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An Interview with Stan Irwin

An Oral History Conducted by Cork Proctor

All That Jazz

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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All transcripts received minimal editing that included the elimination of fragments, false starts and repetitions in order to enhance the researcher's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic images accompany the collection and have been included in the bound edition of the interview.

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Preface

Stan Irwin shares details of his background, family, and early show business experiences. His life story spans many decades and includes attending NYU, doing stand-up comedy, flying during WWII, working at Club Bingo in Las Vegas, and building up the entertainment at the Sahara Hotel.

Mr. Irwin comments on many aspects of the Las Vegas entertainment scene. He recalls many headliners that he worked with and shares anecdotes about several. The Beatles, Johnny Carson, Dinah Washington, Billie Holliday, Lena Horne, and Pearl Bailey are just a few of the many outstanding performers that he brought to Las Vegas.

Stan offers comments on racism in Las Vegas thirty and forty years ago, and gives his opinions on the Mob, Howard Hughes, prostitution, and dress codes in the fifties and sixties, among other things. He recalls how Las Vegas looked in the early days, mentions a cardiovascular health project for children that he's involved with today, and gives a little insight into staying fit at eighty-plus.

We're here with Stan Irwin. And it looks like we've got a good deal. The tape is rolling. This is Side A. Today is the 22nd I believe.

Today is the 24th.

Is it the 24th? Well, it shows you that the old fellow is a little smarter than the younger fellow. And we're at the beautiful Porter Valley Country Club. And we've just had a spectacular breakfast. And I'm going to shut this off and go to the loo and I'll be right back.

Go ahead and say a couple of things.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Stan Irwin, the middle of the afternoon.

Close enough. Okay. We're here at the Porter Valley Country Club. I'm going to move around this side because it's better for us. And then we get a little more intimacy. Pretty soon we'll pick out a room and some furniture and they'll go, What happened to those two old gay guys from the Porter Valley Country Club?

With gray hair. Yes.

Quick introduction. Mr. Irwin and I are not intimate, but we have known of each other and been around each other for probably in excess of 50 years along with Herb Jeffries and some other guys. I thought it would be a great afternoon to sit down and talk to Stan. So I drove all the way down here in a PT Cruiser. And here we are. So we're going to have some fun.

And, Stan, I'm just going to ask you a couple of mild questions. If I think of something that I think would be good to interject, I will break your continuity. And, otherwise, you'll just be talking nonstop until we run out of tape. I have about four hours' worth, so you can just go on forever.

Thank you. I'm going to take a nap now so I'm prepared.

That's called Florida shtick, folks. Anyway, just by way of introduction, you know where to go with this. I guess we'll start at the beginning from where did you come? Were mom and dad in show business? Were your grandparents in show business and so on? And were your grandparents born in Russia or Yugoslavia, which I always find interesting? And then how did you wind up being a comic? So let's take it from the start.

Born in New York City right smack in the middle of mid Manhattan, 204 Manhattan Avenue.

That's between 108th and 109th Street. And Manhattan Avenue is one block west of Central Park.

My father was born in Russia. He was the first of a family of nine to come to America. His first job was a dollar and a half a month and he lived in the back of the store. It was a grocery store. He learned the food business and his profession became cafeteria and restaurant owner.

My mother was born in America. She comes from Polish and German backgrounds. Her brothers were in show business. Edgar Allen, Paul Allen and Jack Allen. Jack Allen was a theater manager. Paul was a black-face performer. And Edgar was an agent. Edgar booked the Fox vaudeville circuit.

When I was in kindergarten, I would be with grandma in the afternoon at a vaudeville house, the Mount Morris Varent or the Palace. So I kind of grew up with a feeling for show business and I loved to see people laugh. I performed in public school plays, junior high school plays, high school plays besides also being involved in sports. Boys' camp was my main background. I was always in major performances. And at very young ages I was doing full Gilbert and Sullivan Operettas, (speaking Latin), et cetera, et cetera. Danny Kaye became my favorite. And I used to write Danny Kaye-type material for myself, but I wasn't Danny Kaye. String beans, tomatoes, lettuce, yams, turnips, potatoes, okra and hams, carrots, pea, celery and (dyseseccral) cheese. I also learned to do the alphabet backwards. Z, Y, E -- I'll get to that in a minute.

Tip your waitress. We'll be here all week.

Yes. Of course, he had Russian names. I wrote my own Russian names so I could perform in that manner. But I was ahead of myself. At that time comics were turmoil comics and I was sort of stand-up Jerry Seinfeld type. And I would do things that were common denominators that people could refer to as having happened to them, which again was ahead of itself.

I worked the mountains. Mad Jack, who later became Rodney Dangerfield, was not going to work the mountains that year. He and I used to write material together, and Joey Bishop and I used to write material together. So I borrowed and loaned parts of Rodney Dangerfield -- Mad Jack's -- routine. I paid him \$50 a week, combined it with mine, and after the summer season I never used it again. Then I started to do nightclubs in New York City. Played the toilets in Long Island and the Bronx, et cetera, et cetera.

Is this the 40s, Stan? Late 30s, early 40s?

This is the early 40s. I went to NYU. I did senior shows at New York University. Then Ezra Stone, who was coming mother of the radio show "Henry Aldridge" was drafted. Well, in those days when I was at NYU I used to do Joey Adams Amateur Hours, which earned me money to go to college, 25, 15, ten dollars. And I would always win in one of those categories with impressions. The main money was working as a busboy in the mountains. I used to work with Joe E. Ross. And as I'm taking a shower after cleaning off the tables and doing the silverware, Joe would come into the shower room and teach me the burlesque sketches we were going to use that night. Then when it was staff performance, I used to headline that and I would do a record act and impressions and standup comedy.

Record act being pantomime?

Pantomime. Now, I'm drafted. And at that time when Ezra Stone was drafted and I went to audition for doing Henry Aldridge, I auditioned for the writer Bone Smith I think his name was. And he loved my voice. He said you have the voice of Aldridge and the timing of Eddie Brackett. So this was right before the summer and I was invited to come back and do this in the fall. And then I was drafted. So that ended that career.

After I was released I wrote to all the people I know -- Mr. Van Hartizfelt at the agency -- here I am; I'm ready to do Henry Aldridge. But Ezra Stone also was out of service at that time. So I followed my career in showbiz. And then I was moved across the country to Philadelphia, Chicago and then Billy Gray's Band Box, which was very popular on the West Coast and in Los Angeles. Billy Gray normally had himself, comedian, and two other comedians, a boy singer and a girl singer. That was his average show. When Billy wasn't there, there were three comics. Then Billy was there, there were two additional comics. I came in when Billy wasn't there and Joe E. Ross was the main comic.

I didn't know anything about Billy Gray. And at one time a singing group came back from Las Vegas and Mancini's (Hank Henry Mancini) future wife, Jenny, was in that singing group. Hank used to hang out there at Billy Gray's all the time because of Jenny. I had him do an orchestration for me for (indiscernible) loco. And later on he said you're the only guy who ever paid me for doing work.

That's a compliment from Henry Mancini.

And then he said you should be in Las Vegas at the Club Bingo where we were. And I said where is Las Vegas? Now, in those years there was Las Vegas, Nevada, as is, and Las Vegas, New Mexico. And Las Vegas, Nevada was so unknown that much mail written Las Vegas, Nevada actually went to Las Vegas, New Mexico and had to be returned to Las Vegas, Nevada.

And a man named Herb McDonald came in. He was head of promotion and advertising and entertainment at the Club Bingo. And he came in to Billy Gray's Band Box and he saw me. I never met him one on one, but the next thing I know is I have a contract for the Club Bingo for 11 days. Well, to give you an idea of the confidence that Herb had in me, the day I opened at the Bingo he went to the El Rancho. But I was at the Bingo. And my fourth day Mr. Prell gave me the room, the Bonanza Room, and I became the head of entertainment, advertising, public relations, promotions, and I started to upgrade the type of performers in the Bonanza Room.

Was that 1948, Stan?

That was 1949. Las Vegas was a two-lane highway, one going east and west and one going west and east, with telephone poles all along the side of the road. I think it a compliment that Beldon Katleman built a white fence around his property after I was at the Bingo awhile because the people would walk across the lawn of the El Rancho and come right into the Club Bingo. This prevented that.

I stayed there a full eight months and went back east because my son was going to be born. I worked the mountains and New York clubs, and then I got a call from Mr. Prell that we are going to build the Sahara on the Club Bingo property; we'd like you to come back in the same capacity. And, of course, the money in those years was exceptional, more than I was making as a performer. So I came back as the vice president in charge of entertainment, publicity, public relations and promotion. In a short period of time I convinced Mr. Prell this wasn't the Bingo, this is the Sahara, and we need individual people to head each of those classifications.

When I came back most of the nightclub performers were already booked at the other hotels over the years that they existed -- the Joe E. Lewises, the Sophie Tuckers, the Ritz Brothers, people of that nature. So I had to create new personalities from allied fields at the Sahara. The first person I went after was Milton Berle. But William Morris couldn't give us Milton Berle because we didn't know an exact opening date. Finally because of certain problems, I convinced

Mr. Prell and his group that October 6th -- or the 9th -- I think it was the 6th was the opening day.

And what year would this be now?

