

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH HERB TOBMAN**

An Oral History Conducted by Deborah Fischer

March 13, 1981

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The Southern Nevada Jewish Community  
Digital Heritage Project

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**The informant here is Herb Tobman. The date is March 13th, 1981, at 8:15 a.m. The place is Sundance Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada. The collector is Deborah Fischer, 2104 (Palidaya Span), Las Vegas, Nevada. The project is Local History Project, Oral Interview. Las Vegas Gambling is the subject.**

**Mr. Tobman, where were you born and the date?**

I was born in Bronx, New York, on December 20th, 1924.

**Thank you. When did you move to Las Vegas?**

In 1950.

**Were you with your family?**

A wife, two children.

**Why did you move?**

I at that time was working for Standard Oil for a very short period of time and I decided I just wanted to leave New York and I was able to relocate here with Standard Oil as an employee of the Standard Oil Company.

**By car?**

Yeah, we drove here. Pulled a trailer.

**Pulling a trailer, okay. Did you have any school or education here in Nevada?**

All my education is in New York. I graduated from high school.

**And your occupation at that time when you arrived in Nevada?**

I worked in a service station, Standard Oil. Actually, I was a tire, battery and accessory salesman.

**And you were self-employed?**

Well, I worked for Standard Oil for about three months. Then after that I became self-employed.

**When was it that you got in the casino business?**

The first time was in 1955. There was a new hotel being opened in town called the Moulin Rouge, which was on West Bonanza. I had had a lot of previous experience in the hotel business as a young man in the Catskill Mountains in New York. That was prior to my time in the navy and while I was going to school. It was a summer-type job. I was in the furniture business at that time and really needed some second employment to live a little bit better and do a little bit better. So I went to work at the Moulin Rouge while I had my furniture store.

**What was your occupation? What did you do?**

I went to the Moulin Rouge, applied for a job as desk clerk because I had worked as a desk clerk, a bellman, a waiter. I had been a busboy. I had worked in every facet of the hotel industry and I applied for a job there as a desk clerk. Within a week and a half I was the general manager.

**Very impressive.**

I knew all these things and it made it very easy for me. People started seeking me out for different information in different departments and the people that owned the place kept wondering why everybody was coming to me. So they talked to me. And after talking to me they gave me the job as general manager.

**Do you recall about what date that was, what year?**

Yes. It was probably in January of 1955. I believe that was when it opened. In fact, I was there about a month and a half before it opened helping them get ready. I stayed there about six months. I made money that I needed to make to further my own personal business.

**What was the popularity of gaming at that time?**

What was the popularity of gaming?

**Were there lots of—number of people?**

Yeah, at that time the town was very small. I think the population of Las Vegas was probably...I don't know if it was fifty thousand people. It might have been fifty or sixty thousand people here. Most of the big casinos were on the Strip. And then there were a lot of downtown casinos, but there weren't very many hotels. In fact, the biggest hotel downtown was the Sal Sagev, which is "Las Vegas" spelled backwards, which is on the corner of First and Fremont, and that was a two- or three-story building. Matter of fact, fifty rooms. It's still there.

**Was Las Vegas western oriented?**

Yeah, I'd say most of the clubs were. A few of the newer hotels on the Strip weren't. Somewhere between '50 and '55, the Sands Hotel had opened. Well, in 1955 when the Dunes Hotel was a brand-new hotel, another hotel opened called the Royal Nevada, which today is part of the Stardust Hotel, and the Moulin Rouge all opened in 1955. Prior to that there were five or six hotels on the Strip. Some of them were open in '50, like the Sahara and the Sands. The Desert Inn was probably open in 1948. Prior to that all you had was the Frontier, the Flamingo and the El Rancho; they were the original three big hotels on the Strip.

And then downtown, you had a lot of little casinos, in the same one or two blocks that they're in today. Naturally, the Golden Nugget since has built a lot of rooms and the Horseshoe is still there. The Fremont was built about that time. Prior to that there was a gas station on that corner. And the Four Queens was just being built somewhere around '55. I'm not sure of the year. That was the first real big hotel on Fremont Street and I think it had a little over a hundred rooms.

**So most of the building of all these hotels came from the people who came from out of town; is that correct?**

Yeah, I think the bigger hotels started to build up and then people came, a new flux of

out-of-town people. But they were all privately owned in those days. That was prior to the big corporations moving in, such as what you have here today. You have public companies owning hotels here.

**Were there any situations down there with cowboys or horses?**

There was a lot of horses, oh, yeah. A lot of people owned horses. You had the old Frontier Village right on the Strip where people rode. There was a riding stable on the Strip. And then Twin Lakes was an area where a lot of people had horses. There was a lot more empty space in those days. I remember riding horses from Twin Lakes to the Silver Slipper and passing just a couple of houses. Naturally, with the increase in population, they've built on these areas.

**Did it cause any problems with downtown with bringing horses, cleaning the mess or anything like that?**

Oh, no. No. In those days the Helldorado Parade was a big, big thing. It's kind of still here, but not what it used to be.

**When did that sort of phase out?**

I'd say in the late '60, maybe the late '60s and early '70s. Time passes when you get old. It's hard to realize it's the '80s now. But probably in the last ten or twelve years. It's still here, but it's not as prevalent as it was. Now you have three hundred thousand people, maybe four hundred thousand people in the city. So it's becoming a big metropolitan area now.

