# An Interview with Gertrude Toston

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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The UNLV @ Fifty Oral History Project

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The transcripts 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.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the UNLV @ Fifty Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Claytee D. White, Project Director
Director, Oral History Research Center
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# Preface

Gertrude Toston was born in Galveston, Texas, and grew up in Austin, Texas. Her parents moved to Seattle, Washington, to provide more opportunities for their children but ended up separating. Trudy's mother brought the children to Las Vegas in 1960 to have the support of her sister while she divorced. Her sister's husband, Reverend Coleman, was pastor of Second Baptist Church, and the family became very involved in church activities.

The family settled in Highland Square near Owens and J Streets, and Gertrude's mother supported the family by working at Al Phillips Cleaners, taking in foster children, and selling clothing lines from home. Many of Trudy's relatives had at least some college, and some were teachers or administrators. To Gertrude, it was a given that she would go on to higher education after graduation from Western High School.

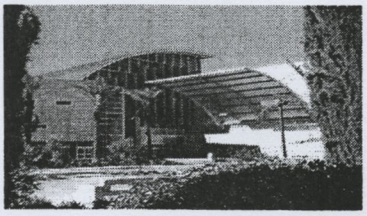
In 1964 Gertrude entered UNLV and began working at the Boulevard store and Head Start to support herself through school. She had several friends who also went to UNLV at that time, and she and Mosella Scott moved in together to share rent and develop their independence. Trudy was introduced to her future husband during this time. They married in 1973 and eventually had two children: a son, Roshawn, born in 1975, and a daughter, Kaneeka, in 1980.

Around 1967, when Trudy was active in the Human Relations Committee, Dr. Barbaro, a professor of zoology and advisor for the HRC, suggested that she apply at Western Airlines since they were hiring. She was hired and trained as a customer service agent, and she ended up working for the airlines for 27 years. When she retired from that job in 1994, she went right back to UNLV for her master's degree. Her mother also enrolled at UNLV and graduated some time after Gertrude.

Back in school once again, but with a greater maturity and sense of purpose, Gertrude worked as a graduate assistant and student teacher advisor. She finished with a degree in special education and was hired at Brinley Jr. High, where she still works today. Mrs. Toston is convinced that UNLV will continue to grow toward bigger and better things, and she intends to continue her education throughout her life.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

# UNLV Oral History Project @ Fifty



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**This is July 21st, 2006. And I'm in the home of Gertrude Toston this morning. We call her Trudy. This is Claytee White for the UNLV Oral History Project at 50.**

**So how are you this morning?**

I'm fine. How are you, Claytee?

**Oh, good. I'm great.**

**Now, tell me a little about your early life and where you grew up.**

Well, I was born in Galveston, Texas, and I was born during the year of the Texas City disaster. That's what was most unusual. The ship came into Texas City Harbor on fire, burning, and the town had to be evacuated. And my mother was about eight months pregnant with me. And so that's how I started. I came in with the blast. But I was born about a month later in Galveston, Texas, and I was born at John Sealy Hospital.

After that I lived in Austin, Texas. I went to school there for about five years. And we moved to Seattle, Washington. We moved more or less for opportunity. During that time the schools were segregated. Texas was segregated. And my parents really wanted more for me than they could give me in the South. So we moved to Seattle where my dad had a sister who had been living there since World War II. So we lived there about three years.

But my mom and my dad separated. She had a sister in Las Vegas, and so we moved to Las Vegas basically to get a divorce and for family support. And when we moved here, my aunt and my uncle pastored Second Baptist Church, which is the largest black church in the state. She only intended to stay here a little while, until she got a divorced and got straightened out. But she ended up marrying and she married a civic leader. And the rest is all history. We've been here ever since.

**Tell me your mother's name.**

Bertha Johnson or Bertha Carroll now. She's remarried since then.

**Are you guys related to Lubertha Johnson?**

No, not her. No, not Lubertha Johnson.

The pastor of Second Baptist was Reverend V.C.L. Coleman. And so she was his wife's sister, Ida Mae Coleman's sister.

**Oh, good. So did you become active in Second Baptist?**

Oh, yes, very much so and different from today because it was a neighborhood-type church. So I and all of the kids in the neighborhood usually went to the same church or around the same vicinity. I can remember going at least two or three times a week for youth choir rehearsal, youth usher board, youth whatever. We were very active in the church.

And now days, though, the churches are so spread out and the neighborhoods are so spread out now -- we're talking about living in West Las Vegas then because 1960 when I moved here was really the first year that schools were integrated, even. And it was even, I think, the first year maybe that the Strip was becoming integrated. And so, therefore, we're talking about a perspective of an all-black neighborhood and that.

**So now, you just said that you came here in 1960?**

Yes.

**I just wanted to make sure I heard that correctly.**

**When I go over to the Westside on Sunday mornings, we still have all of the big churches right there together.**

Yes.

**And people come back because you can't get a parking space over there anywhere. So is it because kids are not that close to the church so they can't participate during the week? Is that what has happened that our children just don't seem to be that --**

I think that may be a contributing factor. I think there are probably many factors or variables that contribute to it. But I think that may be a part of it.

But people don't buy into the neighborhood concept. With integration people sort of try and integrate in their own neighborhood, wherever they're really living. And I think that the Westside is composed now of mostly older people. I think it's an older population.

I don't think even nowadays society puts the same emphasis on church as we did then. That was our mainstay. But nowadays you can pick up inspiration on TV. You have televangelists, you have neighborhood churches, and you have those churches. Sometimes they seem antiquated because I know I make myself go out of habit and usually I plug in, like I say, to Second Baptist because I've been there a long time and it's familiar to me.

