

An Interview with Faye Todd

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

Las Vegas Women in Gaming and Entertainment Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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The transcript received minimal editing. These measures include the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic sources (housed separately) accompany the collection as slides or black and white photographs.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Las Vegas Women in Gaming and Entertainment Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

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Illustrations

Entertainment Director Faye Todd at Landmark Hotel, circa 1980	frontispiece
Special Events Coordinator Faye Todd at Desert Inn, circa 1970	following page 14
Executive Secretary, Faye Todd at the Desert Inn in 1975	25
Faye Todd and boss, Nick Gullo at the Desert Inn in the late 1970s	26
Faye Todd joins other Desert Inn female executives, circa 1970	28
Zula Wolfram, Landmark Hotel owner, and Faye Todd, Entertainment Director	30
Rehearsal for <i>Spellcaster</i> at the Landmark Hotel	38
Ted and Zula Wolfram, Landmark Hotel owners from 1978 to 1984	41
Faye Todd featured in an <i>Ebony</i> publication in 1979	46

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are courtesy of Faye Todd and Las Vegas Women in Gaming and Entertainment Oral History Project.

Preface

Faye Todd represents a small group of African American women who achieved executive status in the Las Vegas gaming industry. Arriving in Las Vegas from San Antonio in 1964 with her three children and husband James, Todd settled down to care for her children. Her career path began when she enrolled in adult education classes to acquire business administration and clerical skills. By 1975 her career took off when she was named Special Events Coordinator at the Desert Inn Hotel & Casino. In 1976 she left the Desert Inn to take up the duties of what she termed “the perfect job” at the Landmark Hotel & Casino as Entertainment Director/Corporate Executive Assistant. The job ended abruptly six years later when the Landmark was forced into receivership.

Todd’s narrative provides a unique insight from inside the executive offices of the gaming industry, one based on the reflections of a black woman. It sheds light on the opportunities accorded to African Americans following the 1971 consent decree, and the different strategies employed by blacks to access those opportunities. Todd also provides insight into class relations within the black community both in Las Vegas and San Antonio, Texas. Todd left the gaming industry in 1997 when her thirteen-year job at the Sahara ended with a change in management. She is currently exploring career options that accommodate a more sedate lifestyle.



Entertainment Director Faye Todd at the Landmark Hotel in the early 1980s

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Good afternoon.

Hi. How are you?

Great. This is Claytee White and this afternoon, October 15, 1996, I'm sitting here with Faye Todd in her home and we are going to do a little talking about the gaming industry. Faye is it true that you've given me permission to use this material for educational and research purposes.

Yes, I have.

Faye, you were telling me a few minutes ago that you're from Texas.

That's correct, Clay.

Where?

San Antonio.

Were you born in Texas?

Yes.

Your husband's family as well?

Yes. We met when we were children, so we've known each other all our lives.

Good. What made you decide to come to Las Vegas?

Well, his passion was food -- to be a chef. His uncle lived out here, so he figured, "Well, hey, what better place to get started and learn the craft, than in Las Vegas with all the hotels -- the Las Vegas hotel industry. So that's what happened.

Did he become a chef?

Yes.

Oh, really? Is he still working in that industry?

Yes he is.

That's interesting. I've interviewed quite a few African American women, as I told you, and you are the first one that I've spoken with whose husband is in that line of work. I've talked to some women whose husbands are in the gaming industry but they were either porters or some other job. So this is really interesting. I just might want to talk to him later on, also.

That would be nice. I think he'd enjoy that.

Do you remember which year you moved out here?

1964.

How old were you and your husband at that time?

We were twenty-four.

Had you already started your family?

Yes, we had all of our children at that time.

That's wonderful. How many children do you have?

Three. A son, who's the oldest, and two girls.

What are their names?

Arthur, who we call Pancho, Deborah and Valerie.

What is your husband's first name?

James.

In 1964, you were here right after the civil rights movement and all of that. What was that time like in Las Vegas?

To me, I felt more of the segregation here in Las Vegas than I did in San Antonio.

So, even in 1964 --

Even in 1964. Some people say that it's better because of the location out West, but for me it was not that way.

Give me a few examples.

For example I never heard the word "nigger," being born and raised in Texas, out of the mouth of a white. I had never heard a white say "nigger." Blacks of course did, in playing, but never a white until I moved to Las Vegas. On Fremont Street, I was parallel parking. There were two men and I had to wait for them to move, they were walking, in order for me to parallel park. They stood there awhile and I patiently waited, like a lady. I've always been a lady. They walked past the car window and they said, "Nigger, in a red car." That was the first time I'd ever heard that.

How did you feel?

I was startled. Very hurt. I didn't know, it was a strange feeling. Very strange. I felt like crying. Of course I did cry. I can remember I was down there shopping. We had the dress shops and things in that area at the time, on Fremont Street. It was a particular

outfit that I was going to buy but I no longer wanted anything to do with shopping. I pulled the car out and came home. I was depressed, very depressed. That was the first time I'd ever heard it -- you know, out of the mouth of a white person.

Tell me how old your children were when you first came.

The youngest was seven, six, and four.

So the seven-year-old, and probably the six-year-old as well, were in school.

Yes.

Did they go to an integrated school when you first got here or was it segregated?

No, it was segregated. They went over to Madison Elementary School on the Westside.

Where did you live when you first got here?

We lived on the Westside, right on McWilliams, when we first got here. They went to Madison. I think they integrated the elementary schools a little later on. I think it was called Bonanza where they went to as an integrated elementary school. But I felt as if I were moving back in time. Because in San Antonio the schools were integrated in I think 1954. So I felt as if I was moving back in time. Even at my age, I went to an integrated school. They were integrating at that time.

When did you finish high school?

It was in 1957.

And they were already integrating in San Antonio?

The law was passed in 1954, right?¹

Yes.

Immediately, right away this was starting to be done in San Antonio. But then you have to also realize that San Antonio is a little different from Dallas and Houston and most of the other cities.

In what way?

I think because it is 80 to 85% Latin American. I think that's what it is. A lot of people have said that. But we never had a problem.

If there's that many Latin Americans, so the percentage of blacks as compared to whites is very small.

Very small. I don't know. That's one reason I've always thought it might be. There was a time, of course, all in the southern areas where you sat in the back of the bus but once the movement started, San Antonio just fell right into place -- the buses, the schools, the lunch counters. I was right there with them, with the sitting down at the lunch counters -- right there. I think it was Woolworth's, one day at lunch time, myself and some of the other girls at the store where we worked, we went down the sidewalk there and sat down at Woolworth's. We just sat there. Naturally we looked the part. We weren't riff-raffs or anything. The people behind the counter were very nice but they couldn't serve us. As a matter of fact the workers would always say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I wish I could serve you." There was never a problem, never anything. We'd get up when our hour was over and go back to work.

¹Todd refers to *Brown versus Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruling which found segregation in school systems, unconstitutional.

Do you remember how many times you and your friends did that?

Personally, we only did it twice. I can remember that clearly.

Did you ever participate in any of the other kinds of demonstrations?

No. Other than there was a big department store in San Antonio called Joske's and this was during the time we weren't allowed to sit at the lunch counters. Joske's had a large lunch counter in the store and I don't remember what organization it was but we made all these buttons, "I have quit Joske's." Well, of course Joske's couldn't afford for the blacks to pull their accounts out because they had a lot of accounts. So this went on for maybe two weeks and that's it, boom, it opened up. So it just was not like what we read in the newspapers or that we would see on television. We never experienced any of that.

Since we've gone back to San Antonio, what kind of transportation did you and your family use to come from San Antonio to Las Vegas?

We flew. Or did we fly. Hold on a minute. That's before we moved though, when we flew. When me and the kids came out to stay, we rode on the train. We came by train.

Did your husband come out first?

Yes.

When you said that you lived on the Westside when you first came, what kind of house did you live in?

It was an apartment.

What did the area look like at that time?

At that time, the apartments where we lived they had just built them so they were

relatively new. It was clean. It wasn't bad at that time.

Were there any trailers over there at that time, or shacks. Back in the 1940s and 1950s, there were tents and shacks over there. Do you remember any of those things still being there?

No, I don't recall. It could have been in certain areas but I would say there was not a lot of them.

Ok, good. How long were you here before you started your first job?

I'd say maybe about four or five years.

So you didn't work at first?

No. I went to school.

Tell me about that. You went to school.

Well, not a really formal situation, like yourself, where you're going and you'll probably be there for four years or what-have-you. The first thing I did, I took an adult class. It was like business administration, brushing up on your typing, this type of thing. There were a lot of black and Hispanic people, to start out with.

Where was this?