**What was the price range of this? How was the money spent when people gambled?**

Well, years ago there were a lot of nickel slot machines back in those days. In fact, the advent of the dollar slot machine probably just came in the last eight or ten years. But prior to that it was mostly nickel and dime slot machines and some quarter ones. A great (dare) in a casino like this size, like the size of the Sundance, if you had five hundred slot machines, probably three and

fifty would be nickel slot machines. Today maybe a hundred and fifty or two hundred would be nickel slot machines; the rest of them are going to quarter and dollars today. There are a lot more dollar slot machines today than there ever were. A big casino would have a half a dozen dollar slot machines and now we've got a hundred and fifty. Naturally, that's because of the economy; people have more money.

**So people played a lot of slots; that was a popular...?**

Yeah, the downtown area was mostly slot—most of the clubs downtown were mostly slot machines. Naturally, there were a lot of twenty-one and crap games, too, but not in the numbers that they are today. When the Stardust opened in 1958, I think they had eighteen twenty-one games; today they have seventy. So you could see that the gambling has grown.

**How did they go about training their employees on those games?**

To work in the games, you mean?

**Yes.**

Well, most of people in Las Vegas in those days at the beginning were people who came from other parts of country where they had been in gambling and it was illegal. So naturally, they moved to a place where it was legal and they could get a job and not have the harassment of being an illegal gambler. So they moved here. There was an influx of a lot of dealers from a lot of different places in the country. As it progressed people here learned to be dealers. You can go to a dealer school if you want to be a dealer in two to six weeks. You're learning the basics, enough to go to work in a smaller place. After five or six months maybe you go into anyplace.

**What was the type of money used? Was there any difference between what the gamblers used and what the casinos used?**

Just like (inaudible) people change their money for chips. Today you see a lot more



hundred-dollar chips and five-hundred-dollar chips, which you didn't see back in those days.

Downtown there is that place called the Boulder Club where you played craps for ten cents.

There's very few ten-cent—I don't know of any ten-cent craps games here. There's some fifty-cent ones, but not ten cents. It was the same format, though, where people just exchanged their money for chips. Naturally, in the slot machines you exchange for coins.

**So you said that slots were the favorite games. What of the card games...?**

Well, years ago there were a lot more people who played craps than there are today. The reason for that is, is because years ago even when I was a kid, people used to shoot craps in the schoolyard. People played craps when we used to shoot dice. So people knew it. See, dice is a little more intricate. You can make a lot of different bets on a craps table where on a twenty-one table all you've got to do is put your money down and the guy deals you the cards and if you can count to twenty-one you can play twenty-one. A lot of the games today the cards are dealt open and it's almost counted for you by the dealer. But there are less and less people who know how to play craps today and more and more people who know how to play twenty-one. So there are naturally more twenty-one games and less craps games, or twenty-one games have grown and craps games have almost stayed the same. You can also get faster action for your money. They deal you a hand and the game is over with and you don't have to sit there and worry about all the intricate things that happen during a game. Roulette is the same type of a game as twenty-one. People in this country are not as much oriented to roulette as people in foreign countries are. When you go to a foreign casino, you've got over a hundred games and seventy of them might be roulette. Foreign people play roulette a lot, but here twenty-one is the big game.

**Were there any particular house rules then, or it was more or less just between the clientele?**

House rules, most of your gambling games. Now, every once in a while somebody comes up with a little variation. But most crap, twenty-one, roulette have been played the same, I'm sure, for the last thousand years or more when people were gambling. Nothing has changed. The odds haven't changed. The layout on a crap out hasn't changed. Somebody will put one or two little things on it, but they're of no consequence. Now, today some people give double odds on craps, which means that if you make a bet and you bet two dollars, you can take two dollars' worth of odds, or in some places they'll let you take four dollars' worth of odds.

What has happened during the years is the limit has gotten higher. I remember when most limits were two hundred dollars, then they became five hundred dollars, and now there are places with two-thousand-dollar limits and there's even a few places in town that might have a five-thousand-dollar limit. And in recent years baccarat has become a big game where people will play two thousand dollars at the turn of a card. In some places, I understand, they even opened that limit for real big play.

**What was the relationship between how much a client or a gambler spent and the so-called red carpet treatment?**

Well, that's changed quite a bit. I remember years ago if a guy was a five-thousand-dollar customer, he was a real good customer. But naturally, because of inflation that has changed. Today a five-thousand-dollar card is still a very good customer, but at some of the bigger casinos out on the Strip, they're not treated as one of their real big gamblers today. A big customer today would probably have, well, in some places a ten-thousand-dollar card is a great customer. Then again, at Caesars Palace you have to have a twenty-five-thousand-dollar card to be a good customer. They have a different type of clientele. Every hotel has different clientele. A place like the Stardust, we treat a guy who is a five-thousand-dollar player or a three-thousand-dollar

player as a good customer. But we deal to more volume probably than a place like the Sands where a ten- or fifteen-thousand-dollar player would be a good player. Then there are customers who have hundred-thousand-dollar credits, too.

