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An Interview with Monroe Williams

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Claytee D. White, Project Director
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Preface

Monroe Williams came from Mississippi to Las Vegas in 1943 with his parents and siblings. They settled in Carver Park in Henderson and Mr. Williams remembers tents and houses built of railroad ties. He recalls many of the black families who owned homes and property on the Westside, the hunting he and his friends used to do in the desert washes, and his early schooling at Westside School and Rancho High School.

Monroe was one of the first black firefighters in Las Vegas and today is involved in real estate. He shares many memories of incidents, personalities, and businesses from the sixties through the nineties. His wife Brenda has held several jobs and now works for Senator Bryan.

Mr. Williams gives many details, opinions, and comments on everything he has witnessed over the past fifty years. He has been involved with the NAACP, Prometheus Circle, school integration, and Operation Independence. Monroe recalls in detail many stories and anecdotes concerning Las Vegas, the Westside, downtown, and the Strip.

Monroe was in the Navy for two years, attended some classes at Nevada Southern University (now UNLV), and worked at Ranch Market on the Westside. He ran a real estate company and a property management company while serving his town as a firefighter. His phenomenal memory creates a very detailed picture of Las Vegas as a small town going through the growing pains of integration, Mob influence, and expansion.

[Editor's Note: interview by Claytee White already in progress] She was one of the coordinators for the Westside School Alumni Association. And what they did is they got together all the alumni of that school, which was the only school in this area that blacks attended in the early, early years.

Okay. Her name is Betty Scott?

Betty Scott, yeah. And she's easy to find because she's a member of the Nevada Black Attorneys Association. I'm not sure what the formal name is, but she's a member of that. She used to work in the bankruptcy courts, but now I think she works for herself.

Good. I will find her.

Yeah. She's easy to find. As a matter of fact, I think my wife knows her.

Oh, yeah. Your wife knows a lot of people.

Yeah, she knows how to get in touch with her. But they put together a reunion, which was amazing to me, of not only people that had gone to that school but also some of the teachers that had taught there. And they put together a booklet that had pictures and information that I had completely forgotten about, really.

How long ago was the reunion?

Oh, the reunion was maybe about seven or eight years ago. Maybe a little longer than that.

Wow.

But the people that were there were like the principal that was not only the principal but teaching there when I went to school. She was my kindergarten teacher. Like I say, some of the teachers and some of the people have moved away, and some people came from as far away as New York.

That's wonderful.

And I'd say it was about 500 people.

I will find her. I will find Betty Scott. Do you happen to still have a copy of that program?

You know, I looked and I looked and I looked. As a matter of fact, my wife asked me for it the other day. And then when you asked me if there was anything that I could refer back to like any pictures or anything, again...And I've seen it as recently as probably a month ago, and I don't

know what I did with it. But I know I didn't throw it away. It's just something that I probably said, well, I've got to put this here. And then wherever that spot is...It'll come to me eventually, I guess.

Good, good.

But like I say, there were some early, early pictures, you know, early, early.

I can't wait to get my hands on one of those.

Yeah. And this is probably just a part. I mean, the booklet was just a part of probably a collection that somebody had or that they put together, that the alumni association put together.

I will find Betty Scott.

As a matter of fact, they gave me an award during that. It was a series of things that happened; picnic, a dinner, a breakfast and things like that. And then I received an award at the dinner.

Wonderful. Now, give me your full name again.

Monroe Williams.

Okay. This is Claytee White. And I'm with Mr. Williams in his home here in Las Vegas. Today is August 15th, 2000. I'd like to know about your early life. You don't remember Vicksburg, Mississippi where you were born. So when did you come here?

1943.

Okay. How old were you at that time?

Three years old.

Okay. So tell me about your parents. What are their names?

My father's name was Noah, N-o-a-h. And my mother's name was Ernestine. My first recollection was he worked at the Basic Magnesium plant. It was in the Henderson area. The Basic Magnesium plant is still there. But there was another plant a little further down that did some type of work that required a lot of labor and a lot of people.

And then my mother, when she left Mississippi, I think she worked as a waitress. But when she came here, you know, those jobs weren't available to black folks. And that's all they used in the South, you know, was black folks in that type of menial job back there. But here it paid a little money, you know. But she worked in different jobs as a maid. She worked in the

kitchen at Las Vegas Hospital, which was a hospital downtown. It's no longer there. It was at the corner of Eighth and Ogden. And I think they just replaced it, as a matter of fact, with some senior housing that was recently put there.

I don't know how they heard about Las Vegas, as I think back on it now. But it appeared, as I think about it, that they came about the same time that a lot of other people came. And a lot of people say, well, it was all because of the dam and things like that. And that could have been. But as I recollect, there were quite a few other jobs in construction and different things like that that attracted a lot of people, especially in the labor force, you know. So they lived here all their lives. They never moved.

My father got sick probably around '65, I think. When he retired from construction, he worked as a custodian at Western High School, and he worked there until he developed a stroke. Then my mother worked at places like motels and things like this as a maid. As a matter of fact, her longest period was at a place called the Ye Kings Rest Motel, which was on Las Vegas Boulevard and Bonneville, and it was there for a long time. She worked quite a few years for them.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

Yeah, I've got one brother that's living. And my sister, she died in '85. My brother works for a contractor that has a contract with North Las Vegas Housing Authority as a laborer.

And his name?

Noah Williams, Jr.

Okay. And your sister's name?

Her name was Herdisine Williams.

Okay. So you never heard your parents tell the story of why they came?

No. They never talked about it, or it didn't mean anything to me at the time if they did talk about it. I just assumed, as I grew a little bit older and thought about it a little bit, that the word was probably passed down South that there was a lot of work here. Just the same as things that are happening now, the big influx of people that are coming now, I'm sure the same thing took place in a cycle about that same time, you know.

Where did you live when you first arrived?

We lived in a place called Carver Park. That was in the Henderson area. From there, we moved to Monroe Avenue. There was a Mexican that owned the property at the time that we came into town. He lived in the rear. There were a couple houses in the rear, and then we lived in the front. Then he decided to sell it to my parents, and they bought that house. We lived there until I was almost an adult, until I went in the Navy anyway.

How long did you live in Carver Park? Do you actually remember living there?

Slightly I remember living there. I can visualize certain things. I see certain things.

Can you tell me about those visualizations?

It seems like it was kind of an area that was developed. I mean, there were sidewalks and things like this as opposed to other areas, which residential areas consisted of outside toilets. As a matter of fact, the Westside, when we moved to where we lived, was mostly tents. And I guess this came about during or after the war, and the surplus from the war was used as housing.

Did you actually see the Westside? Do you remember seeing it at that point?

At that point?

When they had tents.

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. As a matter of fact, most of the houses then were made of railroad ties, the large railroad ties, and tents. As a matter of fact, the house that was in the back of us was made of a hundred percent railroad ties. It was made out of nothing but railroad ties. And the house that we lived in was a frame house, but a lot of the foundation and things like this were made of railroad ties. The house next door to me was made of all railroad ties.

Now, those houses you're describing, that's the house where you moved after Carver Park?

Which was probably in about 1945.

Okay. Getting back to Carver Park, because that is one of the two areas I believe where people of color were allowed to live --

Yeah. That area and an area now called Four Mile. We used to visit there a lot because a lot of my father's friends lived in the Four Mile area. It's kind of hard to imagine now. But most of the area was -- like the Westside, for example -- was dirt roads, dirt streets, and the boundaries were H Street, A Street, and Harrison. Beyond that, it was all desert area. I lived in the 600 block

of Monroe. And I would walk a block and a half, and I'd hunt rabbits. And I could probably bring back, a block and a half from my house, probably four or five rabbits whenever I went out along with the snakes, tons of rattlesnakes and lots of sidewinders. So it was more country-style living. Everybody had chickens. Everybody had pigeons. You raised chickens, pigeons, and rabbits.

What did you use the pigeons for?

We ate them. You ate pigeons, yeah. It was like everything else. We ate pigeons. As a matter of fact, the area near the Water District that they're talking about converting to a park, that area flowed through behind Bonanza Village, which in a sense was another boundary for the Westside because it was straight down F Street. And what we would do is we would go to this area that -- the mouth of this, I don't think I've ever been to. But the flow was pretty heavy at the time to the point that when I was probably about, oh, maybe eight or nine years old the water was over my head. We'd swim there.

So is it like one of those big washes that we see now throughout the city?

Yeah. Those washes now that you see throughout the city were all part of the flow coming from this mountain area, some of it. But this was probably the largest part of it. And that's why they talk about the springs that were there. Well, that spring, we'd probably walk past that going frog and crawfish hunting. We would start out at F, what is now F. You know, as a matter of fact, I look and I see there's a cottonwood tree right at the corner of F and -- what is that? F and -- well, it would be Ogden coming out. But that cottonwood tree was one of hundreds of cottonwood trees that used to be in that area where we'd go and sit.

The way you'd catch crawfish is you'd take a piece of fat meat and a little pole. And then with their claws, they would grab this fat meat. And we would then probably bring a few of them home and throw in pond that we developed in the back along with the frogs. So you always had frogs and crawfish. You know, you could go in the back of your yard and pull out a couple of, maybe, a foot-long frog, at least a foot. I mean, if he was less than a foot, then we didn't eat him, you know.

So you ate frog, also?

Oh, lots of frogs.

And the crawfish, you ate those, as well?

Yeah. Not like people eat them now. I mean, I can't eat them like that.

Well, how do you eat them?

Like the crawfish that I see now are small compared to what we would either raise or what we would catch. If they were small, then we'd throw them back. But if they were large enough then we would take the tail off and take the shell from the tail. Then there was a vein down the middle, and we would take that vein out. And then my mother would fry them. The taste that I recall, it was just exactly like a lobster taste. It tastes like lobster to me now. But the way they cook them now, a whole crawfish -- I remember that vein going there. So there's no way that I could eat one of those now remembering the vein, you know.

I wanted to get back to a point. This area in Four Mile, the friends of my father that lived out there, they raised -- see, like I say, we raised chickens, pigeons and things like this. But they raised goats and pigs. When they got ready to slaughter a pig, we'd go out and help them slaughter the pig and maybe take a part of the pig for helping them slaughter it. But that area, I think it still exists to a point, but not like it used to be.

So now, this is off of Boulder Highway?

Right. Right.

How big was that community at that time, Four Mile community?

It seems to me like there may have been maybe ten houses, maybe more.

That was the entire community?

Yeah. There were maybe ten houses and maybe two houses on a lot or something like that. Maybe every other lot had another house on it. But it was enclosed, as I recall, in cottonwood. When I was coming up, there were cottonwood trees and there was kind of a piney looking tree now. It's kind of a dirty looking tree. You rarely see any. You know, there were some [*of those trees*] right over here on Martin Luther King [*Boulevard*] where I noticed that they just tore the last of them down. Well, that street used to be covered with these trees and they kind of surrounded this area. There was some water going through there because as you can see, if you're going through or passing that area, there's a ditch in the road yet. Well, that water was supplying the trees, and it just created its own little encirclement.

So did you ever hear how that small community got started and why it was

African-American?

No. As a matter of fact, I never thought about it. I never thought how it got started except that then it was far out. It was out quite a ways from everything, including the downtown area, which stopped at probably like Seventh or Eighth Street, as far as commercial and everything. There were a lot of houses on Fremont Street. People lived on Fremont Street.

It's like right now. I look at Craig Road. And it was, as I recall, mostly black folks that lived out there. Same thing with downtown Second Street. I believe right now it's most of the Horseshoe parking lot. That camp area for the Horseshoe was owned by blacks or blacks lived in that area.

That's right, because Zion Church was down there.

It could have been. I don't recall. I recall there used to be a street called Lyndon, I believe. From Lyndon to Mesquite was owned by blacks. Then across on Mesquite, some of that property was also owned by blacks or blacks lived in that area.

Do you remember any of those families who owned that property?

Oh, absolutely. I remember, as a matter of fact, one of the people that I was just getting ready to tell you about, Peave. I know Peave like I know my brother, and his name slips me right now. But he's here. He's local. But it was his parents and grandparents that owned some of that property.

I think some people owned the property at the corner of Sahara and Las Vegas Boulevard. They were black. Also on Valley View where Englestad has his restoration, as a matter of fact, he bought that from a black family. And they owned quite a bit of property in that area and around that area.

Then there's a large, large black family, the Snowdens. They owned property out near the Blue Diamond area, probably still do as far as I know. I don't know. But this was in the early, early years.

But there were people right now that probably bought property years and years ago that still own that you don't even know about. To them it probably doesn't mean anything.

But I think the most significant thing were the property owners that were downtown. As far as value is concerned, now it would probably be one of the more valuable pieces other than the

property at Las Vegas Boulevard and Sahara, which used to be called San Francisco. The street was San Francisco.

Which street?

Sahara.

Oh, really. Oh, thank you.

I want to get back to those first two or three years in Carver Park. Now, you were too young to go to school. What about your brother or sister, did they go to school?

No. They're younger than I am.

Do you remember any schools near the Carver Park where African-Americans attended?

No, I don't. I can't recollect. As a matter of fact, the only person that I knew that even went to school in that area was Bolden, who was on the police department. He was the only black that was going to Basic High School. As a matter of fact, it was his family or some of his family that I recall who were living in the area that we were just talking about, Four Mile area.

His last name is Bolden, B-o-l-d-e-n?

Yeah. He's deceased now. He just died last year sometime. But he was a chief on the police department.

Are any members of that family still alive? His children?

Oh, lots of them.

Good.

The family was large, as far as his family. I've probably seen some of them as recent as maybe a couple years ago or so. But they were friends of mine. Some of his family were friends of my father, and those are the people that I was referring to that he would visit sometimes out there. But he was the only one that I recall attending school. And like I say, at the time that he attended high school, he was the only black person out there.

