

An Interview with Tyrone Williams

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The UNLV @ Fifty Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

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Preface

Tyrone Williams came to Las Vegas in 1957 as an infant. His mother had come out here to live with her sister, who owned property out on Simmons Road. She later sold the land to North Las Vegas, and it became part of the North Las Vegas airport.

Mr. Williams entered first grade at Westside Elementary School. His teacher was Ms. French, who taught many North Las Vegans in the 50s and 60s. He recalls shooting his BB gun with friends in desert areas that are housing tracts or shopping malls today.

Tyrone's mother worked at Holsum Bakery on Charleston to help support her family of eight children, of whom Tyrone was the youngest boy. He can recall that blacks were not welcome on the Strip unless they were going to work in one of the hotels or casinos. There were few places or activities for young people, but he remembers riding up and down the streets in cars and attending wrestling matches at the convention center. He earned money by taking on odd jobs and washing cars.

The first job Tyrone held at age 16 or 17 was cleaning up a large grocery store. After that he worked for Clark County School District, the U.S. Post Office, and Nellis Air Force Base. In 1978, when Tyrone was 21 years old, he applied and was hired at UNLV.

Over a span of almost 30 years, Tyrone has had seven promotions. He literally learned the job from the bottom up, and today is a facilities supervisor two, with approximately 148 people under his supervision. He joined the Executive Housekeepers Association and after completing a two year training program, was certified in executive housekeeping.

In addition to further training and re-certification, Tyrone also helped write a training manual for custodians at UNLV. This manual is used with a hands-on teaching program to ensure that new hires know what is expected of them. His future goals include encouraging a training program that will guarantee a unified approach to cleaning any building, so that the quality of upkeep is the same in any campus building.

Today is August -- 20 what?

25th.

-- 25th, 2006. We're in the Reading Room of Special Collections at UNLV. And I'm with Mr. Tyrone Williams. This is Claytee White.

So tell me how you're doing today?

Oh, I'm doing pretty good.

So like I told you, we're doing a history of UNLV. And I'm just going to start with your early life. Tell me a little about coming to Las Vegas as a young boy. How old were you when your family moved here?

I was a baby.

You were a little baby in your mother's arms. Okay. So what are your first memories of Las Vegas?

I guess that would be pretty much school, Westside Elementary School.

Which year did you move here?

That would be '57.

So 1957. Did your parents live on the Westside, your family?

No. My family was broken up. My mother moved here by herself. My father's still in Chicago.

So where did your mom move?

We lived with my auntie. My auntie lived out on Simmons Road and we lived in a trailer behind her home. We lived there and she had, like, farm animals. The land she lived on is now the North Las Vegas Airport. She sold the land to them. And she had farm animals, like I said, out there.

My mother later got her own place, at which time I went to first grade. It was at Westside Elementary School. I think my teacher was the same teacher everybody in Vegas had before me, Ms. French.

Oh, yes. I've heard a lot about Ms. French. Tell me about her. Why does everybody remember her?

Well, she was like the only teacher in town. Back then the town was a lot smaller, a lot less people. If you walk out to certain areas which are full of houses now, it was just desert. We used to go with our BB guns out in the desert where we live at now.

What kind of things did you shoot with the BB guns?

Lizards. Just anything to shoot at.

Okay. So now, were there any animals at that time that you could actually hunt for food?

Yeah, there was, but we never went hunting. We were just out shooting BB guns. Couldn't kill anything with a BB gun.

Okay. So who were some of the other people living in the area at that time? Do you remember any of your playmates?

Yeah, a lot of them. Most of them have died, passed away.

Well, that's awfully young. You moved here in '57.

Yeah. Not too young. I'll be 50 next month.

Yeah, that's true. Now, tell me when you were living in the trailer, did lots of people live in trailers at that time?

Quite a few. You had a lot of trailer parks here. Yeah, it was the cheaper way to live and everybody did it.

So your mother, when she left the North Las Vegas area, moved into the Westside?

Yes. She got the apartment we all stayed in on A Street. And that's right at the tracks where you cross over and then we had an Indian reservation on the other side of the tracks. I think it's still there.

So now, this was 'A' as in Apple Street?

Yes.

Okay. A and what? What was it close to?

A and Owens.

Okay. So you weren't that far from the school, not really, from the Westside School?

No. No, not very far at all, like three or four blocks.

Did you walk to school?

Yes, we did.

With a lot of kids in the neighborhood? Did your mother walk with you?

Just all the kids walked. I'm the youngest boy of the family.

So how many kids in all?

Actually eight.

Oh, wow, eight in my family, too. So did your mom work with that many kids to raise?

Yes. She worked at a bakery. I think it was -- you're talking a long way back.