**About twenty-five years ago what was the average that a person came with?**

The average person that came in...If a guy came in at a place like the Sands—and I'm using the Sands in particular because back in those days that was one of the hotels—a guy with a five-thousand-dollar card was a pretty good customer.

**Was that rare?**

Oh, no. No. A place like the Sands had a lot of five-thousand-dollar customers and other places had very few. The Sands back in those days had different entertainment policies. They had Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Junior and Joey Bishop. That was in those days the following that people went to. The Stardust since '58 has had the Lido show, which is still there. It's probably the biggest drawing show in town, always has been. They drew different types of persons. Some of the people that went to see the Lido show were just slot machine players, but they were good customers, too.

**How were the accommodations? I understood that at first all the casinos that were downtown did not house guests; that they weren't hotels.**

Yeah, they weren't. There were very few hotels. Probably the first large hotel built on Fremont Street was the Fremont Hotel and that was, I think, built around '55, somewhere around there. They were the first ones who put rooms out. But people who came to the downtown area were usually housed in motels. There were a lot of good motels in the downtown area and people just used to come to downtown because it was a different type of an atmosphere. They came here to slot machines and gamble, eat. The food was inexpensive and they could have a real good

weekend. A guy could come up here with a couple hundred bucks and he'd have a heck of a weekend. On the other hand, if you went out on the Strip, naturally you had to come with more money, although I remember when rooms were six dollars at the Thunderbird Hotel. I remember rooms at eight dollars at the Stardust. But just by normal inflation that same room became twenty-five dollars today. Twenty-five dollars is just as easy for the person to spend today as eight dollars was then. But, on the other hand, you have hotel rooms in this town that are eighty, ninety and a hundred dollars today. Now, a different type of clientele goes there. A lot of convention business goes there.

**About what year was it that the casinos transformed into casino/hotels?**

In the downtown area it just grew right after the Fremont and Four Queens was built. After the Four Queens, many years later in the '70s, the Golden Nugget built rooms. The Mint, I believe, was probably built in the late '60s or early '70s. Mostly, the casinos found that rooms were one of the keys to doing business. Right now this hotel has three hundred and fifty rooms. We're building three hundred and fifty more right at this particular time. The more rooms, the more people you have here. The more people you have here, the more business you do. It used to be where the people walked up and down Fremont Street, so they went from place to place. You didn't need the rooms to induce them to come in. Now if you had your own rooms plus food dining rooms or whatever else you give them and a friendly atmosphere; that's what brings people in.

**Were there special holidays? Of course, now we have a three-day weekend sometimes. But were there holidays or occasions that would have brought in the people?**

Yeah, there were certain holidays. There's probably about six, seven weekends during the year when people are always going somewhere. And naturally they start the year off, naturally New

Year's Eve. Right after New Year's Eve, George Washington's birthday in February is a very big holiday and, because of changing of labor contracts, people get a three-day weekend. No matter what George Washington's birthday is on, the Monday of a particular week—and George Washington was born February 22nd. But this year the holiday was on the 16th only because the union contracts say you get a three-day weekend because the 22nd may very well have fallen in the middle of the week or it fell on a Sunday in February. Monday was George Washington's—well, actually it was the weekend before, the 16th was the holiday. Then after that you go into Memorial Day, which is a big holiday that's in May. Then you have the Fourth of July weekend, Labor Day weekend. Thanksgiving has become a pretty good weekend. Then business tapers off until New Year's. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas business is quiet. Years ago places used to be very quiet during Christmas. Now they're loaded during Christmas. More and more people seem to be traveling. Instead of families having Christmas at home, they meet here at Christmas. So there are a lot of really good weekends.

But Las Vegas used to be a seasonal town; it isn't anymore. Years ago it was very seasonal. It was very quiet around here in the wintertime. But now people just come all year long. I think the advent of the convention center has helped that. It seems our conventions start in October when business used to be slow. October, November, December, January, which were slow months, is when the biggest conventions occur. That was very good planning on the Convention Authority's part.

**So, say, twenty-five years ago, they still did have weekends and holidays that really brought the people here to stay.**

Yeah, weekends and holidays were always very busy here. The summer was always very busy because people now could travel, kids were out of school. But now they just seem to travel

every week. One of the big things that has people traveling every week now is years ago people just came here on their own and now there are tours, tour operators. You can buy different packages. Las Vegas has done a great job advertising and selling Las Vegas. When people buy Las Vegas compared to buying Florida or Miami or another town, and not because we're in Las Vegas, they find that the best value they can get in the country is to come to Las Vegas because they've been able to make special airfare deals. And then when they got here, the entertainment is the best in the world. There is no better entertainment. And the average guy who could never go to see the type of entertainment—he could never see Frank Sinatra in person, but he can see him in person when he comes here.

**So twenty-five years ago they didn't really advertise Las Vegas; they just took people coming in—**

Well, each hotel did their own individual advertising. If the Sands had big acts, they advertised them. But you didn't really have to advertise Frank Sinatra. You didn't have to advertise in those days Dean Martin or Joey Bishop or whoever their star. Their star policy was probably one of the better ones. On the other hand, when the person came here, everybody in town said, “Gee, you've got to go see the Lido show.” Since the Lido show naturally in '55 or '58 or somewhere around that when the Tropicana was open and the advent of the Casino de Paris—was the Folies Bergère. Then the Dunes came with the Casino de Paris. And people just came and when they left they told everybody that they saw, “If you go to Las Vegas, don't miss those big French productions.” Because they were something you couldn't see. Even if you lived in New York, you couldn't see productions in New York like here.