What was the housing unit like where you lived?

It's hard to recall. But for some reason, I think of brick. You know, it seemed like it was constructed of blocks. But they seemed like they were adequate. It seemed like they were modern for the time.

Were they single-family or apartment buildings?

Seemed like they were single-family. I think there might have been some of them that had like a contiguous wall or something like that. But it's hard to recall that.

But you had an indoor toilet and not an outside toilet?

Yes. As I recall, it was an indoor toilet.

So now, that was the only place then -- well, blacks lived downtown. They probably had plumbing. But the Westside and Four Mile all had --

The Westside had some plumbing, but a lot of outdoor toilets. As a matter of fact, as the transition was occurring from outdoor plumbing to indoor plumbing, one of the things that some of the guys would do on Halloween is they would push these outside toilets over. I remember that because that was kind of funny at the time, even though I don't think I was old enough to push a toilet over.

Good. Was Carver Park a mixed community? I've heard that one side of the street over there was African-American, and the other side of the street was white.

It could have been. I can't really remember. As I grew older, it was insignificant. You know, you just didn't think about it, or I didn't know anybody after that that lived in that area.

Do you remember Lubertha Johnson?

Oh, absolutely. She owned property across the street from the airport on Sunset. And she owned I think about 30 or 40 acres, roughly 40 acres I'd say. And I think there were one or two holidays like Labor Day or something like that where she would invite all of the young people out to her house. As a matter of fact, I think a lot of older people went on different occasions. But all the young people would go out for a barbeque. She had lots of land, so there were a lot of things to do out there. And everybody looked forward to that, to going out to her place. She and her husband at that time -- and I just barely remember him. But even after he died, she still would hold these gatherings.

I worked with her in Operation Independence. She, as a matter of fact, created -- and a lot of people don't know this because either the minutes have been dropped or the people that were a part of it, for whatever reason, have never mentioned it. But she started Operation Independence, which was a nonprofit group. At the time that she started this group, then the anti-poverty

program came into being. So she put together a group. I just happened to be on this particular group.

(End side 1, tape 1.)

She started to apply for funds for a certain programs under the anti-poverty program. As a matter of fact, I think one of the first programs was VISTA, Volunteers in Service to America. And I think Vegas was awarded the first grant for that particular program. But then they told her, well, look, we can't fund these programs because what you need is a countywide board. So she put together the Economic Opportunity Board. That little trivia has been lost because nobody that I know of has ever mentioned that. Whenever they do a resume or a background, they never ever mention it. And I mentioned this to a couple people that were employed with the EOB. They were upset that I would suggest that this is the way this occurred, but that's absolutely the way that it happened. That was one of the things that happened. And the thing is that at the time she was going out trying to get people to volunteer for this board, because it had to be people throughout the county. She got turned down by a lot of people. It was difficult for her. You know, it was a lot of work for her to put this board together. But for the thing that she put together, then she started to try to apply for funds for projects that she wanted. As the board grew and as more money came, then after a while the only thing that she had left was the childcare center.

About what year was that, that she put that together?

That was about '66 or '67.

Who were some of those first board members? Do you remember any of them?

Dave Hoggard was one, Senior. Tony McCormick, I believe, was one. I can't think of the names. I can see faces, but I can't think of most of the names. I think Mr. Fitzgerald, H.P. Fitzgerald, I think he was one.

Now, were you on that first board?

Yes.

That's interesting. Thank you for that information.

Larry Powell was one. As a matter of fact, Otis Harris, I believe, was on the board.

When you left Carver Park, you and your family moved to Monroe?

Yeah.

And that property was owned by a Mexican man. How many Mexican-Americans compared to blacks were in the city at that time? This was still in the mid 40s?

Yeah.

How many Mexican-Americans would you say were in the city about that time?

I would say probably on the Westside. They were living on the Westside. On the block that I lived on, the people that we bought the house from were Mexican. The people on the west corner, northwest corner, were Mexican. The people on the southwest corner were Mexican. You know they lived there as long as I lived there, almost. There were several small convenience stores in the area. Two of those were owned by Mexicans -- three of those, as a matter of fact, because there was one that was on A. It would be Owens right now. There was a small store in that little area. But Bravos Market, I think it was called, was on Morgan. It was on Morgan. Then there was another store owned by Mexicans that was on Adams. It was just between D and E Street on Adams.

So you're saying that in the mid 40s, the Westside was part Mexican-American, part African-American?

Mostly African-American, but there were quite a few Mexican families there. If you look at the old buildings, if you look at some of the truly old buildings, the one I can think of right away is right on the corner of Adams and F Street on or about the southeast corner, you see the arches and the Mexican style. And most all the buildings used to be that same style throughout the area. You'd see the Mexican-type architecture for that period. But you still can see a few of them.

Could Mexican-Americans live anyplace they wanted to, or did they have to live on the Westside?

Oh, they could live probably pretty much where they wanted to, even though there were quite a few Mexicans that were on the Westside, if I were to guess. And it would be before my time. I would say they had probably inhabited the area before blacks. And the transition was from Mexican to black, if I were to guess, thinking back on the architecture and thinking back on the Mexican families that I knew of that lived in the area. As a matter of fact, there's one family that still lives right between G and H on Washington on the north side of the street. That family name was Lopez, as a matter of fact. I remember them. They still occupy that property. They

still own that property.

Tell me about race relations at that time. And some of this is what you've heard, of course, because you were so young at that time. I want to know about race relations between and amongst whites, blacks, and Mexican-Americans.

I think the relations were probably good with Mexican and black. With whites, you knew there was prejudice. You knew that you couldn't go downtown. I mean, you couldn't go to any of the casinos downtown. As a matter of fact, the bus station was at the corner of Carson and First. There was Palm Mortuary. Then the bus station was next to that at Carson and First Street, not Main where it is now. And it had separate drinking fountains at the time. I recall that very well.

But the movie theaters were all segregated. There was the Palace Theater, the Fremont Theater. The Palace Theater, you sat upstairs. The Fremont Theater -- wait a minute. The Palace was the one that you sat upstairs. There was another theater, and I can't remember the name of it now, but it had four or five chairs in the back where you could sit.

Were the chairs different from the other seating?

The seating was the same; it's just that they separated you in the back. You couldn't go past the fourth and fifth row of theater seats.

I have so many questions now. So if Mexican-Americans went to the movie, where did they sit? Do you remember anyone other than blacks sitting in those black sections?

No. Nothing but blacks.

What kind of jobs did the Mexican-Americans have?

There may have been some as laborers. But I don't recall seeing any in the kitchens as dishwashers or things like that, which is jobs that blacks maintained, you know, all those type jobs. And I don't recall seeing any in jobs like maids and porters. The blacks maintained all those jobs, which is a little bit different now. It's just reversed it seems like. But I don't recall seeing any in the maids and porters jobs. They may have been. I think they were probably in the mainstream. Other than construction, the only jobs were probably like dealers, and I don't recall seeing too many in the dealing jobs. They probably were, but I don't remember them.

Do you remember neighbors telling stories of race relationships before the 40s?

No.

Was your mother or father in a union, a labor union?

Yeah. My father was in the labor union. Most of the jobs that my mother held didn't involve unions because she worked at motels and stuff like that.

So she was never in the Culinary Union?

No, not to my recollection.

Okay. Do you remember which union your father was a part of?

He was in the labor union.

Do you know which one?

There was only one. There still is, I think. There's only one labor union.

Okay, okay.

The Laborers Union.

Oh, okay. Thank you.

When your mother worked at the hospital at one point --

Las Vegas Hospital.

-- did she ever mention a Dr. Martin?

No. It seems like the doctors were Hardy -- he was one, Dr. Hardy. A few years back, I remembered some of them that were there. Probably the most outstanding was Dr. Hardy. And I can't remember others.

Thanks.

But I don't remember that other doctor that you just mentioned.

What about churches? Do you remember going to church when you were a little boy?

Oh, absolutely.

Where did you go?

Church of God and Christ. It was just where it is right now, at the corner of F and Madison. That was Reverend Cox. That was a holiness religion. And the Baptist Church at the time, the big Baptist Church, was Second Baptist, which is still in the same location today. And then when I later on in my teenage life converted to the Baptist religion, I went to a church called Evergreen, where the pastor was a friend of the family. His name was Reverend Smith.

So now, you're a young boy when you first move here. Tell me about when you're getting ready to start school. Where do you go to school at the beginning?

At the beginning, I went to Westside School in kindergarten. And that still exists. That's at 330 West Washington, the building that KCEP is in. It was the only building at that time when I went. And then later on, as a matter of fact before I got out of the seventh grade, I believe I was probably in about the third grade, I think, third or fourth grade, and that second phase was built that still exists. It still exists now. Probably the most vivid memory about that school was when I joined the band. When I joined the band, it was the year that a black bandleader came to town. His name was Andre Wade. And they had us dressed in these -- you've seen the monkey on the chain with the grinder. Well, we had the same uniform, with the little red hats and the red uniforms. So when Andre Wade came to town, he grabbed all these uniforms. And that was our first duty when he came to town was to help him gather up all these uniforms and dump them in the trash. Just dumped them in the trash. Then he ordered a nice blue uniform. I think they called it the Eisenhower jacket at the time. Then he started teaching us music.

We were so disciplined. The band was, I think, maybe probably 70, 80, maybe even close to 90 members in the band after he got there. We would be marching downtown in the Helldorado Parade. And at this time, some of the people, the patrons of the clubs, would come out, and they would take silver dollars -- it was really, really popular at the time -- they would take silver dollars or 50-cent pieces, and they would just throw them in the middle of the band. And I played the drums. And you could hear the money hitting the drums and falling off the drums. But nobody, nobody in this band, stopped to pick one of these up or to even look a different direction. Now I can't say that about the back grade that was behind us, you know.

But he was a respected instructor because I think that everybody saw that he was sincere. I think that was probably the first time that you really thought about, well, here's a person who understands racism and he's trying to do something about it. But they invited us to play at places like the high school football games because the high school team at that time couldn't play the Star Spangled Banner. And we were the only school, probably, that could play the Star Spangled Banner like it was supposed to be played. One of the most popular tunes at the time was Dragnet, and we marched to that and played that very well.

We took all the trophies at that time for uniforms and marching and everything else. It was out of this guy's concern for a group of people that had been ignored. He was one of the people that I remember, as well as quite a few other teachers. But he was one of the ones that I saw make a difference in the school and in the people that attended the school.

Now, were all of the teachers African-American?

No. As a matter of fact, it was probably -- at the time I was going to Westside School -- and I went there from kindergarten to seventh grade -- I recall one teacher that was black. That was Mrs. Hoggard. And the shop teacher was black. And that was Mr. Fitzgerald. And he was a concerned person. Every day he preached to stay in school, and every day he tried to make you understand that you could get around racism.

If you notice the way that I write my name right now, it is the way that he taught me. And that was in a manuscript-type way. And I never have been able to get away from that, and that was like in the third, fourth, or fifth grade. But he taught us how to do manuscript.

We framed a lot of houses that are in the older section because you couldn't get money to build houses. So people would get together and help each other build their houses. And he, being the shop teacher, would take his students out, and we would help to frame these houses at least with the fire blocks in it and do things that were simple enough. But it still gave us an insight on how these things were supposed to be done.

So you were Habitat for Humanity before it came along.

In a sense, yeah. And the other teacher was, what I recall, the other black teacher was Mr. Moore, Henry Moore. He was not only the teacher, but he was also the athletic coach. He coached all the football, basketball and track, all of them. If anybody that attended that school, if there's a name that you'll hear more than anything else, it'll be Henry Moore because he was the type of guy that wanted you to learn, insisted that you learn, and he was a tough teacher, but you knew that it was for your own good. And not only that, he was a good coach. We had lots of super athletes at the time, and Westside School was number one in all the sports, especially basketball. The only thing that he didn't teach a lot of was baseball. But track and basketball and football, Westside School was always number one.

So now, Westside School went through the eighth grade?

Yeah, it went to the eighth grade. I attended through the seventh grade. Then the next year, we went to Madison School, where again, Henry Moore was my eighth grade teacher.

At Madison?

At Madison School. He carried over the things that he did at Westside School, which were the coaching, the basketball, football, and track.

Which subjects did he teach?

He taught the eighth grade. It was like the eighth grade was everything.

Math, science, everything?

Yeah. He was a math major -- a science major. I'm sorry. He was a science major. I think he went to the University of Milwaukee or some school like that. When he retired, he was a consultant, I think, for one of the firms that had a need for a scientist. And I think that he was a science major.

Are there any of those teachers who are still around?

None that I recall. As I mentioned, the principal showed up at the reunion, but I heard later on that she had died. It was amazing because at the reunion she remembered everybody's name. And she was a dedicated person. Her name was Doris French. She was the principal, like I say. And she chose, I think, to be the principal at that school, to teach at that school. She tried to do the best, I think, that she could. She was sincere. That was one of the reasons that I think the committee made sure she was invited to the reunion because that was out of respect for her and for her attempt to get us on the right track.

Now, where was Madison School located?

It still exists. It's on J Street between Madison and Adams Avenue.

Did you ever see the schools in the other part of the city or hear about them?

Well, we would go there maybe for a basketball game or things like that because they had all of the basketball courts. I mean, we didn't have a basketball court. So you'd go to John S. Park or J.D. Smith, Fifth Street. There weren't that many at the time because the population, I think in the 50s, was 25,000 people.

So tell me which schools were integrated?

None. Westside was the only school when I went to school. I mean, there were no black

people that I knew of that went to any other school but Westside.

Okay. Now, were there white students in the Westside schools?