Just take your time. It's only 50 years.

It was right there on Charleston. I think it was Holsum Bread or something like that. She worked there for a lot of years.

Did most black women at that time work in the casinos or the hotels?

Quite a few of them I think.

Do you remember?

Very little because back in the 50s I was three or four years old.

So now, in the 60s -- you should remember more about the 60s because around '65, '66, you should start remembering things; is that right?

Yes.

Do you remember your mom talking about blacks not being able to go on the Strip?

I remember a lot about that myself.

Well, tell me about it.

The only way you were able to go out on the Strip is when you were going to work. As far as going inside the casinos and stuff, they really didn't like that very much.

When did you see that change?

Pretty much in the 80s.

Not until the 80s?

Yeah.

Wow.

But, you know, I think the blacks had their own clubs.

You entered high school, when was that, in the late 60s?

Late 60s, yeah.

When you entered high school and after that, where did you go for entertainment?

Jackson Street.

So what was happening on Jackson Street at that time?

Just all the kids hung out there. We rode up and down the streets in our cars, and sometimes downtown, but it wasn't tolerated much downtown. They would make you get away.

How did they make you go away?

The cops ran you off.

So tell me some of the places on the Westside that you went to?

There weren't too many places for kids. On weekends we rode up and down Jackson Street, a lot of wrestling matches at the convention center, if you could afford it. I washed cars and whatever I could do to get to watch the wrestling matches.

So why did you like wrestling?

I don't know. I was just always enchanted with it. Ray Stevens, Peter Maivia, all those people. I still am.

Now, tell me about the Biltmore. Do you remember a place called the Biltmore on Main Street?

Biltmore?

Um-h'm.

No, I don't.

Bonanza, something like Bonanza where Main crosses Bonanza.

The Biltmore? No, I don't remember that.

Okay. Do you remember The Cove?

Oh, yes.

Tell me about that place.

I never really got a chance to go in there. I remember when it was open and I remember it just -- but I was too young to get in. And I watched it close down. I remember it just sitting there, just the building, an old, vacated building for years.

What do you remember about the Moulin Rouge?

Moulin Rouge? Pretty much the same as The Cove. I remember when they reopened it. I remember walking in there. I was 21 years old. I walked in and went to the bar and met one of my grade school teachers at the bar. And I hadn't seen him in years. That was my first time ever in the Moulin Rouge.

What did it look like at that time? So what year are we talking about approximately?

That was like '76 I think it reopened. Yeah, I think it was '76.

Okay. So do you remember what it looked like on the inside in 1976?

It was a pretty nice bar. I mean the whole place hadn't reopened. They just opened it sections at a time. And this was when they used it as a bar, but I think it was like a showroom because it was a large area.

Were they serving food there at the time in the 70s?

No. It was just a bar area open.

Just a bar?

Yeah. It eventually opened a bar on the other side and they used this part as a showroom.

So they opened the showroom again?

Well, they had concerts and stuff there. But there really weren't any shows there.

Okay. Do you ever remember going to a concert there?

No, I never did make one of the concerts, never did. I'm not a concert-going person.

Okay. So what do you enjoy doing? Wrestling is one thing. What else?

I go to the movies a lot.

Okay. So once you finished school, tell me what some of the first jobs you had here were. I know you just told me that you washed cars and did everything.

I didn't finish school. The last school I went to was Clark High.

My mother was sort of strict in a way. When you lived in her home, you either went to school or worked, no in between and no time off. So I had to go get a job, and my first job was cleaning at a grocery store out in North Las Vegas. I can't even remember the name of the place. But it was a large grocery store and we cleaned up late at night.

Did you stock shelves and do everything or just clean?

Just clean. We took care of the floors and cleaned the restrooms and stuff.

Did you work for the grocery store or for a cleaning company?

For the grocery store. Pretty nice job. I really liked that job. I did that for about a year until they sold that grocery store and it turned into Smith's Food King.

Why did you decide to quit school?

I don't really know. School just bored me. I got to where I just -- being young and silly I just hated it. So I quit. You could make more money with a job. Why wait?

That's right. Do you regret that now?

Oh, yeah.

What do you tell your children?

I don't have any kids.

No children, okay.

So what do you tell children that you see in the neighborhood running the streets?

It's smarter to stay in school, much smarter. Stay in school or, hey, you can put a Johnny mop in your hand right now and I'll be your boss.

So now, tell me what happened after the store closed and it became the Food King. What did you do then for a living?

I started working at Clark County School District as a custodian. At that point I'm 18 years old. Didn't seem to fit in there; couldn't get along with my boss. Again, hot tempered, I quit there. I took the test and got a job at the United States Post Office, machine-operating clerk. That lasted for three months.