**So after they first merged, casinos and hotels downtown, how did they accommodate their guests?**

Well, I don't really think "merge" is a good word. What they did is enlarge it. They enlarged the casinos by adding rooms. And then the accommodations were less expensive in the downtown area than they were on the Strip, but you got the same room. And a person that comes to Las Vegas usually changes his clothes in his room and that's it. The rest of the time they're out looking at the signs or seeing different things. A million people or more a year, I guess, go to Boulder Dam. Just because a guy comes here to gamble, he doesn't gamble twenty-four hours a day. They have lots of other things to do or see out here. And then it's a sight to see other hotels. People walk in just to see the inside of Caesars Palace. You can't see that if you live in Idaho.

**Meaning there were several people who never gambled; they just come out here for the shows or...**

Yeah. And they fall into it. They use their two dollars' worth of nickels and they play, yeah. It's a trap. They see the slot machines and they figure two dollars' worth of nickels and two dollars becomes four dollars. Contrary to what people think, everybody doesn't come to Las Vegas and go broke. Probably 90 percent of the people that come here can afford to lose what they lose. I'll give you an example. If a guy went on a vacation in Miami, his room would be fifty dollars and his food would be expensive. By the time he and his wife spent the weekend in Miami, maybe between the two of them they might have spent two hundred dollars. Well, they come to Las Vegas and they get a room for twelve dollars or fourteen dollars and they would be able to eat for half the price of elsewhere in the country. So now if they would each lose forty or fifty dollars or a hundred dollars between them, they still didn't spend over two hundred dollars on their vacation, but they had the excitement of gambling. When you go home...I am sure the stories that they told at home, the nickels became quarters and the quarters became dollars and

the lady next to them won three hundred dollars, and these are exciting to people. Everybody is a gambler. You've got to get them to the trough to take a drink. All horses are thirsty, but somebody's got to lead them to the water. It's the same thing with people. Once you get them into the casino and they fall into the excitement of it, so they change a five-dollar bill. That's what has made Las Vegas. Nobody is forced to gamble.

**So in that aspect nothing has really changed.**

No, absolutely nothing, no. As far as gambling goes, if people come here they're going to come and play. And the other important point was you could do something here that you couldn't do any place in the United States. That in itself was an exciting factor. Everybody wants to do something exciting. People in New York, it's very exciting to go see the Yankees play. They go to a baseball game. They go to see (inaudible). It's a big night out. And it is because when I was a father my father would take me to a baseball game and it was an outing to me. So when people come to Las Vegas, everybody's in an outing and now you can play a slot machine where they never saw a slot machine, most of these people. Some people did. Maybe they had them in Elks Clubs or places like that around the country. But 90 percent of the people never saw a slot machine except maybe in television or a movie and here they could come and play a slot machine and it's very exciting. Everybody wants to drive a car in the Indianapolis Race, but who can? Everybody wants to play a slot machine and they all can.

**As far as transportation, how did that affect Las Vegas twenty-five years ago?**

Twenty-five years ago they had an old road; the old L.A. Highway is what we used to call it and it was a long drive from Los Angeles. When they built the freeway, it made it that much easier for people to get here quicker. Airplane fares were cheap. There are a tremendous amount of airlines coming in here today, but years ago Bonanza and Western were the two big airlines,



Bonanza mostly, which became Air West and now it just became Republic, I guess; it is the same airline. And you could come here, like I said, for twenty-six dollars. And twenty-six dollars, everybody can get their hand on twenty-six dollars if you want to come and gamble in Las Vegas. Many of the people that came to Las Vegas had the illusions of coming here and winning five hundred dollars and going home, and many did, but many didn't. But the guy who didn't, didn't lose five hundred dollars, either; he might have only lost fifty.

But you get caught up in the glamour. We've probably got the prettiest women in the world in Las Vegas. Drinks are readily available to most people who play slot machines. Everybody wants something for nothing and it appears like maybe you're getting something for nothing and we feel that they are. You can't tell that to everybody because they think you're nuts. But when we think you're getting something for nothing, we think you're getting the greatest value in the world for your money and that's like getting something for nothing when you have a weekend that's just incredible and you might not have to spend more than a hundred bucks. You can do the same thing and you're standing right next to a guy who's coming here to spend ten thousand, but nobody knows the difference between the both of you. Everybody can get that feeling where all of a sudden you get ten feet tall standing at that twenty-one table. It's a good feeling. People like to feel that way. Everybody wants to be somebody and everybody in Las Vegas is somebody. And the treatment that people receive from the customers was the same. It didn't make any difference whether you were a two-dollar player or a ten-dollar player, if you were at the same table, a girl walked up and offered everybody a drink.