But sometimes I think it's turned into something that's not as sacred as it used to be. A lot of it

is about making money, building bigger buildings and taking care of the ministers and the ministries and all of this. So it's just a changing face of the church I think, you know.

**When you first arrived, how old were you?**

I was 12.

**Okay, so a sneaky way to get your age.**

Yeah.

**At 12 years of age, coming from Texas going to Seattle, did you realize the racial situation here in the city?**

No. I really didn't until the first day of school. First of all, I was familiar with segregation because of Austin. And then in Seattle, when I moved there it was integrated and I knew that that was supposed to be better.

But I had as a child overheard a conversation when I first came. I was a little bit behind and I heard a couple of teachers talking. They had me stay after school to remediate me and they were talking near me or in front of me or somehow I heard the conversation that, "Oh, she reads well, but in math she's lousy. You know how those southern schools are and those segregated schools and all that." So I knew from that that there was a difference and there was a difference in me. And then I sort of told my parents what had happened. So they started helping me at home. And I caught up and I felt fine about everything.

When I moved to Las Vegas, the reason why I knew that the schools were just newly integrated or that we were different or that there was a racial overtone was we had this principal -- I went to Jim Bridger Junior High School then. In the seventh grade we came in on a bus. We were all bussed to various schools throughout the city. And one morning on the loud speaker we heard the principal say, "All of the kids on the Westside who road on bus number" -- whatever it was -- "Two report immediately to the cafeteria. You acted terrible this morning. The bus was in terrible shape. And if you keep acting like this, we will not have you back here. You are guests." And he told us this.

So the phones, of course, rang all over the city calling in and letting them know that we were all taxpayers, we had a right to be at the school, and he should be addressing the kids who created the problem and so forth and so on.

So, again, I realized then that there was something about racism and there were differences and so forth. And I think part of my school life in Las Vegas, the reason why I've never been to a high school reunion, although I graduated from Western High School, is I never really felt a part of the school. I worked in the cafeteria and I think I was a member of Future Teachers of America. So I had some things going on, but you never really felt like you were a part or wanted to be a part of really the foundation of the school or that you were looked up to.

Sometimes even African-Americans made you feel that if you were smart or if you were trying to fit in too much that you were acting white. So that started even back then. And then, of course, the whites, there's a strong Mormon connection there. Many of the Mormons then were not as liberal as they even are now because they had not seen that revelation that blacks could be priests or high up in the churches.

So I think we live in just a really racist society. And when I moved here, we found that most of the African-Americans and the whites were from the South. So it wasn't a real change from Texas. A lot of blacks had come from plantation towns. Like I think you will hear people say Tallulah, Louisiana.

My husband is from Louisiana. So when we first visited Louisiana, although he wasn't from Tallulah, we passed through. And he was showing me where Tallulah was and I had to say, "Where? How could all those people from there be from this one little town?"

**All of them came.**

Yes. And so, anyway, it was Tallulah, Louisiana. You had whites that were from Florida and Texas and Louisiana and Mississippi and all over. So it was almost like carrying on what they were used to there. And I think that sometimes contribute to the fact of why we are like we are.

**What kind of work did your mother do when you first moved here?**

When my mother moved here -- when we moved here, my mother was working at a cleaners. I think she worked awhile at Al Phillips Cleaners and maybe even at another place. Then after that, she did some selling like Minnesota Woolens, clothing, from the home. She kept foster children for a while.

She went back to school and graduated after I did, actually, from college. I have one brother. We're 20 years apart. So she had a child by that marriage. She was young when she had me and

sort of the right age when she had him. So she has sort of two "only" children.

**Wow, that's wonderful. Now, when she went back to school, did she go back to UNLV?**

Yes, she did.

**Now, she had some college before coming to Las Vegas?**

She had high school, just high school.

**So she went to college here. Did she ever work in the casino industry at all?**

No.

**How did she feel, with her sister being married to a minister, about the casino industry? And what did she tell the two children?**

I think we've always felt that it was the law of the land. We didn't even really find anything in the Bible that prohibited gambling. We know that people, you know, bid on Jesus' clothes and things like that. It was wrong because it was kind of mockery. And I guess they believed basically in moderation; that you do anything in moderation. Now, they didn't participate in the casino gambling or anything like that. But they knew that it was an industry and treated it as such. They knew people worked in it and depended on it for their livelihood.

**Give me your mother's full name.**

Bertha Lee Hinton is her maiden name. And she was married to Leo Johnson. He was the civic leader, my stepfather. And then she later married Rossy Carroll.

**Leo Johnson --**

Yes. Do you know him?

**-- was a person who was very, very instrumental in some of the programs.**

KCEP, yeah.

**How much do you know about KCEP?**

A lot. I mean as much as I know they --

**Explain the program to me.**

Okay. Well, KCEP -- the Concentrated Employment Program is what it was. It was a federally funded program. It put lots of people to work. It was big in affirmative action because many people who didn't have the experience came through KCEP. My stepfather was the deputy director. So he was instrumental in placing them in jobs. And I think the government maybe paid

part of the pay until they were established. If they were good workers, they remained there and got jobs. I think maybe a girl that I sort of went to school at the same time with, Dorothy Walton, was one of the big success stories, even Johnnie Fae Daniels, probably all started through the Concentrated Employment Program because she was one of the dealers at the Union Plaza. I think she was very successful there until that hotel closed down. Dorothy, I think, worked for the city until retirement. So there were just a lot of -- this was the beginning of real integration, especially when it comes to jobs.

**Now, do you remember which year KCEP -- what is it? -- CEP? Do you remember the year?**

That I'm talking about?