Now, that was a pretty good job.

Excellent job back then.

So what happened to that?

Like I say, I have a quick temper.

So what was it about those bosses? What would they say to you to make you angry enough to quit?

The one at the school district, what really got me -- I was by his words an excellent worker. I was doing the science area of the school. There was this one guy who worked in the gymnasium area and he made the big mistake of putting some oil on his dust mop and sweeping down the gym, which made it real slippery. One of the players got hurt the next night at a basketball game.

So instead of giving this guy problems, the boss decided to switch us around. Now, he didn't force me to do it, but I told him show me the area, show me what I need to do because I've never done this before. He was talking with another supervisor and I guess he didn't want to take the

time to show me. And he had the guy that messed up show me. The guy showed me what to do and I did exactly what he told me to do.

Two weeks later here comes the boss yelling at me about something that wasn't cleaned right. I tried explaining to him what happened. He didn't want to hear it. And then I didn't want to hear. So I left.

At the post office, now that was --

And what did the people in the community think about a job at the post office at that time?

It was impressive, hard to beat.

Yes. Yes.

Very hard to get.

Difficult to pass the test.

Very difficult. I think I had the second highest score there.

◦ The post office was different, a job that I really liked. But what happened there I was, like I said, 18. Everybody there was in their 40s and 50s. I got nicknamed "The Kid." And along with that, the reverend at my mother's church, which I've known all my life, worked there. At break times and lunchtime, he wanted to read the Bible to me. So I didn't take much of that. I quit.

Then I went to Nellis Air Force Base, again as a custodian. It was a temporary job. I only lasted six months there, and then I came to UNLV. ◦

Okay. So which year did you come to UNLV, approximately?

1978.

And you were about how old?

How old was I then? I was 21.

Twenty-one, okay. So this is the job, then, that became your career?

Yes.

Okay. Twenty-one years of age. So what made you stay at this job?

I don't know.

Had you learned a little more patience by that time maybe?

No, not really.

Okay. Well, tell me about the application process.

Now or then?

Then.

Then? It was word-of-mouth. If you knew somebody that worked here -- one of the guys that worked at Nellis Air Force Base told me about this place. And we came out here. Two other guys from Nellis Air Force Base besides me came out here and put in applications once we got laid off there. And we were hired. So it was pretty much word-of-mouth.

Is it still that way today?

No.

So how does it work today?

You come out to human resources, apply. Human resources brings the applications down to us and we go through them and pick the best applications out of the stack. And it's always a stack.

Oh, really?

Yeah. Extremely high turnover.

Oh. Why do people leave?

Not what they expected.

I mean you have all the state benefits, don't you? This is a state job?

Yes.

And you have the same benefits that anyone else on campus has?

Yes. But it's not what most people expect. Custodian, they got this idea of the lazy guy that sleeps all night.

So tell me what you do instead of sleeping?

You work. And you work hard.

So you've been here now since -- 1978 to 2006. So you have been here for 28 years?

Yes.

In that time, have you moved up and moved around within the department somehow?

I've stayed within the department, but I've really moved up, yeah.

So you started off at the very bottom?

Yes.

How many promotions have you had within that 28-year period?

Oh. Seven.

So tell me about them. Tell me how it happens.

Well, most of them just progressively happen except for the first one. The first one was extremely difficult, extremely. We had a boss here that, again, I didn't get along with him. I started applying for a supervisor position after the second year, but I never could get it. For some reason never did. And he and I just didn't set horses [didn't get along]. Finally, I guess he got tired of me biting at his heels and he finally promoted me. And after that it just came progressively. •

How many people do you supervise today?

A hundred and forty-eight, I think it is.

Wow. So now, these are people that work the same shift that you're working or more than one shift?

More than one shift. I work the swing shift.

Which is?

5:00 to 1:30.

A.m.?

5:00 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. Then there's the day shift, which is 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Then you have the graveyard shift, 10:00 p.m. to 6:30 a.m.

Wow, that's tough.

Yeah. Well I've worked it.

So you've worked all of them.

Everything but the day shift. I've never worked days.

Why?

I don't think I could. Every job I ever had has been swing shift. I have never worked days. Me and sunshine don't get along.

Wow, that's interesting. So now, what is it on a campus like this that can keep that many people busy 24 hours a day?

The people in it. You have no idea the amount of trash we move out of buildings. Some of the buildings like, for example, the Physical Education Complex, we can move 20 bags of trash out of there in one night. That's a lot of trash. And people have this idea of the custodians that work the

building. You can't imagine what it would be like without that custodian.

Oh, yeah. Yes.

So the idea of someone lazy sleeping, that's not happening.