Yes. There were a couple. There were a few. My third grade teacher, I think her name was Ms. Kirby, I think. And her son attended school there. See, there were some white families that still lived in the Westside area, especially around McWilliams and Washington and those areas. There were white families living. As a matter of fact, I think Ewing Brothers and all those, I think that's probably why they ended up with the property that they've got over there is that they originally lived down there somewhere close.

So tell me who the Ewing Brothers are.

That's the towing service. That's all that towing service area on H Street. But I think they've been there forever. And I think, as I recall, maybe some of their family or something lived on that street, A Street.

So tell me about the rest of your education. Once you finished the eighth grade at Madison, where did you go then?

They were just constructing Rancho High School. They split us up. They split the Westside up. So we were going to go to Rancho High School, but it wasn't ready. So what they did was they made a temporary high school at Fifth Street School. As a matter of fact, where the federal building is right now, the old federal building, is where the building was that used to be part of Fifth Street. And it was converted then to Rancho High School. So we went there for a year. Then they again split the area up. The next year, my sophomore year, then part of the Westside students went to Vegas High, and another part went to Rancho. Then I ended up at Vegas High at that time.

Now, Fifth Street School was the elementary school prior to this?

It was an elementary school prior to that, right.

Okay. So now, the high schools were completely integrated?

Yeah, the high schools were integrated because there was only one high school, and that was Vegas High, until Rancho. Gorman, I'm not sure what year it was built, but I think around -- maybe it was '51 or '52 that Gorman was built. And that was a private Catholic school.

Did they accept Mexican-Americans and blacks in Gorman?

They probably did, but none went there during the time that I was going to school. My children went there. I don't recall anybody that I knew ever going to Gorman.

Okay. Now, did you go away to college?

I went to the Navy after I graduated from high school. I went away for two years. Then I came back. I was a corpsman in the Navy. I worked with a black doctor. His name is Frank Staggar. I worked as an assistant, as a urology technician. So when I got out, I thought that's what I wanted to do. So I started going to classes outside of UNLV, which was Nevada Southern at the time. As a matter of fact, my classes were in Fraizer Hall, which was the main classroom building. My lab class, the whole works was right there in Fraizer Hall. As a matter of fact, it seems like there were maybe three or four blacks that went there at the time. One of the Harris sisters, which is a large family and they've been here in Las Vegas forever --

Now, is that the same family that had a boarding house on the Westside at one time?

I don't think they had a boarding house. They may have had a boarding house, but I don't recall it. I don't recall. I know they had a church, which still stands and that is, I think, at the corner of Harrison and F Street. That church, I think, was the father's church. It's a large family.

(End side 2, tape 1.)

You just told me about some of the people who have been here for a long time. And you're just telling me about someone whose name is Berdine.

Berdine. When I was a kid, there was a crew of about four. There was a Berdine and there was Johnson. I can't remember the other one. And then, of course, Arthur Hodges, who came on later. This was probably one of the better jobs that blacks held in that day because these guys were a part of the city, for one thing, the city structure with retirement and everything. And they were doing something other than what the average laborer was doing. So they were kind of looked up to in the sense that you knew that there was nothing else you were going to be able to do. So you weren't looking at the different jobs that the black adult population had. Looking at those, you know.

There were probably a lot of families that go way, way back. I remember Ray Christensen. He was a cowboy. I don't know how far his family went back. But I know that he was the type of cowboy that -- that's the only thing that I ever knew that he did. Whatever cowboys do as an

occupation, that's what he was doing at the time. His family was large. He had quite a few brothers and uncles and aunts and children.

I recall also another family, the Curtises. There were probably at least, oh, maybe seven or eight brothers, maybe four or five sisters. Everybody knew Ma Pat. She was the mother that raised this group of boys. Most of them were industrious or athletic in one way or the other. I mean they had businesses. I think they still own -- them or their relatives -- the Town Tavern, which holds the oldest black gaming license in the state. It was originally owned by a guy named Earl Turman. I don't know when he acquired it. But I think when I was probably three or four years old, I remember Earl Turman. He not only owned that, but he also had apartments right at the end of the street that I lived on.

He's got one of these type of grandfather licenses that permits unlimited gaming, whereas now I think you've got to have so many rooms to acquire one of these type licenses. But it's unlimited. He can have keno, as many crap tables, as many 21 tables as he wants to. And it's a rare, rare license. It's now owned by blacks, by the members of the Curtis family. I think Elijah Green is probably the president of the company.

But the building that he originally used his license for still exists. It's at the corner of F and Jackson. They run it just the same way, with craps and slots and 21 tables and restaurants. It's not as thriving as it used to be because Jackson Street used to have several clubs. I think there was the Louisiana Club, which was leased by Chinese. The building itself was owned by a black lady. I think her name was Laura something. And then Jackson Street had the El Morocco Club. It had a bowling alley. It had the Cove Hotel, which also had a casino, a full casino. There were several retail stores, restaurants, off-sale liquor stores.

Ma Bruno, she was one of the original pioneers. She was probably one of the original business people in the area. Back in that particular area, I believe it was called the Westside Cab Company. They were allowed to function on the Westside. I think that they sold that. And I think it's one of the major cab companies now. And I'm not sure. I don't want to say. But I think it may be Western Cab now.

But there were, as I recall, several entrepreneurs that I recall and respected and looked up to. One of them was a guy named Spatz. He had a little store. When you went in his store, if you

would be short of change a little bit, then he'd kick in a few pennies. Or he'd say, "Well, you can't buy that, but here's some Kits or something else that's a lot cheaper." And he would make up the difference. But I always remember him.

And a guy named Tuney had a store across the street from him, another convenience-type store. He was, I think, doing all right as a businessperson.

P.L., of course, had the Brown Derby. He was a horse person. He owned several Palomino horses that he used to ride in the parades and along the streets. I mean, these were thoroughbred Palominos. Tennessee Walkers, he also had those. That was the first time that I knew of the Tennessee Walker. But he had a thriving business -- what appeared to be a thriving business with a dance hall, a cafe, and gaming.

Now, what was the Brown Derby's owner name again?

P.L.

P.L.

P.L. Jefferson, I believe. P.L. Jefferson. The building is still there. It still exists. It's at the corner of Monroe and D Street, but I think it's boarded up. I think back now to some of the people that had businesses, like a guy named Frank Lima who had a fuel truck and delivered fuel. He also in the summertime had an ice truck and delivered ice. Then along with this, he had a small convenience store. There was a need for all these things. And had these people not had the restrictions that they had on them at the time, you know, they would have probably been somewhere on the stock exchange now.

How were these restrictions put on these businesses? Who said, "You can only drive your cab in this area"? How was that done?

Right now I believe it's the cab authority that polices the cab companies. At that time, it wasn't called the cab authority, but it was something similar to that, that said, "Okay, we'll give you a license, but you can only run the cabs from here to the Moulin Rouge or whatever."

But these people that owned the cab company, I can't even think of any one of the names, but I think there were about four or five of them that had this cab company. They had to use their own money, of course, and fund their own cabs. It was a struggle to maintain everything based on the inability to borrow money.

I was trying to think of the professionals that I recall. There were several black teachers, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Cline. I remember them when I was 11, 12 years old. It's really hard to recall, but I think there was a chiropractor. He was located on Madison between G Street and H Street. His name was Dr. Mirage. And I say that he was a chiropractor, and I'm not sure. But even though he was a chiropractor, the only thing that people knew is that he was a doctor. You know, most people knew that he was a doctor. I mean, he had doctor in front of his name. So that meant that a lot of people just went to him. He was able to cure a lot of things. So if there was a neighborhood doctor or a black physician at the time, then he would have been the first one that I remember.

And he was before Dr. West?

Oh, absolutely. He was before Dr. West, but not as a legitimate doctor. He was, I think again, a chiropractor. I think he was. But people would go to him for everything. And some things he was able to heal with advice or, in some cases, even the sides of his business. But it was like in the early 40s that he existed. As a matter of fact, I think he was there at that same location probably until he retired or passed away. I don't recall. But he was there for a long time, right there in the heart of the black community.

A few minutes ago, you were telling me about some of the first men who worked for the city. Can you tell me what kind of work they did for the city?

They worked as sewer maintenance. They were the people that on an ongoing basis would clean out the sewer system using some type of a line. I remember seeing these lines way back when. You used to see these lines being rolled out. That's what they did. But like I say, at the time it was one of the jobs that you looked around and saw that they wore white uniforms. They were clean all the time. It looked like a nice job to have at the time.

Okay. We're going to get back to where we left off with your Navy career in a few minutes. But earlier you said something about school children in your shop class helping some of the people build their houses. So African-Americans could not get loans to build houses, even if they owned the property?

That's true. As a matter of fact, the first tract homes were built in 1955, and that was Berkeley Square. Along with that, there was another venture called Cadillac Arms, and that was

an apartment complex.

But prior to that, you got together and you went as far as you could and got as much help as you could and did what you could with whatever limited resources you had. But you can see some of the houses now that are in the old Westside area. Even on some of them, the construction is probably far superior to what it is today. But you can see in a few of them that they were beyond what we would consider under the building code -- today's building code, anyway.

But it was difficult. I think the first money that was loaned for building or purchasing a house was from the Westside Credit Union. That was formed by some people who were knowledgeable about banking. As a matter of fact, one of the people that I just mentioned, Noah Johnson, one of the people that was working with the city, was one of the founders, I believe, of that credit union along with Nathan Scott, who worked for the Las Vegas Sun. If you recently saw the Sun's anniversary, you saw his picture where Hank Greenspun named him -- in 1952, I think -- a title and gave him a position within the newspaper that were probably unheard of for blacks at the time. But these were some of the people along with Foreson, I believe, that founded the Westside Credit Union. This was probably the only vehicle at the time for any type of financing for anything. But so far as housing goes, I think there were several people that either purchased or built houses through the credit union, through the Westside Federal Credit Union, which also still exists and still is going strong.

What about car loans?

Car loans were easier because you can't do anything to a car. It can always be repossessed. Those weren't difficult. A lot of people, when they won any big money or anything, it made it a little easier to go get a car of your choice. The car dealers that I recall were the Havest Brothers, Vic Havest and Teddy Havest. They were the ones that I think probably everybody went to buy their car from. But they probably also added a little bit here and there and kept themselves in a position where they could lose because I think they went out of business -- forced out of business, I think, eventually. But these were the people that most of the black folks dealt with. They had furniture stores that were liberal with them. Tinch Furniture was one of the furniture stores that a lot of black folks dealt with. Tinch, as I recall, would carry a note for you or give you probably cheap furniture. But at the same time, you could get the best deal there.

The reason I ask is because I hear a lot of people saying things like, "They have a Cadillac, but they have to park it in front of a shack." And they say it thinking that the black community did not use their money wisely, not knowing that they could not get financing for a house, but they could easily get it for a car.

Yeah. That's probably true. I had a paper route like when I was maybe 12 years old or so, and I delivered papers from Harrison all the way to the last house on Bonanza, which would have been not quite to Rancho. But I never saw a Cadillac in front of a shack. That's probably stereotyping a little bit. There were Cadillacs. But the Cadillac dealer was right up the street. I mean, if you walked out the back door in the Westside, there was James Cashman's Cadillac. I know the only person that I truly remember with a Cadillac were the preachers. Reverend Cox always had a Cadillac. I remember rumors of people saying, "Well, he or she won X amount of dollars and they went down and woke James Cashman up." And these were stories. I doubt that they happened. But you never know. I don't know. But it wasn't obvious. If it happened, if it occurred, it wasn't obvious.

Like I say, a lot of houses that were here still exist. And you can see the shacks, and you can see the houses that were well built because a lot of houses that I see -- every now and then I'll just drive through the Westside area. And I see a lot of the houses that are still there that were there when I grew up. Some of them are really stable, nice homes.

You were talking about some of the businesses on Jackson Street. Did you go to some of those clubs?

Not in early life, but when I came of age. For us, when I grew up, the things that you had as a teenager or as a preteen, even, was the Jefferson Center, which was a USO club converted to a recreation center. That wasn't too bad because it was a black and white thing. And the same thing occurred in the white community. They converted a building downtown, which was at the corner of Fourth, diagonally across the street from City Hall. The Wildcat Lair, it was called. It was also a USO club.

The people that ran the USO, as I recall now, were a lady named Ms. Elmore, Jimmy Gay, and one of the people that really participated with youth at the time voluntarily, Spurgeon Daniels. He did what would now be the Pop Warner League. He involved blacks in football in one of these

types of leagues. He was also volunteering his time as a coach.

The recreation center had a swimming pool there. This was pre-television in Vegas. I think the first television came in about '52, '53. But they would show continuation movies for a dime on Wednesday nights or Thursday nights. And you'd go to these movies every Wednesday or Thursday nights. So it led to things to do for young people at the time other than during the day when you went hunting, rabbit hunting, or spent your time at the creek.

The hunting was just out in the desert?

Well, the desert was like maybe a block from where you lived. But, yeah, from where I lived, it was maybe two blocks.

The reason I say it that way is because where I grew up in North Carolina, you would go hunting in the forest.

Right.

So you went hunting in the desert?

In the desert, absolutely, yeah. Lots and lots of jackrabbits, lots of cottontail. There was a lot of burro in the area, also. As a kid, I remember we used to chase them and ride the wild burros.

For money as a teenager, we would go to the municipal golf course and try to go out as caddies. That existed for a long time. That's been there forever that I remember.

Did you learn to play golf?

I never got interested in playing golf. But we would go up and caddie.

Did you ever see Jimmy Gay playing golf?

No, I never saw him. But I knew he was a golfer. I never saw him play.

Was Block 16 still around when you first came here?

I'm not sure I know what Block 16 is.

It was the red-light district.

