memories, I would say, would be good.

I remember, interestingly enough, I was in the National Guard during the riots in Watts [a suburb of Los Angeles, California] and then we had some problems here [in Las Vegas]. When I say "problems," we mostly had some marches and things like that that they were concerned about. I remember we were actually activated as a National Guard unit to go out and make sure that there wasn't going to be any problem, and fortunately we never had to go. But that was the first problem I ever remember in Las Vegas, and I would be in the early Seventies, I think is when that was.

So do you remember any of the marches in the Seventies? Does the name Ruby Duncan mean anything to you?

Yes, I remember Ruby Duncan.

Do you remember any marches on the Strip?

Yes. I remember hearing about them. I did not participate in them. I was gone a little bit in the Seventies, too.

When you left to go to school, you left for a while. Where did you go?

I went to a California school for a year and then came back.

Where in California?

I went to Santa Monica City College.

Oh really! And you liked Las Vegas better.

Oh, absolutely. Well, I was going to go to Reno [Nevada] and then I didn't end up going to Reno, so I came back and went to NSU.

That's wonderful. Wonderful. Thank you so much. This is wonderful. And thank you so much for the names and for the people that you recommended for interviews as well.

I would put down Art Lurie if you could get a hold of him, Ron Lurie's father, and do it as quickly as possible. He's not doing so well. By the way, Art Marshall. I think I gave you that name and you've had trouble [contacting him]. Art's wife [Jayn Saltzman Marshall] is really sick now, so that's going to be somewhat of a problem.

Nancy Shepherd e-mailed me today, I believe, and she said that Art Marshall's wife was very ill.

Yes. So that might be [a problem]. And he has a fountain of information.

Yes, that's what everybody tells me.

And Art Lurie would be [informative] in a different way, too, and he's certainly worth being interviewed, and I'd be happy to help you with getting that interview. If there's any problem, call me.

Yes, please. If you have a telephone number or any contact information, it would be great.

I'll get it for you if you want. I think you'd get a kick out of doing it, too. He's very funny. He's got a great sense of humor. I haven't seen him in four or five months but I think he's still doing well.

OK, good. That would be wonderful. Thank you.

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