**Yes.**

This would be like anywhere from '64 on. But I'm not sure if that's when it started or whatever, but it would be like that.

**Oh, that's wonderful. And thank you for that information. Leo Johnson is one of the people that we plan to interview.**

Yes, okay.

**School life you told me about. So when you finished high school at Western, what made you decide to go to college? Your mother had not gone to college. What made you decide that?**

Well, like I say, from the beginning they wanted something better for me than they had. I think my dad had an eleventh-grade education and my mother had finished high school. So she, of course, wanted it for me, and my grandmother, just all generations had. Now, that was in my immediate line of people. Like my grandmother's sisters and brothers and so forth, all of them had a little college. They had a teachers college called Seguin that was in Texas, and almost all of them went through there. I have an uncle, my mother's youngest brother, who was an assistant superintendent of Houston schools. I had an aunt who taught for it must be 40 years and her daughter taught. So there were a lot of teachers and educators in my family. And even though my mother hadn't gone to college, she was surrounded by family who had education.

**Good. Could you spell Seguin for me?**

I think it's S-e-g-u-i-n-e (sic) or close.

**I know I can find it on Google.**

So a lot of them had participated in that. Even in the little country town where I used to live with my grandmother sometimes during the summer -- it was called Glen Flora (sic) (Glen Rose), Texas -- we would have teachers who would teach at the school. They would come and do bed-and-breakfast or whatever you want to call it with different people in the community. Some of my great aunts used to keep the teachers and that was the pride of their day was talking about the teachers that lived with them and all of that. So they partook of the culture and this kind of thing.

So it was really great. I didn't really have a bad self-image or I didn't think I couldn't do it. I thought I should do it. And I know that it was something that you needed in order to take care of yourself.

**And why UNLV?**

Because it was here and I felt like that's what we could afford and, if they couldn't afford to send me, I could go myself. And I did start. I worked at Operation Head Start. It was one of my first jobs. I worked at the Broadway, which is now Macy's, a little part-time job. I worked at Head Start with Eva Simmons. She was my first supervisor there while I was a student at UNLV. So it was like on the work-study program. And I worked with Helen Toland. She was Helen Anderson then. And I truly have a lot of respect for her. She was the principal at Kit Carson. And I often say, why don't they change -- they're changing names. Why don't they name Kit Carson after Helen Anderson? They have so many others and stuff. But she was really instrumental.

All of those ladies contributed to my wanting to continue my education and they made it easy for me to do so. So I owe a lot to the community. There were always people coming in doing good things.

**Did you know a person at Head Start named Katherine Joseph?**

I know Katherine Joseph but only later. And I knew her as a seamstress. I think she sewed my daughter's uniform. So I wasn't aware that she was with Head Start. But, no, I didn't know her then.

**And what about Mabel Hoggard? Did you know her since you knew some of the early teachers here?**

I knew her but mostly of her. David Hoggard, of course, worked with Reverend Johnson with CEP. But I didn't know her like up close and personal. I was younger. So they just were mentors sort of.

**That's wonderful. You grew up at a great time here in Las Vegas.**

Yes, I did.

**How would you compare Seattle -- well, I guess you really did it. But any other comments on Seattle versus Las Vegas or comparing the two of them?**

In Seattle I will admit that I felt like a little fish in a big pond. And in Las Vegas I felt more like a big fish in a little pond because there was opportunity all around. Seattle is such an established town. There's a lot to do there that it's easy kind of to get lost. And unless you are from there or have grown up there, it's kind of hard to find your niche.

But I think my church life flourished in Seattle. I can remember that Billy Graham brought a crusade there and we participated as kids. I can remember when Martin Luther King was marching down South, we did fundraisers and we sang and stuff as youth there. And we had a wonderful pastor, Reverend Ware, who had a youth church. He sort of taught us a lot about church. Even though my uncle had a church here, I really feel like my Christian experience was based in Seattle.

**Oh, that's interesting.**

**Tell me about UNLV's application process when you started there? How difficult was it? How easy was it? How did you feel as a senior from high school now getting ready to go to college and applying?**

Then it seemed very easy because I think I knew that because I was from here they probably would not turn me down if I had a good enough grade point average. I did have a good grade point average. I think I graduated in the top ten percent. But the interesting thing about that is that my counselor didn't know that I did and he told me at the exit interview that he wished he had discovered that I was such a good student earlier because he could have told me about some scholarship opportunities, more out of state. And so he came up with a few scholarship offers, but they were much too costly. I knew that I couldn't as a high school student swing it and I didn't think my parents could either.

So UNLV was just the place to go. And it was good. And I love that, too. UNLV was really a good experience, even though sometimes I rode the bus to UNLV. I didn't have a car or whatever. So the city bus was transportation. I made friends with people like Jerry Lockhart and Clyde Dawson and stuff. And they used to give us rides back and forth. But all that was there was maybe about three buildings and one of them was a little student union, which is now surrounded by a massive building.

**Now, do you know that there is a new student union that will open in August?**

I don't, but I don't doubt it.

**So three buildings. Now, which year are we talking about?**

We're talking about 1965, '66. So you're not even talking about the same student union that I am.

**Oh, no, you're right.**

Because you're talking about the one in Flora Dungan. But you know where registration is now, that little registration building in the very center [Maude Frazier]?

**Yes.**

There used to be one room in the middle there.

**Yeah, because I'm talking about the Moyer Student Union.**

Yeah, right.

**So that's a -- okay. And now I'm talking about a new one after Moyer.**

So it's even back.

**Isn't that something?**

**Now, where did you live?**

I lived on Freeman Avenue in Highland Square.

**So tell me where that is.**

That's bordered by Martin Luther King and J Street, Owens and J.