It could have been, but I was probably too young to understand it. I do know that somewhere out near the Four Mile area that they used to say that Glen Jones had a place out there. He was the sheriff. And I remember people talking about that. I never saw it or knew anything else about it.

So you don't know anything about that. It was a whorehouse out there. You don't remember anything about that from your friends who lived in Four Mile?

Well, not so much them because it didn't have to be. It was a thing that everybody did talk about that Glen Jones had the whorehouse out near Four Mile. I don't know. It was just one of those things you didn't even think about because it was legal to have those things in Nevada. So you never thought about them.

Let's get back to your education. You were telling me that you went into the Navy. Then after the Navy, I think this is where we stopped.

After the Navy, I started working in a grocery store, which was the only black grocery store in the area.

Now, is this the same time that you were going to take the classes at --

The same time that I was going to UNLV or Nevada Southern. And this store was on Van Buren between F and G. It was called Ranch Market. It was in a shopping center area. The store had probably, maybe I'd say, five check stands. It had a full meat counter with an average of at least three to five butchers working full time. It had a produce section that this white guy -- I can't think of his name now -- ran the produce section. It was owned by a person -- his name was Billy Jones -- and his sons. They owned it. He was white. It was managed by a white person.

Next door to it was a clothing store. I can't remember that guy's name. He moved out on the Strip from there. That'll show you what the profit was at that time. Next door in this same area were a laundry mat, a liquor store, a bar, a bar-liquor store, and a drugstore, a full drugstore. Then around the corner from that were a couple other shops, a real estate office, barbershop and that type of thing.

So it was a business area. It was a thriving business, and I worked in this market. As a matter of fact, it was the same market that O.J. talks about. When his folks used to bring him here, that's the market that he worked at. His uncle was head of the butcher shop at the time, Lloyd Armstrong.

But then I worked there, and I would attend classes at UNLV on the times that I wasn't working.

Did you live at home?

I lived with my mother and father at the time, yeah. That was in 1960. Later on, about two years later, I got married. Then I went on to the fire department.

Tell me about your children. How many children did you have?

Three children. Two girls and one boy.

And their names?

Tonya is the oldest. She graduated from the University of San Francisco as a business major, but she chose to work as a flight attendant for Delta. And she's been there ever since she graduated from college.

My youngest daughter went to Pepperdine. She didn't graduate from there, but she went a couple years there. She went to work for a risk management company. She's vice president of this risk management company in L.A. She enjoys what she's doing there. But they both live about two miles apart in Los Angeles.

My son works for a company that set ups for the conventions, a small company that works out at the Convention Center mostly setting up and taking down booths and things like that.

What is your son's name?

Kenneth.

And my middle daughter's name is Jolene.

That's the one who went to Pepperdine?

Yeah.

And your wife's name?

Brenda.

Okay. Now, after this segment of your life, you go to work for the fire department after completing some classes at UNLV?

Yeah. I dropped out of UNLV in '61. That was my last time that I attended out there.

(End side 1, tape 2.)

I was working behind the meat counter as a butcher in Ranch Market. A guy named James Walker came in and we were talking at the meat counter. He would say, "I'm planning on going to the fire department." And I said, "The fire department? I never thought about that." So he said, "Why don't you go down and put an application in?" So I did. He had been hired, but he was

waiting on some paperwork or something like that. Or maybe they were waiting on another black. I don't know. But I know that he and I went on and started school together. They took one bed and put our names on the bed. They separated us by putting him on one shift and putting me on the other shift. So he slept in the bed on one shift, and then the next shift I slept in the same bed.

So were you the first two black people on the fire department?

Yeah.

So what was that like?

The first day I went to the agility test. The process was kind of stretched out a little bit. I don't recall exactly when I took the written exam. But when I took the agility test, this guy -- his name was Charlie Boy -- called me over in the corner. He was giving the agility test. He called me over in the hallway. It was at Doolittle Recreation Center where they were giving the agility test. So he calls me over and says, "Let me speak to you for a minute." So we're standing in the hallway at the center there. He was saying, "Man, you don't want to go through with this." And I'm saying, "Go through with this?" He said, "Yeah, because they're going to be waiting on you." Who's going to be waiting on me?

Now, you know, when I went to this agility, I was thinking, man, I really don't want to do this. I'm having a good time where I am, working a few blocks from my house because the hours are good and the pay was pretty good. It was better than what I was getting ready to make. But when he said this, then this motivated me to want to meet this gorilla, whoever this was that was going to prevent me from working because I had never met that. And I was kind of arrogant, too, because I had just come out of the Navy and had worked with this doctor as his assistant. And I'm still pretty young at the time. So I thought, well, I've got to give it a try.

So when I hit the floor, I was defensive. But the first day I went to work, the fire chief said, "I you understand you were a corpsman in the Navy." And I said, "Yeah." This is after the two-week training course that they give you. He said, "Well, I need you to take a look at this sore I got on my arm." He had a splinter that went in his arm straight down. So I went to the rescue unit and got some tools that I needed, an Alice clamp, and I probed through the mucous and stuff and felt for the splinter. I had just left the Navy and all this was fresh in my head. So I probed and I found this splinter and I pulled it out. I worked at a urology ward. So the bandages that you

do there have got to be unique. So when I bandaged him up, he looks at it and he thinks, wow, I've never seen anything that good.

So right away, I went to the rescue unit. This was a good and a bad situation. It took me away from the engine, which was the basic for fire-fighting or for even learning about the engine itself. You know, that's what the promotional exams are all about, this engine. But it also took me away from the rest of the crew because I'm gone all the time on rescue. So I don't see the prejudice. I don't hear the prejudice that I might have if I had been around the station most of the time. I did that for five years.

Then from there, I went to driving a tanker for a while. You didn't have to be certified. Everybody could drive this. It was just an assignment. I stayed on the fire department for 25 years.

What is a tanker?

It's a water truck.

After 18 years, I made captain, which was kind of unique because there was an ad in the paper. And it said four people were promoted today to captain. John Doe, he's been on the fire department six years. And Joe Smith, he's been on the fire department eight years. And Joe black, he's been on there ten years. And Monroe Williams, he's been on 18 and a half years. And we just promoted him. It was a big thing. There were two blacks, as a matter of fact, promoted at the same time, a guy named Bill Young and me.

There were a lot of little things that would happen on the job. People would write on the locker, "Joe Nigger" or something like that. Or one day we came to work and there was a swastika on somebody's boot that somebody else had put on there. But there were some good people on there, too. There were people, if they heard of anything that sounded prejudiced, then they immediately jumped up and said something or came to at that time my defense, but it was just the overall black defense. It was a good experience.

I look at the guys now that are on there. There are probably seven or eight chiefs. As a matter of fact, the county fire chief is black. So things have changed and because they've changed it was worth all the things that you experience. Seeing the change, then you think, well, it's great that guys are able to do these things that none of us were able to do way back when.

What kind of traveling did you do in the Navy?

None. I was assigned to Oakland Naval Hospital. And that's where I worked on the urology ward from the time that I went in until I got out.

Was that disappointing?

Oh, no. It was interesting work. Like I say, I scrubbed for this black doctor on everything that he did. That included all of the surgeries that we did on the ward. If he wanted to look at an autopsy or go to the autopsy, then I went with him. I did all the meds. I ordered all the medications. I did all the IVs, which wasn't allowed at the time. That's why that was unique. Everybody couldn't do an IV. But I had this nurse that just insisted, well, you do this IV. So I would do those.

So I had an education on the job, but it was an experience. It gave me confidence. When I went in the fire department, as far as first aid or anything like that, I got a first aid card. So I taught everybody there. I gave everybody there their first aid card. Everything was in my head. We'd sit around and be talking about something, and I'd rattle off the bones in the body and the different things like that. So I think that background gave me their respect, which I probably wouldn't have had coming on as one of the first black persons that they had ever seen.

I worked hard at the job. I fought fire. I ate a lot of smoke. I tried to be the first one in the building to, again, gain their respect to make sure that I didn't hear anything that was going to be derogatory or negative. So I think I did gain their respect. I think a lot of them would come up to me and pull me aside and say, "I'm from so-and-so, and I never worked with a black person before and, man, you've changed my mind about these people." Or I had people in a roundabout way still remember things that I did at fires that nobody else would do.

So it was a thing, where I guess when I look back on it, I kind of wished that maybe I was coming along now because things would have been a lot different. I kind of feel a little bit cheated because I didn't get the rank that I probably should have gotten. If I deserved it, maybe some of the accolades that I should have gotten, even though I did get a few little plaques and things that nobody else has.

Well, I kind of think that those are going to the next generation.

I'm sure they are.

Those that are standing on your shoulders.

They are my friends because some of them were there when I worked, and I'm seeing them get rank, and that makes me feel good. One of my best friends now, Dave Washington, got promoted. And I was really elated to see that because I know how he came up. He was one of the people trying to get things changed not for himself but for others. They just made him a chief. So I was glad to see that.

So now, give me the ranks in the fire department.

Well, it starts with the chief. I think when I went on there was one chief, one fire prevention chief, one guy that was over all the fire departments. But now there are training chiefs. There is a property chief. There is a chief over the medical division. There's a chief that's over personnel. And there's a chief that's probably administrative. There's probably about five different what they would call -- I guess you'd call them deputy chiefs -- or maybe more than that, about six or seven different deputy chiefs. Then under them, there are battalion chiefs. There are two battalion chiefs on each shift now. Then under the battalion chiefs are the captains. And each engine has a captain. He supervises that crew on the engine. Each battalion chief splits up the city, and they're over a group of stations, about four or five stations. But that's about the way the organizational table runs.

My wife's name is Brenda. We got married in 1962. We both worked. She worked as a teller in a bank. And I think as a matter of fact, she may have the first black teller that anybody hired. Then later on --

How did you meet?

We met because we'd known each other's family for years and years. The town was small. As a matter of fact, my father and her grandfather were very, very close friends.

What was her maiden name?

Marks. They've got a very large family here. As a matter of fact, her mother and father passed away. All of her aunts and uncles are here with the expectation of one. They were here probably before time. I don't recall when they came here. They probably have a lot of knowledge about a lot of things that have happened. She went to work for the Concentrated Employment Program when that was going on.

What was it called?

It was called CEP. It was one of the things that came under the poverty program. She was working in this program that did a lot of job training and a lot of things like that. From there, when the funding was up for CEP, then she went to work for employment security with the state. She was working as an assistant manager or supervisor in the North Las Vegas branch. She worked there for probably about 15 years or so. Then she did a couple things. She and her sister had a hat shop together.

Did they make the hats?

No. They bought them wholesale from different manufacturers. Then they had a board-up business. They would board up vacant houses, which was thriving in '85, '86, '87 because at that time you couldn't give a house away here in Vegas. And at the same time, I was in real estate myself.

So while you were working at the fire department, you also worked in real estate?

I had a real estate company. I had a property management company, as well as a real estate office. As a matter of fact, I was an appraiser in the 70s and also maintained a real estate office. Then I had what they call the area management contract for Clark County and Nye County. That means that you maintain all the houses that are owned by HUD. In the late 80s, we were in like a recession, a housing recession anyway. So HUD had an inventory of 700 houses on average per month, and they were getting about 100 houses foreclosed on and back into their inventory per month. So we had the largest inventory of anybody in the country. At the same time, she and her sister saw that they could board up houses. So they became board-up contractors. They just boarded up single-family homes and fourplexes.

Did she do any of the work herself?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, they physically nailed nails and screwed screws. They had their brother helping them. They had a couple trucks. They had a generator and all kinds of tools necessary, necessary tools. Then later on in the 80s when things started to pick up, the board-up business started to get not as good as it was. So in '89, I believe it was, she started campaigning for Senator Bryan. Once he got in office, she and Dave Washington ran his office in this area on the Westside. After he won, then she started working in his office as a client constituency

representative. Then she's been working there ever since until present.

So tell me a little about Dave Washington. You've mentioned his name a couple times now.

He is very, very active in a lot of things. He is like a person that has to be doing something, especially within the community. He's probably a one-person committee. I mean, he's worked with 100 Committed Men. He started the black firefighters association. He's very active with children. He has a camp on Mount Charleston that he takes children up to every year on his own. Spends a lot of his own money. He's probably the most dedicated and sincere person with no motive that I know of. He can do anything.

He told me, "Man, I'm going to build a house. I've got \$40,000. I'm going to buy a lot and build a house." And at that time, I just couldn't see how it could be done. And I told him, "No way are you going to do that," because I was an appraiser, as well as having been in real estate for quite a while. And he said, "Yeah, that's what I'm going to do." And sure enough, that's his house down there on the corner that he built. It's probably about a 3,000-square-foot house with two-and-a-half baths and the ideal home. And then when he told me that he was going to become chief of the fire department, I definitely didn't believe that. But he's like one step away. He probably eventually will be the chief of the fire department.

And we're talking about "the" chief?

"The" chief. He's like one step under the chief right now.

Wow, this is wonderful. How old is he now?

I'm going to say, he may have just turned 50.

So now, has he been in Las Vegas all his life?

He's been in Las Vegas most of his life, yeah. He's been here quite a while. Yeah, most of his life, he's been here.

I have not talked to that many black men. And I haven't talked to anyone on the police department, fire department or anything like that. Do you think he'd be willing to -- do you think he even has the time to sit for an interview?

Oh, he would. Yeah, he would. As a matter of fact, the ideal situation I think would be to have him and another friend of mine, Ray Feaster, together.

Is Feaster related to Pat Feaster from Fordyce, Arkansas?

They're related, in-laws. But they're close friends. They're together a lot.

And where does he still work?

He has his own business. He does air-conditioning. He's another very talented, interesting individual. I mean, he started out working for Dr. West at "The Voice" newspaper. He was the newspaper layout person.