1952. By the way, I also performed at the Silver Slipper when Hank Henry went on vacation.

Herb McDonald was the mayor of the Silver Slipper area, which was a frontier-type area. And he brought me back to Vegas twice. I also -- I'll get to that. So I then went to William Morris.

Hershey Martin was the agent. And I said I'd like Ray Bolger. And he said Ray Bolger does not perform in nightclubs. I said someone convinces Ray Bolger to perform -- a wife, a girlfriend, a boy friend, an uncle, an aunt, a friend, a mentor. He said his wife. I said what's her name? And Hershey Martin said Gwen. I said may I have her number? He gave me the number.

I called. I said hello, Mrs. Bolger, my name is Stan Irwin. I'm the producer of the newest hotel on the Strip, the hotel Sahara. And I deem it an honor and a privilege if Mr. Bolger would open our room. She said Mr. Bolger does not perform in nightclubs. Ad libbing I said, Nightclubs, nightclubs? It would be an insult if I called you for the services of Mr. Bolger in a nightclub. We are a dinner restaurant presidia stage, two spotlights, full sound system and console. And she said, Why don't you come over? So we opened with Ray Bolger.

At that time of my booking at the Sahara and producing there I introduced more new personalities to the nightclub arena than all the other hotels put together. But I did have a problem. When the Sands opened the head man there was Jack Entratter. Jack Entratter was associated with the Copa in New York. And I found out my problem immediately as to why I had to find new performers for our theater. When I went to Danny Thomas and I said, Danny, love to have you over at the Sahara, he said, Stan, I know you as a comic. I know Jack Entratter as a booker, as a producer. I worked for Jack at the Copa many times. And now that he's at the Sands, if you were me who would you work for? I said Jack Entratter. And he said right; that's where I'll be going.

So I brought in people from opera -- Helen Trauloo, Mel Keogh. I brought in Jose Greco and his dancers. I brought Eleanor Powell out of retirement after 14 years. I brought in Abbott and Costello. I just went through anybody I could think of who could put together an act. Separately, Nelson Eddy. Separately, Jeanette MacDonald. And I proved very successful.

But then I went to Mr. Prell and I said Jack Entratter has first choice of prime people.

There's a man called Bill Miller, who had Bill Miller's Riviera. And he was as equal in influence as Jack Entratter for the Copa. And Bill at this time was in Copa City in Miami. And I advised Mr. Prell that we should go see Bill Miller. We went to see Bill. Then Bill was brought in as the entertainment director/producer. I was under him in that vein, but I still headed -- oh, I was still over all of the other people who were in publicity, promotion, public relations.

The Sahara became quite successful. We built the best lounge ever. We had the top people. I brought in Don Rickles. Bill Miller brought in Louis Prima and Keely Smith. Later on we brought in Mary Kaye Trio from the Frontier. We had secondary groups that were marvelous such as The Characters. The last show was five in the morning and you couldn't get in. It was five to 5:45. When Rickles and Prima first opened, they did five shows a night. But by the time it ended they were doing two shows a night.

After a while Bill Miller, for whatever reason, left and went to either the Riviera or the Dunes. And then he was involved in multiple hotels, finally in the International, which is the Hilton. And he was involved with Alex Schuffe, who used to be our treasurer and then our vice president. And he became president of the Hilton -- or the International. He and Bill were involved in bringing in Barbra Streisand and Elvis Presley to the Hilton. It was a different type of contract. It was a certain amount of salary and stock, heavy stock.

I created at the Sahara what I call the Stan Irwin Security Program. If you perform for me, you perform well, then I would give you a three-year contract of a minimum of 16 weeks a year. I would buy you at a salary that was beneficial to the hotel. It gave you financial independence to ask whatever you wished to ask for outside bookings in other arenas because you are already financially secure for the last three years. I also created the per-head policy at the Sahara. I would pay you a minimum, but give you \$5.50 per head of the people you brought in over the week. Many people enjoyed that -- Donald O'Connor and other vocalists and other comedians. So I had that feel having been a performer that you needed certain security, or if your value was above a salary, why not benefit from it?

The secret of gaming is the involvement of walk-in participants. The more you can get people into your hotel, the higher the percentage would be from your machines and your gaming tables. That's why our lounge was so important. From midnight to six in the morning we were

jammed, which gave us great traffic. That's the secret word, traffic, as shown today in the way all hotels have become independent cities or countries to maintain the people there and to keep them there as much as possible.

When it came time to renew Louis Prima's contract, Bill Miller was elsewhere and I went to Louis' home to renew the contract. Louis said I don't belong in a lounge; we belong in the main showroom. One of the reasons he said that is because when we would have a problem with a performer, I would move Louis and Keely into the main showroom as an opening act for the star. So he says, We belong in the main showroom; I shouldn't be in the lounge in back of a bar where the bartender is using the malted milk machine, where the waitresses are running up and down calling out orders, where the people are sitting there drinking in front of us.

And I went to myself, Oops. Again, I ad libbed. Louis, you're absolutely right; you don't belong in a lounge. You notice that our chairs in the lounge have wheels. Why? So that when you're performing the audience swings their chairs around and face you directly. That's a theater. That's it. It's the Casbah Theater. I said give me your phone. And I called John Romero, who was head of our publicity. I said, John, we do not have a lounge anymore at the Sahara. That is the Casbah Theater. Louis doesn't belong in a lounge; he belongs in a theater. Change all the signs. Get rid of all the old tents that are on the table. Eliminate any thought or reference to Casbah Lounge. That from this day forward is the Casbah Theater. And Louis said, That's different, and signed another three-year contract.

That's a great story. The bartender was Ramsey.

Ramsey.

You could never make Ramsey laugh. He would sit there. And Rickles would beat him up and he would just keep that stone face.

That's it. Ramsey was the model for mummies.

Can I interject something?

Sure.

That's when I think the first time -- we never had a formal sit-down. But I think the first time I met you would be '62 when I was with Dede and Bill.

Yes. Dede and Bill.

They were there. Freddie Bell. We worked back to back with Freddie Bell and somebody else too.

Novelettes.

Yeah. Were you the first guy to put Mary Healy and Peter Lind Hayes in the Sahara? Did they work for you?

I'll tell you someone who did that very few people recognize or realize. It was -- oh, God, I have a senior moment at this time. By the way, Artie Shaw played the Casbah.

Yes, he did. Kirby Fields was there opposite Louis and Keely.

Well, I had Andre Previn, who played jazz, there.

He certainly did.

And he was not that successful, but he stayed over one night when Louis and Keely opened and watched them and could not understand how they were so successful. Andre Previn, we know what future he had in the Philharmonic areas.

Also the most successful jazz album I think in the history of jazz, My Fair Lady, with Shelley Manne and Monte Budwig, 1955, somewhere in there.

Yeah. Now, I had Dinah Washington. I had Billie Holiday.

With Sam Butera's Band.

Yes. And at that time they could not live at the hotel. Lena Horne and Pearl Bailey broke the color line for African-American performers to live in hotels. We had a marvelous trailer park type of accommodations for them right outside the Casbah.

Right out the back door.

Right out the back door.

Right on Sahara, which was then, what, San Francisco Avenue?

Yeah. We made it Sahara Avenue. That became the Sahara Avenue.

Yeah. But before it was San Francisco.

Yes. But Lena Horne and Pearl Bailey broke the color line so that artists were allowed in the hotel as guests and could visit all the eating areas. Some people who don't know said the black performers had to come to the stage through the kitchen. There wasn't a hotel in Vegas in those days where, until they built proper dressing rooms, that the artists didn't have to come -- black,

white, green, pink or yellow -- through the kitchen to get to the stage or to their dressing rooms.

They changed in the back.

That was (indiscernible) for everyone.

I got one that you used to book, Kay Martin and Her Body Guards.

Yeah, Kay Martin.

Jesse Hotchkiss, the worst bass player that ever picked up a bass.

Oh, yes. Yes. Absolutely true. The same I haven't thought of in quite awhile.

The Sahara became the Sahara and was recognized as a major edifice and hotel. When the Sands brought in the Rat Pack, the Sands became like "the" hotel based upon the promotion, the publicity and Sinatra himself. Few people remember that Sinatra many years before the Sands performed at the Desert Inn, and not too successfully. That was when he was having a problem because he was married to or going with Ava Gardner. And they used to say the best shows at the Desert Inn at that time was in the --

Dressing room.

No. In the casino when he and Ava Gardner would argue. From there he went into "From Here to Eternity" because of the relationship he had with the people at the Desert Inn. And Sinatra's history, it's unknown after that.

The Desert Inn also did this type of favor for Jimmy Durante, whose career took a dive. And the boys there brought Jimmy Durante in and rebuilt his career.

Can I throw in a footnote? I went to see Louis and Keely. And I'm sure you would concur.

They really were never a big-room act because I went to see them when they had that production show at the DI, Stan, with the rickshaws and everything and it died. It just didn't work because it wasn't enough of that jing-a-ding, a-ding, a-ding, a-dinga.

There's a certain room that's better for certain artists. When I designed and helped design the Congo Room at the Sahara having been a comedian, and comedians were very high in attraction at that time --

(End Tape 1, Side A.)

We're at the country club up here, the Porter Valley Country Club. It's Cork Proctor and Stan. And he's talking about when he designed the room, the Congo Room at the Sahara so

it would really be a great workspace for comics, singers, et cetera, et cetera.