**So you are near Owens and J. Is that near Doolittle and --**

Yes.

**-- the library?**

And Matt Kelly. Yes. And Agassi now.

**Yes. Okay, good. Now, is that where your family always lived once they moved to Las**

**Vegas?**

Yes, pretty much other than my mom and I lived with Reverend Coleman and his wife, which they live in that same area. They just lived on L Street. We lived on Freeman.

**Okay, good. What kind of community activities did the children on the Westside participate in at that time in the 60s?**

You know, other than church and like the community youth choir and we used to have the place called The Center, which was where K-CEP sort of is now and there were dances that were held there on Friday or Saturday nights, besides that, we did things like play ball in the desert. There were a lot of open spaces. So it was fun to just get the whole neighborhood, a group of kids to go and just get a baseball game going or something out in the desert and play there or ride bicycles. That's all we did.

But we didn't have very much organized activity, not until the late teens. And then everybody knows about Le Femme Douze. I was too shy. So I didn't even participate in it, even though I had been invited.

**Well, would you please explain what Le Femme Douze is?**

Well, it's a group of ladies, professional ladies, who do the debutante ball. And it's the coming out of sorts and it's a fundraiser and introduction to society. I guess it was hard to even imagine that Las Vegas had a society to be introduced to. So...

**Yes. And I just went to one of their affairs. They're still doing it, as you probably know. I went to the affair last year and I was really impressed, still.**

It's beautiful. Yeah.

**It was wonderful.**

**What were your first impressions of UNLV?**

That it was going to be difficult. It did what college does to most kids. It wakes them up and lets them know that it's going to be not a plaything. I can remember that I didn't have to take bone-head English. A lot of my friends did. And so I was feeling pretty good about myself. But I can remember this teacher I had, Dr. Jaffe, I think is her name, and she taught English. And I'd write a paper. She'd give me a D on it. I'd write the revision, she'd give me an F. And you're talking about self-esteem going down. She never thought my papers had much substance to them.

So it took her pretty much a half a semester to teach me how to write like she wanted me to write. And I managed to do okay in it. I got a C or whatever in English.

But just things like that, in essence, is what it did. It stopped us from just sitting in the student union playing cards and not taking it real serious. I think sometimes when you go to school at home you think it's just like high school.

**Well, that's good. That wake-up was really good.**

**Who are some of the other professors that you had during this four-year period for your bachelor's?**

I had Dr. Wright, who was in the history department. And I think the most touching moment with him was we were in his class the day that Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed and he actually cried. And I think that before that, I thought he was really conservative. I hated the way he taught about slavery and how the slaves were happy and singing in the fields and how it was because of the economy that it was never a moral issue that slavery was ended and all of that. But then he showed the human side of him. He was teaching the material that he was given to teach. But that he felt touched, I liked that.

I always had Dr. -- what's his name? -- Dr. Hess for psychology. I had doctor -- I had a philosophy teacher that's still out there. And I can't even remember his name. I had all of the people in the education department. You'd probably have to help me with names. But I had pretty much everybody that was out there at that time. I see a lot of their pictures posted on the board as retired. I had Dr. Lockett for one class. And I think she's an African-American teacher, maybe one of the few families that lived in Boulder City.

**That's right. What was your major?**

Elementary education and a minor in social studies.

**So is the current education building that we have now, that big white structure, was it there at the time for education classes? Or I should say where were your education classes taught?**

And, you know, because there were only -- the building that was for education was that front building that's up there by the theater and all of that.

**So Maude Frazier?**

Yes, Maude Frazier.

**Isn't that something?**

Yeah.

**Have you seen the campus recently?**

It's been probably five, six years.

**Okay, good. Tell me about the student activities because you were working and going to school. Did you have any time for any kind of clubs or activities on campus?**

Well, I pledged a sorority when I first got there, but we didn't make it. There were three of us that pledged. And when I say "three of us," still there's segregation, Claytee. You just have to understand. We still sort of segregated together whether it was legal or not just because you were familiar and you had more in common that you did things with and stuff. We all lived in the same neighborhood and probably were the same socioeconomic status and that. But, anyway, we pledged. One made it; two did not.

Later, though, a couple years later, I was one of the founders of Eta Chi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. Yeah, so, anyway, they finally got enough girls on campus and we pledged.

**Tell me which sorority you pledged at first.**

I don't even know. It was just a sorority. Maybe Gamma was in its name, but it was just...

**Okay. Now, tell me about forming a chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. How did you go about that?**

Well, we went about that mostly, again, through the alumni chapter. We had an undergrad on campus from Grambling, and her name was Leanette and I don't remember her last name. But she talked us into it. She told us how great Delta was on the campus at Grambling and, oh, we just needed this. So there were about five or six of us that all started out. We did it and it was good. It was successful. And I think Eta Chi still exists and they still do it.

**So do you remember the six?**

I probably have pictures of that I can show you.

**Oh, good. One of these days I want to get some pictures and scan them.**

Okay.

**Was Delta, then, the first sorority on campus, you think, that was geared to the**

**African-American culture?**

I'm almost sure it was, yeah.

**At that time did we have the male fraternities, any black fraternities?**

No.

**So, wow, Delta was paving the way.**

**Do you remember anybody in administration at the university at the time who was president or anything like that?**

You'd have to say names and then I would remember who was. It was somebody that was in -- let's see.

**Goodall?**

I remember the name, but I don't know anything about him.

**Maxson?**

No. He's later years.

**Baepler?**

Baepler, yeah.

**So you remember some of those names?**

Yeah, right.