Well, good. Yes, I do want to talk to both of them.

Now he's built three houses from the ground up. He's done everything in the houses in his later years. That's how talented he is. That's how gifted he is.

Now, are we talking about houses here on this side of the city?

We're talking about houses on the south side of the city. As a matter of fact, he built one on Sunrise Mountain and another one he built just off of Nellis and Lake Mead and another one that he's finishing up right now on the other side of Decatur and Blue Diamond.

He also plays the guitar, having picked it up maybe three or four years ago. He plays like Wes Montgomery or somebody. Very talented. And he's an artist, but he doesn't do art. At a very late age, he chose to go to air-conditioning school. He went there and does the whole thing. He can do a house completely. He does the sheet metal. The air-conditioning, he can get installed. He's always busy because he's good at what he does.

So then I can get a good picture of an entrepreneur, an African-American entrepreneur. That would be wonderful.

Yeah. He's that. And also, like I say, he amazes me because he's so naturally talented. And the most amazing part about it is that he found out late in life that he had all these many, many, many talents. But he's knowledgeable about a lot of things, especially about the history of the Westside because he grew up here and he seems to retain a lot of the things that happened. In the area that he grew up in, there was a lot to see and a lot happened. He grew up right there on D Street.

Good. Why did you stay?

In Las Vegas?

On the Westside.

I never thought about it. I've been in every house in the city, number one, working in real estate. And the other thing was doing the appraisals for HUD. So I've seen the early tracts. I've seen every single house. I've been in all the areas, including not only here but in Nye County, Pahrump, all the way up to the red-light area up there. For one thing, I like the area that I'm living in because of the space. It's a three-quarter-acre lot. It's a transitional area. It was at one time. It was an area, when I was a kid, where everybody wanted to live. But at the same time, when it changed, it changed. But it's going through another transition again.

Now, what is the name of this area that we're in right now?

Bonanza Village. But I like the lot size. I like the space. But I also like the convenience of going to the barbershop or going to the store and seeing a lot of the people that I grew up with.

Now, you just said that it's changing again. What do you mean?

Well, they've formed an improvement area. They've got an association to try to improve the area because a lot of the houses are older and a lot of them are probably -- some of them are not deteriorating, but just in need of some maintenance and some things that a lot of people just can't afford to do, especially a lot of older people that have lived in the area for a long time. As a matter of fact, you may have noticed a block wall going completely around the area. They've got the engine sway that comes into the area being revamped. They're redoing that. The city comes through about once a year, and they do a cleanup. My prediction it's going to be one of the prime areas, eventually.

But I still like the idea of going a block away and seeing people. I like going to the local grocery store and seeing people that I haven't seen in years. You talk about briefly the old times, or it brings about memories of things that you may have forgotten. And you don't see these people that often, and you don't see that many of them because it seems like everybody's either moved out or moved away or died. But it's a good feeling to see somebody that you knew 30, 40 years ago.

How do you like the idea of the wall going around?

I think it's a good idea. I think it gives some privacy, but it also adds to the value of the community. Once the wall does go up, it will bring on a lot of things inside the walls, a lot of changes inside the walls, also.

Now, you just said a few minutes ago, that you're forming an association that might

help with some of the fixing up of some of the houses where maybe some of the older owners don't have money for it?

No. I didn't mean it that way. I mean that there is an association, and what they have done is things like spring cleanup. Where you may not be able to move all the trash out of your yard, old cars and couches and things like that, well, in this spring cleanup, this association comes around with a bunch of volunteers and loads all this stuff up for people who normally wouldn't be able to afford to rent a can or to have somebody haul this stuff away. So in that respect, I think -- and I'm not active member of that association, but I think it's a great deed that they do every year. And I know the reasons that these things accumulate.

I was early coming over here today. So I drove every street here in Bonanza Village because I just love these homes. When I go to the new developments, there are probably two or three different houses and every other house looks just alike almost. But this place is just so unique. The houses are so --

(End side 2, tape 2.)

Now, as beautiful as these houses are over here, do you get the value that someone in Summerlin might get where the houses aren't half as beautiful?

No, you don't. The average house in this area will probably sell from anywhere from -- I think the most recent sale that I know of, it probably went for 180, and that was high. That was on the high end at the time that it sold. So the average would probably be around 150 to 160,000.

And we're talking about houses how big? How many bedrooms?

The last sale that I knew of, the house was probably three-bedroom, two-bath, on a half-acre lot. I think that part of it is going to pick up eventually. And the block wall and things like this are going to make that difference. But the value is not comparable. And the comparables have to be unique in that they have to be within this particular area because that area is unique to itself.

It is unique.

If you tried to appraise it based on comparables that are close around, then you would overprice it as far as the market is concerned.

I'm curious also about when I drive down the street, these streets are not maintained

in the way that streets are maintained in other parts of the city. I don't see sidewalks. The streets don't have that polished look with the gutter and all of that. Why is that?

You mean in this area?

Uh-huh.

Well, in this area, the reason that there are no sidewalks is because it started out as horse property. And horses would trip over sidewalks. So it was bad for a horse. As a matter of fact, the few curbs that you do see around were put in late. And horse lovers don't even like any kind of concrete. The maintenance itself, the city comes through every now and then and they do a brush job.

I think it originally started out as an association. It was formed way back in -- I think I saw a sign that they put on the outside back in probably '50 something or earlier than that. The number one thing that the association said was no blacks. That was the top of the CC and Rs. Not only was it an association, but it was almost a total private community. I mean, at that time when they did that, there were a lot of people that probably had a lot of influence and a lot of money at the time that were living in the area way back when. With that influence, they were able to say, "Well, we will handle our own thing. We will do our own thing." So I think a lot of maintenance that didn't take place in the early days was because these people took it on themselves to say we'll take care of that.

So I'm wrong to believe that Bonanza Village started as an African-American community?

It started out as a total white community. Like I said, the first thing on the CC and Rs -- and people have brought them out; they're on record, so you can see this -- but the first thing was no blacks. The first person, as a matter of fact, that moved in here was an attorney. His name was Keller.

Charles Keller?

Right. He fought the association and finally, finally, after a long, long fight, won and was able to build his house, which is the biggest house in the community, in the area.

Which house was that?

It's on the corner of Comstock and Fair. It's on the northwest corner. It's huge. There's no

house bigger than his in the area that I know of.

But Charles Keller left that house a long time ago; is that correct?

He still owns it.

Oh, he does still own it?

He lives in Long Beach, I think, but he still owns the house. I think his son or somebody lives there now.

Okay. Here in this village would you consider this a place where you feel that everybody knows everybody?

No. It's a place that could be that way. For one thing, you're not next to your neighbor. I mean, you're quite a way away from the neighbor. And some of the houses, you can't even see the neighbor because of the mature brush and trees and things like that. One of the things right now, I think, is the association probably has a lot of members that know each other and that speak to each other and maybe even socialize a little bit.

But there is also another faction of the residents who, for whatever reason, said, "We don't want the wall. And the reason that we don't want the wall is because" -- I think it was explained to me by one of the guys that brought a petition around -- "I'm on a fixed income and I can't afford to pay the assessment that's going to be charged." So it's my understanding that there are about 40 people like that. So there's a division.

And I don't know if you noticed, but the work has stopped on the wall. And the reason that it has stopped is because of one person, an attorney, had said that, "Well, I wasn't contacted. I'm not being paid enough for the inconvenience of taking part of my property or putting this wall up. I don't really want it." And he has filed a suit with the Supreme Court. And then there's another 40 people that also -- I don't know if they joined him in the suit or if they've got their own suit, but that stopped the wall. So there's a division there.

So how many houses, do you think, are in Bonanza Village?

I think there are about 150. I knew exactly at one time, but I can't remember now exactly.

When you were growing up, you had a paper route.

Yeah.

I've heard that young men who have paper routes become very successful because

they learn how to manage money early in life and they have the potential of becoming very successful. Do you agree with that?

I think that there's probably some truth to that. In my case, I never became successful. But I thought I would be because nobody said to me, "Look, why don't you go into real estate?" It was something that I wanted to do since I was 18, 19 years old. I think I went into it when I was about 20, 22, 23 years old. But I went into it not to sell real estate but to learn how to buy and sell real estate, which I did for a while. I bought and sold houses on my own, for myself. Then I began to sell real estate. I think that I dropped it at the peak time. I stopped in the 80s, the late 80s, '89. I got out of it when that was the biggest boom. And had I stayed in it, then I probably would have been successful. But I got out of it at that time and am just now deciding to go back into it.

Oh, good. So you're back into real estate now?

Yeah. Well, I renewed my license actually about a year or so ago. I've just been waiting to kind of get straightened out with the IRS and things like that.

Because this place is going through -- I mean, the boom is still present here in Las Vegas.

Well, I wasn't concerned because I know the city. I see the cycle, but I don't see the peak of the cycle. I figured, well, there's still time to make a lot of money, if that's what you want to do. I plan to get into it, but I don't plan to try to get rich at it.

When you were in real estate before, who were your clients? Who did you do business with?

I converted the first 235I, which was a program with subsidized payments. And I took an existing house because I knew that you could use a 235 commitment on an existing house through some contacts that I had made or some people that mentioned it or something that I read. So I converted this 235I, an existing house. As a matter of fact, the house belonged to a judge. And I converted this to a buyer.

Then through word of mouth, people would say, "Hey, I want that kind of a deal." So I became kind of the person to go to for that kind of a situation. But I also became the person that could solve all problems. And people would say, "Okay. Well, I have a foreclosure and I had a car repossessed and I had this and that happen and I want a house." I'd say, "Well, let's figure this

out." There was never a negative.

Explain to me what the 235I is.

Well, it was a purchase at a lower interest rate, plus it would have some parts of the payments subsidized. There are probably some parts of that program that still exist, but it's mainly probably geared at contractors. A lot of contractors came in and developed housing under the 235I. But it was not successful. As a matter of fact, in the Vegas Heights area, 75 percent of the homes were 235Is.

Okay. Now, where is Vegas Heights?

Vegas Heights is the area between Miller and Lake Mead and Martin Luther King and H Street. That area has deteriorated because of the foreclosures that are in there. And most of the foreclosures were those 235Is. But it's coming back. It's coming back.

In some cities every once in a while, they'll have housing that is probably owned by the city -- I believe it's the city -- and maybe the area is running down. They'll sell the houses for two or three dollars if the person can invest so much. Has Las Vegas ever done anything like that?

Yeah, they've had similar programs. Right now that program is probably still available to people that is nonprofit. They've got that. And they've got a teacher program, I think, that if you're a teacher you can buy in. They've got a police program where if you're a policeman and you're willing to live in the neighborhood, then they've got houses set aside for that. As a matter of fact, that's the biggest latest thing.

Now, tell me more about the teachers. Does it include college professors, too?

I'm not sure. It was a college professor that was telling me about this. So I think that it might be. Again, I'm just getting back in. So my vocabulary and language will be up to all the current things in about a month.

Wonderful. Tell me what kind of clubs and organizations you and your wife have belonged to over the years.

Well, we created an organization in the 60s, me and two friends of mine, Larry Powell and Otis Harris. And it was called Prometheus Circle. What we did is we set up to do political education. But after we got involved, we started doing a lot of things in the community. We did

subtle things. We did things like if your lights went out, then we took up a collection and had your lights turned back on. We did a lot of voter registration. We probably were best known for our registering of voters. One of the things that we did after that is we created things like the signs that used to say "black and proud" and "black is beautiful" and "register to vote." We created those signs. We defeated the biggest racist in the state. His name was James Slattery.

His last name again is?

Slattery.

Slattery. Okay.

And the way we did that --

First, tell me who he is and what he was running for.

See, the legislature used to run at large. He was one of these guys that was a total racist. He would brag about how much he hated blacks.

Which year are we talking about?

We're talking about '66, '67, '68. Even though he was from up north, see, all Assemblymen ran at large, throughout the state. So he won a primary. And most of the votes that he got were black. He got on the air and said, "See, here's what I'm trying to tell you. You see, black folks have voted for me, and they know my feelings, and they know how I feel. It just goes to show you that they agree with my philosophy."

So the next day, we went out and got all of his signs. They didn't need to put it in the black neighborhoods because he just took for granted that no one was going to vote for him in this area. He didn't need it. So we went out and went for miles looking for his signs. We gathered up all of his signs, and then we came back, and we wrote a little note on his signs in red: "Racist." And we placed them throughout the Westside. The next day this man lost by a grand slam, with a solid black vote against him.

But these were things that you couldn't do if you were a member of the NAACP. You had to be part of this rebel group. We were used by other groups. As you can see from that article, we were honored by Mr. Bailey on that situation.

So tell me about this situation.

Well, he was honoring Prometheus Circle, the group that we put together.

For the burning of those --

No, not for that particular thing. But just for all the things we were doing in the community. But as I say, just to show you some of the extreme things that we could do that no legitimate organization would be able to do. We had probably, oh, anywhere between 150, 200 young people between the ages of probably 18 and maybe 28.

Because you were able to do things that were not -- like the NAACP has such a structure.

Yeah. They had such a structure plus I think it was the times. We brought in people like *Bootstrap*. We were offered to bring in Stokely Carmichael and people like that. *Bootstrap* was a Los Angeles group that wore the dashikis. So we brought all those people in as speakers.

We brought charges against the police department for police brutality. We were the first ones to mention the phrase "police review board." It was us that first said we want a police review board. That came about because we worked very closely with the Equal Rights commissioner, Earl Wynn. But again, he couldn't do the things that we could do. So he relied on us a lot to go in and look tough and evil and to try to threaten with stare-downs employers that he was unable to talk to in a sensible way.