It was at Rancho, at night. Rancho High School. The adult class was at night. It ended up over at Vo-Tech, when Vo-Tech was brand new. [Southern Nevada Vocational Technical Center] It was a new school, Vo-Tech High School. It was way out on the mountain. In fact that's where Kevin goes now, to Vo-Tech. That was what I did there. That lasted for, I think, two years.

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Did you come out with any kind of certificate for the classes you'd taken?

Yes, we did. I have no idea where it is.

You said we. Did you go with a girlfriend?

Yes, Pat Feaster and that's where I met a lot of the girls. Yeah, Pat.

From Fordyce [Arkansas].

That's right. That's Pat. I knew you'd know Pat.

That's great. This is such a small city.

It is. And that's where I met most of the ladies that I'm associated with right now.

After you finished the schooling that you wanted to finish, is the baby in school by this time? Your baby was four years old when you got here.

Yes. By now she's in kindergarten.

So everybody's in school and you're going to school at night. Was your husband able to start in the kitchen as a chef right away?

No, not right away. He was the cook, then the sous chef and all of that.

So he went through all the steps like an apprentice?

Right.

Where did he start?

At the Tropicana. He was so fortunate. We laugh and talk about it now. He worked with the master. We call Otto the master. So he was so fortunate to have been able to work

with somebody like Otto who taught him a lot of things that he did not know. But he learned a lot in San Antonio because he worked with a German man who was also a master chef. He worked at a small German restaurant there on St. Mary's, that he more or less broke in at -- learning to make the pastries and things of that nature. Then he came out here and I think Otto polished him.

So Otto was the master chef?

Yes.

Do you remember Otto's last name?

Ramosa.

Is he still at the Tropicana?

No, Otto has retired. As a matter of fact, Otto went to the Sahara and my husband James eventually ended up with him at the Sahara, in later years. As a matter of fact, he's still at the Sahara. But he's working more-or-less just in banquets, just doing banquets, which I think is his passion.

Is that what he loves?

Yes.

That's great. So now I want to talk about when you started your first job. Do you remember which year you decided to go to work?

Yes, I think it was -- oh, dear.

You came in 1964.

I came in 1964. It was probably around 1969.

Where did you go to work?

At the Clark County Health Department.

So you and Pat Feaster went to work at the same place.

Right. I was there first. There was one black woman there. Her name was Faye also, Arnetta Faye James. She worked in the rotunda area, out in the receptionist area. She called me one day and she said, "Faye, why don't you come out here? There's a job open out here, clerk typist. So why don't you come on over." So I said, "Okay." I got dressed and I went in but I didn't get to talk to -- I was supposed to talk to Otto Ravenholt, I believe. Who I talked to was a woman. He wasn't there, I don't remember. And she said there was no opening. I mean she just kind of gave me the -- you know. You know what I mean?

She brushed you off?

Yeah. That's it. So as I walked out, naturally Faye was sitting there and she could see me. And it's like, "Where are you going so quick?" She said, "Call me," you know, when I got home. So when I got home I called her and I told her. She said, "Oh no, you were supposed to ask for -- whomever." So I put on another suit. [laughter] I didn't want to wear the same suit. So I changed clothes. I put on a different color and I went back and I guess I spoke with the right person.

So who was the person you spoke to?

Otto Ravenholt. He was the Health Officer. So I spoke with him. It was his secretary I was supposed to ask for but see I didn't get his secretary. I got maybe like a receptionist

or something of the nature. But when I went back then I did ask for the right person and I spoke with her and she let me go in to speak with Otto Ravenholt. I will never forget what he asked me. He said, "I see you don't have any experience."

So you didn't work in San Antonio.

Yes, but not in that field. He says, "I see you don't have any experience." I said, "Well, no I don't but I have the training and I can't think of a better place to get it than right here." And I hit the desk. [laughter] I won't ever forget it. Well, when you're young you have that -- you know. And he just went back and says, "Well, when can you start?" It was as easy as that.

Wonderful. How long were you at the Health Department?

I guess no more than two years.

Why did you decide to leave there?

I needed to be with the kids. I needed to come home and stay with the kids awhile. From that point I went to Dunes Hotel.

The Dunes.

Right.

You didn't tell me about the Dunes.

I was there such a short time.

How long were you at the Dunes?

I don't think that was more than maybe -- it was under a year.

What did you do there?

It was more or less, clerk typist.

So you started in the clerical field there.

Right.

You stayed home about two years, so we are now at about 1971 or 1972.

Now wait a minute. We're not looking at that much because I hadn't started at the Desert Inn yet, which was in 1971. So this may be 1970.

Okay. So in 1970, why did you leave the Dunes?

Let me explain this to you. I had heard, after I got the job, that several black women had been in that particular office and they'd work a little bit, then they'd let them go. So we figured out what they were doing. They were trying to fill this quota. This was during the time that they had the consent decree.² They needed to fill the quota. So they would fill the quota and then let them go. Their excuse was, "We tried it but it didn't work." So a couple of girls were telling me about it, that had worked there, and what had happened. I thought, "Ooh, gee." So one day -- I think his name was Rice. I can't remember his first name but one thing that he had me do that nobody else in the job that I had did, was to go down to the cage and help them count the receipts from the different outlets. Now I understood that it was always two people that did that in the past. It was just me. He expected me to be through and back up to my desk in the same length of time that it took two people to do it. And it was impossible. So then one day he told me, "You're just not

²Under the leadership of attorney Charles Kellar, the NAACP filed a decree in Federal Court against Las Vegas Strip hotels and labor unions. The decree charged that blacks were not being hired in non-manual positions. The Federal Court ruled in favor of the NAACP, forcing hotels and unions to consent to fair employment practices.

balancing fast enough." And I said, "Well, gee, I have to have time to balance out the whole thing." That was always a problem for me. [Responding to a knock]. That's Kevin. He's lost his key. Just wait.

That was Kevin that just knocked on the door. Tell me who Kevin is.

Kevin is our grandson. He goes to Vo-Tech. His second year in public school -- we've always had him in private school -- so last year was a little adjustment. He's okay now.

Do you like the change from private to public?

Well, I'm always partial to private but with Vo-Tech it's a little different.

Is that like one of those academies, what do you call them, magnet schools?

Well, no. They have crafts. What am I saying? Computers --

It's like a trade school?

Yes. Like that. They have the classroom here [gesturing] and then they actually do the work here. So it's very nice.

What is his major?

He's doing the culinary, which I don't know if he really likes -- and not wanting to change, you know.

Is it because of his grandad?

I think that's what it is.

So you have two men in the house cooking. You don't have to cook at all do you?

Two men, but they don't cook. [laughter]

So you're still doing all the cooking. You were telling me about the situation at the Dunes and I think that's really, really interesting.

Yes. So he told me, "You're just not doing it fast enough. And I need you up here by eleven o'clock every morning and you're not doing it." I sat there on my chair and I listened to him and you know what, I got up and I went back to my desk -- 'cause there was some unfinished business. I just couldn't leave it like that. I sat there and I finished up everything I had to do. That took maybe two hours. He'd pass my desk and he'd look, like "Why is she still here?" I finished and I went into his office, with my purse, and I says, "Mr. Rice I'd like to thank you for the opportunity." And I walked out. I had heard that a lot of the girls had cursed him out because they knew it was not fair. They had said, "Oh, you're this and you're that." But I thought, "I'm going to be a lady about this." I knew it was unfair. It was just unjustified. I went on and it was shortly after that that I went to the Desert Inn. I went to the Desert Inn and on my resume, Dunes Hotel -- Reason for Leaving, I said, "Terminated." My boss at the time -- I'll never forget him, Harry Williams. Right him down -- was interviewing me. He already had my resume and my application and he had already did a background check on me. He says, "Faye, you say you were fired from the Dunes." And I said, "Yes I was." He said, "Did you get a pink slip?" I said, "Yeah." And he says, "I called over there and I have gotten a lot of background checks on people, but I have never gotten a recommendation like the one that Mr. Rice at the Dunes gave me on you." Yeah, he told me that. And I said, "Well, I was fired."

By that same Mr. Rice.

Mr. Rice. And he says, "Well, he gave you the best recommendation I've ever heard." I



As Special Events Coordinator at the Desert Inn, Faye Todd (center) socializes with (from left) Harry Williams and guest golfers, Dr. and Mrs. Pulas at the Desert Inn in the mid-1970s.

believe to this day, it was probably the way I carried myself. Even though I knew he was wrong, it was no good for me to jump up and down and scream. I was fired. He wasn't going to take me back. So that worked out real good.

Tell me about Harry Williams.