**But at that time I guess it never struck you to see what the administration was doing, what some of the advances on campus -- what were some of the advances that you saw going on?**

In my opinion it was a very quiet movement. But I don't know if that's because I just wasn't plugged into it because I was working and going to school. So I wasn't paying much attention. I really just don't know. But the kind of progress that you would see was usually silent. It was mostly athletics that we noticed.

**What kind of things did you notice in the sports?**

The basketball and so forth, that we were pretty good at that. Roland Todd, I can remember him. He was a basketball coach. But I'm having difficulty thinking about who else was running the school or whatever. And I remember we played the University of Houston and almost beat them and that was good enough for us. So it was just things like that. I don't remember a lot other than the buildings that came up slowly. That's all I know.

**Okay. When you started at UNLV, did you already have a core group of friends that came from high school, the same high school as you, into college with you?**

No. A couple of us maybe had gone to the same church, but not necessarily the same school. And I can remember especially Claudette Enus, Connie Nichols, and her brother that went also at the same time I did and, like I said, Jerry Lockhart who was there already when we got there. Clyde Dawson was a transfer from a junior college that played ball. Jerry Chandler, who I think is a coach at Long Beach State now or an assistant coach, he was there. He was older, too. He had been in the service and he had come back to school to play for UNLV. John Trapp was a ball player. Rose Carroll, she's from an old family here --

**(End side 1, tape 1.)**

-- Rose Carroll -- not to school -- but she was from Rancho and I was from Western. But her mother was a minister in the neighborhood on the Westside, which was unusual then because they didn't have very many female pastors. Reverend Mary Carroll was her name.

I went to school with Mosella Scott. She remains a good friend. We were roommates through college after I moved away from home. We lived together in an apartment near the school on Koval and Flamingo way back then.

So we weren't really from the same high schools, but we sort of formed just a community of caring, I guess, with each other.

**Good. Now, tell me about moving away from home. How did that happen? What did your parents think of that? Did it mean that you were working more? Explain that to me.**

They didn't really want me to move away from home, but I needed the feel of leaving home just to feel independent and I guess for my own identity in the fact that I didn't get to go away to school to be my own person or something. I guess every kid just sort of needs that. So I did.

I met Mosella. She was from Mississippi and she worked at the hotel. She was putting herself through school, as well. So we just became great friends. At one time we decided we would just try it on our own. We liked the idea of decorating our own place and being able to go out when we wanted to. And we did like to dance, which we used to go out almost every weekend dancing.

They had dancing at the top of the Flamingo and they had dancing at the Hilton and they had dancing at the Pussy Cat A Go-Go. So we did those kinds of things besides going to clubs even

on the Westside because I think then Bob Bailey had a club on Miller. The name eludes me now. It later became the Colony Club. We never really went to the Colony Club too much. But he did have a place on Miller Avenue that was nice.

And so we just were ready to grow up. This happened when I was about 20, 21.

**I want to know about the dancing that was available. What kind of dancing? Did you have to have a partner when you went in? How did that work?**

You didn't have to have a partner. It was informal. You just had to be of age. And sometimes you could sneak through because I think we probably started sneaking through. But we noticed that the main thing, if you came with a guy, you weren't scrutinized too much. If you came just as women, they'd want some kind of ID. You couldn't sit at the bar without being harassed because they thought maybe you were prostituting or something like that. But other than little rules like that, it was just dancing, rhythm and blues and whatever. They had bands, a lot of live entertainment.

Plus, we could go to lounge shows then like Gladys Knight and the Pips, Redd Foxx. We saw all of the big name entertainers just for two drinks and a cover and just had a great time. You didn't even have to buy alcohol. You could just buy Cokes and sit there.

**And a cover, did you have to pay a cover charge?**

Well, that was the cover, the two drinks.

**Oh, the two drinks served as a cover, okay.**

Yeah. So you didn't even have to pay to get in or anything. You just nursed those drinks all night and you saw some of the best entertainment ever. So...

**Did you get to see Sammy Davis?**

I have seen Sammy Davis, yeah.

**And the clubs on the Westside, tell me then, you are of age to go to some of the clubs on Jackson Street.**

But I've never been. Maybe one time. When Roosevelt and I got married, we went to Town Tavern to dance one time. The clubs had kind of dwindled then, even though Reverend Johnson had been instrumental in opening The Cove hotel on Jackson Street. But I was too young then. So I didn't go there other than just to see where he worked.

**What were some of the things you heard about The Cove?**

Just that it was a good place. They thought it was going to be the beginning of great things for Jackson Street. They thought that The Cove hotel opening there would uplift the neighborhood and that there would be plenty of going on and all that kind of stuff. But it just didn't. It seemed like too many undesirables and stuff hung out there and it just never took off.

**Wow. Because it was really a wonderful looking building.**

Yes.

**We have photographs of it.**

**Tell me about meeting your husband.**

We met at a friend's party.

**Now, is this while you were at UNLV?**

Um-h'm. And, actually, Clyde Dawson, whom I had mentioned before, was a friend to both of us. And a girl whose name is Emma -- I think she may be a teacher in the school district now -- her name was Emma Anderson then, was having a party. And so Clyde said, "Gertrude, I've got somebody I want you to meet." And he said, "Y'all will fit really well together," or, "You'll like each other very much."

So we had this party. And this guy came in and he spoke very softly and he danced with me one time. Clyde introduced us. And, to tell you the truth, I didn't really hear his name because he spoke so softly. So I said, "Oh, he's a nice guy." He seemed like everybody kind of liked him. You know what I mean? He was just a social butterfly. And I wasn't because I was kind of stand offish and I was wondering why Clyde thought I would like this guy.