When we saw the garbage strike in New York on television at one point -- I can't remember how many years ago now -- but the garbage was just piling up in the streets. So, yes, I can imagine. And with as many students as we have around here...

Oh, yeah.

What time of the year is better for a custodial staff? Is it when there are fewer kids? Do you lay off people during the summer?

No, we don't. When the kids are supposedly off -- there's really no off time. There are always classes going on. When it's not classes, they rent out the buildings on weekends. There's always something. But when there are fewer classes, that's when we redo your floors, when your carpets get cleaned, when your floors get stripped and waxed. That's when we really work. When you're here, we're not really working, we're just maintaining. But when you're gone, that's when the work really starts.

What kind of fun things, what kind of celebrations do you have in your department?

We really don't have enough.

Do you celebrate birthdays?

In the different areas. See, it's separated -- each supervisor has two buildings. Well, yeah, they do celebrate each others' birthdays, but only in that area.

I see. So now, you supervise 140-something people.

Yes.

How are they broken down? You have how many people directly reporting to you?

Right now the way it's set up, we have the custodian. Above the custodian is a custodian worker two and then there's a supervisor one. Now, the supervisor one is like a field supervisor. He has two buildings. When he's absent, he's on vacation or something, the custodian worker two replaces him. Then you have supervisor two, which is a shift supervisor. One's on graveyard, one's on swing. Day shift, what they really do on day shift is they just do emergency cleanups and stuff like that and make sure all the restrooms are well stocked. Now, over the supervisor two,

that would be me. I'm a facility supervisor two. And over me there's Phil Shealy, who is the assistant director.

What is that name again?

Phil Shealy.

Shealy. So how many buildings are you in charge of?

Right now all of them.

So you're in charge, really, of the whole campus?

Yes. It wasn't so a month ago. A month ago we had a guy who retired named Dave Anderson. He was over the graveyard. Now that Dave's gone I have to cover everything until he's replaced.

Okay. So did you get a raise?

No.

Okay, just more work, but not more money.

Yeah, raise in responsibility.

Right. And you have a person who covers two buildings. And that person reports to you?

No. That person reports to the shift supervisor.

Okay. And that shift supervisor has how many buildings, how many of those people under him?

The one that works on swing shift, he has like 50 people.

Okay, I see.

Not quite 50. But he also has to do the warehouse. He runs the warehouse, which has two people in it, which issues all the supplies to all the buildings on campus. And he also does the training of all the new custodians that come on campus. That's why he's a shift supervisor along with the guy on graveyard. Now, the guy on the graveyard has like 90-something people, the bulk of the people. But all he does is supervise.

I see, not the warehouse. Is the warehouse here on campus?

Yes.

Where?

Over in the yard there, custodial building.

Oh, this yard over by --

Right behind the Westfall Building.

Yes, okay.

That's where all the facility is, most of them.

But that building is pretty small, isn't it?

No. We have a full-size warehouse.

Well, we don't pay enough attention.

We have about a 350,000-dollar-a-year budget. We spend that much in toilet paper and paper towels. You can't imagine the amount.

I can't even imagine.

But we actually spend that much.

Do you have a union, a labor union that you and your people belong to?

There's a union, but most of the people don't belong to it.

Why?

Because there's not much they can do. I mean I agree that the people should have someone to speak on their behalf, but that's all they can do. Nevada is a right-to-work state. And as a state worker, you're under laws where you cannot strike. It's illegal to strike as a state worker. So a union is pretty much useless.

Okay.

But we do have the Southern Nevada Employees Association. They debate issues with me mostly. That's all.

So there's a shop steward?

Yes.

How do you feel about that?

I'm okay with it. They need somebody to speak up for them.

Okay, good.

Everybody makes mistakes, including supervisors.

Oh, yeah.

If we made a mistake, we made a mistake. They should have somebody representing them.

So how long are you planning to continue to work?

I don't know.

(End Tape 1, Side 1.)

So now, what do you like about the job now? It's not that hard work anymore, is it?

I think it's harder.

How?

We've got a lot of different personalities to deal with. And to keep the peace out there amongst them is really difficult; to match the people in the areas working together is really hard to do.

A lot of the things I wanted to do that -- the reason I became a supervisor is there were a lot of things I thought that weren't done right and I wanted to change that.

Give me some examples.

I really thought that for a long time blacks were mistreated. You know the old saying "last hired, first fired?" And with a black up there amongst them, it's a little bit more difficult to do. That was one of the things I did.

The other thing was like custodians weren't well trained at the time. I don't think my supervisor knew how to do it. Or if he had the time to do it...but I made time for it. Training has now become one of the main things in the custodial department. We've written a training guide for custodians and supervisors alike. And I think it was a pretty good thing. And there's a lot of things I want to accomplish before I go.