Okay. I was Executive Secretary by this time and Harry had never worked that closely with any blacks, period. He had seen blacks as maids and porters, bus-people. But he had never worked that closely with a black person. Also this job was obtained as part of the quota, filling the consent decree. Several black women had been interviewed. Later on as he and I got to know each other better, he told me, "Faye, you made it over twenty-five people. I was so tired of interviewing." I said, "Oh, is that the only reason you hired me, because you were tired of interviewing?" [laughter] He said, "No. I just wanted to let you know where you stand there. You made it over twenty-five." Both black and white, he had interviewed for the job. I said, "Well, that's great." I worked with this man and he told me at one time -- you could tell that he was worried that if somebody said something negative to me, I was going to get all upset, fly off the handle, and he would have to defend me. He thought he might have to take care of me. And you could tell he was worried about that. But I never, ever had to do that. I told him one time when he brought this subject up, "I can take care of myself."

When he brought this subject up, how did he approach it? What did he say?

He says, "Faye, you never get mad at a customer. The customer's always right." It was like, "whatever they say, they're right," or, "just don't get upset with them."

What was Mr. William's position?

He was the Hotel Manager.

He was the manager of the hotel.

Right.

Okay. So now the Desert Inn opened about 1950.

Yeah, it's been there a long time.

So it had only been opened about twenty or twenty-one years when you start here. So it's a relatively new place. You're an Executive Secretary at this point?

Right.

What kind of duties did you perform?

The hotel management part of it which entailed the front desk, housekeeping, the whole bit. I typed memos, answered the phone, took care of customer complaints.

Tell me how you would take care of a customer complaint.

I would talk to the person and find out what the problem was. Naturally, get their name, their room number, or what-have-you. I let them know that we would investigate it as soon as possible and get back to them. So that would give me an opportunity to let Harry, my boss, know what the problem was and if it warranted a complimentary meal or what-have-you. So then I would call the people back and of course apologize. This is the second time I'm apologizing and invite them to dinner in one of the restaurants. Then we would leave the complimentary slip at the restaurant of their choice. A lot of times we had to write letters to them. A lot of times if the complaint was something that we just couldn't figure out what to do with at the time, had to discipline an employee over it, we would get the person's address and let them know that they would hear from us in the future.

Give me an idea of a complaint that could be handled on the spot.

For instance, if it's room service, their order just came up and it's cold. So right on the spot we would send them up another order. Right away, just what they had. We'd ask them, "What did you have?" This is what they had and we'd make sure. But made absolutely sure that the waiter got it up there right away.

Would that meal be on the house?

Yes. Oh, yes. We would compliment that.

Give me an example of a situation that would take a longer time and you would have to get in touch with the person by letter, once they had left Las Vegas.

Sometimes people call you and they want a fruit basket or some type of amenity put in a friend's room, and the hotel must follow through on that. You'd bill it to their credit card. Well, possibly they didn't get the right thing. If it was a fruit basket, they got wine instead of a fruit basket. They'd want it credited off their credit card. So we'd have to take care of that by letter and have the head cashier take it off the credit card. Then we'd have to write and let them know it's been done, with a copy of it and everything.

Did you every have any face-to-face meetings with any of the customers?

Oh, yes.

Describe some of those to me.

Let's just go for an example. Here's a black couple, they come to my office. The food server was rude, did not bring what they ordered. They ordered the steak medium and they brought it well. And more-or-less the food server was just rude. The first thing, I listen. I don't interrupt. I listen to them. And of course I'm making my notes. Normally

when they come to your office like that with these complaints, they don't want anything. Of course the first thing I'm going to do is, if they were inconvenienced I want to offer them a meal when they come back or something when they come back on their next visit. But they don't want it. They just want to let you know that this is what happened. Many times they do want to know that you disciplined this person, but naturally you're not going to do it right in front of them. You can pick up, you can feel whether the customer is right or if the employee is right. You get a good feel. A lot of times the employee doesn't warrant a disciplinary notice of any kind. Of course you don't let the customer know that you're not going to do it.

Because of something you just said, I want to ask a different question. At this point, black people are just beginning to stay in the different casinos on the Strip. It's the early 1970s and it's just really beginning to be integrated well.

Right.

Were you getting a lot of complaints from black people who didn't think they were being treated well?³ Were black people coming often? Did you see a lot of black people there?

No. During that period I did not see a lot of black customers coming to the Desert Inn. At that time, the Desert Inn was a country-club hotel, catering to high rollers and those type of clientele. I do not remember seeing a lot of blacks as guests at the Desert Inn during that time.

We just mentioned a few names a few minutes ago, of some of the owners of the hotel. At this time, supposedly Las Vegas was being run by the mob. Did you ever hear this?

³End side 1, tape 1.

Yes I did.

Did you ever think about that? Did it ever have anything to do with your work at all?

None what-so-ever, and if I might add, when I think about it now it was a much better situation then than it is now. I think it was much better.

Give me an example of what you mean by much better.

Well I would think more class. Now it's quite everything. Las Vegas is commercial now but times have changed and we do have to go into the new age. I guess I'm a little old fashioned and I liked it much better the way it was at that time.

When you say more class, does it have anything to do with the way people acted or is it the way they dressed? What do you mean by that?

Both. The way they dressed. When we went out to dinner, you know it makes you feel good when you dress up and go to dinner. A nice restaurant that you're not allowed in there without a jacket and tie. That's how it was at that time. I enjoyed that. We were treated with respect, the people that participated in things of that nature. It was just better. I like it much better.

When you and your husband first got here, you were really young -- twenty four, twenty five years of age. What kind of a night life did you have when you went out without the kids in the evening?

Well at that time Jimmy was working at the Flamingo as a butcher. Of course he was well liked by his superiors. And each time the show would change at the Flamingo, we would get an opportunity to go to the show.

You're talking about the mid-1960s.

Right.

So you were actually going into the casino to go to shows, at that time.

He and I were, yes.

How many other black people would you see in those shows?

Very few. Very, very few. As a matter of fact, he and I didn't realize that this was happening. I remember one night we were coming back and somebody that lives in our complex, you know where we were living, says, "Where you guys be going every Tuesday night?" I we told them, "Oh, to a show at the Flamingo." "You guys go out there?" It was like, "We didn't know you could."

That's interesting. Did you ever play the slot machines or the tables or anything like that when you were in there?

I played the slot machines. My husband was never one to play slots, but I loved the slots and he'd stand there and watch me. A lot of times I'd get put out because I looked so young for my age. [laughter]

But that was the only reason you were put out?

Oh yeah. Now that part I never, from the time we were here, I never had a problem. We were always in the casinos. We were always going out to eat in the smaller restaurants, like the lunch rooms or going out to the shows that we wanted to see.

Did you realize, though, that there weren't that many other black couples in there, if any?

We noticed that and I can remember us saying, "Well, gee-whiz." We missed being

home in San Antonio. At least when we socialized, we socialized around our people. To us, at the time, we felt like, "You just don't see our black people." We missed that part. But we just never thought about it. We were never turned away, but we always went. That's what we did.

Tell me something. Did you ever try Jackson Street, over on the Westside, when you went out?

No. Faye and I -- I'm saying Faye [Daniel] and I because we were buddies at the time and we never did.

Are you talking about Faye Daniel?

Faye Daniel, right. I remember we would drive down there on a Saturday evening. We would drive. But we never did --

You never would go into the clubs.

No.

Tell me why you didn't go into those clubs.

I always felt, and I think probably Faye would say the same thing, we felt that they were different people. We were a different set of people than they were and we didn't go. This don't have to be the truth. I believe this is how we felt.

Do you think that there is a strict break in class, here in Las Vegas in the black community?

At that time, I felt it was but now I'm not too sure. We're all able to more or less blend now a little more. In San Antonio we were all accustomed to being raised up in San

Antonio. Just for an example, we always had the debutante balls every year. There was a lot of women clubs, black women society clubs and things that you could get involved with. We had the Symphony. We had a lot of culture there. We were involved in going to the symphonies. When we were in elementary school, they introduced us to all of these things, the different art shows and all. So we were more or less introduced to these things and we were exposed to them. Then when I came to Las Vegas, we didn't see that. We didn't see any of that. It did not exist -- until later years.

Tell me something. What kind of work did your parents do?

My mother died when I was very young and she was a housewife. But when she passed away, my great aunt and uncle, they raised me. I was raised as an only child. My uncle was with a construction company for many, many years. They were not poor and they were certainly not -- they were just comfortable.

They were probably what we think of as middle class.

Yes. Comfortable people. With me being the only child, you know, I had what I needed. I may not have had everything I wanted, but I had everything I needed.

I don't think any child has everything they want.

See that's it.

Did you live in the city of San Antonio or did you live on a farm outside of the city?

In the city of San Antonio.