**They still do that.**

Oh, sure. Oh, probably more readily then because places were not that...crowded is not a good word, but they are. They get so crowded today that a little of the personal touch has left. A little

of the personal touch has left with the advent of corporations, public corporations where the guy who's running the place is somewhere in an ivory tower and may not even be there. Years ago the people around the place were there. When you walked in you saw the guy. "Oh, that's the guy that owns the place." Everybody wanted to say, "I saw that guy." You walked through a casino and Angie Dickinson walked by you or Jane Russell, the big movie actresses and movie stars.

**So returning back, so there were a lot of stars?**

Yeah, celebrities. Baseball players, football players, movie actresses, movie actors, people like Mickey Rooney that entertained at the hotel. And then in between his entertaining, he'd be walking around. Today—

**They can't really get away with getting in a crowd like that.**

Well, aside from that I think the aspect of entertainment became such big business today. A guy does his show and then sits in his dressing room and waits for his next show and sits in his dressing room and then goes to his suite. But in those days, just as like years ago in Hollywood, I guess stars walked up and down Hollywood Boulevard. Today I guess if you walked up and down Hollywood Boulevard all day, you wouldn't see a star. But years ago it was different. Public relation aspects for stars were different. To be seen was good. To be seen today, I don't know whether...I guess maybe people bother them. I don't know what it is. If I was a big star, I would be out where everybody could see me, but I'm not a big star. It's different. A day didn't go by that you didn't see somebody that you'd want to go home and tell everybody that you saw, or her. Of course, these people go a lot of different places today and most of the hotels had a star policy. See, there was always somebody of note entertaining. Now you have more and more production shows and, obviously, you don't have a star policy. So the person there doesn't mean

anything. There's maybe a hundred people in the Lido show and nobody would know any of them. They would gawk at a showgirl if she walked by because she'd have all that makeup and she'd usually tower above everybody so they know she's a showgirl. But you couldn't go back and say I saw so-and-so because they don't know who she is.

**How was the entertainment twenty-five years ago? I mean dressed?**

Well, there was a time—and I don't remember the exact date—when you couldn't entertain in Las Vegas and be nude. And then they had to pass the law. It might have been around 1958, maybe when the Lido show started. I'm not sure. But it was the first advent of the nude showgirls. I mean who in the country ever show a nude showgirl before? There weren't even any pornographic magazines you could look at. So if somebody came in, they thought, *boy, I'm going to go see a nude show*. Now, the guy wouldn't say that to his wife, but he'd tell her, “I think we ought to go see that show.”

**The guy?**

That's right. Yeah. But he would take his wife to that show and they would find that the shows were in excellent taste. They were not a burlesque or a smutty show. The same girl who was nude, as little a costume as she had on, it costs thousands of dollars. There were feathers and beads. A lot of people go in and you'd think all they'd be talking about when they came out was, “Boy, did you see all those nude girls?” But they were talking about all the beautiful costumes and that was what we really had to sell, but you had to get them in there. You just couldn't go anyplace—I don't care where you came from, if you came from the biggest cities—Chicago, New York, Cleveland—I don't care where you came from, you couldn't see a show like that. You'd have to go to Paris to see that show.

**And that's where these girls came from originally.**

Originally when most of the shows came, they were mostly foreign girls, yes. But today I'd say there are a very small percentage. Because at that time you sent your daughter to ballet school and she became a great dancer. The last thing you wanted her to do was to run around the stage nude. Well, nudity isn't that offensive today. It's just because of changing times. We have lots of our girls in our show who danced in the London Ballet and some of the finest ballet companies around the country and around the world and some of them will work topless and some of them don't work topless. The girls that work topless, as I say, it's done in very good taste. Nobody ever talks about a show being dirty because they were nude, anyway. Years ago I guess it was thought of to be that way. But that's because the whole world has become more promiscuous, I guess. I think it's a plus, too. Everybody's entitled to their opinion.

**How were they seated in a production show twenty-fives ago? Did people just walk in or were you assigned to a seat?**

You've always been assigned to a seat and it's always been handled by maître d's and captains taking people to tables. Years ago every place had a dinner show. They don't all have a dinner show today. Two of the reasons you don't have dinner shows—or some of the reasons is firstly because of costs and, secondly, because of the advent of so many people here, it's very difficult to serve meals. And the people who actually come there, we find it doesn't make any difference; they just as soon sit there and have a couple of drinks and see a show. Some places still have dinner shows. It's all according to what they're getting for their money.

**About how long would a show, then, last?**

Most production shows are about an hour and forty-five minutes, in between number. Nothing less than an hour and forty minutes. Some of them go up to two hours.

**So that hasn't changed actually either.**

No. The time length of the shows have always been the same because the secret is you've got to get them in to see the show and get them back where they're supposed to be; that's out in the casino. Then you have another show and the same thought is in mind. Put them in a good frame of mind and get them back into the casino. A lot of people would go from one place to another and see two shows a night. I'm sure they still do that.