Then after the fire we had at the Sahara when we rebuilt the Congo Room, I even made it more intimate for comedians. The fire was one of those grease things in the flume. And we interrupted gaming. But we had another room, a convention room built on the second floor with a booth and spotlights and sound. And we immediately moved Teresa Brewer up there and we never interrupted any action at the Sahara. It was an involved fire but not devastating.

For humor I put up signs in the passageways that were built so you could get to the casino cage or back to the eating rooms or the escalator to go upstairs. And one of the first signs I put up was, "Dealers and women first. You talk about hot games, you haven't seen our crap game lately." So there was a certain amount of humor involved. No one was hurt, just material damage.

Was that '54, Stan, somewhere in there, '54?

No. It was I think a little later. I'm not sure. Fifty-four is when I brought Eddy Arnold in. And he and Colonel Parker used to have arguments in their dressing room because it was at that time that the Colonel was beginning to bring Elvis Presley to the forefront.

But the Sahara was always on the cutting edge, always involved in futuristic thinking. It was through the Sahara that I brought the Beatles in. And I brought them into the convention center because they would have been too big for just a hotel room. Now, the Sahara when you landed at McCarran Field was the last hotel people would come to. They'd come down the Strip. And at that time they'd hit the Flamingo, then they'd hit the Frontier and they'd hit the Desert Inn and they'd hit the Thunderbird and they'd hit the El Rancho, then they'd hit the Sahara. So by the time they got to me -- every other hotel said, no, I'm not interested in the Beatles. And when they came to me I said yeah, but I'll put them on in the convention center.

And at that time I helped develop -- prior to that along with the other publicist assists, the Publicity Directors Association. We would come up with ideas to promote Las Vegas. We would take it to the Hotel Owners Association. And if they liked it, they would say you got it and they'd give us the funds. So this was a relationship of all hotels to each other, whereby if you had a star that had laryngitis and couldn't go on, you'd call another hotel and then you'd switch your opening and closing and they would send their star over to you or we would send our star over to them.

Reciprocal goodwill.

That was it. And the idea was with the Publicity Directors Association to bring people to Vegas and then let each hotel vie for them with their own publicity and their own methods, means and know how. But bring traffic to Vegas. We opened the TWA flight San Francisco to Vegas. Normally it takes six months to a year for new flights to go into the black. This flight went right into the black. We all went up there and put on major performances, shows, convention dialogue, meetings, threw silver dollars away as we rode down --

Abe Schiller.

Abe Schiller in his pink outfit was one of the majors and recognized as a Vegas attraction.

The Beatles -- I put aside and divided up the convention hall with an equal amount of seats for every hotel. And I advised the heads of each hotel that I've blocked seats on their behalf for the Beatles. The reaction was, Yeah. So what? Okay. That's fine. About ten days before the Beatles were due to open every owner called me. Do you still have our seats? Because the nieces, nephews, grandchildren of the top gamblers wanted tickets for their youngsters to see the Beatles.

If I weren't brought up with the moral character that I have, instead of saying they're \$12.50 or \$25, I could have asked for a thousand dollars a ticket and every hotel owner would have paid it based upon the people that are coming in for their youngsters to see the show. I also was not intelligent enough to cut up the stage and tear its wooden parts down and sell them, or to sell the sheets and pillowcases, one-inch cuts, that the Beatles slept on. But my thinking wasn't there.

The Beatles -- I was told I could only put 7,000 people into the convention center at that time. This is the old convention center. I decided to put people behind the Beatles, as well as in front of the Beatles. And I'm the first one to do two shows with the Beatles in one day. I put in 8,408 people per show or 16,816 people for both shows.

At 12 bucks a pop.

12.50, upper 25. There were two attractions that ever filled the convention center at that time. One was Leonard Bernstein and the other was the Beatles.

Stan, did you work a percentage of the door with the Beatles or did you just give them a flat fee?

The Beatles were paid a flat fee because they wanted to see Las Vegas.

Do you mind telling us what that fee was?

\$25,000 for both shows. Now, we also made a small fortune for the Sahara with the Beatles.

Few people remember that Vegas had an opera association. Bill Willard headed that. And we used to do operas at the high school auditorium. I also produced the second straight play, not a musical, in Vegas. It was at the International. They had a room there that sat 1301 persons. The first show in there was Jesus Christ Superstar, a musical. My show, I had Art Carney in a trilogy of Broadway comedies written by Neil Simon and other top comedy writers at that time. So we were very innovative in Vegas thinking. Maynard Sloate then began to do Broadway shows down at the Plaza. So we created a lot of new ideas and new personalities in the Las Vegas area.

At that time Mr. Jones, who was formally the lieutenant governor of Vegas, came to Mr. Prell and said we'd like to use Stan Irwin to electioneer for our mayor since his re-running Mayor Baker. And then they changed it to no, let's let him run for the state assembly. He undoubtedly won't make it, but at least the people will recognize his name throughout the state.

Well, I don't do things to lose. So I went on a full campaign of "Stan, Your Man." TV just came into Vegas, Hank Greenspun's station out of Henderson. I was the only one running for office I think who appeared on TV. And I would come into a desk setting with flags behind, remove my jacket, put it on a chair, sit on the edge of the desk and basically said I'm Stan, your man. How can you vote for people who can't talk to you to talk for you?

Ooh, good line.

I beat every incumbent. I was also a pilot in World War II. And I got permission to do fliers and drop them out of a plane over Henderson and Las Vegas.

The Las Vegas Sun, after the 1955 session, headlined "Irwin railroads sales tax." The sales tax was needed because the growth tax on gaming was getting out of line and became like the sole, major supportive tax of the state. And the state needed another form of taxation to alleviate the total responsibility of gaming. The first year of the sales tax, which was two and a half percent, was higher than the total gaming taxes. That doesn't exist today, of course.

It's seven and a quarter now.

Okay. When I forced the tax through, I did a "Mr. Smith goes to Washington." I blocked debate, set time certain for the vote, tie the sales tax, because I was on the Ways and Means committee, to

Aide to Dependent Children, meaning if you didn't vote for the sales tax, you voted against Aide to Dependent Children. So we got it through.

It's important to know that when people talk to me now they say, What's the difference between Vegas now and when you were there? And I say they took the fun out of Vegas. Vegas is big business. At one time you could not own more than one place in Vegas. You could not have multiple floors of gaming in Las Vegas so that you would use territory rather than high-rise. High-rise was in Reno because there was a limited amount of room in the city.

When Hughes took over in Vegas, the action was such at the government level that it was approved that one could have ownership of more than one establishment. How Howard Hughes became involved is that he was staying at the Desert Inn and had two of the upper penthouse floors. It was now approaching the Desert Inn Tournament of Champions. And word was sent to Mr. Hughes, we are having the Tournament of Champions; we would like to know when you will be leaving since the top two penthouses are booked for the golf tournament. The reply sent by Howard Hughes to the owners of the DI was, How much do you want for the hotel? He bought the hotel and threw out the Tournament of Champions, which went to La Costa where the former owners of the DI now became owners of the La Costa Resort area.

That's basically -- we used to have a thing called the Branding Iron, which was a forerunner of roasts. Everybody knew each other so well and so intimately that once a year Bill Willard would head the writing staff. I was part of the staff and part of the performing organization. And we would roast everybody -- owners, mayors, performers. And it was a major charitable event.

My father, Al Proctor, did that for years.

Oh, yes. Yes.

That was my old man.

Oh, my gosh.

One of the great working alcoholics of Las Vegas fame who rode his horse into Big Joe's Oyster Bar in the Thunderbird. I have pictures. That's funny, man.

Every once in a while Bill Harrah would ride his horse into the multiple structure in Reno. And as he would pass a table, he would say, "Double their bets."

And the old man Smith did that, too, old man Raymond.

Ah. Okay. Any other questions that we may have?

Well, yeah. We still have time. I want you to tell me, because the people are not going to know this and I'm sure you're not vain to this point, when were you born?

I was born March 28th, 1920, in New York City.

For those of you that don't do math well, that means he's just a little over 39.

Slightly over. Almost if you reverse it.

But you look great. And what I didn't do today is bring you a picture. However, when I come back I will get a picture, which can go in the archives as well along with the other people -- Freddie, Sonny and blah-blah-blah.

Well, when you send me a copy of this tape, then I'll send you a gorgeous picture.

I certainly hope so. You don't even have to autograph it. We'll put it in the archives.

I want to go back if I may and ask you about World War II.

Please.

Were you married to Ruth then?

I was married to Ruth for World War II. When I became a cadet -- first, when I wanted to go into the service, I wanted to go into Navy submarine service because that duty paid one and a half times your salary.

Hazardous duty.

I didn't qualify. So I went for Navy pilot. I didn't qualify. I was too heavy. I went for Army Air Corps pilot. No. I was too heavy.

I've never seen you heavy.

Yeah. I weighed at one time 191. I looked like Costello. I was 187 when I was drafted. Since I was drafted I enlisted in airplane mechanics. I went to Chanute Field in Illinois. In due time I lost enough weight to qualify as a cadet. Now, if I were a cadet accepted in New York, I would have been in Mississippi and that area. Since I was accepted in the middle of United States, I went to Texas for cadet training, like at West Point -- no horse, no wife, no mustache. I graduated December 6, 1943. That's when I married Ruth in uniform with a mustache.