After he flirted around so much or people were flirting with him, I had kind of ruled him out and I had told Clyde, I said, "Clyde, even his slacks are too big for him and he keeps going outside." So I was running him down, mostly because I didn't think he was paying me as much attention as I'd like for him to.

The girl who was hosting the party was just so impressed with Roosevelt. So she came over and she said, "Oh, Trudy, oh, that guy. What's his name? Do you know what his name is?" I said, "Oh, I think his name is Robert." So the strangest thing is that he told her his name was Robert. And so that was the thing that sort of bound us because I told her Robert. I could have

told her I didn't know, but I just told her Robert because I figured, oh, go make a fool of yourself. So, anyway, I did.

So we met like that at the party. We became fast friends. I invited him to some kind of a political thing at UNLV. Jean Dunn or Jean Childs was running for office and she was a friend. So we were going to support her. But then he said he would be my date or he would escort me. He called later in the week and said, well, he wasn't sure because he was coming down with a cold and could his friend Fred stand in? And I said, "Who are you kidding? It took all the nerve I had for me to invite you." I said, "I don't want a stand-in. If you don't want to go, just don't go. I'll go by myself or whatever."

So we didn't hit it off really well. But he took me to that event. And from then on we started a very good friendship. And we dated for about five years before we married.

**That's wonderful. Tell me about graduation ceremonies at that point. So you graduated in about 19 --**

'71.

**-- 71. Tell me about graduation.**

Graduation was sort of uneventful for me. We just graduated because, like I said, it took me a couple extra years because I was working and sometimes I'd just take a class or two. But I wouldn't really stay on the program or whatever. My advisor was really good and I got through my student teaching and all of that. So I graduated, just an average student, and just glad to have the degree. And then I didn't quit the airlines. I continued to work.

**Airlines? You never told me about the airlines. What do you mean the airlines?**

Well, Head Start was just for a minute. It just was a little job. It paid a dollar-twenty-five per hour. So Dr. Barbaro, who was the professor of zoology, but was also with the Economic Opportunity Commission, gave me a little card because we all knew of Dr. Barbaro. He worked with us with the Human Relations Club, he and his wife, at UNLV. We had like a Human Relations Club with where we did march a little bit. We did do a few things, really, in the community. We marched for the Consent Decree and all of that down with the other people with the NAACP or whoever it was. We participated and we tried to talk about things that were going on on campus. They sort of advised us and kept us up with what needed to be done and tried to

keep us serious. They really made a big contribution.

**And tell me who were some of the community leaders that worked with you on the Human Relations -- Committee?**

Um-h'm. Well, it was mostly Dr. Barbaro and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Barbaro. And the rest of us were students. Ms. G worked with us. She was an older student, but more or less as you say an alternative student because she had returned to school later. Just a group of students, really. But we plugged into people like Joe Neal in the community, Woodrow Wilson at the state level, just different people. So they sort of tapped into us.

Well, Dr. Barbaro gave Jean Dunn and me an Equal Rights Commission card and said, "This Western Airlines is hiring. They have no African-Americans at all. And they say you need two years of college. Why don't you guys go and apply? It will make a good job. Maybe they'll hire you part time. I know they hire part time."

So we did. We went. Jean decided she wouldn't go. She either got something better or didn't want to commit to it. But I did and I took my first flight on Western Airlines.

**What was your position?**

Customer service agent. I was too young to be a flight attendant yet. Plus, I really didn't want to be in the air. I did want to continue school. And I started and they hired me full time. They trained me. They sent me to Los Angeles for three weeks. So I quit Head Start. I worked in reservations is how I started. We did things like Cardex, which was filing. We did things like on an old-fashion machine called a Resitron where it would signal yellow if a flight was booked part of the way and green if the flight was open all the way and red if it was full, you know, and this kind of thing. So it was just old-fashion material with the very beginning of the airline here. That was 1967 that I started at Western Airlines.

So I was going to school all the time while I was doing that. I'd work swing shift or graveyard and I'd go to school during the day. That's how I got through and that's how I paid my way through school.

**So now, how long did you stay with Western?**

I stayed with Western until they were bought by Delta. My career spanned over 27 years. I just left about -- when I saw you at UNLV and I told you I remembered you from the library, I was

leaving the airlines then. I was in transition then. And I was working in the department of special education.

**So let me go back. When you got your degree at UNLV, you continued with the airline?**

Right. And for a couple of reasons. One reason was mostly economic. I said, "If I leave here, I'll be taking a cut in pay of so many thousands of dollars." I was married -- let me see. Was I married to Roosevelt? No, not yet. I wasn't married to him yet. But I was saying, "Well, this would be a good opportunity to travel because I didn't go all the places that I wanted to go because I was working." So I didn't leave. The money was the main thing.

Roosevelt and I married in 1973. He was in the TV news business then, so that was good. We got a lot of perks in town like going places and so we could travel together on the airlines. So I said, "Well, this is a pretty good lifestyle. I don't really need to teach." And then when I had my children -- my son was born in '75 -- I said, "Well, I'll stay a little longer and then expose them to some travel and all of that." So it got to be that. It was one of those things where everything was just sort of deferred because it was too good to leave.

But, in a way, it wasn't just something I really wanted to do all my life. So when deregulation came about and later after deregulation, there were so many things going on with the airlines, it just made it not such a great place to be anymore. They had two-tiered pay and a lot of stress. So in 1994 it was when I left. I said, "You know, I finished college so I can have choices. Why am I still coming in here day to day?"

So when they offered me something, a win-win situation where I could have travel privileges pretty much the rest of my life if I wanted to -- they didn't give me much money to leave, but they said that, you know, you can have this perk. And it was enough. It was the ticket out. So I took that out. I went back to UNLV and got my master's in special education.