He came to me one day and said, "Man, I've got these prisoners that are really complaining about police brutality." So I said, "No problem. We'll get on it." So we tried to interview these people that were beaten up in jail and things like this. We got interviews with them. But we had a hard time getting them to sign statements. So what we did is that we claimed that we had these statements, and we held this folder. So we said, "Look in this folder. We have got seven complaints of police brutality." It was an empty folder. I held it. I was the only one that even knew what was in it. First of all, we showed the movie of the L.A. Riots at the city council meeting.

And you're talking about the riots of the 60s?

Yes. Then I held up this empty folder that only I know is empty. And I said, "In this folder are seven complaints of police brutality." They had a vote. This was to put together a police review board. They had a vote. At that time I think there were five commissioners. But it was three to two. What they said was that they voted to have an investigation by a third party.

And I think it was some kind of committee. It was some kind of committee that the city had already established not for this, but for another purpose. But they used this committee. So the committee came back about a month later. And there was a policeman that was killed. I don't remember what the circumstances were now, but he was killed. Underneath the article about his death, there was an article that said the review committee investigated the police brutality charges and the seven people that were involved in the folder, and they found no brutality and no reason to bring these charges.

Now, I know that they didn't because I've got the folder. But I can't say I know you're lying because I got the folder. So it was a battle lost with psyche. They just out-psyched us. Then the FBI came in, and we met with them a couple times. When there's something like that, they come in on their own. So myself and Dave Hoggard, Jr. -- he was the president; we elected him president -- met with them. They just wanted to let us know if there was anything they could do or anything. But I still didn't let go of the folder. So I know to this day, I can always recollect back. Even Earl Wynn didn't know because he wasn't in on the conversations.

So did you ever tell anyone what was in the folder?

No, I didn't.

Oh, really?

Couldn't have. No, I didn't. But I lost anyway. But I do know the way things run now.

Oh, that was a gutsy move.

Yeah.

Now, I love this idea. That must have taken a lot of time, you and your wife participating in something like that.

No, it didn't, as a matter of fact, because it was me again, a guy named Larry Powell and a friend of mine named Otis Harris. We were talking one day. So Larry's saying, "Well, man, we need to do something." At that time the John Burke Society was heavy and there were a lot of cross burnings and all kinds of other racism going on. So he said, "We really need to do something." I said, "Well, no problem." So he said, "We need to get people together and not only do a political education," because it was during a big political year, "but we just need to get together and put people together." I said, "No problem. We'll do that." He said, "How are you

going to do that?" So I tell him, "Man, just be at my house Tuesday night or Wednesday night or whatever."

So when he and Otis came in, there were at least a hundred people there. So he said, "How did you do this?" I said, "I just told everybody we were having a party." So then after we started, everybody was getting together and everything, we started to talk at the parties. But every time we had a meeting, it was a party. And we'd have meetings in different places. Maybe we'd use Sugar Hill or somewhere like that where we could say, "We're having a party at Sugar Hill." But then we would talk about voter registration and things like this.

Then it took off on its own. The John Burke Society had a big thing one night because they were showing a film and they were showing how the Communist Party was using Martin Luther King. So we went out to picket that. They were waiting for us, but they were waiting for a lot more people. We went out with about 50 or 60 of our members. Then we decided, well, let's wait and see what the movie is about first before we do anything. And sure enough, there was nothing there. And had we picketed, it would have been just playing in their hands.

Tell me what "Prometheus" means.

Once we got started, the thing that comes up is, "What are we going to name this?" And that's always the problem. What's in a name? So here was this one genius. His name was Mark. I can't think of Mark's last name. In the 60s, whenever you sat around, it was about philosophy. Everybody had to read a book, and someone would say something about philosophy. So he was one of these people to make sure that when he did sit around that he knew what he was talking about. He had read a lot of philosophy books, books on philosophy, as well as a lot of things about the Greek gods and things like this. Prometheus was a Greek god who rescued all these people by bringing fire. He was a fire god and rescued all these people by bringing this fire down to all these people. Well, it fit. Well, okay, that's what we're about. We want to rescue our people. So the name came up. Somebody said, "Let's call it Prometheus." And then somebody said, "Let's call it Prometheus Group." And then somebody else said, "Let's call it Prometheus Circle." That stuck.

Now, you said a few minutes ago something about cross burnings in Las Vegas. I had always heard that the Ku Klux Klan was not that present here, that kind of a presence. But

maybe it was the John Burke Society?

No, I don't think it was the John Burke Society because I don't think they were that militant. I think they were more people who figured that they have something they can convince you of to change your mind, as opposed to the Ku Klux Klan who just are violent people.

The one cross burning that I recall was next door to me. Well, two houses down from where I lived. And that was a guy that they claimed had raped a white woman. And he went to jail for it.

And we're talking about in the 60s?

Yeah. So I think while his trial was going on, then they burned the cross in front of where his wife lived. He was married. So they burned this cross.

Was he found guilty?

Yeah. He served time. He served time for it. At that time it was cut and dried, I guess. They said, "Whatever the situation was, it doesn't matter. You're guilty." I don't know who did this, but it whoever did this was organized. It was nobody that was black.

(End side 1, tape 3.)

It wasn't anybody black. And anyone white would have to come into the heart of the black community. So they were very well organized to come in, set up a cross, set it on fire, and move out in kind of a paramilitary situation.

How did you feel when you saw that?

I was upset because I was one of those people that were out there trying to fight racism anyway. So it was just a way of trying to figure out, well, how do I get even? What can we do? But I didn't know which way to go. I had my suspicions. I thought, man, this had to be very well organized. It had to be people who are very close working together, a person who one can spontaneously say, "Let's do this," knowing that everybody in there is either going to be for it or is not going to snitch them off, as they say. And they had to have the vehicles in order to bring this thing out. So my thoughts were, "I wonder if the firemen got together and did this?" All of them had pickup trucks, first of all, and there were many, many racists on this thing. And they were such a close, tight-knit group that they wouldn't even have to organize. And this was something that was done like that, but it was done in a way that some organization had to take place.

Now, was this when you were living on Monroe or when you were living --

No. It was when I was living on Monroe.

Okay. So now, you lived on Monroe as young man when you first got married?

I lived on Monroe when I first got married. Then my wife --

In a different house from the one that you grew up in?

Yeah. I built some apartments for my mother and father. One of the units, I stayed in.

But I had these apartments. I say I built them because I drew up the plans and got a contractor and then I did a lot of finagling and bought cabinets that were mismatched or floor covering that was mismatched, but cheap, and I could make it work. The air-conditioning units, I bought from different people and stuff like that. Then some of the labor, I helped out to do it. So my wife and I then moved into one of the apartments. So that's when I was on the fire department when we did that. So yeah. And then a year or so later, we moved out of that and into our own house, which we were waiting to get. It was on Eleanor. Since we've been married, we've had four houses to live in. So we've lived in four different locations.

Okay. And this one you moved in when? Do you remember?

1988.

Okay, good. Being a fireman, you've probably seen more of the city -- and in real estate -- than anyone else that I'll ever talk to. How have you seen the climate of the city change, not just talking about race relations, but the population, the traffic, people no longer knowing their neighbors? When do you think some of that happened?

It started happening in '88. I think that it was a part of the economic cycle because, see, it not only happened here, but it started to happen all over. I say that because we managed the property where the Mirage parking lot is right now. There were fourplex units where the Mirage and the -- the two Steve Wynn properties. But the parking lot right there where --

Treasure Island.

Yeah, Treasure Island. Okay. HUD had those apartments that were just in the rear and in the back. In the HUD contract, we were managing them for HUD. We appraised them and put a price tag of -- what was it? I think they went for 64,000 per fourplex. Now, that was in '87. So in '88, they were torn down. And the next thing, there's a wall up and then this hotel is going up. So

that was the first sign of things changing because for a unit like that, a property like that, to go for that kind of price -- you know, that's 64 per unit. There were maybe ten units in there or maybe even more than that. I mean, that's a ridiculous price because you couldn't even build, even at that time, that kind of property for that price. So knowing that fact, I know that that was when it really started to make the change was '88. And then from there on, it started to really boom.

I admire the people who run things because it's hard for me to understand how they've been able to keep up. We complain about the traffic situation and the problems that we have as far as traffic is concerned, the biggest concern. But still things are really developing and moving. And to be able to do this takes insight because I think they had to have planned a lot of things long before they got started. But they are right with the growth, it appears to me. It's different for me because, like I said earlier, where I grew up we used to hunt and go crawfishing and things like this, which is a country slow living. And now here is this horn blowing traffic congestion and things like that all in a very short amount of time.

What was the major change?

The major change that I've seen was probably the Strip because there was a time that you could drive down Las Vegas Boulevard and you'd be the only car. And now it's bumper-to-bumper, totally.

Often.

You could go into a hotel and you could see the back door of the Dunes or the Flamingo or any one of the older hotels that were there prior to the late 80s. But you go in now and you're going to get lost in any one of the newer hotels. I mean, you better not have a partner and say, "I'm going to be over here and you'll be over there," because you'll never find each other. It's amazing, the size of all the newer hotels.

And the housing, of course, that appears to come with the uniqueness of everything else. It amazes me. I never ever saw, in the time that I was dealing in real estate, a million-dollar house. Now I'm looking at picking up the paper and they're starting at a million dollars. So this is another change I see. You see people with money now are starting to come in and participate in the real estate market.

You just said something a few minutes ago about how you don't know who's in

charge, but they're doing a great job keeping up with this growth. But since you had this Prometheus Circle and what you just said a few minutes ago, where do you see the power in the city? Who is it? Is it the government, county, city, or is it the casino owners?

I see a lot of it being the casino owners. And I say that because if you look at all of the previous politicians, people who once upon a time were in politics, who we would normally see as the power brokers because they make the decisions as to whether you can build this here or put this there -- every single one of the ex-county commissioners or the ex-city commissioners or the ex-North Las Vegas councilmen or whatever are working for the casino industry, including all the mayors that we have ever had. I think Ron Lurey works for one of the gaming companies. The mayor works for Harrah's or ones of these clubs. The people who don't work for those are trying to get involved in land deals and things like that.

I think I read an article last night where this thing with the sports complex was an ex-county commissioner, but now they're in trouble. But that was another land deal that they were involved in. All the city managers and things like this were all involved in the land deal that they all somehow ended up selling to major casinos.

So I see the power brokers being the casino owners. To me the other change is that you can't really point your finger at the casino owners. You used to be able say, "Well, I'm going to go talk to Howard Hughes or Beldon Cattleman or Bob Rice or any one of these people because they don't exist. Now you say, "I'm going to talk to representatives of the MGM Corporation or of the Golden Nugget, Inc., or somebody like that. The last person was probably Steve Wynn. And now I think everybody knows that he himself was not as strong as he appeared to be. So there are even people who are stronger than him.

Why do you say that?

Well, because the MGM purchased all of the properties that he owned without anything, without his knowledge, even, that it was even going to be bought.

So that wasn't a friendly takeover?

No, it wasn't. It was hostile. It was hostile in the sense that -- you know, the mechanics of it, I don't understand because obviously it's way, way up there on a level that even Steve Wynn probably doesn't understand. It was obvious that he didn't want to sell, but he had no choice but to

sell everything. And it all happened within a week.

So that, to me, is power because if you apply for a Visa card, it takes a couple months. So I think that's strength and that kind of strength has moved to town. As a matter of fact, now you see the NAACP or you see the purchasing council, the urban chamber and all these people who are now going to these people instead of going to -- in past years you'd go to your representatives, the Assembly, and say, "Hey, we need this, we need that." But now the takeoff is to go directly to the power brokers who are the MGM and people like this. That's where I think we're going to solve our problems if it ever comes down to it.

Compare Las Vegas under the Mob to Las Vegas today, that power you were just talking about.

Well, under the Mob, they created the organization. I mean, they created the organizational chart. The corporations came in and they just used the same organizational chart. I mean, they got exactly the same thing. They've got floor men. They've got people watching people. Every job description is exactly the same. And the reason it was created that way was because they didn't trust each other. So they got the casino manager watching the pit boss and the pit boss watching the dealers and on down the line -- or on up the line. But the corporations didn't change that. You know, they said leave that intact.

And they have done nothing to change that. But they have improved on the earnings by marketing. And I think that's probably the biggest thing that they've done differently. They market on a larger scale than I think the Mob would market, but they would market to big players. They would say, "Okay, we're going to fly in five or six millionaires and treat them nice and give them a line of credit." These people market to all of the common folk. They'll bring in tons and tons of buses and planes and send you out a two-day free night stay to Minnesota and to all these places that never ever came here. But I'll bet you there must be more flights coming in from Minnesota than anywhere. And these are just all foreign people.

And they have the high rollers just like the Mob did plus --

Plus the masses.

-- all of America.

All of America.

You look at this in a way that I never even thought about before. And I really appreciate this.

People have told me, a couple years ago when I was doing other interviews, that they liked Las Vegas under the Mob because it was safe. How do you feel about that? And how do you feel about Las Vegas under the Mob? What was it like?

Well, from a black perspective, you couldn't like it because you couldn't go into any of these joints that the Mob held.

Some of the workers?

Yeah. Well, the union was stronger when the Mob ran it simply because a faction of the Mob ran the union. And everybody belonged to the union. So if you had a complaint, you didn't have to go to the Mob. Your union steward or your union leader handled the problem. Now if you've got a problem, now you have got to go through the chain of command, if you can get that high, because a lot of the hotels are nonunion. A lot of the employees are nonunion.

So I think the only difference is the union is not as strong as it used to be. And I don't think there's anybody in the world that doesn't know that. I mean, we saw the union secretaries killed and put in trunks, the same way you see in the Mob movies. So without a doubt, that had something to do with the Mob running things. And the connection was there, I'm sure.

