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AN INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE MOORE

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



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Joyce Moore 1/22/13
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Preface

Joyce Moore's family moved to Las Vegas from Chicago in 1953, when she was eight years old. She attended Rancho High School, married and had three daughters, and currently lives in Las Vegas.

Joyce's father was in the gaming industry and her mother was a nurse. Growing up in Las Vegas meant going to shows with her mother, spending summer days in the pool at the Showboat Hotel, and riding horses to the Last Frontier. While a teenager at Rancho High school, Joyce worked at several movie theaters including the Huntridge, went to school dances and marched in the Hellodoro Parade. After her divorce, Joyce returned to work to support herself and her children, first at the Daily Fax then later on the Strip at the Aladdin and Circus, Circus doing a variety of office and accounting jobs. As a lark she and a friend applied to work as cocktail waitresses at the MGM; she was hired and spent the next five years in a job that was by turns interesting, exhausting, frustrating and fun.

This interview covers several periods of Joyce's life – her childhood, teen years, and early adult life – and what it was like to grow up, live and work in Las Vegas in from the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s.

So Joyce, tell me about your early life. I want to know starting from Chicago and how the family got to Las Vegas. Could you do that?

Well, I was born in Chicago. We lived in an apartment building that was run by my great-grandmother. She was very entrepreneurial and during the war, the Second World War, when all of the men went off to serve in the military, my great-grandmother—her name was Cora Goodale—she went to the owner of the apartment building and talked him into turning this into a girls' club where young girls whose men—boyfriends, husbands, whatever—had gone overseas—we even had some kids in the building. Of course, we were in the building, but that was because my great-grandmother ran it. So she did that during the war. So that's where we lived and that's where I was born.

So how did it operate?

It was just the girls paid rent. Well, the apartment building was built in 1918, so they were all shotgun types. You needed to ring the doorbell to get into the foyer and then somebody had to come and open that door. Our apartment was on the right. So when you walked in, there was a huge entry foyer and there were three rooms up in the front. They were designed to be a living room, a sitting room, whatever, but they made them into bedrooms. Everything was a bedroom. And then you walked down the hall, there was the bathroom. And then in the back was where my family lived. There was a bathroom, a kitchen. They didn't have kitchens up front, although my mother did a lot of cooking for them. So we had a living room and a bedroom, one bedroom, where we all slept, and a bathroom and a kitchen. We actually had an icebox. And then we had a porch in the back and then the backyard. Although I don't remember a lot of the other apartments, I do remember ours. It was up on the first floor. There were three floors to this apartment building, no elevators, of course.

A woman up on the third floor had a little boy. He was two or three years old. And she

used to pay me to come and play with me, a quarter, a lot of money. And he had great toys. So I was all about it. So I'd keep him busy.

And then my great-grandmother, she lived on the first floor across from us and she had the whole apartment. She had the whole thing to herself. So we spent a lot of time over there.

So why did the family decide to leave Chicago? And who was in the family at this point when you get ready to leave Chicago?

Well, I'm the oldest. And my brother Royce, who I always called Bud, Buddo when he was little because I couldn't say brother, but Bud, he was one year younger than me. And then Steven came along six years after I was born. So he was only a couple years old when we moved to Las Vegas.

We came out here so that my dad would do what he was doing anyway but legally. He had connections. He had met one fellow in particular when he was in the service who was very connected. He got my dad in the casino business.

Would you like to tell us who that is?

Well, I don't remember. My brother would remember his real name. I remember just Itchy. And I always thought it was because he had a very bad skin condition. Oh, he had terrible acne, I guess, and no treatment in those days. So I just assumed that it was this. But actually it was this [demonstrating]; that's a little trigger finger. He kind of got my dad involved in that and they came out here.

Did your father come first and then send for the family?

No. We all came at one time.

How did you travel?

We traveled by car. We had a Ford that someone in Chicago owned and they were now in Los

Angeles and they wanted somebody to bring the car. And so I know that we all piled in that car and came out here in that.

So now, tell me about your mother's occupation.

My mother was a nurse, always been a nurse. She went to nursing school in Buffalo, New York, where she was born and raised. She, I think, went into nursing school because they lived there at the hospital at the time; all the nurses in training lived in dorms. Her mother had died; her mother was diabetic and she passed away. And her father was a total alcoholic, drunk, and very, very abusive. And so I think she just wanted to get away and this is what she did. When she had been there about six months, I guess they did the autopsy room and my mother almost fainted or did faint and the head nurse called her in and told her to quit now because she was never going to make it, and that was the spur that made my mother complete it. And she loved nursing; she loved it. She worked actually at the Millard Fillmore Hospital after she graduated in Buffalo and she worked in the TB ward, never got TB, but I got it when I was nine—or I was eight, I guess, when I got it.

She was going with this fellow, Abe Weinstein. He was also there during his residency. He was a urologist, ended up being a urologist. They were going to get married. And his family came to my mother and said, "If you marry our son, who is our only son, we will bury him; he will no longer be mentioned in our home," because they were Jewish and my mother, of course, was not Jewish. So she broke up with Abe. It was very sad. One day she was walking down the street and she saw the big "The Army wants you," and she walked in and joined.