You were 23 years old. Wow. Do you have one of those pictures?

Yeah.

Ruth probably has one.

Then she came to all the camps where I went. One of the camps I went to was flying bombardiers in Texas, Big Spring, Texas. And George Gobel also was a pilot there.

"Lonesome George."

And when I left Big Spring, I gave the house I rented to George and Alice. George used to perform for the troops there and I would help write material for George.

You booked him at the Sahara, didn't you?

Yes, I did.

I think that must have been a wonderful reunion.

It was George Goble and the Ames Brothers.

Oh. Ed, Gene, Vick and Joe.

Right. Ed is still with us. They were known as the Amery Brothers out of Boston.

The Air Corps -- I mean I'm a firm believer that almost everybody -- like in Israel -- should serve a certain amount of time in the military. You learn discipline. You learn dedication.

Loyalty.

Loyalty. Networking. Camaraderie. Commitment.

Commitment to your country.

Yes. And I would perform, of course. And then when I was at Laredo, I worked with personal services. We did shows for the camp there and we traveled the shows. One of the major shows we did was "Boy Meets Girl." And we took that over to Corpus Christi, the naval base. And the coincidence is that Herb McDonald was flying out of Corpus Christi. I didn't know him at that time. And there's the man who brought me to Las Vegas.

It's a small world, Stan.

Later on Herb became head of Chamber of Commerce. And then we brought him back. Milton Prell and I brought him back to the Sahara. And then later on he became head of special events and the rodeo, which fills time and people in December in Vegas. It was one of Herb's major projects.

Any other questions?

Yes. We're getting short on this tape. If you have the time, you have wonderful stories about interpersonal relationships with all these people. You have not alluded to that because you just started, you know, I'm Stan Irwin and this is what I did. But I know you must have great stories about Ray Bolger, about all these things and some of the glitches. I remember I think there was an incident once when you were there with Cai Star, which I witnessed, and her then paramour --

Hal Stanley.

Then her husband -- yeah. And it was over the drummer Frank Hudak. And I forgot because I was playing at the time. So I used to try to go see everybody. Was Jack Eglash there when you were there?

Jack Eglash -- Benny Short had the relief orchestra. Jack Eglash had a relief orchestra. And it wasn't until later on that we brought Jack in because Benny Short couldn't get enough gigs and he became a cab driver.

But there was another guy whose name is -- not C. Davidson. I'm thinking of all the guys up and down the Strip. Al Johns was at the Thunderbird when I was there.

C. Davidson was our first orchestra. Took him out of Chicago. He was playing I think at the Drake Hotel. And then I brought in, also out of Chicago from the Chicago Theater, Louis --

Whose daughter has gone on to quite a successful career.

Yes. And I was the first one to book her into our chorus out of high school. Basile, Louis Basile.

Yeah, Louis Basile. Toni Basile is the daughter.

Right.

Who is very, very talented.

Absolutely.

So what about some clashes with people? I want to get into the management side of the guys that were trying to stick it to you over this guy or that guy because I know how good you are, pragmatic or whatever, where you say this is our budget, this is what we can pay, this is what we won't pay, you get room, food and beverage. Mae West, great stories about the Bodybuilders, George, who just passed away.

Yes. Mae West was brought in originally by Bill Miller before he left. Mae West had the six

musclemen. Mae West could do more with a sound than most people could do with a five-minute routine. There was one scene where she was carried in a chaise and placed upstage facing the audience. The musclemen came out wrapped in --

Togas?

Sort of a toga. And they echeloned away from her on either side of her facing the audience. One by one they would turn to face Mae West. The audience couldn't see. They'd spread their toga like a butterfly's wings. She would look at their crotch and just make a sound.

A hissing. More like a cobra.

One sound could be just (making sound). Another sound would be (making sound). And she would get six howls, six howls. I bring Mr. Prell back to meet Mae West. Knock on her dressing room door. She comes to the door in her robe, silk. And I said, Ms. West, I'd like you to meet Mr. Prell. And she wants to fold the kimono a little tighter, so she opens it wide enough to show her breasts and then closes it. And Mr. Prell turned --

Maroon.

-- maroon.

Milton was a very conservative man I think.

Yes, very. I said to her at one point, Ms. West, you know, normally after shows I take the artists and we go see Hank Henry or Shecky Greene or just have a light bite. And she said no thank you. And she used to come from the tower in a limo to the back door, through the kitchen, into her dressing room, leave into the limo, go to the tower. And she said if the people want to see me, let them pay to get in.

Well, you can't argue with that. She had a great career. Her life story is incredible. One of the first women in show business to be an arch advocate of using black or African-American, whatever you want to call them, performers. She went right -- as Clark Gable did one time for Billie Holiday -- she went right to the wall. And Artie Shaw, too. He said if Billie Holiday doesn't come in this hotel, I don't work. And that's when Irv Clugger I think was on the band. And he just turned around and got back on the bus and left. There weren't many people that had that staunch commitment to this is performance; it has nothing to do --

These were true libertarians. Ahead of the word, in fact. Ahead of the word.

Give me the worst experience you ever had with a performer. If you don't want to name them -- probably most of them are dead. You've outlived all your contemporaries anyway. But I mean the guy or woman that created so much crap that you just wanted to go push her off the top of the tower because there had to be one.

I really never had one.

Didn't you really?

Betty Hutton was tough. But Betty Hutton and I had a relationship of theatrical understanding.

Was she married to a trumpet player then?

No. She was married to Alan Livingston, president of Capitol Records at that time. And his brother Livingston was a songwriter.

Jay.

Jay, who did a lot of music for Betty Hutton.

Betty Hutton never lost her kinetic child energy and heat while performing. For Betty Hutton we had to put in an additional five-ton air conditioner on the stage so she would feel cool. In the summer women would wrap themselves in the tablecloths at ringside because it was so cool. When she came off she was as human as any of us. This was cold; this was hot. But on stage her energy was such that, winter or summer, a five-ton air conditioner on stage.

Betty, like other great performers such as Streisand who were thought to be temperamental, was a perfectionist. If I'm going to perform, I'm going to give 110 percent and I want my performing area to be as perfect as I am so that I am not shortchanging the audience.

At that time -- and not unusual -- gaming was of most importance to any hotel operation. If you said change all the felt to red, it would be done overnight. But to get something in the showroom was almost impossible. So while we had a sound system, we didn't have treble or bass control.

And with Hutton I had to do a few tricks. I would always be backstage so that she could hit the wings and say something. Most artists love to complain. And as a manager you have to never ask a question, you make statements. The sound was great. The lighting was magnificent. You look gorgeous.

Positive affirmation.

Right. Never, What do you think of?

Oh, no.

You make positive statements, no questions. So I'm backstage. And Betty says too much bass. So I pick up the intercom so that --

(End Tape 1, Side B.)

Second tape. And we're on Side A. It's Stan Irwin, Cork Proctor. We're at the Porter Valley Country Club. And I'm having a great time. And he's just starting to come up with some killer stories now that we have the litany of his entire life. And we didn't talk about his children, but we will, one of whom I know fairly well.

Anyway, we went through the World War II flying experience. Now, you did get your pilot's license or you were --

Oh, yeah. I was a single-engine graduate and a twin-engine instructor. And my last flight -- fortunately I was in America. I was in the Third Ferrying Group. I flew about 26 different types of aircraft, everything up to and including the B-26. I never got into four-engine work.

Does the name John Pugh ring a bell as an instructor in Texas? P-U-G-H.

No.

He's your age. He lives in Vegas. He taught I think at three different fields in Texas, John Pugh, P-U-G-H.

No, it really doesn't.

Because we talked to him about his flying experience. He taught a lot of guys to fly.

Anyway, let's go back to -- we're talking about Betty Hutton.

Okay. So she hears this announcement --

In the Congo Room.

-- to change the settings. Well, there were no settings to change. Then the next time she'd come off, I'd say how's that? And she'd say that's fine; that's fine. Now, anytime she appeared there I always put a mike on the piano. And the wire never went anyplace.

Ah. Another cheap theatrical trick.

So there were times during certain performances -- and I can't tell you which one, the first, the

second, the third, the fourth or the fifth -- she'd say the piano's too loud. And then she'd come off and I'd say, Take the piano mike down two decibels. Next time she came off, I'd say how's that? She'd say that's much better.

That's funny.

Well, we not only did it with Hutton, we did it with a few performers because it seems that they have to have something to talk about in order to justify their star position.

Yes. And be able to look down at somebody and say fix that.

Right. Well, we handled all those. But I never had a confrontation with an artist, never. I had it with their managers, but never with the artists.

Well, of course.

Because the managers, especially if they were married to the artists, had to justify their position.

And why they're getting all that big bucks. But the majority of the people to whom I've spoken about you, and this interview as we speak, have all given you high remarks. Said you didn't steal.

No.

Even though you had great opportunities.

The best.

I've cried myself on my own job working for the Gaughn family and the Coast hotels. It was tempting. But, you know what? I look at it this way. When you take the job you want to have your dignity. And when you leave the job, you still want to have your dignity.

Let me put it this way. Everybody who took under the table during my era is dead. And I'm here, thank God.

That's right.

And they were all guys who looked you in the eye. And you said, Do we have a deal? And they'd say, Yeah, we have a deal. And then all of a sudden you get a funny phone call.