**So now, what do you mean by "two-tiered pay"?**

For instance, people who had seniority and were protected by the union, perhaps, were making top salary. But they may bring in a new person who's part time or give them no benefits and pay them seven, eight dollars an hour to do the same job that we were paid much more for. Well, that brings with it an attitude. The airline may employ the person and they may think at first this is a great opportunity. But then when they see that they're doing equal work to the person making more

money, then they change attitudes and it makes it very stressful. From time to time you would have people that would just leave you with all the tickets to count and they'd go on to the next duty or something, just pile-the-work-on-you sort of thing. So it was sort of an unfair work situation.

**And so when it became Delta, do you remember which year that you --**

It was 1987.

**So that was a great career.**

But I continued working seven more years. I didn't leave until '94.

**Wow, I like that. And you decided to go back to UNLV in 80 --**

In '94.

**In '94, okay. So you worked until --**

Right. So I finished at UNLV and then I got hired at Brinley [Middle School] and that's where I am now.

**So now, tell me about going back to UNLV in 1994. What were the changes that you saw because you had graduated in '71 and now you're going back in '94? Twenty-something years.**

Massive changes and I never felt so old until I got there because I thought it was going to be a simple thing. I was just going to take a class and I didn't know where to start, but I was going to take a class in education because I knew I had a degree. But I knew it was an old degree. I hadn't really kept it up. I had taken maybe two or three classes during the time but not really working toward anything and trying to keep my certification.

The only thing that was open was a class in introduction to special education. So I said, "Oh, I'll take that because I've read a lot about special education and I know it's going to be a part of it. So, hmm, I'll do that." But I didn't think about it as a special education teacher. I was thinking of how to cope with it just as generally a teacher. So I took a class from Dr. Thomas Pierce, who's now the chairman of the special education department I believe. And he really was a carryback (sic). He wore his hair in a long ponytail. He looked like somebody from Haight-Ashbury or Berkeley or something. He sat on top of the table to teach and all this kind of stuff. He said some good things. He made me think that it was a field that really needed me and that I really had what it took to be a part of it. So I bought into that.

He noticed me. I scored well in his class and I was outspoken. I think older students sometimes make the better students because they're too dumb to shut up. They just talk and tell everything they know and stuff. So, anyway, I participated. And he asked me one day if I would be interested in working at UNLV? What was happening with me -- he found out that I had left the airlines and I was in transition and I was drawing unemployment, but it was going to be short-lived because I really wasn't going to take a job. I was going to continue with school. So really I became a teaching assistant in the department and I worked there for 18 months until I got my degree and then got the job at Brinley.

The special education department at UNLV was so inspirational. I think it was one of the best times of my life. Now, I don't know if that's because of the age because you just get smarter as you get older, really. You do get wiser and you just know different things. I guess you know yourself better. But they really gently took me back because they knew, too, that there had been a big gap in my education. So they showed me. I worked as a supervisor of the student teachers for a while. I went from school to school, so I got to find out where many of the schools were. I worked on their evaluations where you input it into the computer and do the database. So they gave me some computer experience and I worked for a while in advising and field placement so that I knew what different things were, like programs and stuff, which I certainly didn't know when I was going to school. All I would do is go in and see the advisor and he'd tell me what to take and I'd go take it and that was it, not realizing that there are consequences if you don't stay on program or whatever, this kind of thing. So they just really gently guided me and gave me what I needed I felt. And so I really am appreciative of that time. And I loved it. I really enjoyed it.

I think special education is a very good field. I really do. I just wish that all teachers had special education training and that we weren't segregated. I think special education, I guess, has proved to follow more or less racial segregation with the laws. What I mean is the progress that they make. And that all people should be integrated. I think the CC teaching that I'm doing now is really what it is about. And once we mesh and get it all going so that you can just give all kids what they need, then I think that would be the perfect world.

**So do you think special education students should be in the same classrooms?**

Yes. And now, I wouldn't even limit that. Sometimes we limit it to say -- not the ones that are

physically impaired so much or whatever. But I'm almost of the mind that if they are able to go to school, they should be able to be in the same classrooms. Now, I know there probably are kids with mental issues or something like that, then maybe they should -- and I don't even know then if it should be segregated out or if it should be a pullout where you let them get what they need somewhere else, if it's that specialized.

**Because they do have to live in the same world.**

Yes. Right, exactly.

**Well, this is great.**

**Did you join any kind of organizations? Did you have time because now you're raising a family?**

Right.

**And I want to know the name -- your son was born in '75. What is his name?**

Roshawn.

**And then when was your daughter born?**

She was born in '80. She's Kaneeka.

**So raising a family and going back to school. And your kids now, though, are older now.**

They're grown, yeah.

**Okay. So what did they think about mom going back to school?**

I don't think they thought much about it. And, really, they played a part in me going back. I kind of had always been just mom. Dad always was the high profile person and I had always sort of stayed home and just been sort of the foundation of giving them what they needed because my husband traveled a lot and stuff like that. And then it just occurred to me. I said, "I want them to have the stamina. I want them to go back to school." And I guess the fact that my son didn't choose to go to college, he chose to just work, be average -- he wanted to be a great rapper. I could see his dreams crumbling. My daughter was still in school, so she was a little bit impressionable, but she was a good student anyway. And it's sometimes easier for girls anyway. So I said, "Let me set a good example for her, show her how you have to stick to it or how you can always go back." And you know what? God always gives you enough to start over. And so I said, "Let me just show them, too. I want to influence them in some way. I'm more than just

mom. You can be whatever you can be."