So you actually grew up in a city?

Yes.

How big was San Antonio when you were growing up there?

When I was growing up, I think we're looking at three hundred thousand. That's growing up.

Good. So you're talking about a good-size city?

Oh, yes.

So when you came to Las Vegas, you were coming to a town.

I was coming to a very small town.

I understand now, the differences. Before you and your husband left San Antonio, give me an idea of your social life there.

In San Antonio? Okay. For an example, we had this club called the Black Orchid. I thought it was the neatest thing to go to the Black Orchid, to a private club. So my experiences being there was with somebody that had a card. So with my birthday gift one year, my husband gave me a card. He'd bought me a membership in the Black Orchid. So I thought that was really neat.

How much are we talking about for a membership?

We're talking about fifteen dollars month.

That's wonderful. In the early 1960s, fifteen dollars a month was --

Oh, this was not fifteen dollars a month. This was one time, a one-time fee of fifteen dollars. It lasted a year and then you renewed it.

What was that club like?

It was so nice. I'll never forget, it was all black velvet around the walls and very thick carpet. The fireplace. The piano bar.

It sounds so romantic.

Very romantic. It was the "in" place, I guess you might say, for the after-work black attorneys, the black business people. This is where they met and socialized. A beautiful black lady at the piano with the strapless gown. It was lovely. At the other clubs you couldn't sit down and order, at that time, liquor. You couldn't order a cocktail. But in the private clubs you could.

So you couldn't order a mixed a drink.

Right. They had to bring their own to the table.

That's right. That sounds like my little hometown in North Carolina. So now I understand why, when you came to Las Vegas you expected to go to the Flamingo, not to Jackson Street.

Right, because we didn't even do it at home.

Tell me about some of the stars that you and your husband saw in those early years when you first got here.

Right. This is in the lounge. Do you remember Dorothy Dandridge?

Oh, yes. Of course.

We saw Dorothy Dandridge in the lounge. What's her name that's on *Touched by an Angel*?

Della Reese.

Della Reese was in the lounge. All these people. Gladys Knight and the Pips, that was a lounge act.

Wasn't it a prestigious thing to be a lounge act?

Well, the prestige came when they made it to the big room. That's the showroom. It was more or less prestigious to make it to the stage in Las Vegas at that time, period. But in the lounge, that was just the lounge. You could go in there for the price of a drink. Sometimes not even a one-drink minimum. B.B. King. Fats Domino. Yeah, all these neat guys. They were at the lounge at the Hilton.

Always at the Flamingo.

Yeah, well they didn't call it the Hilton at that time. It wasn't the Las Vegas Hilton. What was it, International? I think it was called the International at that time.

We're not talking about the Flamingo Hilton at all.

No, the other Hilton.

You're talking about the one out on Joe E. Brown [Street] or something.

Right. Their lounge acts were the Fats Dominos and B.B.s.

What hotel is your husband working at this point?

He's at the Sahara.

Now, I'm going to get back to you. We were talking about working with Harry Williams, who is the hotel manager of the Desert Inn. This is your second job and we're still back in the 1970s. How long did you stay there working in that position as his Executive Secretary?



Executive Secretary Faye Todd at the Desert Inn in 1975

For five years, then I was promoted.

Oh, good. Promoted to --

Promoted to Special Events Coordinator, promoted to marketing.

Tell me about that. What is your new title?

I'm Special Events Coordinator. It was my responsibility to come up with different events like golf tournaments, tennis tournaments.

So those are called special events.

Special events, right. One in particular, this liquor company sponsored it -- Lauder's King of the Hill Tennis Tournament. Charlton Heston was the founder of this. Of course he was a part of it. So that was a lot of fun.

So you had to put all these events together. That must have taken a lot of skill.

It did but I was fortunate that at the time I was working for this guy whose name was Nick Gullo. He's an Italian. Born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was great.

Can you spell Nick's last name for me?

Gullo. Nick was one of these type people, he was secure in himself. So he was not intimidated. He did not think anybody was trying to step into his territory. So he gave you free reign. He taught me a lot. If I made a mistake, he showed me where I made my mistake. And when it was done well, he made sure I got the credit for it.

Good. What was his title?

He was the Marketing Director.



Faye Todd and her boss, Nick Gullo at the Desert Inn, circa 1970

So he's head of all marketing.

Right.

And you were special events.

Right, that came under his [direction].

Is Nick, with that name, is he part of the mob?

[laughter] Well I'll tell you, we always thought so because he had this friend -- oh, what's his name. I should never forget it because I talk about it to people a lot. When I got this plane reservation -- Nitty was his last name. Frank. Was it Frank? Yeah. But maybe he was Frank Nitty's -- I don't know if that was his son or his grandson. I believe it was Frank -- Nitty. That was his real pal. One time I was trying to get out of here into San Antonio and could not get a flight out the day that I had to leave. So Nick told me, "Don't worry about it. I'll call Frank for you." And I could hear him because he was on the intercom. He's telling him, "Faye needs to get into San Antonio, round trip, and it's full." And he say's, "Maybe we can bump on that." So anyway Nick got off the line and says, "Faye, you got your reservation." I don't know how I got it but I did get it.

Did Frank have any connection with the Desert Inn Hotel?

No connection. Not that I know of. I don't know if he did or not. He was Nick's friend and he was a customer that always came to the Desert Inn.

As Special Events Coordinator, you coordinated all the special things like golf tournaments, tennis tournaments, and things like that. How long were you in that position?

I was at the Desert Inn for a total of almost nine years, so I was there five -- so that was

about four.

Four years in the position. Now tell me about other women. You're there a total of nine years, tell me about other women that you worked with. Were there any equal to you or above you? Were there any other black women?

At that time, when I was working in marketing, Jackie Brantley -- yeah, we worked together. Jackie was in advertising, publicity and advertising.

And Jackie Brantley is a black woman.

Yes, right. Very seldom throughout the years have I been fortunate enough to work side by side with another black woman. That was one of the times that we did, but very, very, seldom.

Were there any other women?

Yes. There were other women. Under Nick, who was Director of Marketing, we had a Sales Manager. She was a woman. And we had the Special Events Coordinator, myself.

Now are you equal to the woman who was Sales Manager?

Yes.

So you were one of the higher level managers.

Right. I guess you might call it mid-level, with Nick being the Director.

So you did have some women equal to you?

Yes. And Jackie. Jackie was equal on that level.

Because she was Publicity and Advertising. So there are three women right below



Desert Inn female executives (from left) Faye Todd, Special Events Coordinator; Jan Faust, Sales Manager; and Jackie Brantley, Publicity Director, late 1970s

Nick.

Right.

That's very interesting. I like that. You know that I want to talk to Jackie.

You haven't talked to Jackie yet.

No. I don't even have Jackie's phone number. Faye Daniel did not have Jackie's phone number when she gave your phone number to me. So before I leave here today, if it's okay with you, I'd like to have her phone number.

I don't exactly have Jackie's number, but Jackie works for the Motor Vehicle Department down on Sahara. That's where she works.

Good. I'll get in touch with her. I'm really interested in the women in the hotels. It's good to hear you say that right there at those mid-level management positions, there were women. I love this. We're talking about the early 1970s. So this is really good. Why did you decide to leave the Desert Inn?

To accept the best job that I've ever had in my life and that I will never have again.
[laughter].

Tell me about that. Are we getting ready to go to the Sahara?

We're going to the Landmark.

The Landmark. Okay. Tell me, what was this job?

The story at the Landmark was, I met the people that eventually bought the Landmark while I was at the Desert Inn. We became very, very good friends. The man's wife and myself, we became very good friends. They lived in Ohio. The guy that I was working

with at the time, he took care of the golfers and putting on the tee times and all that stuff. But anyway, Gary. Gary and I met Ted and Zula, who eventually bought the Landmark. They were from Ohio.

Their names are --

Ted and Zula Wolfram. I'll give you a little material before you leave.

Good because what I found in my library was an owner named Frank Carroll.

That's the first one. That's before Hughes bought it. That's the first one.

I see. So tell me my history. So by the time you get there, it is about when?

It's about 1978.

You were telling me about Zula and Ted Wolfram. They owned the Landmark in 1978 when you go there. Start telling me again about meeting them and how you got to know them.

I met them when I was working at the Desert Inn. They were special customers for the Desert Inn -- high rollers, the two of them. We got to be very close friends. Zula and I would go shopping and the whole bit. She told me one time they were going to buy a hotel in Las Vegas and I would have to leave the Desert Inn and come and work for them. I thought, "No way." [laughter] I mean they were such simple people, so down to earth. I realized that they had money but I didn't think they were that wealthy, to buy a hotel. Apparently they was because they did. It was the Landmark that they bought. Escrow was closing in April and I was to be there and on the job in April. I thought, "Oh, my goodness." But I did promise that I would do it. She told me, "Faye, you would be my right-hand person, my eyes, my ears, and my voice," because they lived in Ohio.