Well, what was great in those days is you say, You got it, and you'd handshake. That was all you did. You'd say, You got it, and you'd handshake. And it was a marvelous time of trust and respect, marvelous time.

Would you say that along about the time that Hughes -- and I don't mean to blame Howard

and his henchmen -- but about the time he came in it seemed to me that everything started to change. The fun started to leave. The bean counters came in. And the whole aura of Vegas that was exclusive and fun and exciting seemed to now go into the corporate mode. I felt the change. I guess everybody did. That was 30 years ago.

Yes. That was the major change when you began to be able to own multiple institutions in the Vegas area.

And put girls with virtually no experience -- and I can name them and so can you -- as entertainment directors, secretaries.

Secretaries. Right. Absolutely.

Yes. Jan Cadilano or Judy Sharobian and so on and so on and so on.

Yeah. The only one who had some sense was the one that Entratter had, whatever her name. I forgot her name.

Eleanor Grosso?

Yeah.

Well, we knew them all. And some of them were certainly reliable. But I'll tell you I have never seen greater abuses of power from the distaff side from women who were handed the keys and said do this and do this. I remember fighting to try to get a contract at the Frontier to make 750 a week 30 years ago. And Jan was smoking a cigarette looking out the window and telling me about her new car. I said, Bulls***, I didn't come here to talk about your new car, I came here to try to get a job.

Well, when we first started in Vegas, you had knowledgeable, theatrical people functioning for theatrical purposes. All of a sudden -- I was at a meeting when I resigned from the Sahara as head of every division. And I brought up somebody's name that I'm going to bring in. And this is when Del Webb had it. And Mr. Jacobson turns to the chef and says, What do you think?

Time to go.

I said -- to the chef. I said, Mr. Jacobson, may I call your attention. I don't go into the kitchen and tell the chef how much salt to use or how much green to use because that's not my knowledge and he knows nothing about show business. May I see you after the meeting? And I resigned.

Good for you. What year was that, Stan?

That was 1965.

That's about right. That's about when you bailed I think. Yeah, I remember what happened with Stan because I had been working with Dede and Bill.

Yes.

Who were big fans of yours, both of them. And Dede is still here in Southern California.

Well, they were wonderful.

Well, they were fun. You're right about the fun, man. And that was my early days of being a drummer.

And punctual and professional.

Yep. I drove the wagon for a year and a half and schlepped the props from Albuquerque to Seattle to -- did you ever use a lady named Joanne Hill who at one time was a singer kind of in the Peggy Lee genre? We were on the road together in our band later.

No. I didn't.

She was Stan Kenton's last wife. She is now the widow of Kenton.

Oh, no.

Did you bring big bands into the Sahara?

I brought in big bands for dancing from two to five in the morning in the Congo Room.

That's when it was fun.

Yes. And people would show up. As I say the town was alive until 6:00 a.m. You see, in those days we had what we called rounders. Rounders was a name that started during the speakeasy era. And most people don't know what a rounder was. A rounder would have breakfast when you have dinner and would have dinner when you would have breakfast. They kept the nightlife alive.

You know what I miss? One of the things I miss -- and I can talk about it because I was there, as you were. In a state that has decried prostitution, the majority of the women that were endorsed by and covered as it were, quote, unquote, by the hotel never got beat up.

There was no trick rolling. A guy didn't come to the door dressed as a waiter, beat the living Jesus out of some high roller and take his money. And about the time Hughes got there all of that started to change. The trick rolling went in. I remember I have lots of friends that are cops in Vegas.

Well, how about these German visitors who were killed at Caesars by prostitutes?

Yeah. Same thing. It almost came in a wave.

You see, when the boys were there, Vegas was what you call off limits.

Right. No monkey business.

No monkeys. You look at who was killed. They were killed in LA. They were killed in Phoenix. They were killed in Tucson, New York. Never in Vegas.

Of course not.

And there was no prostitution. There was the Four Mile --

Mr. Irwin is reaching for the check as we speak. And using a very fluid nice initial and also putting a huge gratuity on there. How nice. Thank you so much. Now I have to send him a thank-you note. I have to send him a gratuity note. Well, it's on tape now. You need some money? I got money.

No, no, no. It's automatically on the bill. But because we're sitting here so long, I do a little extra.

That's good. And you're on a city ledger and they'll send you a bill.

Yeah, they send me a bill.

That's great. I love it. And it's a beautiful facility. For those of you that never get to see it, that's too bad because it's right off Grenalde and Tampa here in the valley. And the food was exemplary.

Delicious.

Yeah. So now we've beat up Howard Hughes about bringing all these bean counters in.

Okay. Now, there was the Four Mile, which was --

Roxy's.

Yes, Roxy's. Four Mile was out of Vegas going towards Lake Mead. And those who wished to indulge would go there. The girls -- if you came to town and you wanted to go to a show, an escort would be arranged who would dress to her eyeteeth. And she would accompany you, which did not mean that you and she went to bed.

True.

And they were gorgeous women.

Many men I know and you know did not, especially guys that were players, did not want any

bad publicity.

That's right.

And they wanted a date and they wanted a beautiful girl, but they did not necessarily want sexual favors.

That is exactly what it was prior to prostitutes and local deaths coming into Vegas. Now, the first person to be found in the desert after Vegas was off limits was -- I think his name was Al Bramlet.

You're right. Head of the Culinary Union.

That's right.

You're right. And a tragic death and unfortunately all sprung to the best of our knowledge from a scenario where the union wanted some guys to blow up three restaurants. One was David's, one was another place I think called the Cavalier and maybe the third one was the Flame Room or something.

Whatever it was the ambiance of Vegas changed.

Well, yes. It vanished because all of a sudden it became hard cash, hard everything, you know. We miss those days. However, we can't go back in time.

I'm looking forward to Steve Wynn's casino.

Wynn Las Vegas.

It's over two billion. It's a city, apartment buildings, condos, office buildings, casino of course, restaurants.

Hopefully we won't run out of water, Stan. Hopefully there will still be water.

Well, what has happened is that many a hotel -- MGM and the Bellagio --

We're talking about the cultural diversity in Vegas when Howard Hughes and his henchmen came in. And that's kind of what they were. So here we are at the country club. And I've just been admonished not to have my cell phone go off. So I shut it off.

And this is an interesting thing because when Stan Irwin was entertainment director and I was playing in the 60s, 70s and 80s as a comic and a drummer, there was a dress code that was implied. It was never written down. It's like the tavern and the green.

Correct.

It's not written down, but you still when you see pictures of Flower Drum Song with Jack

Soo and Arlene Fontana and those kinds of guys, everybody was dressed. And I'll grant you they were all drinking and smoking.

Well, it was the thing to be dressed. The women came there to put on their finery and go visit hotels.

Wearing a fur in July was acceptable.

Absolutely, because of the air-conditioning.

But don't you think, Stan -- and I know this sounds like we're trying to be arrogant and smug -- but there was a degree of refinement that will never come back to Vegas?

Oh, it won't even come back to Broadway or San Francisco.

Too many muscle shirts.

That's right. San Francisco I used to call a polite New York where the women wear hats and gloves. I mean you go to a Broadway show now you'll see athletic shirts going through the door. And the people who do have furs -- there's the anti-fur groups who come with rings that have a hook on the inside and they rub your fur and tear it.

I think that's a little extreme. That's kind of like blowing up a birth control clinic to save babies.

Oh, what's just happened with the EOF or whatever.

I know. Burning up Hummers to make a statement. I don't know.

So let me ask you a couple of questions that I've been harboring here while we're interviewing and now we're in the -- this is great. I mean this is wonderful. It's going to look good on paper. Some interviews don't look good on paper. So in your tenure, which would be over the period of, what, 20 years? Or it was 20 years?

Close to 20 years.

Where you came and went and you brought in -- was it your idea to bring Herb Jeffries?

Was that one of your first moves?

Oh, yeah.

And the trio. And you were doing standup then in that little -- in what became the --

The Club Bingo, which became the Sahara.

And I was there the night that they gave away the '48 Cadillac and the '48 Ford. And my

friend John Ansilone's mother won the Cadillac. It had twin Appleton spotlights.

Oh, yes.

It was a '48 Sedanette. It was black. It came from Cashman's who was the only Cadillac dealer then.

That's right.

Up on Main Street where the Union Plaza hotel sits now.

He had all of them -- Cadillac, Oldsmobile --

Everything. Buick, LaSalle. Talk about a monopoly.

LaSalle, what a name.

What a great car.

Yeah. I almost bought one when I got out of the service, 16-cylinder LaSalle -- no. Pierce-Arrow.

You're what I would still consider to be a very handsome man in your 80s. You must have had chicks following you from one air force base and plane to another one because you --

Oh, I was married at the time and I didn't -- no, no, no.

A true loyal man.

But I'll tell you the funniest thing that happened to me was when we started to have the women pilots.

Who never got any recognition I might add.

That was in Texas. And one day I was ferrying a plane into their airport. And I'm in full uniform now, first lieutenant. I ended up a captain. And one of the girls came by and saluted and said, "Hello, handsome."

And you turned around and said who's she talking to?

And it was the funniest feeling. Should I say okay, soldier, come here, you know, and all that and play a game or just smile as I did and just let it go by? But you have to accept whatever your looks are for whatever reason with humility, otherwise you're in trouble.