And you're talking about Al Bramlet?

Yeah.

Okay. You know, I like the way you put that together.

Getting to some more pleasant parts of the black community, social life as an adult in the 60s -- now, when did you get married?

'62.

So about that time, tell me what you and your wife did for entertainment. Even though the Strip was integrated in 1960 --

Yeah.

-- did blacks really take advantage of the Strip that early?

No. No, they didn't. As a matter of fact, the Westside probably saw its best days in that period. I had mentioned the bowling alley, for example. That wasn't constructed until 1960. The

Cove Hotel, I don't think it received its gaming license until 1960. And it was a thriving hotel/casino.

So then, I was under the assumption that the good businesses left the Westside when integration happened. I'm not right about that. So what happened?

I think a lot of what happened was because the employment of blacks was probably upgraded to the point where -- because I don't think the first waiter was out there -- even though it was open, the first waiter probably didn't have a job until the late 60s. Then that waiter was hired at the Desert Inn in a place called the Skillet Room. They changed the theme to make it an all-black thing. Well, it worked and it gave blacks an experience as waiters and waitresses, but it was still a plantation-style atmosphere, not so much as to the working conditions but the motif, the atmosphere itself. So they would say, "Okay, we want the Skillet Room to be Southern style. So to make it Southern style, we'll bring in blacks to give it that same thing that folks had down South." Now, blacks don't complain because they need the work. They needed to integrate this thing.

So I think those were the first waiters that I recall, which was a place that they could step off and step up because a lot of people that did start there became maître d's and became bosses and things at other places. But that was late, late 60s.

So now there are still complaints. Hey, man, you're not doing enough. There was probably a greater effort to go out and get black dealers. As a matter of fact, I think the (indiscernible) employment had a program that trained black dealers. Well, the program didn't even come into effect until the late 60s.

The other thing was the transitional thing where you had to go downtown to become a dealer before you could go out on the Strip to become a dealer. So that period also made a difference. In that first phase, they never changed the rules. Even after the Consent Decree or whatever it was that was signed, they didn't change the rules. They just simply said, "You still, even though we've got this decree, you've got to go through the process. You work downtown first. Then you come out on the Strip." So blacks still did that. They still said, "Okay, we'll do that." So they worked in a lot of places downtown, the Golden Nugget, the El Cortez, places like that.

The time period, again, that was a stifling point, the point being you must go through the transitional period. Then that period came in the late 60s. It drew a lot of the black dealers out on the Strip and away from the casinos that were on the Westside. So I think that the employment thing was one thing.

And then I had heard that the Cove Hotel was doing so well. They were attracting -- now, this was hearsay and I don't know if this was true or not, but the timing seemed like it was there. And it sounds like something that the Mob would do. They would say that it was doing so well that it was like the New York thing where whites used to come to the Cotton Club. Well, the same thing was taking place here. A lot of whites were going into the Cove Hotel. People didn't like this for whatever reasons, either way. So what I heard was that they went in with a lot of money and they just broke the place. I mean, they gambled more money than the place could handle. And that can be done if you're on a limited bank and you're geared towards certain clientele and you come in with somebody that's betting 30,000 per hand at you. Then it would be possible to do that.

Now, this was a little before the 60s. As a matter of fact, the mid 50s. What do you know about the Moulin Rouge?

Very little, because I wasn't old enough to go in there. I just remember it being there and a lot of people coming to the Moulin Rouge.

But now, the Cove story really interests me a lot because that was later. So now, if a business like that goes broke, then do black people then start going to the Strip or downtown to gamble?

Yeah. They started going downtown or to outlying areas like Jerry's Nugget, places that are close by. The last club was probably the El Rio, which was there on Eighth Street. And it lasted a long time after everything had closed down. But eventually, there were places that could compete with it. They could play nickel and ten-cent keno at Jerry's Nugget. They claimed that the employees were taking from them and a lot of other things. They were probably taking a lot of funds themselves and blaming it on the employees. But it was the last casino that was active in this area that went down.

But the Town Tavern is still in business, isn't it?

Yeah. But it was closed and then reopened in this period, in the transitional period. It's now reopened again.

So have you been in there?

Not lately.

Tell me what the Westside was like. And let's say you're a young adult that can go into the clubs over here now, in 1960, 1962. Tell me what Jackson Street in the Westside is like on a Saturday afternoon or Saturday evening.

A weekday in the early afternoons we'll say because the town is 24 hours. Then you would walk into a place like the Town Tavern. People that were off -- and you have a large group to choose from because of the different shifts that everybody worked. You would walk into the bar. And now you're in a bar where everybody lives close around or everybody knows everybody. So the first thing that would happen is that somebody would buy a round of drinks right away. Then the next person would buy a round of drinks. And it would go on and on and on and on. Probably the bar owner from Sugar Hill, Bob Bailey, would go to the Town Tavern and he'd buy a round of drinks. Well, the next night the bar owner from the Town Tavern would go out to Sugar Hill. As you can see here, the party is -- I wish we had those pictures. But the people that were there at Sugar Hill in 1966 -- it was really the place to go. As a matter of fact, I've been out there when Johnny Carson and Ella Fitzgerald were there at night, 2:00 in the morning, they're there from just visiting out on the Strip. A lot of celebrities used to go in there. Bob himself was an entertainer. So he knew a lot of people. It was one of these things where it had its own style of nightlife.

One of the problem areas was at the same time that this style life was going on, then that was when the drug thing was just coming into being. So that was then a mixture of the drug thing and the legitimate business, we'll call it. So even though it looked like everybody was having a good time, half the people in there were probably drugged out on something else and the other half of the people were there for just a straight drink. But it appeared that everybody was doing the same thing; that everybody was probably having a good time doing the same thing.

(End side 2, tape 3.)

This is Claytee White. And I'm with Mr. Monroe Williams again. Today is August 22nd of 2000. And this is our second session together. So how are you today?

Fine.

Good. What is your date of birth? I didn't get that last time.

12/14/39.

When you lived in Carver Park -- I'm going back over some of the things that we talked about before -- when you lived in Carver Park, did any of the black families have telephones?

I've got to say no because I don't think phones even came to Vegas until the late 40s. It seems like the phones were -- the mid 40s is when we got the first phones. But I really don't recall that because I was about three years old.

So in order to get in touch with someone quickly, you did it by telegram?

Probably, as I recall. I don't really remember.

Okay. You were telling me about some people who lived in Four Mile. The last name was Bolden. Did you remember any of the first names of anyone in that family?

I was trying to think. As a matter of fact, I knew them. I knew them well. It's been such a long time since I've seen them that I don't remember.

So you think I might find a name in one of those class reunion books that you have there?

Well, Mrs. Bolden lives across the street from Madison School. And her husband lived, I believe, in the Four Mile area. At least he went to that Henderson school. He was the only black person I knew that went to school in Henderson.

Good, good. So I'll look for that first name.

You told us that when Lubertha had this ranch, she would invite some of the young people from the community out for picnics and holidays. How did she get the word out to the community?

I think it was by word of mouth. But she had people out there quite often, not only younger people, but adults also. It was a large piece of property. I think in latter years, she ended up with 40. But in the early years, I think it was about a hundred acres or more. I think it was called the Mill Warden Ranch because I think that was her husband's name at the time.

What is the last part of that word?

Warden. Mill Warden, M-i-l-l, Mill Warden. It seems like that was what everybody called it.

Okay, good. We talked about the Westside and how it was sort of well integrated with Mexicans and blacks at one point. Do you consider the Westside ever being all black?

Being all black?

Did it ever become all black?

Yeah. Probably in the late 50s, maybe. Maybe not total, total, not 100 percent black, but probably about 90 or 95 percent black.

When the Mexican-Americans or Mexicans moved out of the Westside, what part of the city did they move into, or did they just disperse throughout the city?

I think they dispersed throughout the city, although, like I mentioned before, as I go down Washington I see the one Mexican family that still lives, the Lopezes.

You gave me the names of two movie theaters. And there was one you couldn't remember. Was that the El Portal?

That's it.

Okay, good.

The Fremont and the El Portal and The Palace.

Good. Yes. When we ended the last interview, you were talking about the style of nightlife on the Westside and how you think that the Westside could have continued to thrive except drugs came in. And that's sort of where we stopped. Did you want to add anything to that statement?

Well, I don't think drugs were the main problem, although drugs were all over at the time. I think that's the same period that the President mentions 'drugs. So it was all over the country at the time. But I don't think it would have had any real significance in the business deterioration of the Westside. I think it was probably a number of things. And I think integration probably played a large part of it. If there was any type of study, I'm sure that the facts would be more towards the integration than any other single issue.

Talking about the integration, in 1960 there was a meeting held, and it was decided that the Strip would be integrated. Do you remember that happening?

Yeah. As a matter of fact, I not only remember that, but at the same time that was occurring, there were other pockets of segregation. For example, the same time that occurred, we integrated the city pool. We had an organization called the Young Democrats. With that organization, we went down and made an attempt to integrate the city pool.

Tell me about that.

Well, we had a monitor. We had several adult monitors. But we just simply told them that we were coming on a certain day. And we went down with our swimming trunks and went swimming. Nobody said anything at this time. But it was just prior to this -- I think it was just a word-of-mouth thing -- that you just weren't allowed to swim in the city pool. There were no signs up or anything like that. It was just an inferred situation.

Where was the city pool located?

Doolittle, same place as Doolittle now.

When you alerted people that some blacks were going to come down to swim, do you remember how you did that? Who was alerted?

I think it was handled by the adults that organized us. I don't recall exactly how it went about, but I know it was peaceful. Then after that, it seemed like it was on a regular basis that blacks began to utilize that pool.

And this was in the early 60s?

This was 1960.

Okay. So the same time that the Strip was integrated.

Yeah, the same time.

Even though the Strip was integrated, did people from the Westside actually start going to the Strip to engage in gaming?

Yeah. Not in a rush. I don't think there was a rush to do it. This was in the mid 60s, early 60s, and that was the Stardust and that was dinner at the Stardust.

Mr. Williams is showing me a picture of African-Americans sitting at a table. I see at least eight African-Americans at a table in the Stardust in the early 60s. And now, the way you're dressed in that picture, the men have on evening attire. Is that the way people dressed on the Strip at that time?

No, not as formal. I think it was just something that we did. And I think it was maybe another occasion that took place that we were involved in. From where we left, I think we just went on over to that place.

So maybe you were coming from a formal affair --

Yeah.

-- And just went out to the Strip. Okay. Now, are you in that picture, Mr. Williams?

Yes. That's me and that's my wife.

Oh, wonderful. You guys are beautiful.

You mentioned a few minutes ago an organization called the Young Democrats. Tell me about the Young Democrats, how they were formed, who was in it, and about some of the projects.

I think it was something that was formed by the Democratic Party. But at the same time, I think one of the stronger black Democrats brought it over to the black youth at the time. I can't remember her name. But she was very, very active in the Democratic Party, as well as in the community. Everybody knows her. She's deceased now. I can't remember her name. It will come to me.

Was this composed of all young people? And when we say "young," what ages?

I'd say between 15 to 20, 15 to 21, maybe 22 at the oldest.

What did the group do?

They were involved in things like helping with voter registration, bird-dogging and voter registration.

Tell me what bird-dogging is.

Well, that's where a group of people go ahead of people who are registrars, voter registrars. They knock on the doors and they ask people if they want to register. If these people say yes, then it saves time for the registrar. Then they maybe mark the sidewalk or do something that would let the registrar, who's not too far behind, know that this household is not registered and would like to register. I think it's still done a little bit.

Were you a part of that group?

Yes.

Okay. So this was the early 60s. So you're in your early 20s.

Yeah. I was 20.

There was a Civil Rights movement here starting with that incident integrating the Strip. Do you remember any of the other events that went on? Do you remember the integration or any of the other fights that went on in Las Vegas?

The school integration, I think it was an agreed upon thing. As a matter of fact, I was on that committee that formed the sixth grade centers. It was just something that everybody said, "We need a plan. We need some way to do this." It was being done nationally, and I think it was more a preventive thing to prevent the feds from coming in and doing something that the cities or the states or the school district should have or could have been doing. So it was a transition, I think, that took place peacefully as far as the schools were concerned, even though the plan itself, the integration plans, created a lot of controversy there as far as the bussing. But I think it was more on the white side than it was on the black side.

Who formed this committee?

I've got a letter someplace. It will probably take me a second to get it.

Wonderful. So tell me about that council that you were appointed to.

Well, it was an advisory council to the planning council. It was made up of community members. The planning council was made up of people like Helen Anderson, Lubertha Johnson, a few of those. And the advisory council included people like Dave Hoggard, Jr., Earl Wynn -- I'm sorry -- yeah, Earl Wynn, Joe Neal, Dave Hoggard, Sr., Sylvia Harris, Lamar McDaniels, Leo Johnson, and Eloise Blue. And the staff was James Puzley, Mabel Hoggard, Isaac White and Henry Moore.

The responsibilities were to try and figure out an integration plan, a plan that ended up being a bussing plan, even though I think now days everybody saw that was a big mistake. It was controversial to that point. There are some that say that it could have been done otherwise. But you don't see the things now that existed back then. People weren't as spread out as they are now. It was more concentrated.

So who was the superintendent at that time that put that group together, that council?

The superintendent at that time was -- who was that at the time?

I thought maybe his name was on that letter. So the letter that was sent to you came from whose office?

James I. Mason was the superintendent.

And so the letter actually came from his office --

Yeah.

-- inviting you to participate?

Yeah. And he was chairman of that committee.

Tell me about sixth grade centers, what that means.

Well, along with bussing, it was a way to figure out how to make it even as far as the white students were concerned. It was a way to give everybody a turn at coming into the black schools. So if you were in the fifth grade, you figured next year you're going to be going into the black community. And they set up centers with mostly sixth grade students. This was just a way to make it fair, in a way.