**Las Vegas now is considered a twenty-four-hour town. Was it still twenty four hours actually?**

It's always been a twenty-four-hour town. In fact, years ago I think the town was busier at two, three, four in the morning than it is today. It seems that people are not staying up as late as they used to. One of the main reasons is people used to go from hotel to hotel because back in those days lounges were very big and lounges have kind of faded into the past. They still have them in a few places, but they're not like they used to be. All the action started at two o'clock in the morning. You could walk into a lounge and see personalities that you wanted to see in the audience, not in the show, because all the entertainers at two o'clock in the morning when they got through, they would go around. They were rounders. The showgirls used to be rounders. I say rounders not in a detrimental way. In other words, that was their time. They were through working. It was their five o'clock or six o'clock in the evening compared to the guy that worked in a plant in Henderson. Now, they were out on the street. They were going out to have dinner and a drink and they wandered around and people could see these people. It was an exciting experience to be in the club. You'd go see Don Rickles at two o'clock in the morning and there would be fifteen celebrities in the audience and that was exciting to people.

**Was there a difference in the time between locals and your out-of-towners? Could you tell a difference by locals (inaudible) such time?**

There were more local businesses in the downtown area than there was out on the Strip although after two o'clock in the morning, once again, all the girls who were cocktail waitresses, the guys who were dealers—there weren't very many girl dealers here, union dealers at that time. Most of the dealers were men. They'd all be out on the streets. Local people went to all these places and local people had very good income. They probably on a per capita basis made more money than the tourists that were coming here. So they were good customers around town. What has changed that a little bit is years ago there were two or three local places to go to that were not gambling houses. Like you'd go out to the Day Dream Ranch, which was way out in Paradise Valley. It was way out in the middle of nowhere. Today it's all built up out there. So the local people had a few hangouts, but most of the hangouts were at hotels. So they'd be hanging around lounges. Lounges were a big thing. And then they'd go out and have dinner. Local people gambled a lot, too. Today local people...the husband works and the wife works and the only time they get to see each other is when they both get off and stay home, where they don't really have the time to be out. There's more family oriented people around today. See, in those days Las Vegas was in its infancy. But then everybody got married and people started to have families and then you started to stay home when you had families and you took them to Twin Lakes instead of you going out with your husband at night to gamble and drink.

I'm sure the population growth has brought—just because all the people are here now, there are more shopping centers, there's more stores, there's more retail businesses and people are working in clothing stores just as though they worked in the clothing store in Detroit. They live the same kind of life. But back then the largest population of people were employed in the gambling business and they were gambling oriented people. It's a stable community just like any other community in the United States except some people work different hours; that's all.

**What was the age limit?**

It's always been twenty-one.

**Twenty-five years ago it was still twenty-one?**

Right. It's always been twenty-one as long as I can remember. It's still that way as far as gambling—anything really goes. The only difference today—and that's a problem—or has changed is a fifteen-year-old girl or a seventeen-year-old girl years ago looked fifteen years old or seventeen years old. And today a seventeen-year-old girl looks twenty-three, very easily. So there's probably a lot more younger people in casinos until you catch them and run them out.

Where you could spot a younger person or a boy. It's easier for a girl to look older than a boy to look older because girls don't shave. But I'm sure when it was twenty-one there were probably a lot of nineteen-year-old girls who could sneak in here and there. But today it's kind of different because of the clothing people wear and the makeup and the way they dress today. Everybody's gotten older in my opinion.

**So they were still pretty strict about the age.**

Oh, yeah. They have a lot of security and it's a very important factor to control. I personally think that the day will come when the legal limit of gambling and drinking will be eighteen. That's my personal opinion. I lived in New York as a young boy and you could drink when you were eighteen. And all the kids that lived in New Jersey and you had to be twenty-one used to come across the river and drink in New York. You can still drink in New York when you're eighteen.

**How did the changing or the enlarging of the casinos into hotels and such, how did that change the community? Did it enlarge it?**

It just made more people work. When you build a thousand rooms, you employ a lot more

people. Then when you had a thousand rooms, you made your casino bigger. I remember when the Stardust employed four, maybe five or six hundred people. Today the Stardust employs almost three thousand people. I'm sure that the MGM has almost five thousand people working there. It's a lot bigger than the little place down on Fremont Street, which just has slot machines that might employ forty people. So with the population it's naturally increasing. When you have more people working, you have to have more grocery stores and you need more shoe stores and clothing stores and gas stations and so forth down the line, and people go to work there, too. The falloff of what you really employ...our company has the Stardust and the (Primo). We also own the Sundance. It's another group, but it's the same people. We employ maybe six thousand people. Over six thousand people that we employ has probably thrown off another thousand jobs elsewhere. Because if we didn't have the six thousand people, you wouldn't have twelve Smith's Food Kings and Safeways and Vons and all the big markets and everybody coming in. And they in turn employ people because there's so many people working in the hotel industry. That's what's increased the population. That's our industry here. We don't have any other industry. We do have an industry sixty, seventy miles away out at the Test Site, which at one time employed, I think, as many as ten, eleven thousand people. They might have five or six now. And Henderson has some industry. But other than that there are probably more people employed in the gaming industry as an overall industry than any other industry in the state.

**The jobs that people had when they were employed, were they any different? I mean did you have a keno girl and did you have the—**

Everybody employed in a casino is the same kind of people employed years ago. People in the culinary lines, employed with food, and cocktail waitresses and dealers and floor men and bellmen. That's what you have today, too, only more of them; that's all.