Okay. So tell me...a new person walks in, what do you have to do to train them?

Like I say, we've written a training manual. We go through the training manual with them. We take them out into the buildings and show them exactly what we were telling them with the books. Then we assign them with a supervisor. And they get to keep the books as a reference guide, also. The supervisor is responsible for the ongoing training. All we do is the initial training so they won't be lost like a deer lost in the headlights. It's not as easy as everybody thinks it is.

So tell me what I would have to do. I'm starting to work today. What happens? You take me through the manuals, then you take me into a building, and what do we do?

I show you how to clean the restrooms properly.

Okay. How do I do that?

First of all, you have to gather everything that you need to clean that restroom. Like in this

building you get a locker maybe on the other side of the building. So you can't keep running back for gloves and all that. So you should have everything you need right there with you.

On your cart?

On your cart, yes. And first thing you have to check all your dispensers, paper towels, toilet tissue, soap, everything to make sure everything is filled, dump all your trash, sweep your floors and remove your debris from your counter. Then you begin your cleaning process.

And you do it in that order?

Yes.

Is that the order you do it at home, also?

Not really.

Okay.

I said do it right. I didn't say do it quickly.

And you find that's more efficient, also, that's faster?

Yes. It's much more efficient. If you start cleaning with paper on the floor, then you'll have a problem getting it up.

Okay. So now, your supervisor didn't have the time to train you the way you should have been trained. So how did you learn it and how did you put it all together in some kind of a training manual?

Back then you learned it through watching the other guys, the guys who had been here awhile, which is not a bad way of learning. But what if that guy hadn't been doing it right? So you've been taught bad habits.

As far as what I put in the manual, what I put in the manual was 20 years of knowledge and about 10 years of trying to re-educate myself into this field. I had done a lot of studying in the field. I joined the Executive Housekeepers Association. And they have a certified executive housekeepers program, which is a study program. Two years it takes to do it and re-certification. You have to study in all the different areas of executive housekeeping. And I achieved certification.

Is that local, the organization?

No. International.

Okay. So where do you go to take the classes?

They had some here and they had them at community college and then they have a self-study. I took the self-study.

So do you suggest that for your other people, some of your other people?

Supervisors that want to move up, yes.

And that's something you pay for yourself?

I didn't.

How was it done?

The university paid for it.

Okay. Do you have some of the benefits? I know that you have medical benefits and vacation and everything else just like everybody else on campus. Can you also take classes at a discount rate?

Yes, you can.

Okay. So how does that work? So if you have children and they want to go to school here, how does that work?

You have to apply for it. I've never done it, so I really don't know much about it. But I do know it exists, yes.

Okay. So you have those same benefits. That's great.

Do your people take advantage of that for their children?

I think some of them are.

Well, that's good.

And for themselves. We have a lot of young people working out here.

Ah, okay.

And I would advise them to do it.

What are your expectations? You've trained this person. What kind of expectation do you have of these people who are coming in? You talked about how high the turnover is. Well, what do you expect of them?

Good attendance, number one. And we don't expect for them to be really proficient at the job because there are lot of things that take a long time to learn, such as operating the floor machine.

It's not a very easy job, especially for some women. It's a heavy piece of equipment that's really hard to manage. So we don't expect them to be that proficient at it, but we want them to make an effort. And as long as they're here and make maximum effort, I don't see any problem. But attendance is the biggest reason for the turnover. And a lot of them just quit. First night wasn't what they expected and they just throw their keys and go.

Okay. Women do the same job as men?

Oh, yeah. We don't have women and men; we have only custodians.

Have you seen that change a lot in the 28 years that you've been here? Do you see more women now?

Yeah, a few more women than what it was, yes, especially in supervisory positions. It's changed a lot. And back in that day that's another thing the previous supervisor -- he wasn't much for women supervising. I don't remember us having one. We had one that had been here a long time and I think she left our department and went over to the student housing. So for a long time we had no women supervisors at all.

So now, is student housing part of your responsibility, as well?

No. No. Student housing is a self-funded part. They're still state workers, but a lot of them are self-funded. So they're a different department. So is Thomas & Mack and so is the student union. You have like four separate cleaning entities on campus. We're considered the main campus, and Thomas & Mack is I guess the next largest.

Oh, that's interesting.

Have you noticed that the way students take care of the property changes over time? When you look back 28 years ago at the way the students took care of the buildings on campus and took care of the chairs and the tables and all of that and the trash and everything, has it changed over the years?

Well, it's a lot better than what it was.

So explain that.

I don't know. Just the fact my memory -- when I first started here, there was nothing that could surprise me that you would find.

I expected you to say just the opposite. I expected you to say it's that way today.