So the sixth graders from all over the city came to the Westside to attend class?

Yeah, mostly. Mostly from all over the city.

So then we had a whole school almost made up of just sixth grade?

Yeah.

Oh, that's unusual. Okay.

Anything else about being on that council that you remember that you would want other people to know about?

No. It seemed like it was kind of cut and dried. Even though there were committees and meetings, it seemed like the plan was made up in advance because it didn't seem like it took that long for things to go into effect.

Okay. Was the NAACP really active at this point? Do you remember? 60s and 70s?

Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, as long as I can remember, there's always been an NAACP. When you do think back, I think people have a tendency to think of things progressing slowly because the people that were around then weren't as sophisticated or as educated. But to me it seems like the earlier years produced more people who understood, first of all, where they were

and where they came from. And there were a lot of people who could articulate the problem and were well educated. As a matter of fact, as I think back, there were more entrepreneurs located in the black community or in the black area than there are now, per capita anyway. So it seems like there's always been people who were fighting for integration.

The NAACP has always been the main organization. There have been things like voters leagues and things like that that were spin-offs that were active in the black community and in the Las Vegas community. There have been politicians that have been around for a long, long time. People have been involved in politics for a long, long time. There were probably more in the early 60s than there seem to be of late.

Woodrow Wilson, I recall, was a Republican and Assemblyman, which would be unheard of nowadays. But it just shows that people were a little more progressive politically than they are now.

Were you ever a member of the NAACP?

Yeah, I've always tried to maintain a membership. I probably wasn't as active as a lot of the members. But I've always been involved, some kind of way, with either the NAACP or some other organization.

I like the fact, though, that it seems like you did other things, though, that were maybe a little more radical than the NAACP was allowed to do at that time.

Yeah, we did that. As a matter of fact, the president of the NAACP, I remember, once came to us. There were some things happening that they couldn't be a part of and they told us about it. So we took part in it, in the parts that they couldn't play, the roles that they couldn't play.

Good. Still in the 60s, were you aware of Howard Hughes at all when he came to town?

Yeah, I was aware when he came to town. It was a definite recession at the time that he came. The Landmark was there, but it was closed down. I mean, it was empty. There were several other hotels that were either -- if they weren't empty, they were just barely holding on. So when he came to town and started buying properties, then it made a difference in the economics of the city. So, yeah, it was definitely something that everybody was aware of.

So now, because the economics of the city began to improve, was there any evidence

on the Westside that there was a difference being made economically?

There was nothing as far as any new development was concerned. There probably were some changes as far as individuals were concerned. There were probably individuals that made some strides during that time. I recall that at this time or right after Hughes came to town, I think there was a group of very, very young people that put together what was called the Golden West Shopping Center. I think first of all, Bob Bailey, I believe, bought it. And then later on, it was sold to a group of very, very young guys. They converted it into a very enterprising business. That was right after the early 60s.

I do remember that I was approached by some people who said that the union, the Teamsters Union, felt obligated to put some businesses out on the Strip for blacks. And there was a place that had been vacant for quite a few years on Convention Center Drive. They wanted to reopen this place with black ownership. There was a convention at the Stardust. They had scheduled a meeting to try and make plans to seek out some blacks that would be interested in participating in this type of venture. And it would be a feather in their cap because every hotel on the Strip had borrowed money, in one way or another, from the Teamsters Union. And their reasoning for doing this, I was told, is that they felt obligated in that a portion of their membership was black and that these monies weren't being used, they felt, to help the blacks doing the same thing that other businesses were doing.

So it was on a Saturday morning, I think, that there was a meeting scheduled. And every union official was here not so much for this meeting, but they were having a convention at the time and they were just going to utilize -- since they were here, they wanted to utilize some of this time to put this thing together, to at least initiate it. I got a call that everybody had to leave because -- I think it was the same day that Hoffa came up missing. So everybody left town at that time. Then nothing was ever said about it that I know of since.

Do you think if I could find the newspaper from that period, do you think anything about this would have been reported? In a Teamsters newsletter?

No. No, it wouldn't because it was in the talking stages and it was kind of confidential in that they hadn't made any plans. Actually, what they wanted to do was seek out some blacks that, first of all, would be interested in the venture. I think there were probably going to be three or

four things that were going to come out of this thing. One of the things was that it was in a business that was going to be sold because it had been in bankruptcy or had been involved in some type of litigation for years and years. And it would have eliminated the bankruptcy, brought these people, and cleared the property. And at the same time, it would have put some blacks, not on the main Strip, but in an area where it would have been a start. So the plan sounded good.

Do you remember any names involved in this at all? People from the union?

Anybody else from the community? Any names at all?

The names that I can remember that probably would be aware of it would be Tony McCormick. He would be one that would know something about it.

Who is Tony McCormick?

He is a local black person. He has been involved not only with the unions but within the community doing a lot of things. As a matter of fact, he was the one that put the local development company together for the Nucleus Plaza.

Is Tony McCormick someone who's still around now?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. And he's involved in a lot. He's good at a lot of things. He can do a lot of things that a lot of people can't do.

Wonderful. The information that you've given me has just been great. I just have a few other questions and we can end this. I never thought about the correlation between the Westside and Howard Hughes. So this gives me another way of thinking about this, and I appreciate that.

The Las Vegas Westside community at that time probably felt like a community, a very closed, cohesive community. Did you feel that you knew everybody here on the Westside?

Oh, absolutely, yeah. Well, I worked in the market, in the local neighborhood market. So everybody came through the market at one time or another, even though it was one of three markets which you would consider semi-major markets. They were probably medium-sized stores in comparison to some of the grocery stores now. But there were three of them. I think there were Gilbert Brothers and Snyder's and then Ranch Market. Ranch Market was right in the heart of the Westside on Van Buren, and Gilbert Brothers and Snyders were on Bonanza. As a matter of fact,

they were directly across the street from each other at D and Bonanza.

That's near the Moulin Rouge?

No. It's the opposite end. It's right near the underpass.

Okay, good. Yes.

And there were several businesses, then, on that street that blacks would utilize. I think there were a couple of liquor stores. As a matter of fact, Gilbert Brothers had a liquor store on the corner. Snyder's, he goes way, way back. He was known for his malted root beer. Everybody loved his root beer.

Was it made there?

Oh, yeah. It was good.

(End side 1, tape 4.)

You were just telling me the location of some businesses. You had stopped at the feed store.

Yeah. Bob Moore's Feed Store was on the corner. Down the street, I think, was a lumber company. O'Neil Lumber Company was across the street on the same side. There were several gas stations on Bonanza. As a matter of fact, there were three that I recall that most people utilized. I remember one up there quite a bit with my father. And there was a liquor store. I can't remember the name of it, but it was kind of the hangout. It was owned by Harry Leevy. I don't remember the name of it. But he was a councilman, and he was a businessperson that owned that store. And quite a few people used that as a hangout.

Now, Leevy is not black?

No. He's white.

Okay. When did you feel that small town feeling, that knowing everybody, when did that change?

It probably changed or started to change in the 70s because in the late 60s you could still feel the small town. Everybody seemed to be friendlier towards each other and everybody spoke to you wherever you were. But I think it began in probably the mid 70s. That is when things started to change.

Now, when that change came in the 70s, I want to get to that in a few minutes. At

what point did the more successful people have the opportunity to start moving out? You never moved out, which I want to ask you about. But a lot of people then began to move out.

I would say probably in the mid 70s. See, moving out wasn't like moving out today because there was no such thing as Summerlin or Green Valley or things like this. But there were people who started moving to places like Normandy Estates or Twin Lakes or some parts of Charleston Heights. And that was probably the boundaries. I think probably Jones would probably be as far as you were going to move out. But it first probably started out with Twin Lakes. That's when people started to go. But I think there were probably a lot of apartment dwellers that were in places like some of the better apartment units that were out or near the Strip, out around Desert Inn and areas like that.

Tell me where Twin Lakes was located.

Twin Lakes is just west of Martin Luther King about four or five blocks. It was originally built at the same time or around the same time as Berkeley Square. So the floor plan is almost the same. The floor plan is almost identical to some of the houses in Berkeley Square.

Now, you told me before, which area is considered Berkeley Square?

Berkeley Square is the area north of Owens. It's west of D Street. There are three tracts in that area, three separate tracts in the area between Lake Mead and Owens. And that's Marble Manor, I believe and I think there's a Marble Manor II. Berkeley Square. Cadillac Arms was built as a rental, but it later turned into a sale, you know, able to buy and occupy. And then the other tract was a place called Highland Square, and it was built right after or about the same time as Berkeley Square.

Okay. Is there any relationship to drugs coming into the community and people moving out of the community? Would you say that there's a relationship if we look back on it today?

No, I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I think the drugs at the time that they were popular were probably all over. They were probably more on the outside of the community than they were in the community. It was probably an elitist thing. As you moved out, you know, that was probably part of the elitism, the drugs. So it was probably more outside than inside.

Okay. If we looked at Las Vegas then, let's say the 60s, until now, where would you

say that the seat of the power is for Las Vegas? And I'm talking about the county, as well as the city. Would you say it's city government, or would you say it's the powers on the Strip? Is it business or is it government?

Oh, I think there is a combination of both. I think the power is in big, big business, but it also involves government and government officials. I think back and as long as I can remember, I look at all the valuable land, like I say even the valuable land on the Westside. Everything from Owens back to Madison Street from H Street over to J where all the commercial property is right now belongs to the mayor or some of the council members. But Mayor C.D. Baker -- if you look at the change title on most of those properties, you'll see that it was owned by the mayor. But then if you look also at some of the land where Summerlin is now or some of the land that was broken up, which used to be called Hughes Site, but some of the land just east of Hughes Site --

Where is Hughes Site?

Hughes Site was an area that was bought by Howard Hughes in the early, early years, but it was very, very valuable in that it blocked the city, both from the west and from the north. So the city may have developed faster, but there was no place for it to go. I think a lot of the city officials were learning that the Hughes Tool Company was in the breakup and getting ready to develop Hughes Site. Then a lot of these officials, if you look at some of the records there, you'll see that a lot of city councilmen, a lot of city managers, people like this owned a lot of these parcels of land. And it turned out to be very valuable. It was desert land. It was spec land. It was speculation, I'm sure, but there was some insight in it. They were officials.

But I think back to what we were originally discussing. I think as far as power is concerned, if it is divided between governments, I think the county would be the strongest. The county government would be the strongest because more money is there. The Strip is there. The individuals in the county will probably come out better than individuals in the city. But still the stronghold, I think, lies in the major, major hotels, the bigger corporations, even the ones that are solely owned. For example, I think there's just a few out there right now. But Imperial Palace, I think that still may be owned by one individual. But there are not too many.

And there are some properties that are owned by blacks out there now, as a matter of fact, closer or nearby the Strip.

Give me an example.

Well, I think that this property probably near Mandalay Bay that's owned by some blacks.

Still today?

Yeah. There have probably been blacks that have either formed syndicates or corporations that have bought some of the properties near or around the Strip.

Do you think that's a recent development, as well?

I think it was probably prior to the last five years or so because the value of them is so high now. But the value was probably low enough in, say, five years, maybe ten years ago even that you could afford, the average person, the average working person, the average even businessperson can afford to buy or even go in with somebody and afford the prices that were high, but still not as high as they are now.

Okay. When you look at Las Vegas as a city, how do you think people throughout the country see this city? What is our image?

Well, I think the image is probably that it's a carnival, that nobody lives here. You know, you hear that. And then I hear it from people that I know that I actually talk to that say they never believe that people actually live in this town. To me, living here all my life now, to me it seems like it's a carnival. It seems like a circus. It's unbelievable some of the things that have come to town. So it's not amazing to me that this occurs because, like I say, even living here, it's amazing.

So do you see it as a positive place to live or a negative place to live?

I see it as a very positive place to live mainly because of the growth that has taken place that I think is going to eventually balance out. I think that the low tax structure -- there's no income tax. And I've heard stories on those type of taxes and how people pay quite a bit of their salaries in incomes taxes. Inheritance taxes, there are none of those. Everybody I talk to claims that the utilities are cheaper.

So I think it's going to bring about large corporations, major corporations. It's probably going to bring about a lot of the Internet businesses. A few of them have already located in town, I think. The base is going to be broader and the economy is going to be more diversified. If that happens, then it's still a boom and still a better place to be.

The other day in the newspaper, our present governor said that because of the low

educational level in the state that he's having problems bringing businesses here. Do you agree?

I think that that's probably true. But the same thing happens when they get ready to put up a major, major hotel. If they need 50,000 workers, they have no problem getting those 50,000. And they're not here, you know. So I think these people, if they put a plant here, they'd have no problem fielding with the best intellects.

My last question is: What do you see as the future to Las Vegas?

I see it that there's one big hurdle that has to be crossed, and that is black involvement in the gaming on the Strip. And when that occurs -- you know it's going to happen. And you know that when it happens that it's going to open up a number of things for blacks, as well as doing a lot of other things for the city. It's going to bring in a lot more black tourism because if there is any marketing towards the black tourists, it's very, very subtle, very light. So I think when this occurs, a lot of black people will start to come here as tourists, as well as investors, as well as all the things that we enjoy as black people.

But I think that hurdle is yet to come. It's expected. It's going to happen. And when it does happen, it's going to make a big, big difference in not only the city overall but black folks who -- and then that's going to, also probably take care of the major problem that we have on the Westside, and that's lack of development. So I think once the Westside is up and functioning -- and I look for that happen to eventually -- once that is happening, then I think it's going to be a beautiful city.

Yep. I like your vision. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

(End side 2, tape 4.)