### **What part did the economy play in gambling here?**

It's probably one of the largest producers of revenue for employment. During the times that I've been here there have been two times that I actually remember when we went through what would be called a slight recession, and that slight recession was maybe in '55 and another one in '65. Now we seem to be going through a very slight one right now. It stems from the gambling industry. The MGM put a lot of people out of work. I'm sure they'll be back to work very shortly. But it's probably been one of the most taxing things on our unemployment compensation as we've had in the state in a long time because there were more people thrown out of work at one given time.

The biggest industry other than the gambling industry, which probably comes awfully close to being as big as the gambling industry, is the construction industry. When you take a town that had twenty-five thousand people and now has four hundred thousand, somebody built some houses. You have a large amount of carpenters and plumbers and whatever is in the building trades. Our building industry here has just been incredible on a per capita basis, probably one of the biggest in the United States. We don't build as many houses as they do in Los Angeles, but Los Angeles has ten million people. So based on a per capita basis, our building trade salaries are probably as high as anyplace in the country or equal, and you have a tremendous amount of people building houses and apartments and condominiums and so forth and shopping centers and whatever else you have to go along with it.

Right now with all the people being out of work from the MGM and the people that were out of work for so long at the Aladdin when it closed, the building industry suffered. There were less housing starts and less construction contracts taken out and less business licenses taken out. But now with these places going back again—the Aladdin is open and as soon as the MGM

opens back up again—I think it will trigger our building industry again, which will make our economy get that much stronger. If there was no gambling, nobody would be here to buy houses.

**So how was Las Vegas affected by the slump in the economy in '55?**

The same thing happened in '55. There was a slump around the country and less people started to come here, so employment stopped. In other words, employment was growing every day and, as employment was growing every day, guys were building houses every day. Then all of a sudden, employment came to a standstill because there was no more growth; of course, no new hotels were being built. And when no new hotels were being built, the building guys who had all the houses built had houses they weren't selling, so they stopped building new houses. Each time it seems that that's what happened in both those times, and it's a trend that happened all around the country because the building starts are all over the country. In Detroit they're not making cars and someplace else because their industries has slowed down; the steel industry has slowed down. That's another story. That has to do with economics, which I'm very interested in. But economically, you've got our building industry—what President Reagan has to do is get the building industry and he's got to get the automobile industry back on track so that people will start working around the country, and that's the two biggest industries in our country, and people will start spending money again. People have money and they spend it.

**What was the general attitude towards Las Vegas in '55?**

Las Vegas has always been the same as far as I know as long as I've been here. There's always been a myth; somebody wants to come see this place and find out that it's really not a myth. In everybody else's mind back home, they say, hey, it's a place with surly looking gamblers with big wide brim hats and black shirts and white ties, like you see in the movies. And then they come

out here and they see that everybody is just like the guy that lives next door to them. They are all New York people that live out here. They're no different from anybody else in the country, as you can see from looking at yourself. When you look out at our university and if you pick the whole campus up and transplant it to Boise, Idaho, it would be right where it belongs. They would belong in Boise, Idaho, and it belongs in Las Vegas, the campus of six thousand people going to school. It's the same kind of town except we've got gambling. And gambling is a form of entertainment; that's exactly what it is. It always has been. Oh, they have it in New Jersey now and I'm sure they'll have it in other places in the United States in time to come because they are realizing that that's what it is; it's a form of entertainment. There is more money waged in New York every day than probably was waged—and I knew these statistics at one time—on horse racing and all track betting than is probably waged in Las Vegas in a whole month in every place here. So people gamble wherever they can gamble.

**So in many aspects Las Vegas really hasn't changed.**

Not at all. It's just gotten bigger. To hear people talk who come here...I've heard people say, "It's not as friendly as it used to be." Well, it may and may not be. I don't know. All I know is our operations and our operations we think we're as friendly as Vegas could be. The problem today is it gets so overcrowded at times that people mistake that for unfriendliness. It's not my fault that we can only seat eight hundred and fifty people in the show and two thousand want to get in. That's an asset to us. But the thousand people that can't get in probably come back another night or go see something else, but they would like to be the only one in line and that's impossible.

And when they leave—see, when people get here...we have circumstances in Las Vegas that you don't have in hotels anyplace in the country. So when people go to another hotel—if

you were to go to a hotel in New York and you get there at eleven o'clock in the morning and check-in time is at twelve, you can walk up to the desk and check in because the guy that is checked into that room is probably a salesman or a businessperson traveling through town and he had to get up at seven thirty in the morning and he's out. He's out selling his wares or doing business. Well, the person that comes to Las Vegas, when you tell him check-out time is at twelve o'clock, he don't get ready to start leaving until eleven thirty because his plane don't leave till two o'clock and he's not going to leave that room at eight o'clock. So now the maid has to go in and make the room up. And fourteen hundred rooms get empty or half of them. And the person that comes here to check in, he walks up to the desk and you tell him he's got to wait till two o'clock. He starts off with a very bad taste. But he, on the other hand, doesn't leave until twelve when he leaves. So it happens to the next guy. But the minute he gets into his room...he's a little aggravated by the time he gets into his room. But by the time he does and he gets ready to go downstairs and then he gets caught up in the action, he forgets that and that's your impression. So there's always the few that don't and because of that you always get letters. You never get a letter from somebody who had a good time, or very seldom do you. But the few letters that you do get are from the guy who couldn't get into his room on time or the towel wasn't there or something like that. That happens in Las Vegas very often. There's no way to control that unless we can control the airline schedule. If we made all the airplanes leave at nine o'clock in the morning, they'd all be out of there. But, on the other hand, we don't want it that way. I just assume they stay until twelve. There's always another chance if a person stays until twelve.