Zula Wolfram, Owner, and Faye Todd, Entertainment Director at the
Landmark Hotel & Casino in the late 1970s

And they were going to continue to live in Ohio?

Oh, yes. They continued to live in Ohio. I thought, "Well, okay." The offer was one I could not refuse. It was not twice my salary at the Desert Inn but three times what I was making at the Desert Inn.

Now Faye, if you don't mind telling me just so I'll have some idea, can you tell me your income at the Desert Inn and then at the Landmark?

I left the Desert Inn making about -- hmm. I never got over sixteen thousand. I think I left the Desert Inn at sixteen thousand a year. When I left the Landmark I was making about forty-two or forty-three thousand a year.

Now that's when you left the Landmark.

Yes.

How long did you stay with them?

I was at the Landmark for six years.

Great. Now let's talk about this. I'm excited about this. What kind of title were you able to get?

I had a double title. My title was Entertainment Director/Corporate Executive Assistant. It was very, very nice. They continued to live in Ohio. I took care of things for them. Naturally we had a General Manager. And we had a CEO, the whole thing right there. But I was more-or-less the liaison between them and Zula and Ted. It was a wonderful, wonderful job.

Did you get along very well with the CEO and the General Manager?

I did. I wouldn't have if I had pushed my weight around, which I did not.

Okay, good.

I understood how he must have felt. I more or less pampered his ego, I guess you might say. So I got along great with them.

Who was General Manager?

Jeff Silver. He was an attorney here in the city and I think he has gone back to being an attorney now.

And you worked directly with him on a daily basis.

Right. And I handled all the entertainment.

Tell me about that! Handled all the entertainment!

Sometimes I would have a problem -- it wasn't a problem really, but there were white groups in town, word was out and they would say, "The lady there, does she book white groups?" I mean, I didn't want that because what I was booking was the best.

That's right. So tell me some of the people that you booked.

We had this guy, Freddie Umpire and his group. They were all lounge groups. Oh, you want to hear the showroom.

Yes, I want to hear everything.

Okay. Well it was the same budget that I had to stay within. So I had to go with entertainers who were more-or-less, had been great but all of a sudden they were not on the top anymore. So my budget would allow that. Oh, what's his name? He was so

wonderful. Oh, but Redd Fox. He was the hardest to work with. He was one of the main people.

Why was he so difficult to work with?

Oh, he was very mean. I don't know. He wanted to be a superstar. But I always feel, if you're a superstar you don't have to say it.

That's right.

He was very difficult to work with. George Kirby. Do you remember George Kirby?

Yes, of course!

George Kirby was one of the nicest people you ever wanted to meet. But it was certain people like himself. And I'm trying to think of the guy's name that did the boll weevil song.

Benton?

Brook Benton. People of that class where they were great entertainers but all of a sudden they had just gone into the background. We had to more-or-less go with people like that. There's a comedienne. I see her every now and then on television. I booked her one time in the showroom. Quite a few that we used. But it was interesting.

This is wonderful. This is the entertainment half of your title. Tell me what you did on the other half of the title? How did you have enough time to do all of this?

It was very hard. It was not easy. I handled a lot of the corporate situations like making sure -- now of course we had a comptroller that took care of the financial end of it but I was the one that he called when, "Next month we're not going to make payroll." Then I

relayed that information to Ted and Zula in Ohio.

So you were really the pipeline to the owners.

Right. I worked directly with the owners of the hotel. It was wonderful. They're great people and there is a story behind them, which is another story.

Have you ever thought about writing a book. Now I haven't talked with the other two black women who were also in management along with you, Faye and Jackie, but do you know that there's a book here?

Yeah, I know that. I kept telling myself I'm going to do that.

I'm going to have to do it for you.

I wish somebody would start it. Yeah, it is a book there.

You mentioned earlier a CEO. It sounds as if all the day to day operations really went through you and Jeff.

Right. Well, Jeff was really the CEO. I say he was a general manager but it was the same.

Is there anybody between Jeff and the owners?

No.

I was mistaken. I thought there was a General Manager and then a CEO. So the GM really ran the hotel anyway.

He runs the hotel anyway. And I didn't realize it. I had never been in the security office but they have pictures. In the security office they had pictures of the corporate people,

so that maybe if they saw you falling down drunk they won't drag you to jail. I don't know. But I didn't realize my status, really, because I'd never thought about it until I went in there one day and I saw the pictures on the wall. This was a pyramid. Here was Ted over here, there was Zula here, I was in the middle. And then it dropped down to Jeff. And so it went down like that.

So were you on the top level of the pyramid with owners?

Between the two of them. And that's when I realized, "Wow, you know." But to me, I don't know.

You just enjoyed that job.

I did. I did enjoy it. I enjoyed that job so much. I really did.

When you told me on the telephone that you were head of entertainment, I didn't realize that you were Head of Entertainment.

Yeah, I was.

This is so interesting. During my research in the library, I find that in Las Vegas the person who was Mr. Entertainment back in the 1960s was Jack Entratter over at the Sands. He would do all the fancy stuff like bringing in all of the big stars for openings. Were you able, with your budget, to do anything like that at the Landmark?

Not the big ones. We couldn't bring in the big ones like that.

Tell me what you would do for a big occasion at the Landmark.

Like New Year's Eve?

Yes.

Then we would bring in one of them. Normally they wouldn't work for just one night. Like we would love to just pay them for New Year's Eve night. But most of them would want a contract for at least three nights, to make the trip. There's one guy in there and I can't think of his name, but there was a story behind him and I never want to see him again. Yeah, we would bring in the bigger stars for usually three nights.⁴

I'm back with Faye and she was just telling us what would happen when an act doesn't show up for a special event at the hotel.

Normally, special events, when you have a show of that nature, you've sold tickets in advance. Therefore you've got to give back all of the money and make some type of arrangement for those people to see some type of entertainment. You just have to put it together the best you can. What we did, in a situation like that on New Year's Eve, we had a very good lounge act in the lounge and we brought that lounge act into the big room and put him on stage. It was at least entertainment. The opening act for that act that we had coming in was Willie and Lester. So we thought, "Well, we'll have Willie and Lester be the act and bring in somebody to open for them." But he said, "No, he is the opening act and he would not be a main attraction." So we had to let the lounge act be the main attraction and he was still the opening act. So it went off okay.

So you mean that we have some people in show business with that kind of an ego, that he knows he's an opening act --

He's an opening act. He doesn't want to be a main attraction because he hasn't reached that point yet. He feels that if he's considered the main attraction, he won't go over as big as he would being the opening act.

I want to know more about Zula and Ted. What kind of people were they? They must

⁴End side 2, tape 1.

have been just wonderful people. What did they do for a living back in Ohio?

Genuine people. Ted owned and operated a stock brokerage firm. They had many, many holdings. They had an oil exploration business and they had race horses in Florida and Kentucky. In fact one of the horses was called Zulabird. One of the horses they called Spellcaster. And from Spellcaster's name I co-produced a show that we put together ourselves. I was the co-producer. She was of course the executive producer because the money was hers. We called the show Spellcaster after this horse who had won several races.

When you said, "Put show together" did you have dancers and showgirls there at the Landmark?

We did for this particular show. It was a production show. Small in comparison to a lot of the shows, but we put it together from scratch and decided to call it Spellcaster. We had an entertainer, his name was Roy Clayborne. Roy was a country-western singer. I never like country-western but for one of the rodeos we had here, Ted told me, "Faye I think you need to put some country-western in the lounge." I thought that was going to be very difficult for me because I don't like country-western. And somebody told me, "Faye, I know what kind of country-western you would like. It's an act over in Los Angeles at the Playboy Club, that you need to see." I went over there and I saw Roy. Right away I signed him up, right there that night.

What was so different about his country-western?

Well, he was bald. I named him the Kojak Cowboy. He was kind of upbeat. It was more-or-less country rock. So it was very, very good and with the bald head and the whole thing, I pictured him all in leather. So we built a show around him. We put together songs that were already popular, for him to sing. And we put him in black and

red leather and kept his head bald. We made him like a sinister character and named it Spellcaster. So we had the kids on the motorcycles on stage and we had dancers. With the show budget, again, I could not put a wardrobe woman or a makeup person on payroll, so we had to do it ourselves. We could not afford a lot of stagehands, so when the dancers got on the two carousels, they turned the carousels themselves and rode around.

Did you have any black dancers in the show?