And so they played a part of it. I think they were both just very proud of me. My son still chose not to choose education as his life form. But then, actually, you have them so that they can live free to be what they want to be and make their decisions. My daughter graduated from the school of pharmacy. She did her undergraduate work at Temple University. She majored in forensic anthropology and now she's graduated from pharmacy school. She's about to make us grandparents again. My son has two children. So I'm about to become a grandmother for the third time.

And I think education is ongoing. I will never stop being educated. Even as far as school is concerned, I will probably seek more schooling even throughout my life.

**How do you feel about -- I asked several questions at the same time a few minutes ago. Did you join any organizations this time around?**

CEC, I did, the Council of Exceptional Children. That's sort of like a national organization, but they have a part on campus at UNLV. So I worked with that for a little while, not that active, but I did. Other than that, professionally, no, not really that I can think of. Just school stuff, but not any organization.

**And in '94 I believe we were close to getting Carol Harter as president. Eleven years ago...**

I think she was already president, I think. Yeah, I remember her.

**Okay. What were the major changes on campus from the first time and then going back?**

Registration was the big difference.

**Okay. What was the difference?**

It used to be lines just throughout the gym. I can remember registering and you had the letter of your name up there and you stood in that line forever.

Now this time around, this is what made me feel old -- besides them having to go to the archives to dig me out which took about 20, 30 minutes. I was sitting there wondering if I had ever been a student for them to find a record of me. Then you register by telephone using a credit card with a menu. And you're talking about processing, it took me awhile to process that whole thing.

But once I got the knack of it, it's a much better thing and I think it's just typical of this

information age that we live in, that we can just do anything.

**What about the cost? Did that strike you?**

It's very expensive I think, especially for a state school. But I don't know what to compare it to. But I imagine it is expensive. Now, with that, when I was going back with my master's I didn't have to pay the whole thing. I think they paid 80 percent.

**Because you became a GA.**

Yes. And I only paid 20 percent. So I didn't feel it that badly and I didn't take out any loans. But when I think about the kids now that actually take out these loans, it's terrible. It's a deficit to start out owing so much money just for your education.

**And education is probably, though, one of the most important things that you'll ever do.**

Exactly. And so, yeah.

**I want to get back to the organization you belonged to the first time around. It was the Human Relations Club. You mentioned earlier that you participated in the Consent Decree activities.**

Well, in marching for it, yes.

**Yes. Tell me first what the Consent Decree is and then how you participated.**

Well, basically, the Consent Decree was an agreement between the NAACP and the hotels. It was to hire so many African-Americans or to get them into positions where they could receive promotions and have equal jobs with their white counterparts. Marching was a real thorn in the side back then. They often would not want you to protest or do anything. And they still don't even now, like with the teachers. I think we marched for salaries year before last or something on the Strip. And it still is discouraged. But back then it was really sort of a no-no, even in the black community. They were saying that the gangsters or the organized crime was going to play a part if anybody was so bold as to be marching and protesting on the Strip or downtown. But we actually protested on the Strip and downtown, I believe. It was a part of the NAACP. Whenever they marched, we marched with them.

**And you actually remember marching on the Strip?**

I'm trying to think if it was the Strip or if it was just downtown. And I'm not sure. But we would have marched whenever they marched. And I know the Strip was involved because the Strip was

the main part that the Consent Decree needed to play a part.

**Okay. UNLV is still changing rapidly, changes that you've talked and then lots of other changes. Right now one of the things that's happening is satellite campuses. Are you aware of that and how do you feel about going in that direction -- that the university is going in that direction?**

I think it's progressive and I think it's good because the town is growing so fast and the traffic is so bad and people just need some conveniences. They need to be encouraged. It seems that I read some kind of statistic awhile back that less than ten percent of the population has a college education in Las Vegas. So if they can do anything to help people become educated, I think that it's important. Is that the same as distance education? Do they call them the same? Or distance is through the computer?

**Right. That's correct.**

And I think that that even is good, too. That's good progress. We as teachers can take distance education classes. I participate with the regional education. What do they call it? Like Southern Utah University, they offer classes, and that's how we do our professional development many times so that we can re-certify. So all of that I think is a plus. I think that's all progress and I think it's good.

**What do you think of as the value of a university like UNLV in a city like Las Vegas? You just said that only ten percent of the people have degrees. So what role does UNLV play?**

Well, I think it plays a big part. But I think some things I've seen or heard point toward the community colleges playing a bigger part because the university, of course, is the four-year course and higher. And around here people with associate degrees probably can operate better. I think the jobs that we have to offer here, the abundance of jobs in tourism and gaming and so forth, would not necessarily require a four-year degree, or at least not for everybody. It seems like it would be kind of a waste of time. So for the professionals that we have in the different areas like teaching and doctors and this kind of thing, I think it plays a great part because it gives them a choice.

**What do you see as the future of UNLV?**

Probably only bigger and better things for UNLV because -- I guess it's the School of Medicine

they have here. They have the School of Dentistry I believe. And I think they're getting a School of Pharmacy. My daughter went to the private one. But if I'm not mistaken, they are going to get a School of Pharmacy. Just different disciplines, I think it's great. I think it's good. It's going to be bigger and it's going to grow and get better.

**And that really ends the questions that I have. Any other comments about any aspect of the community, the university?**

Let me understand. This is the 50th anniversary of UNLV?

**2007.**

That we're celebrating in 2007. What are they going to do with these oral histories?

**We are going to house them in the library. And in the future people who want to do research -- so we do different projects. And people who want to do research will have this material available.**

Okay. All right. Oral as well as written history, then.

**That's correct.**

In case they've left something out of the books, right?

**That's correct.**

Well, that's good.

**Well, thank you so much.**

Thank you.

**(End side 2, tape 1.)**