Oh, no. I think there's a lot less graffiti than what it was. Every restroom you went in, including the ladies restrooms, graffiti everywhere. I remember going into the Humanities Building. At that time the whole second floor was nothing but classrooms, and students had smattered the walls with feces. It wasn't a surprise to me because they did it all the time. We had to clean it off the chalkboards and stuff. In the last five years, I have never seen anything like that. But back then it just didn't surprise me to see it.

Wow. That's a surprise to me.

I think they've grown up a lot from what they used to be.

So does that mean that our students are more serious today?

I think so. A lot more serious, as far as I can see.

When someone comes to work in the department, they're known as a custodian. Now, hasn't that title changed over the years?

They're known as custodial worker one. They used to be known as custodian. But that would be the only way it changed is just custodial worker one. They were upgraded from a grade 20 to a 21.

What does that mean?

When you're a state worker, you have grades. Ten years ago all custodians across the state were grade 20. Our present executive director, Harold Archibald, petitioned to have them upgraded. And through that petition not only did the university custodian get upgraded to a 21, but so did everyone statewide.

Now, what does it mean when you're upgraded? What does that mean to you?

It didn't mean anything to me. But to the custodians it means more money.

Okay, I see. Once you're a custodial worker one, then you become a two?

No.

Okay. What happens?

You have to be promoted to a pier two.

Okay. So once you're promoted you become a custodial worker two?

Yes. And what that is, is like a lead person. In the absence of the supervisor, you become the supervisor.

Okay. And the supervisor is just a supervisor, not a custodial supervisor, just a supervisor?

Custodial supervisor. A working supervisor. At that level he's a working supervisor.

Working supervisor, okay.

Yeah. And custodial supervisor two is a shift supervisor, who doesn't work, he just supervises.

Okay, I see.

And then you have me, facilities supervisor.

Okay. Now, do you think the custodial staff gets the kind of respect these days -- has the level of respect changed over time?

I think it's getting a little better. It's getting a lot better.

What do you see to say that?

Just the way they talk to you and the way they treat you. Back in the day you weren't even a custodian, you were a janitor. And we all hate that word. What is a janitor? And today they pretty much call everybody a custodian and they treat you a lot different than what they used to.

Now, who is 'they?'

The people in the buildings.

Okay. So the professors and everybody?

Yes.

Clerical staff?

Yeah, they treat you a lot different. I think they have a little more respect for you than what they used to. Back when I first started -- it's not like it is now; all the buildings are smoke free. Well, back when I started a professor was smoking in the classroom and he stomped all his cigarettes out on the freshly waxed floor you just did. You're standing there and you get in a room, you got a pile of cigarettes six feet wide where he's just been stomping them all day. And you got to redo that floor. How often can you redo a floor, you know? They just didn't care. You burn a hole into the wax and you want the wax replaced every time you do it. Can't nobody do that every day. Like I said, that's something you do in the summertime when classes are down. But they expect it to look clean every day when you just stomped a cigarette in it. Can't do it. That black mark's going to be there.

Wow. What kind of complaints do you get and where do they come from mostly?

Clerical staff mostly. Trash not being dumped, forgot our trash can. You go in a big office that's got like 16, 17 trash cans around, some days you just forget one. It happens. But that's the biggest complaint.

Okay. What happens when there is an emergency? I have special guests coming and I need to have some special work done in my area. What do I do? Who do I call?

You call the help desk.

Oh, what is that?

That's the area where they receive all the projects that you want done whether it's maintenance or custodial. You call the help desk, tell them what you want, when you want it, and we try to deliver.

Tell me the difference between maintenance and custodial.

Maintenance is all your, what they call, trained work like A/C people, plumbers, all your skilled maintenance people. We're considered non-skilled, wherever that came from. These are your skilled workers on the maintenance side.

I see, okay. What do you consider the best location to work on this campus?

That would be EPA or the computer center for a custodian. By far the best.

So the EPA really adheres to what they believe in?

No, not really. What it is, is EPA is buildings that we lease to the federal government. As in this rest of the buildings -- in the computer building and EPA, we lease those buildings -- not in the computer building; that's our building -- but they pay us because they are a self-sufficient group. They pay us to provide the custodial service that they got. So they dictated how many people they wanted in their building. So did EPA. They're over manned because they want a high level of cleaning in their building. So they have too many custodians. Like in the computer center--one person could do the job, but they've got two. At EPA, they've got seven over there when four could do it. So you've pretty much got nice, easy jobs.

So that's the job that people expect when they first come in, that kind of job?

Yes.

Who gets those jobs?

Just the luck of the draw. On my shift, which is the swing shift, you'll find that most of those

people that work the swing shift are the people that have been here the longest. The reason is everybody starts off working graveyard shift. And this is what you call a desired shift, so you get here by longevity.