There was one. As a matter of fact I think he hurt himself before the show opened -- Pat Feaster's son, I think his name was Maurice. I was auditioning dancers and I didn't know who he was at the time because I had not seen him since he was a little boy. He knew who I was. Pat had told him. Later on, Pat told me that she told him, "If Faye doesn't recognize you, don't say anything." She wanted him to get the job on his own. She told me this later. Maurice was so great. He was so great. And I thought, "Gee." And right away I chose him as one of the dancers. So he went back home and he told Pat, "She hired me." But I didn't know who he was. She called me and she says, "Faye did you hire somebody by the name of Maurice?" And I said, "Yeah, I did, as a dancer." She said, "Did you know who he was?" And then it hit me. That was her Maurice. Yeah, sure did. He got the job on his own. But I think he pulled a hamstring or something, I don't remember what happened, but he didn't go on with the show. But he was one of the first ones that I hired.

Isn't that something. Did you do any other production numbers like that, any other shows that you actually put together from scratch?

That was the only one. That was some kind of an experience.

It sounds rewarding though.



Rehearsal for *Spellcaster* at the Landmark Hotel. (from left) Roy Jergan, Production Manager; Roy Clayborne, star of the show; Zula Wolfram, Producer; Faye Todd, Entertainment Director; and Larry Hart, *Spellcaster* Director

It was very rewarding. As a matter of fact opening night, I think it was like having my first job. I'll never forget sitting there waiting for the curtains to open. We had the press and oh, the room was packed. Everybody was there. I'm sitting there and I couldn't stand it. And when the curtains started to part, I thought my heart was going to jump out on the table. I just knew a dancer would fall or trip. It was my baby.

But it was wonderful?

It was wonderful.

How long did the show run?

It ran for about eight months. It ran a long time.

Would Zula and Ted come in for something like that?

Oh, yeah. They were there. After the opening of Spellcaster -- you know I'll never forget. Zula's calling, "Well, Faye, how's the stage set?" Because we had to build the stage set. People building the stage set. "Oh, it's coming." And I would get so angry and I'm thinking to myself, "She's sitting back there in Ohio, kicking back, drinking her Jack Daniels and I'm out here working my butt off." And Kevin was little at the time.

This is your --

My grandson, Kevin. He was little and I would sometimes take him, go back to the hotel at night for the rehearsals or what have you. And I'd have him there. We kept a pillow and a blanket there in a booth, lay him there and let him sleep. I would think, "Oh, I'm so tired and she's back there in Ohio and she's going to ask me about how I'm doing." After the show then I would get a big bonus, a thousand dollars, two thousand dollars -- cash. She would come in, they would leave. They flew a private jet, of course. They'd

always leave before I got into work that next morning. Because they liked to go out on early flights. There was always an envelope, like in my typewriter. We didn't have computers then. I'd open the envelope and there was a nice note, "Thank you for a wonderful job well done. Here's two thousand dollars." But this is the kind of stuff that they would do. And my old car that just got pulled off today, out of the driveway, I kept it for sentimental reasons. They bought me that car brand new.

What happened today? Why did you get rid of it?

Well, it's just gone. I drove it down to the ground. No more driving for it.

What kind of car was it?

An Oldsmobile, Cutlass. But I drove that car all these years and my son, he says, "Mom, you drive a car down to the ground."

Do you ever talk to them now?

All of the time. They eventually moved to Las Vegas. And like I say, that's another whole story. Zula and I go out to dinner at least once a month.

Oh, that's wonderful. Now tell me, six years and what happens to the Landmark?

Okay. One Saturday morning at home I got a call from somebody that was at the Landmark, "Faye you need to come in right away." In fact it was Jeff Silver, the CEO. I said, "What are you talking about?" He says, "Haven't you heard?" I said, "Heard what?" [He said], "Ted was arrested last night for -- what do you call it, disappropriating funds, through his stock brokerage company." You know, fraud, embezzlement, whatever you want to call it. "And the gaming control board is here and they're considering closing the doors. We need to get things in order." That was a terrible,

terrible situation and I can give you a book to read on that.⁵ That was the end of a beautiful, beautiful experience. I cried so hard. I was so upset. I worked for about maybe three months, miserable. The hotel was in receivership. They started repossessing different things. They owned a condo here at the Regency Towers, on the twenty-fourth floor. Zula and I had a bank account with both our names on it, Zula Wolfram or Faye Todd, for our entertainment.

This was the entertainment budget?

Right, this is money that I used for different things. It was for the production company, we called it. We just kind of formed a production company. So the bank account was there. It was at Nevada State [Bank]. Somebody in the hotel, I think it was the casino manager -- he and I were very close -- he said, "Faye what about that bank account?" I said, "It's there. I'm not going to tell anybody unless they ask." Then Zula called me. She was distraught, back in Ohio. She was distraught. She called me and she told me, "Faye, take that bank account and pay off --" She wanted me to pay off something. Anyway the funds that would have been left after I paid off the things that she asked me to pay off, would have been about eighty thousand. She said, "You take the balance and write a check for yourself." But I was afraid to. I could have and when I think about it now. . . . but the casino manager mentioned to me, he said, "Faye maybe you'd better not because something might happen." And I was afraid. So I wouldn't do it. They did not find that particular bank account for six months. They had so many things to go into. But I could have done it. I do wish I had. [laughter] But I didn't.

She actually was going to give that to you?

⁵Homer Brickey, Jr. wrote a book about this incident in, *Master Manipulator: How Ted Wolfram Pulled Off the Largest Brokerage Fraud in History* (AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, 1985).



Ted and Zula Wolfram, Landmark Hotel owners from 1978 to 1984

Yes. That's how they were. Just a really great couple.

So you're still in touch with her now because she's still here in Las Vegas. Are the two of them still together?

They are now.

After this you leave the Landmark. The Landmark, then, is no longer their's?

Right. Then I leave.

Did you take some time off work at this point?

I took some time off, but so depressed. I didn't enjoy any of that time I took off because I was so depressed. I think, maybe three months. My stage director Julius, who was a black guy -- I hired Julius as a working stage director. He was good at what he did. And there was another guy that I used as a production manager to take care of the entertainers and all of that. His name was Roy. Roy was white, Julius was black. They became very good friends. I loved them both and today I call them my big brothers, Roy and Julius. Neither one of them drank. I have to go back and tell you this.

[interruption in tape]

You were just getting ready to tell me about San Antonio, a job you had there.

Oh yes. This was at a dress shop. I believe the dress shop was called Ann Lewis, down on the main street, downtown. I was working as an elevator girl. We had the black elevator girls. That's about all we did during those days, or in the stockroom. The manager of the place, a little Jew man who wasn't as tall as me, got on the elevator with me one day and he put his hand in a pocket. I had a breast pocket in the little blouse or dress I was wearing and he put his hand down in the pocket, feeling my breast and trying

to be fresh. It repulsed me so much. I was a young girl, very young. I didn't know how to handle it. So the way I handled it, I left, got off the elevator, parked it, went down and got my shoes because I always wore high-heel shoes to and from work and changed once I was on the elevator. I had my little brown paper bag, walked down the sidewalk to the store, which was about three doors down -- one of the big department stores -- walked in. I saw a porter, a black porter, he was vacuuming a floor. I asked him where would I be able to pick up an application, "Where is the personnel office?" And before he could answer me, this big, tall, statuesque, blonde woman walked up and said, "Did I hear a little voice ask for the personnel office?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "Well I assume, if you're looking for the personnel office then you're looking for a job." I said, "That's correct." She says, "Follow me." Then she took me to the stockroom to talk to two, very attractive, older black ladies that were there. One, her name was Velma, she had been there from the time the store opened. At that time she had been there thirty years. The other woman was in her thirties, which was also an older person where I was concerned at the time. She told them, "I'm putting her in your hands." Of course I had the job that day and from that point on, some days I would run the elevator and some days I'd work in the stockroom. We'd take the clothes when they came in and we would mark the price tags on them.

That's wonderful. Because you related that story to me, it reminds me of something I want to ask you. You're an executive secretary or you have been in management most of the time that you've been here. Did you ever have any problem with any sexual discrimination or sexual harassment?

I didn't personally. I did not. Just that particular story that I told you. Other than that I don't recall ever having a problem.

That's good. Now that the Landmark is closed, where do you go after you take off the

little time to rest?

I go to the Sahara.

Tell me why and how you got into the Sahara.