But your hair turned gray early on, didn't it? Or did it?

I am now flying P-40s out of Hillsgrove, Rhode Island.

Which is certainly a big place.

And we did not have runways. We had a field --

Dirt strip.

Dirt field, not even strips. And in order to accommodate the plane irrespective of which way the wind was blowing, you had to land on the diagonal. Now, I just came out of an AT-6, which is the Texan, 650-horse. I'm now taxiing in a P-40, 1400-horse Merlin engine. And you taxi it and you read the MOs. When you feel you're ready to take off, you say hello tower, I'm ready to take off. Hello, tower, I'm ready to take off. I take off on the diagonal. I am now 4,000 feet and God knows where when I said thank you, God, I'll take over now. You remember your full throttle. You remember your speed. You remember that the cockpit is open. You remember to pull the stick back.

Flaps, wheels.

You remember the wheels. And you remember -- at 4,000 feet I am now starting to close the canopy.

Ooh, that must have been scary.

Well, it was so much power.

Had you not had a preflight in that plane?

No. There was no buddy-buddy system.

You just walked into it and said let's go.

Either you're in it or you're not. Yeah.

Chuck Yeager, say Max.

That's it. Now you're flying and all that. And you learn to land on the diagonal. One day I'm up doing Immelmans. An Immelmann is a move that you come in, you dive down, you come like you're going to do a loop, and when you get to the top you roll out and you're going 180 degrees in the other direction. And I'm doing Immelmans. And then suddenly I do one at 10,000 feet where I stalled out at the top. I didn't have enough speed. And I go into an inverted spin, which is the opposite of a normal spin. Now, we never spun the P-40 because we were told that the engine was heavy enough to take it out of spin. And now I am in an inverted spin.

So I do the inverted spin procedure. Firstly, you shut off power, which puts me into a regular spin, which allows me now to do the normal, regular spin procedure. I now have the canopy open and I'm thinking of getting out when I now feel control of the plane. But if I pulled

back on the stick, I would go into a high speed stall. The nose would come up and you just shudder into the ground. So because of training I now use the trim tabs along with pulling back on the stick. And she flies out over the treetops. I take it back up by applying power, removing the trim to 10,000 feet and do another two Immelmans and come in and land. Now, when I got to the 10,000 feet, I couldn't keep my feet on the rudders. They were just (making sounds).

They were jumping around. Was somebody watching you? The base commander or anybody is seeing all this?

No, no. You're out in the field. And the next morning I had a gray streak. And the gray streak, which was right here, was the fashion for women. So most people thought I dyed it in.

Stripe in your hair.

Johnny Desmond also had a gray streak. And I cannot tell you how many autographs people are holding where I signed Johnny Desmond.

You know there was a story about a guy you booked, Kirby Stone, with Art Engler, "Cow Eyes."

Oh, yeah.

And supposedly -- I don't know if it's true or not; I never asked Art because when we parted before his death, we kind of had a bad situation going where he just got a little too funny with the money -- but supposedly Art somewhere in the story was on his way to either Bergen-Belsen or Auschwitz or somewhere and his hair supposedly turned white overnight. So I don't know the story, but two people told me. And I think Larry Foster, one of Kirby's guys, may have been the guy that I got it from. I don't know.

Well, it happened.

So when I met you, you were already pretty much starting to go gray. But you know what? You wear it well. You're like I am. We don't want to trick anybody. When I see people our age that have their hair dyed, they just look really kind of like --

Orange.

-- Dorian Gray. I know. Steve Lawrence the other day was at a party and he had kind of a rinse on his hair.

And it's on the edges. Yeah.

Yeah. Steve, come on, we know how old you are. What's the mystery? Our lieutenant governor has dyed her hair black.

But somehow you get the feeling that you're here for a purpose. There are three times I should be dead that I remember. And each time I came through it, not (indiscernible), some sort of a possible accident.

In a car or a plane or all of the above?

One in the plane, the P-40, because years later as I'm driving cross country -- I present different thoughts to myself to stay awake. What is the shape of space? I used to go into that kind of thinking. And then I said wait a minute, you know, if you bailed out of the P-40, you'd be dead. Of course, when you leave a moving object, you leave at the speed of the moving object. And if I left the plane at that speed and I opened my chute, it would have torn right through me. And if I didn't remember to trim out, I would have gone in.

And they flew, what, at 250 miles an hour then?

That plane was over 300 red lined.

300?

Yeah.

So you would have been history the minute you left the cockpit probably.

But the other part, as soon as I pulled on that stick -- pull on my arm.

Okay.

I said, oh, shit. I go into high speed stall. So as you trim out you begin to get the feeling in the stick.

Were all the trim things on a manual crank?

Yeah.

So there was no hydraulic for the --

No. No, no, no. Not like the big planes today.

So that was almost like the Jab Zero, which Howard Hughes won the Bendix Trophy Dance with in 1938. Nobody wanted it and the Japs bought it. That's the old Hughes' little stubby bubby.

Yeah. They had no backup, no failsafe, no armor plating.

No nothing. And you couldn't hit them because they could roll over in a heartbeat.

Right. The point is I can't understand why kamikaze pilots wore helmets.

Which brings up that famous joke about the head of the air force for the Japanese armament group that's going to fly off the carrier and bomb Hawaii. He said now, your instructions, you get in frame. You wear a thousand sticks necklace. You get in Zero. You take off. And then you put nose down. You dive down smokestack of Americans. Destroy them for the good of Japan. I said are you out of your f*ing mind? I'm going to do what? I don't think so. I have a wife and some kids at home and I'm going to own a Toyota someday.**

Who was our pilot, bomb pilot flying a bomber that took it into a Japanese stack? Kelley.

Yeah. I think so.

I mean if you know you going to get it, go for it.

Well, you know what? Seven Brides for Seven Brothers. I guess you just --

But I'll tell you the truth. Each time it seemed that -- three were in a car -- that death should have been inevitable, it didn't faze me. It didn't faze me.

Well, at that point as a young man you had already faced death a lot.

It didn't faze me.

Did you get shot at in some of your forays?

No. Like I said I was very fortunate in that I served all my time in the States. I did fly the flangeable bullet deal. I did tow on a B-26 --

A sleeve.

-- a sleeve.

I know my terminology.

That you do. You have a fantastic mind. One day we'll put it in a human being.

Yes. Thank you. Right now it's in a gorilla. So I'm using all my knowledge. Producers?

Good guys? Matt Gregory, pretty good?

Matt Gregory had a great eye for talent. I bought Sandler and Young from Matt Gregory in a rehearsal in fall. And I gave them a six-month contract. With that in mind he went to Harrah's and said Stan just bought them. And they haven't even appeared yet in the Casbah Theater.

Sold his artifacts and memoirs to the University of Nevada for 27,000.

Well, he and Bill Willard have magnificent memoirs and in conjunction networking with each other.

Interesting man, Matt. I had known him off and on for years.

Very intelligent man. Again, his loquaciousness was one of his negative facets.

Yes. He could wear you out.

But I wanted to bring up a group that you had that was so great, Peter and Hank, a little duo.

Peter and Hank, the afternoon, positive, infallible performers who kept -- the reason you had music in the Casbah was to set a pace, a tone, which assisted with the gaming. And they were perfect.

And stepping up toward the evening. And the volume went up, the excitement went up.

That's right.

And the colors of the rug were an inducement. Peter or Queetie, who suffered a terrible accident. Got out of a car to help a guy push his car and a guy ran into him. But he's okay. Which is what killed Herb McDonald's wife.

Yes. I think you're right.

She went across the road coming down from Salt Lake City because a van overturned. And as she went back to her car to get her cell phone to call for help, a truck took her out.

She wasn't thinking. There's a great story that's digressing from this. But the plane crashed. A mother standing holding a little baby. And then there's another baby she's got a hold of and he's about three or four. And he's saying, mommy, mommy, why did all those people get killed? And the mother looked at the child and said, well, I guess God had a better job for them, which is -- you know, what do you say to a three- or four-year-old child about carnage?

That is a lovely statement.

I thought it was. It touched me. I've repeated it a million times. And, Joyce, I hope I'm not boring you. Joyce is the wonderful transcriber who got me this job to whom I am orally obligated.

Hello, Joyce.

Don't take it any further than that, Joyce, okay?

So Matt Gregory, first guy to put a topless show in Harrah's. And that might have been with Sandler and Young. That was about 40 years ago when Bill Harrah was archconservative in Reno with the two stores, Lake Tahoe and Reno.

When I put a topless show into the Sahara, I had to borrow two nudes from Sam Boyd.

Both of whom were girlfriends I'm sure. Kidding.

Did you ever think in your wildest dreams, when you were sitting there in the 50s as an assemblyman running for the taxes up and doing this, there would ever be -- I know it's a stupid question -- the kind of growth? I mean I'm still in shock when I drive down the Strip today, Stan. And I look at these buildings and I see that the water in front of the Bellagio is now connected to three 1200-foot wells down there to pump that water out. When you and I were there, we had the dancing waters at the Stardust.

Yes, we did.

So there's not really -- Jay Sarno, genius that he was, certainly a visionary. God knows, man, you know, Circus Circus, they went, oh, nobody's going to go in there. And the minute they opened the front door, boom, you know.