What one is the desired shift?

Swing shift.

That's the one from 5 o'clock to --

1:30.

-- 1:30. That's desired?

Yeah. Well, really day shift is the desired one, but you're not getting day shift.

Okay. So how does somebody get day shift?

You really don't get it unless Phil Shealy wants you there. He chooses who goes to day shift.

Oh, really?

Yes.

We have some great people in here on the day shift. We have a special security on this department, so the custodial staff cannot get in here. We have our cleaning done during the day.

Linda, Mike, Glen.

Yeah. So we like them.

What are some of the other things that you wanted to do when you became in charge that you still haven't been able to do, that you're still doing, or in the process of?

I wanted to train them in a way where we're all on the same page, a unified way of cleaning no matter which building you're in. Right now we're getting there, but we're not there. Right now you might see in this building it looks a lot cleaner than it does over in the classroom building because of that individual supervisor doing things his own way instead of...

When you started 28 years ago, how many buildings were there on campus? Do you remember how many buildings?

I couldn't be exact on that. Let's see. MPE, all the EPA buildings, which is four of them, technology, Lilly Fong, museum, Herman Westfall, Grant Hall, Dickerson Library, which is now the law school -- did I say Wright Hall?

No, not yet.

Wright Hall, Grant, Frazier, Humanities, the museum and Tonopah.

Okay. And now today, today...

So how has the cleaning staff increased? It's almost doubled?

Pretty close, yes. I would say except for five or six people it has doubled. Yeah, I think we had like 53 or so. Yeah, it has doubled, quite a big difference. I remember we had a board hanging up when we came in that showed where every person worked and you had like 53 people and you only had 68 slots. And I thought they would never get to that "68" one.

So what do you have now?

148.

And you have how many boards now?

We don't even have a board.

Oh, okay. You don't even do it that way.

A new building comes on line, it's getting ready to be used, what do you have to do as the person in charge to get it staffed and everything? What do you have to do yourself first?

What I have to do is I have to take a look at the plans, decide what equipment we need for that building, how many chemicals, dispensers and custodians we might need. We generally get what they give us, the state. Then we allocate for the size of the building how many people you're going to get. But we can ask. And we generally try to ask for more than what's really needed so we can open the building right.

Once the building is built, we've got to go through and do all the floors because they come with a factory finish, which is just something to keep it covered until they get it down. We've got to scrub all the floors and put down the permanent finish on it, which is really not permanent. So that's a couple of weeks to do that. There's a lot of things to be done in opening a new building.

And that team that opens it, is that the team that stays there to maintain it, as well?

Pretty much, yeah. Pretty much, yeah, because lately they've been hiring the people a month or so before the building is finished. That way they can go in and they have it ready for the opening.

Do you have anything to do with selecting the person who is hired?

I do a lot of recommending to Phil and he pretty much goes along with it. But Phil Shealy does all

the hiring.

Okay. How long has he been around?

I would say six years.

So would you ever want his job?

I couldn't get it. Like I told you, I didn't graduate high school.

Oh, so you have --

It takes a bachelor's degree.

Okay. To do what he does?

Yeah.

Which building do you think will open next? Do we have anything that's close to being open? It was the student union that just opened. We don't have anything else close, do we?

Not that close. But I think the first one that probably would be open would be Science and Technology, which is a huge building. It's probably going to take ten people to do it.

How many people does it take to do the library?

You've got nine at night and three during the day, I think, and one on weekends.

Yeah, because it's open all the time.

Yeah. So you have quite a few people over here. It will be about the same size building, but they're not going to be open 24 hours. So we'll probably only have nine to ten, which is what originally we put over here. But it's been growing.

Well, tell me about the law school because they have two buildings. They have the round building where the classrooms are and then they have that other building that has everything, faculty offices and all of that. That's a pretty big complex, too.

Not compared to here. I don't think it takes as many people. You can do that with six or seven people.

Okay. So these people really work?

Oh, yeah. The national average per custodian square feet you have to clean is like 18,000.

So give me an idea of a place that's 18,000 square feet. It's like a three-bedroom house?

Yeah, somewhere around in there -- or big, much bigger, bigger than that. 18,000 square feet, let's see...

Oh, 18,000.

Yes.

I'm thinking 1800.

Oh, no.

18,000 square feet?

Yeah, that's the national average.

And you should be able to clean that in one shift, one person?

We're cleaning 30.

30,000 square feet?

Yes. Per person. Like I say, you've got nine people working over here at night. This is a 300,000-square-foot building. So that's a little over 30,000 feet.

That's a lot of work.

So there's no sitting down and sleeping unless you're in EPA. But they don't get to sit down; I make sure of that. They've got the shiniest floors and the most well dusted offices on campus. And it must stay that way always.