I was sitting at home, naturally in my robe everyday and my friends kept bugging me and telling me, "You need to get up from there. Your savings will run out eventually." One day, one of the two guys that I always called my big brothers at the Landmark, called me. He was working at the Sahara as a sound manager or something of that nature. He says, "There's a job opening in the Food & Beverage Department, here. Come over here and get it." Well, I didn't really want the job. I was never interested in working at the Sahara. But to please him -- because I'm feeling, "Well, my friends are going to get tired of me, telling me this and I'm not doing anything about it." I got up, only for his benefit, got dressed and took my resume over to the Food & Beverage Director there at the Sahara. I knew I had the job because I didn't want it. [laughter] Shortly after interviewing me, he said he needed to talk to the General Manager because there was a problem with my salary history. So they had to discuss that and in order to get me with my credentials, of course in the job I was applying for, naturally they were going to hire me. He told me I would also be able to book some functions for catering and get a percentage of everything that I booked. So this should help raise the salary. So I thought, "Well, okay." I took the job. Two days later, I found myself updating my resume because I did not want to be there. I found, though, that I became too busy to do any functions. I did book one function. In fact I booked it for Cranford Crawford. It was his fraternity. That was about it and I was at the Sahara. You know how you get. I guess you get comfortable and you get settled. And that's what happened to me there. I was promoted to supervisor at the Sahara, in the Food & Beverage Department. I was very comfortable until they sold the hotel to Bill Bennett. Then everything started changing.

What kind of changes did you see?

Well, the people coming in from Circus Circus, that's where Bill Bennett was from, they had a totally different management style. It appeared -- it was obvious that they wanted only their own people there, we're speaking for Food & Beverage now, and did not want the people that had been there for years -- somebody that had four weeks vacation under their belt. I had been there for over thirteen years.

At the Sahara?

At the Sahara. Right. My other coworkers, they had already left or were terminated. I was the only one still there and we were all wondering, "When will the time be, for Faye to leave or be termed?" Well after Bill Bennett bought the place, there had been four directors. So the fourth one came in and he decided after he looked at everybody's salaries, he felt that my salary was too high. He said I could continue the job, I could keep the job, but my salary would have to be cut down to nine dollars an hour. I said, "No thank you."

Do you remember the year that you started at the Sahara?

That would be 1984.

So thirteen years did you say?

Yes.

So you were at the Sahara until -- just a few minutes ago.

Right.

So the job that you left about three weeks ago -- you said you'd been off for how long?

Just about three. This is my third.

So the job that you left three weeks ago is the Sahara job.

Yes.

Interesting. I know that the Sahara was probably a very good job but I'm very impressed with the job at the Landmark because I guess I'd like the power. Because I looked through your scrapbook while you were out a few minutes ago, I liked the clothes that you wore. It looks as if you have this wonderful evening wardrobe as well as a very, very business-like wardrobe. Tell me how your husband took all of this. I see you in pictures with a lot of men.

Yes. You know maybe it has something to do with us being married so young because we were married all of our life, except when we had that period of divorcing and then remarrying in there. But he was always so proud of me. Everything I did, he was so supportive. He was so proud. People can tell you that he'll sit and talk about things that I've done or what "Faye's going to do tonight." Or, "Faye went to this affair." He was always supportive of that. He never felt threatened. He never did.

That's wonderful. Because he was so secure in what he was doing and so happy.

Very much so. He knew me. So he wanted to see this happen.

I saw a picture in your book. It's an autographed picture from Natalie Cole.

Oh, yeah.

Did you get to know her?

I got to know her. At that time is when Natalie Cole was on the skids. I was negotiating

Faye Todd, 37, is an executive secretary in Las Vegas. The 37-year-old divorcée is the mother of three children, and she relaxes by reading, writing and attending the theater and prefers the company of intelligent, affectionate men.



Faye Todd featured in an *Ebony* publication in 1979

with her manager to use her there at the Landmark.

That is wonderful. This is when she had a little downfall in her career and she was making a comeback.

Right. They had put her in the leather. She was always very elegant in the gowns. I had told him, "If we put her on the stage I would like to see her be Natalie Cole, in the gown." We were talking about that and he brought her in to the office one day and we sat and we talked awhile. It was so obvious that this lady was "stoned out." It was so sad because to me she was always so -- I always thought she was the neatest person, and so elegant. And when I saw that, I could not believe it. She had like a -- what do you call it? If your nose is stuffed, the Vick's inhaler. She kept doing that. Later on, a few weeks after that meeting, I was told that that was not Vick's, it was something else.

Did she ever perform for you at the Landmark?

She did not.

Was it your choice or their choice?

It was mine. She refused to get out of the leather. She was into that mode and she didn't want to change the image back to what it was. Of course, as you see now, she is back in her old image.

That's right. She's wonderful.

She's wonderful, right. But she didn't want to get out of that image.

You told me about black people working at the Landmark. Tell me about the customers at the Landmark. Did you see more blacks at the Landmark, which is off the Strip, than you did in the hotels on the Strip at this time?

I did. Then that was a few years down the road, too, from the beginning of the Desert Inn. Yeah, there were more black people. As a matter of fact, we had one black man in particular who was one of the high rollers, and one of the highest.

Is he still here?

He lives in Michigan. I remember at that time, I believe he was running for mayor of this little town in Michigan. I can't think of the name. It was a small town in Michigan. He was very well off, very intelligent, well spoken, well read, but very, very nice. He was one of our highest rollers.

With the position you had there and all the work you did, you must have gotten to know other executives in other casinos. Were there any other women? Black, white, makes no difference. Were there any other women in a position on the same level as yours?

As Entertainment Director, I was the only woman on the Strip in the history of Las Vegas. The only woman, so I was taking up two -- their black and the woman. There had never been a black entertainment director in Las Vegas and there had never been a woman. I was the only woman. I got to know several of the Entertainment Directors in the other hotels. These were the big cigar smokers and they'd been in the business for years. I felt quite intimidated because this was something that was thrown on me, something that I had to learn on the job. But I was so fortunate to talk to so many people that I learned from. Gregory Hines' father, at the time I believe he was holding a position at the Tropicana and I can't remember what he was doing. But I had spoken with this gentleman several times on the phone. I asked questions of him. One day he just decided to show up. It was at that time that he found out that the woman that took care of entertainment at the Landmark, was black. He came to see me without an announcement. He did not call. He showed up in my office door one day. One of the nicest people I've

ever met. He sat down at my desk and he talked to me, and he talked to me, and he told me, "Anytime you have a question, call me." And I took him up on that offer many times. He was really great. Another person that was very helpful to me, he was the manager for Jimmy Dean back in Tennessee.

Back into the country music.

Right, the country music in Nashville. I knew him on the telephone. For maybe two years we talked on the telephone all the time. Well he was sending little, small groups out -- material on small groups. So we communicated over the telephone. Nice man. I guess maybe with him being in the business for so many years, and knew the business so well, he could tell that I was green. He would talk to me. He wasn't one of those types -- most people would try and push things on you and try and take advantage of you. He was the type that he would tell me things and he would talk to me. So one time he called and says, "I'm going to come out. I'll be out in Las Vegas. My first stop will be to visit with you." He did. Very nice man. A cowboy, with the cowboy boots, the cowboy hat and I'd say early seventies. Very nice man. I learned a lot from him.

You must have developed quite a reputation here in this city, for six years. That's kind of a long time in Las Vegas. What does that mean now that you are thinking about what you're going to do next?

I think one thing that it means now, and all the years that I spent at the Sahara, I've never been satisfied. Not satisfied in a job situation because I did have that.

You had the perfect job.

I had the perfect job. Perfect. At this point in my life, and my age, I don't want it. I don't have the energy.

What do you want to do now?

What I would love to do is -- I would like to write children's books. I would like to have a business from my home. I would like something like that, something that's not going to pin me down to a routine.

No eight-to-five routine.

Right. Driving the same way to work everyday and back.⁶

That's what you think you're going to do in the future, something you're complete in yourself, your own thing?

Right.

Tell me just a little bit about the Sahara. I know you became supervisor of Food & Beverage. Now what does that all entail?

The Food and Beverage Department -- anything, all of the restaurants, all of the bars, anything that has to do with food and beverage. You have your back end, your front end. The front end [is] the restaurants, the food servers, cashiers and the bartenders at the bars. And your back end is the kitchen.

And you supervised all of this?

On one shift, right. We had shift supervisors and I was the one on day shift -- day shift supervisor. Of course after being the administrative assistant -- and in this job though I still took care of the administrative assistant part plus my duties as shift manager. I did them both.

⁶End side 1, tape 2

What was your position when you first started at the Sahara?

Administrative Assistant.

You remained just that for how long?

I'd say for about seven or eight years.

Then from there you became supervisor of food and beverage, plus you were still doing your administrative-assistance job.

Right. The way I was promoted to supervisor -- we have to make note of this because it's very important. The time I was at the Sahara, thirteen years, I went through eighteen Food and Beverage Directors.