Yeah, see, but the thing with Jay Sarno is he came to me for Carson to put money into Circus Circus, not that I'm brilliant because I'm not going to go through what I could have done for Caesars if they had knowledge of what show business was.

(End Tape 2, Side A.)

Second tape. We're talking about Jay Sarno, who created among other things Caesars and Circus Circus and the Tahoe whatever, a visionary and a genius. And you said to Jay?

I said to Jay Carson doesn't put money in. But, Jay, in order to get into Circus Circus, you have to go up steps to the second floor. May I suggest that you do a main floor entrance? And the gamblers who like to gamble don't care about circus acts, so put a net over your casino tables. Well, he never did it. And when Bennett bought it, the first thing he did was main floor and separation.

God bless you, Bill. Bill had some good ideas. I drove by his house today on the way --

yesterday on the way down here, Stan. All the trees are dead. He had a beautiful ranch not far from my house. And they've just kind of let it go. I guess his wife's probably going to just dump it and they'll develop it or something because the ranch is state property.

Yeah. Turnberry will buy it.

Yeah, conceivably. We can't hope for anything except the worst.

Anyway, tell us about the Johnny Carson years, how you got in and how long you stayed because that's an interesting story.

Again, 1952. Sahara's not built. They're tearing down the Bingo. We have a work area out in the back where you have to walk across caliche to get it to, which is nothing but heavy dust. The people come to town. A man named Irwin Atkins, associated with Art Linkletter now over 60 years, starts coming down the Strip. Flamingo, Frontier, DI, Thunderbird. Finally he gets to me, and he says Mr. Linkletter would like to do People Are Funny out of a Vegas hotel next April, May, whatever it is. But he wants to do it with millionaires. We will have six different millionaires a night for five nights. And we'll do it in the afternoon. The millionaires will be playing for people's name off of postcards. So whatever they win on the show goes to the people whose name is on the postcard.

I said, Mr. Atkins, let me get it straight. You are going to have six different millionaires on our stage five days during the afternoon. The people will then have lunch and come in and get free admission to the television show and the Sahara will get national promotion publicity? This comes from the Congo Room at the Hotel Sahara in Las Vegas? I said you got it. He says don't you have to ask anybody? I said no, you got it. He says, well, every place else I went to said we'll let you know or we'll take it up or why don't you go see that new guy?

Okay. Same thing with Carson. Carson just started in New York City. Formerly he did standup.

And magic.

Yes. So they started the Flamingo. Why don't you see the new guy?

That's funny, the new guy.

They come in. Mr. Carson, who does the Tonight Show five nights a week, likes to come in the summer when he's off. Now, in those days you could take your waitress, maître d', or swimming

instructor and put them in the main room. The room would be filled in those days.

Yeah. Five hundred seats or less.

So I said Johnny Carson is on five nights a week on the nationally televised Tonight Show and he'll come here in the summer. Who could miss in the summer? This is Vegas. I said you got it. Don't you -- no. You got it.

Now, this was done with the managers because Carson couldn't get agency representation. And when he could get agency representation, he said where were you when I needed you? So he never signed with an agency. They were all after him, but he never signed with an agency. So Carson comes in and he over produces. He brought a fine singer, dancer and somebody else.

"Button" C.C. Robinson.

No, no, no. I did that. Somebody else, somebody else. And I said actually you have too much. So they asked my suggestions and they dropped two acts. Then it's somebody and Johnny. Johnny did a thing, Sheriff John. And that works with a tape recorder. And you have to tape that volume past the red line or it doesn't mean anything because he asks the question, you hit the tape and the kids answer. And then he does his tape because Deputy John comes in with a hangover and for the kids to yell the answer --

It's got to be really heavy.

He now gets the recorder. Well, they take him to the Fontainebleau in Florida. And the first night miscues on the tape, not enough volume and all that. And they find out a busboy's running it.

Just like now.

So he threatens to leave, but now they get theoretically a sound man who f***s it up. And he is now out of his gourd because, as great as he is, this he loves.

And he's losing the edge.

So he screams at them f*** them. Comes back to the Sahara. Says would you like to be my manager? Of course, I seem to know suggestions I made regarding the show and the operation of the sound.

Plus you've been a standup and you've dealt with all of the people in his genre.

And then I become his concert manager because he's already on TV. Now, I'm at one of the hotels on the Strip, Sunset Strip, and I get a call would you like to be my producer? So I became

manager-producer. And I had to put Pearl Bailey, who I was handling, and put her in black Hello Dolly, which I created through David Merit, which made history. It's the first time a Caucasian show became a black show. So the innovative thinking paid off.

Where was Freddie De Cordiva during this period?

He was doing the movies.

So he didn't come until you left, about?

He came I think two people after I left. Two people after I left.

Pretty smart guy.

Yeah, he was smart enough to lay back.

Yes.

See, having Carson work for me and now I'm working for Carson, I still had some of the attitude. I can --

And some credibility.

-- mention things. Like when Carson would come into Vegas after I would book him at different places and raised his money to a hundred thousand a show -- in those days we only did six shows -- no. More, 14 shows. And he said to me you think you can do better for me than Bushkin, my attorney? I said Bushkin can handle legal things for you better than I can. When it comes to Vegas, I'll get you more money than Bushkin. Bushkin had him at 50,000 theoretically at Caesars. I put Carson out for auction and I got him to Caesars for a hundred thousand.

Six shows?

A show.

A show. That was big money. Was that after Liberace got the first 50,000?

No. The first one to get big money was Mario Lanza at the Frontier, 25,000, who never appeared. Why? In "Be My Love" he wanted to do it to a voiceover recording. They said no. He could not have the confidence that he could hit that note every night, two shows a night, seven days a week. So they dropped him. And we loaned them Ray Bolger for the opening.

That's amazing. Great stuff.

All right. You have a few minutes to give me some concluding remarks about where do you see this business going in terms of -- forget about the chicanery, the stealing, the kickbacks

and all that other crap. Is it just going to go to, you know, a hundred thousand-seat stadiums, Stan? Do you think there will always be room for a Celine Dion at two, three, \$400 a person because that's where it's going? You know, it's a hundred and 50 now to see her.

When I was opening the Sahara and I was creating new personalities with innovative ideas, I went to a man in New York. I think his name was Kermit Bloomgarden, top New York theater producer. And I said I'd love Hugh Cronin and Jessica Tandy in "I Do, I Do." Oh, where? Las Vegas, the Sahara in our theater. After due conversation, Mr. Irwin? Yes. Broadway is not interested in Las Vegas. I thanked him. I left. And I did a Columbo. I went out the door and I came back. I said, Mr. Bloomgarden, with all due respect one day there will be a meeting of Broadway and Vegas and it will take place in Las Vegas.

Now, that's what's happened. Vegas now has theaters for rent. Broadway has theaters for rent. I doubt if many people know that the Celine Dion show in the 95 million-dollar theater that Caesars built seating 4,000 people is rented by a producer who is responsible for the show and the profits of the show.

Tragon, Frank?

It's a man with an A, Anholtz or Auschholtz or something like that.

It's kind of a leaseback deal. They win, she wins.

That's it.

If she walks, the theater closes.

That's it. Now, the producer who will undoubtedly possibly be in six different establishments because of his innovative quality is the producer of Cirque du Soleil. And Vegas now has rooms and theaters for rent to bring in shows and people are in line waiting for shows to get out of the venue so they can get into the venue. Why? Vegas now has 35 million people passing through. So you keep the same show and you change the audience, which was Berle. I keep the material, but the audience changes.

So what I see is that Vegas will continue in its Broadway attitude of "we have the venues"; if you wish to produce in it, these are the terms and conditions. And it's less expensive to do a production show than an individual personal appearance of "where are they coming from?" There

are no training areas anymore. Some of the biggest bombs in Vegas were Tony Curtis --

Monty Hall. You were a part of that, weren't you?

No. No, no, no.

You missed that. He tried to do his act one show and then the next day it was the Price is Right or whatever it was.

No, no, no. And surprisingly Ethel Merman, who came in -- instead of performing the way you would perform on Broadway, came in with a pianist, not even an orchestra, and stood in the crook of the piano. And, of course, Noel Coward, who as you and I said about Mort Sahl, was great, but this wasn't his venue.

And the other guys from M*A*S*H, two of the guys of M*A*S*H, Ted Knight --

Ted Knight missed, and a good ventriloquist. And Carroll O'Connor. Now, I went to ICM for Carroll O'Connor. And I said I must produce his act because I did. I produced many acts in Vegas for people who have never been in the personal appearance field. And they said no, he was just the producer. And I said I pass. And why? Because he wanted to sing. And the people knew him as Archie Bunker.

I know. Redd Foxx, same thing. Many of them walked out of the theater with their head on backward because the Fred Sanford they saw was not the guy that they knew.

Oh, no. Now, the only time the federal government interfered with anything was during the Kefauver administration. And I brought the first family album.

Von Meter.

Von Meter to the Sahara. I went to Buddy Allen, who was his agent, and I said give me the nine top tracks. Then I went back. And I worked the tracks with the idea of where he could appear, when he could appear, what's in four, what's in three, what's in one. And I had that all stylized. And he came in with Mickie Ross and Bernie West, who later became the producers of the Archie Bunker shows and others. Now, when they came in they said, hey, there's nothing for us to do; it's already done. There's only one codicil: after he did all that -- and he did it beautifully and brilliantly and the laughs were magnificent --

Oh, yes, he was great.