**Was there a large difference in one casino to another?**

Well, some of them are more elaborate looking. Some of them had better restaurants. When I

say better restaurants, what I mean is more the gourmet type of restaurant. If you want a fancy room, a place like the Sands had a real nice room, a place like the Sahara. I'm talking about way back when some of the other places just had a normal type of coffee shop or a smaller restaurant. Some people like gourmet dining and some people didn't, and that was the type of clientele the hotel catered to. The Thunderbird always catered to people who—everybody used to say it was the greatest buffet in town. There were people who love to eat buffets and they were great buys for the money. Sahara had that type of buffet. But, on the other hand, the Sands didn't. One was a dollar ninety-nine or a dollar forty-nine; the other one was five dollars. But there were enough people who wanted to eat that five-dollar buffet, too. That's how they determined their clientele. Each hotel in particular wanted the type of clientele they had or they could have changed their restaurant. You can't be all things to all people. It's very, very difficult. Some places have tried it and find that it didn't work. So you have to get yourself to a point where you know who your clientele are. I don't expect people from Caesars Palace to come here to the Sundance, but I don't want them either. The type of clientele we have here, are the type of client—they're middle-class people and we give them a good value for their money and a nice room. That's what these people want. There's more of those than there are of the other.

**What were some of the differences between downtown here and on the Strip? I mean were there more here when—what would you say were the major differences?**

Well, the major difference is that the downtown area was the kind of an area that had the middle-class, the working class person who came here and they just wanted to play slot machines. A woman who is sixty years old who wants to come up here with a hundred bucks and play nickel slot machines would rather be in an atmosphere like this than sit at Caesars Palace where she could years ago have been out of place. She might not have felt as comfortable

because people might have been dressed differently. In the evening they all get dressed up and she may feel uncomfortable there. So those are the type of people that come downtown.

Years ago in the downtown area we had a lot of train business that came in here. A lot of the people were coming on the Greyhound bus where the terminal is down here. You didn't have to rent a car. You could walk to five hotels. You don't need a car. You don't need to rent a car. You don't have to go anywhere. And if you do want to go out on the Strip one night, so you get into a taxi with a few people and you go out to the Strip. But basically, somebody could get off on a Greyhound bus and spend all that time downtown and walk right back to the bus and they never spend two cents on anything other than what they came to do, play slot machines, gamble and eat. And they've got it all here. On the other hand, there's the other person that comes to the Strip and he flies in and he takes a plane or rents a car and goes to his hotel and then he has a car and he drives from place to place. He's a different type of a customer and he would go to the Strip. That doesn't mean that what I'm saying runs a hundred percent. There are people that come down here that rent cars and go to the Strip, too. But a lot of people would prefer to stay downtown because I'm sure the rooms are more reasonable.

**So from now and twenty-five years ago that's more or less the same.**

Very much.

**People have orientated themselves with one area.**

Yeah. There are people that come and stay downtown and then stay at the Strip and they'd rather stay downtown because you go into a place and it's full. You may walk into a Strip hotel at ten o'clock in the morning and you can shoot a cannon through the place. It's quiet. They don't start. Where you get down here at ten o'clock in the morning and you have to walk around to find a slot machine. And people like that, certain people. You don't want to be the only one in the

casino playing a slot machine. I think that's the way a person feels. You want to see the guy next to you hit a jackpot and you want to hear all the noise and the action. A lot of people like that.

**Well, so actually what we have found out is Las Vegas hasn't really changed as much as people's attitudes towards gambling.**

The attitudes haven't changed. The people who gamble have changed.

**How have they changed?**

You've got more and more people. The person hasn't changed, but there's more of them. It's not only in Las Vegas. It's happened all over the world. The world got smaller. So now there's people here from Europe. The Japanese people come here in droves. Forty years ago you rarely saw an Oriental person walking around the casino unless it was a person that came from Los Angeles or someplace on the West Coast. But today because of air travel, the world has gotten small altogether. Where probably twenty-five years ago a guy in Tokyo never heard of Las Vegas, everybody in Tokyo knows about Las Vegas today.

**Can you remember actually around what time that was?**

I'd say it started in the early '70s, probably, and that was when air transportation started. McCarran Airport grew and planes that didn't come here before came here. I'm sure planes came from Europe very early and made their transfers into here. And tour operators became a big—I think they call it (Jal Pack), a Japanese airline has a tour. I think thousands of people. And the proof of that is I remember when there were five or six planes that used to go from here to the Grand Canyon and now there's probably fifty to a hundred. And they run full at certain times. You just can't seat a seat to go to the Grand Canyon. I remember when it was fifty-nine dollars and now it's a hundred and twenty-five dollars. But that is inflation that's doing that. It's a

hundred and twenty-five dollars because the guy probably more readily has got that than he's got fifty. We're a world-renowned resort area now where years ago we just catered to people in the United States. There were people from out of the country, but very few compared to today.

**[End of recorded interview]**



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