Tell me something. After training eighteen Food and Beverage Directors, why didn't they make you Food and Beverage Director?

Well, I did not want that. I didn't. I've never been that fond of the food and beverage job, that industry. It was offered to me by one of the General Managers that was there but I refused. I would rather be the second man. I think about the thirteenth director, when he left, I told everybody, "This is it." And I told myself, "This is it. I'm not training anymore." It's very difficult. It's like starting a new job all over again, all the time.

You had to train these people.

Oh yes, because you come from someplace else. You've got to get accustomed to what's going on there. I thought, "This is it. I won't do any more. I'll just sit." But the man they brought in this time, to introduce to me as my boss as the Director, was a black man. Rudy McMillan.

So that's number fourteen.

Yes. The first ever that I had experienced.

Is it probably the first ever in the city?

Oh no, no. We've had them. Not a lot but he was one. I was so happy. I felt so good for this man. Well, all of a sudden I felt like Harry Williams felt with me, "I'm going to have to take care of her." I felt that way. I thought, "Oh well, here we go. I'll put on my running boots here. I got to take care of this one." So I had to take care of Rudy. Very fine person. He saw my talents. It didn't take him long at all. And it wasn't a matter of him promoting me because I was black and he was black. It was because he knew what my talents were and he could see it. And he could not believe that -- well, he could not believe the salary. He of course promoted me and with the salary increase.

How much of a salary cut did you take to go to the Sahara?

Whew. I would say over one half. It was over one-half. And of course it was a matter of being between jobs and somebody saying at least get your foot in the door. And all those years I stayed.

Did you ever miss the entertainment part of it. It sounds like that was so exciting.

It was, very exciting. I missed it. I missed it so much. As a matter of fact one of the reasons I went to the Sahara was, "Oh, well. You get your foot in the door. You never know." In fact a couple of people told me that, "You might be able to --" but it never happened that way. Oh, I missed it a lot. As a matter of fact even to this day, I still have some people that will call me, when I was at the hotel. Entertainers will call me. They want to know, "How can I get in the lounge there?" And they're talking to me about it and I have nothing to do with that. It was nice then. My girlfriends and I would

sometimes go out, maybe to like a little -- one night one of the girls and I went to this little place. She wanted to see this jazz band in there and we went in just to sit and listen to this jazz and have a cocktail. We were sitting there and all of a sudden when they broke, they came over. I couldn't believe it. They knew who I was. They knew that I was there. They rushed me. It was like, how in the heck did they know? But they know. I was getting some groceries out of the car one night. It was at night. I had the trunk of the car open and I was putting the groceries in the trunk and this person came up to me, "Faye Todd, why don't you ever book me into your room?" And I look around and here's this cigar-smoking Italian. Oh my goodness.

Have you ever thought about your own production company or -- what do you call it -- promotion and production company?

Promotion and production. I had thought of that. As a matter of fact, one of the groups that I used to book a lot, she asked me that. She says, "Faye, you can handle me." But I don't know. I think one reason, I can remember how hard they had to work and how many times I would throw their material in the trash. [laughter] So the side I was on I liked much better. I thought, "I wouldn't be able to sell a group."

What was your day-to-day job like once you became supervisor, other than training these eighteen people?

Okay. The cocktail service, now I don't know why, that was my pet. Everybody said, and I still haven't weaned them -- they call me all day now, too. The cocktail servers, I would go down to make sure they had what they needed. Because my philosophy as being a manager, you take care of your people. You take care of them. If they've got a problem, you look into it and you solve it. If two employees are butting heads and they've got a problem there, you bring them together and you talk to them. And most

importantly, be neutral. I have seen people take sides. I never. And this is the reputation I had at the Sahara. But I'd go down to see how they were doing, the whole bit. I would never have to -- like my counterparts, they would come through and maybe [say], "Why didn't you pick up those glasses?" or "Why are you standing in the station?" I never did that. I would see a glass as I was coming through, I would get the glass and I would take it and set it right over in front of them in the side station. And they're all standing there, I've picked their glasses up, bring it and set it down. I think that did more for them. They would just scatter. And the food servers, say I'd walk through the coffee shop. I did it on a periodic basis, just made my rounds to be seen. As long as they knew you were there and available for them. But most of my work was doing the paper work, taking care of employee-related matters -- disciplinary, the whole bit.

With the position that you've told me about, even started with the first clerical job you had on the Strip onto being supervisor, you were never part of the Culinary Union were you?

No.

Was there ever a union that you belonged to?

No. It was always management.

As a manager, what kind of a relationship did you have with the business agents from the union or the shop stewards there in the hotel?

Okay. I tried to always keep a good relationship with them because I've always felt that you could have more harmony that way. So I tried to keep a good relationship. Now the employees, I was always so fair to them. Naturally they'd sometimes know more than you do about a certain situation and they would come to me and tell me, "Faye, you know

that person should not have been given that shift over this person because -- whatever.” And then I would think and I would talk about it with them and I’d say, “Are you sure?” In the meantime this other person has gone to the union. But whoever the representative is, I would call them and I said, “Well you know, I did this or that or whatever.” I would stop it right in midstream. You take care of the matter right then. Back with entertainment, I dealt with the stagehand’s union a lot, the entertainer’s union. I really decided, “Well, I’d better be very careful with these people.” Because I never worked around this particular union before and I had to be very careful. But there was this one person, he was very lenient with me because I didn’t give him that strong-arm thing. Anytime if something was going to happen, he’d let me know. He says, “You know, they’re coming in.” Meaning the union is going to be in the show. They’d pay their way, naturally -- “They’re going to be in the show and they’re going to see who’s turning the carousels.” So that particular time, Roy and Julius, they turned the carousels. So it was always better to have a good working rapport with them. It’s better.

You know, I don’t know what you want to do right now but I know that it’s going to happen for you.

Well, thank you.

This has been a wonderful interview. I thank you so much.

Well, I thank you.⁷

⁷End side 2, tape 2.

Index

A

African American,
 class relations, 21-22
 dancers, 38
 female executives, 28-29, 48
 high rollers, 48
 hotel guests, 18, 47-48

B

Bennett, Bill, 44
 Black Orchid Club (San Antonio), 23-24
 Brantley, Jackie, 28-29, 34

C

Caroll, Frank, 30
 children, 2, 4, 8
 Clayborne, Roy, 37-38
 Cole, Natalie, 46-47
 consent decree (1971), 12, 15
 customer complaints, 16-18

D

Desert Inn Hotel & Casino, 12, 14, 16,
 18, 25-27, 29, 30, 31, 47
 Dunes Hotel & Casino, 11-14

E

education, 7
 employment, see work
 entertainment directors, 48
 Entratter, Jack, 35

F

family life,
 children, 2, 4, 8
 James (husband), 1-3, 8, 13, 19,
 23, 25, 46
 Kevin (grandson), 12-13, 39
 Feastor, Maurice, 38
 Feastor, Pat, 8, 38
 Flamingo Hotel & Casino, 19-20, 24-25
 Foxx, Redd, 33

G

Gullo, Nick, 27

H

Hilton International Hotel & Casino, 25
 Hines, Gregory,
 father, 48

J

Jackson Street, 21, 24

K

Kirby, George, 33

L

Landmark Hotel & Casino, 29-42, 43,
 46-48
 lounge acts, 25, 32

M

McMillan, Rudy, 51-52
 mentoring, 51-52
 mob, 18-19, 27

N

networking, 48-49
 Nitty, Frank, 27

O

opening acts, 36

P

production show, 37-38

R

race relations,
 in Las Vegas, 3-5, 12, 15,
 18, 19-20
 in San Antonio, 3-5, 4-6

S

Sahara Hotel & Casino, 9, 25, 29,
 44-46, 49-52, 54
 Sands Hotel & Casino, 35
 San Antonio (Texas), 1, 11, 20, 23, 42
 sexual harassment, 43

Silver, Jeff, 32-34, 40
 socializing, 23
Spellcaster, 37-39

T

Todd, James (husband), see family life

U

unions, 54

W

wages, 31, 52

Westside, 4, 6, 21

Williams, Harry, 14-16, 25, 52

Wolfram, Zula & Ted, 30, 31, 33-36,
 39, 40-42

work,

being fired, 14

clerk typist, 10, 11

corporate executive, 32

elevator operator (San Antonio),
 42

Entertainment Director

(Landmark), 48

executive secretary (Desert Inn),
 15

Food & Beverage supervisor

(Sahara), 44, 50, 53

producer (Landmark), 37

reputation, 53-54

responsibilities, 16-17, 50

"revolving door," 12-13, 14

Special Events Coordinator

(Desert Inn), 26