-- he wanted to play country western piano. So that part of the show was over. We moved out of

any standup and he signed country western.

And they went, well, a bonus, serendipity.

And that was it.

Now, Kefauver, congressman, says I want von Meter to appear for -- and I forgot the name of the brothers in Tennessee for a fundraising program. These brothers were on a train and an accident happened where the metal piece that comes up as you go into the car almost killed one of the brothers. And they pledged themselves, two Jewish boys, to charity. And they developed the Siskin, S-I-S-K-I-N, Foundation in Tennessee. And this was a benefit for fundraising for the Siskin Foundation. Their switchboard operator was blind. They built a special Braille switchboard for her. They took children in irrespective of their IQ. So it was a foundation for the mentally retarded and physically handicapped.

God bless them.

So he wanted von Meter. I went to Prell. I said we're going to have to go and we'll fill in with so-and-so while he's gone. Well, they like what I did so much that I did five Siskin Foundation shows. "Button" C.C. I would bring in. I brought in Rona --

Martin.

-- Martin before Laugh In. I had them appear with Dinah Shore. And I think there was a relationship there. "Button" C.C., Doc Severinson, Rona Martin, Dinah Shore. And they said to me -- I said what are you going to do after this? I said, well, they want us to do a TV show. If it's successful we'll have a future and if it isn't we'll go our own way. Isn't that funny?

And ironically I'm going to Paris --

And Kay Starr. I added Kay Starr one year.

Love Kay.

Morey Amsterdam with her and all that stuff.

I just read Rose Marie's book, *Hold the Roses*. And my daughter's a manicurist. Very small world. And I have an autographed copy of the book and also some of the other principles are in there.

But as we sit here, you know, the sun will set the way we stimulate each other, but that's --

You gave me great stories and most of these not because I know you.

That's basically it. Now, Al Freeman, who was the publicist and an excellent one for the Sands, and I had a bet. He came to me one day and he said there'll be 11 hotels on the Strip by XYZ. And he bet me a Cadillac. And I said no way. And there weren't. But God bless him, he passed away before he bought me my Cadillac.

Do you hear that, Al, we're still waiting for that car?

Tell me something. And I don't want to bring up anything unpleasant. But we had a discussion about money management. And I told my daughter yesterday that the way the Mills Brothers handled their money when I met them in the 70s -- Harry and whachamagigger -- I would say, Harry, how do you guys watch your money? And Harry would say, well, we hired a cat to do the books, to do all the research on Capitol to get our residuals. And we hired another cat to watch him. Then we hired a third cat to come in and do an independent audit. And you and I talked about that. My friend Mickey Fynn -- and this is public knowledge -- Mickey had a guy that was his partner and he refused to listen to many people, me included, who said, *damn, get an independent audit. I said you've got half a million sitting there in a trust account. And your advice I think would bode well along with mine, which is to anybody that's reading this, if you have any aspirations to do anything with your money, for God's sake have people monitoring your scenario.**

And the monitor the monitor.

Thank you. Yes. And the Mills Brothers said that when they popped those independent audits --

Hey, listen. There was a fellow called -- who took Red Skelton, John Wayne and other majors -- **Kirk Douglas.**

-- in that arena at that time for \$8 million, went to Mexico, Acapulco and lived like a king.

I think it's a name like Norman Pellen or something like that.

No, no.

That's one of the guys. I don't know his name, though.

Of course, when we visited down there or when the president visited the hotel (who at that time was going with Anne Miller), we would reciprocate to keep gaming out of Mexico.

Sounds like Cuba with Batista.

What was his name? He's passed away since, of course. Great host and, you know, anybody'll say but he was such a nice person. Well, a con man has to be a nice person.

Of course. It's like Iyendi or anybody else. If you had -- in the waning moments of our wonderful discussion. And thank you again for the wonderful lunch and your time. Would you do anything different? I mean seriously. Now, you had Ruth and you had a good relationship and you guys have been married, what, 30 years? Close to it?

Almost 35 years.

And the children are doing okay?

The children, thank God, are healthy and each has a boy and a girl who are intelligent morally and disciplined positive.

Well, your wife is a charming lady and very good, and from what I can see through knowing your son, a very good mom.

Yes.

You still have a good relationship.

Oh, yes.

Last night I watched two minutes of "Affliction" and I started to cry when I saw James Coburn and Nick Nolte going fist to fist and the father's relationship with the son. And I'm saying, my God, I am so thankful it never got that extreme in our family. And I'm an only child. So you wouldn't probably do anything different would you, or would you?

Well, there were many areas where I could have been a multimillionaire based upon somebody else.

Better management?

No. Like I created the Buddy Rich Orchestra.

Which was great.

And this is before Blood, Sweat and Tears in Chicago. I created it as a rock orchestra. We recorded four numbers for Singer. Buddy refused to allow them to release it and went to jazz. So Buddy could have died a multimillionaire --

He was rigid, a tough guy.

-- rather than a pauper. I went to Brian Epstein when I had the Beatles. And I said the Beatles get

haircuts. And that's when lamination started. I said I'd like to license their hair. And I would have put them in that little lamination thing and sold them for lockets. He said no. Could have been a multimillionaire.

Do you remember the story about Buddy Rich as they wheeled him in the emergency room at age 69 with his massive coronary occlusion? They said, Mr. Rich, are you allergic to anything? And he said yeah, country and western music. That's a true story.

That would be Buddy.

But I would rely more, as I am relying now -- I'm on a project that's three years and four months in the making and that'll be to save lives of children six to 12 so they don't have cardiovascular problems when they get older.

That's a good project; get them to eat right. Tell us about that.

And exercise.

Yes. Stop the fat.

I have good people. I have all the people associated with Stan Lee from Marvel.

Marvel Comics.

And Stan Lee Media. And we are now in the throes of seeing a candle light at the end of the tunnel, which we're going to turn into a flashlight, then a headlight, and finally a spotlight. And we will save the lives of people in multi-disease arenas, both the youth, the teens and the adults. And that's a lifelong project now.

No more toxicity. I think it's an inspirational moment here that in the closing of this interview, which as it is, that you are able in your 80s to look forward to something positive and keep going. And I firmly believe, having met C. Everet Coop and some other octogenarians, that you have to keep the three-pound universe, which sits above our shoulders, busy.

Well, as I said I think to your wife on the phone call checking on your -- the return phone call, we can get elderly without getting old.

And you're going to play tennis this afternoon?

I will play, seeing the time now, only about three and a half or four hours at best. Then I'll go to the fitness room.

And lift some iron. And do some leg work.

I just do machine work mainly to stay toned. I'm not going to become Mr. America.

If you saw Stan Irwin walking away from me and you saw his calves, you'd think he'd be in his 30s or 40s. So that's pretty high marks.

I enjoy that.

I, on the other hand -- my mother was scared by a stork. So I don't have what you'd call real defined legs. However, they have walked the world. I went to Masada where 960 Jews held off 15,000 Romans.

Oh, yes. And you walked up?

Yes. And my wife said I suppose you're going to walk. I said I don't want to get in that *damn cable car. This is a historic moment. The hair is standing up on the back of my neck talking about it. I said how do these people manage to do that? And nobody's figured it out. It's amazing, Stan, because it ain't that big. I mean the Sahara hotel swimming pool, where I used to do three laps underwater by the way in the 50s -- I had good lungs, which is probably why I'm still here. Anyway, thank you for your time.**

I think I would match that because when I swam in high school I did the breast stroke. No. I only did the first 50 yards underwater.

That's what Sinatra did to build up his lungpower. People didn't understand how Frank could hold those notes and still smoke.

Oh, yeah. And drink.

It was all that swimming. Oh, my God, he did everything well. Anyway, I hope to see you again.

Listen. I've got to compliment you and your wife. I've got to compliment your lifestyle. I've got to compliment your philosophies, your moral standards and your devotion to honesty.

Well, you know what? You only got that one little plaque that said here he was. And on mine it's going to say he was good to his friends. And I think that's simple. And Jonathan Winters had one that said go ahead and step on me; everybody else has. Isn't that funny? Go ahead and step on me; everybody else is.

Stan, thank you so much. As soon as we get this transcribed, I'll get you a copy of the

tape and a copy of the transcription. And then at that point you can correct any errors and omissions or whatever you want to do. And if you think of any other stories, you can always put an addendum in there. I know you type or your wife types or somebody types. And if you want to put in a story that we missed -- those are great moments. And they're going to be there for the history of the Arnold Shaw project forever. So hopefully a hundred years from today some guy will go in and say, you know, there must have been some guys that were visionaries here before the Steve Wynns and before the guys from Park Place Entertainment and the conglomerates that came and just bought up everything. It's almost like the Candle Russell Days where one guy comes into town, kills all the ranchers and owns all the cows. It's almost gotten to that.

And sells it to the railroad.

Yes, as it were. Thank you again.

Thank you, Cork.

Always a pleasure.

My pleasure.

All right. Stan Irwin saying goodbye from the beautiful Porter Valley. And, man, this is a beautiful -- and how old is this club?

Over 30 years old.

It's beautiful. It really is. And I'm sorry you can't be here.

(End Tape 2, Side B.)