Because they're paying for it?

Yes.

And they pay extra, really.

Yes, they do. And they expect it. They send down government inspectors to make sure we're doing what we say we're doing.

(End Tape 1, Side 2.)

We were talking about the EPA building and how it's the cleanest building on campus. So would you repeat what you just said there, the last thing you said?

What was that, about the government inspectors? Yeah, they send down government inspectors to check our work and make sure we're in compliance with the contract. And we stay in compliance.

How are you evaluated?

I'm evaluated by Phil Shealy, who is my immediate supervisor, a yearly evaluation, the same way everybody else is evaluated. He gives you your strong points and your weak points. I generally get a good evaluation.

Wonderful. What kinds of problems do you encounter that keep recurring?

I think the biggest thing is personality conflicts between workers. Sometimes supervisor and worker, they just don't get along. And you move them around to try to get everybody -- some people just don't fit. It happens.

Is there a male-female friction, as well?

Sometimes.

But no more than male-male?

Not really. It's pretty much the same. A lot of the guys, you know, you have the macho guys who don't like the female supervisor. There's a lot of that. But they have to accept it. If you want to work, you've got to accept it. She's the boss. And I will stand behind her a hundred percent.

That's great. Working the kind of shift that you've worked for the number of years that you've worked it, tell me how your social life, church life works in a place like this. I know it's a 24-hour town, but how does it work?

Well, it works like everything. Like you say, it's a 24-hour town. I don't go to church as much as I used to. As a matter of fact, I haven't been there in a while. Social life, the only thing you can't do at 1:30 in the morning that you can do at 12:30 in the afternoon is banking. But you can shop until 1:30 in the morning. You can even shop for clothes at some places. This is Vegas. It's a 24-hour town. There's nothing you can do in the day that you can't do at night.

How often do you get back to Chicago?

I have never been to the place and don't intend on going.

So no more family is there? No more family members?

Like I say, my father is still there and I probably got some new half brothers and sisters, but I never met him.

Where are your brothers and sisters now?

We had a lot of death in the family. All my brothers have died. I've got three sisters still living here.

And no one moved away?

No.

Wow. That's great. My family's all over the country.

Oh, yeah?

Um-h'm.

Nah, we ain't going nowhere.

What do you like about Las Vegas?

The weather, the people. It used to be a lot better; you didn't have as much traffic. But I guess you got to deal with it.

And that's something good also about work; getting off at 1:30 in the morning, traffic should be fantastic.

Yeah, it is. The only problem you have with traffic is getting here. But leaving, no traffic at all.

So tell me about some of the more interesting people that you work with, some of the most interesting events in your life here at UNLV.

A lot of interesting people.

Anybody who stands out in your mind?

Jay Gray.

Tell me about Jay Gray.

Well, this was my supervisor. Later I became his supervisor. But he's been my friend for all the years I've been here. He died a couple of years ago. And in the lobby of FDH, there's a plaque with his name because that's where he worked for most of the time he'd been here. President Harter dedicated that to him. I think that was my biggest event here. He deserved it.

That's wonderful. What about him would make you feel that he deserved it?

Nicest guy you'd ever want to meet. Like I say, the big boss and I back in those days didn't get along. And if he had his way, I'd have been gone. But Jay never let that happen. He always told the truth, whether you liked it or not.

And so did he actually get to know Carol Harter?

Yes. She knew him. Everybody had met him like that.

Wow. That's great.

Who was the most memorable president--you came here in '78, so who was the most memorable?

President? Most memorable one I think would be Robert Maxson.

Why is that?

Just the speaking power he had. The best, Carol Harter. But Robert Maxson had the most presence. Leonard Goodall, he sort of just fit in. He was a good president, but he just fit in with everybody else. Maxson was a real strong president, but he was I think a little too strong.

Tell me about sports programs here, speaking of Maxson. Did you ever get involved in going to any of the sporting events, football games, basketball games, any of that?

I went to one basketball game, just one.

Was that when Tarkanian was here?

Of course. It just didn't seem to be no more fun after that. But, yeah, I went to one. Craziest thing you ever saw in your life.

In what way?

It was just insane. The noise level, the people, sea of red sharks circling the building. It was crazy.

So different from wrestling, huh?

A bigger show.

Okay. Do you think our basketball team will come back to that heyday period?

They're getting close. I'll go see another one before I leave.

Okay. Good. That's good. Well, I really appreciate this information, telling me all the ins and outs of the department. Anything you'd like to add?

No, that's pretty much it.

Okay. Well, I really appreciate this. Thank you so much.

Thank you. Sorry it took so long to get back to you.

(End Tape 2, Side 1.)