And so she was stationed in Memphis, Tennessee. My father was also in the service. She was a first lieutenant and he was a second lieutenant. I think a second lieutenant is lower, right? I'm not sure. But whatever he was, he was a rank lower than my mother. He was serving

in North Africa in the tank corps and he got a bunch of shrapnel in his stomach and so he was sent back to this hospital, Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis where my mother was the nurse. So long story short, that's how they met and got married. Then, of course, during the service he had met Itchy. My brother knows his name; I'll have to find out for you.

And you came to Las Vegas. How did the car get from Las Vegas to California?

I have no idea. This is what I do know—and I should clarify this because it really wasn't Itchy who got us here. My father had another connection who I don't know who that was and he died of a heart attack on our way from Chicago to here. So we got to Las Vegas. We had no money. My father knew no one because this guy was his connection. We were starving. We were living in a place called Robbie's Motor Inn right there on Fremont Street, right where the federal building is now and we were about to get kicked out. We were living on tomato soup. And my mother every day would take me to the phone booth on the corner and she would call any relative regardless of how remote and she would say the same thing, please send money and get me out of this God forsaken hellhole, which being born and raised in Buffalo and then living in Chicago and coming here in—actually, it was 1954 by this time because we came right at the end of the year. There was nothing here. There was nothing. We picked Robbie's Motel because the school was across the street.

Which school?

Fifth Street School.

Oh. So now I know where it is, okay.

So my brother and I could go to school. And I wore the same thing every day because all of our clothes came in a trunk on the railroad and we had no money to get the trunk. So one day Bud and I are walking across the street to come home for lunch to our tomato soup and my dad is

standing out there, outside Robbie's Motor Inn, and Bud starts crying immediately, "Oh, no, we got evicted. What are we going to do? What are we going to do?" And I'm looking and I said, "But look at Daddy; he's smiling; he's happy." And so we ran across the street and my dad had a silver dollar and he flipped it in the air. Of course, my brother and I both killed each other trying to get it. He said, "Go buy yourself some lunch."

Well, right down the street about four buildings down was a place called the White Bunny. The White Bunny is where all the kids that had money, which a lot of them did, they would go eat. For fifty cents you could get a hamburger, fries and a milk shake. And my brother and I, we ate like it was our last supper.

To find out, my aunt called my mother—or when my mother called whoever, because that's what she was doing, they told her that her dad, my mother's father, had died, who she always hated with a passion. He had died and they had been looking for her for six months. She got a check for twenty-six hundred dollars. Well, twenty-six hundred dollars in 1954 was a lot of money. And so that night we were going to the Fremont Theatre to see a movie. I think it was the Fremont or it may have been the El Portal because I don't even know if the Fremont was there; I can't remember. But we were walking down Fremont Street and my dad spotted Itchy across the street—or Itchy spotted—whoever spotted who. Well, it was this grand reunion. The next day my dad went to work at the El Rancho. So all was well and we bought our house.

How much did the house cost?

The house was nine thousand eight hundred dollars and we bought it from John Foley.

So where was the first house located? And is John Foley the Foley family?

Of the Foley family, yes. It was located on Wengert, which was right off Eastern, like behind the Showboat Hotel. They were building the Showboat Hotel or it had just opened when we bought

the house. My mother wanted to buy there. It was either there or Twin Lakes. But Twin Lakes was not finished and they had no sewer out there yet. My mother was worried about the bus; she never drove. And she was working at the Las Vegas Hospital—well, actually first, she got a job at the county hospital, which she absolutely hated and she worked there about six months and then she went to work at the Las Vegas Hospital.

Where was the county hospital located?

It's Memorial, Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital, UMC. It's still in the same place.

Okay, good. And then she went to work where?

At the Las Vegas Hospital, which was on Eighth and Ogden. So she picked that house because of the Showboat Hotel and she figured that if there was a casino there, there would be bus service. And as it turns out, the bus came down Eastern. And the bus driver for the whole time my mother worked down there, his name was—I don't know what his name was, but they called him Whitey because he had real white hair. He would wait for my mother if she wasn't there because he knew she was coming. Anyway, that's how we ended up in that house.

So Joyce, tell me what Las Vegas looked like to you. You're old enough to probably remember because you remember the fifty cents and all of that. What did it look like?

There was not a lot here. It was very desert. There was Fremont Street and that was the only place to hang out. I can remember the library sat in the middle of the park where the City Hall is now; all of that behind there was a huge park and the library sat right in the middle of that park. And I remember going to the library. We walked everywhere. Of course, when we bought the house then we were living way out. Across the street from us on Eastern it was all desert. My brothers used to go build forts. There was a lot of kids in our neighborhood, none of them very respectable, as it turns out. However, we just walked everywhere. We didn't have what they

have today.

So the Showboat pool, we would go swim in the Showboat pool all summer long because my dad would always have—oh, and the El Rancho. The first year that we were here, the summer, because he worked at the El Rancho, he would take Bud and I—Steven was too young—he would take Bud and I to the pool in the morning. I just remember this like it was yesterday. He would flip the lifeguard a five-dollar chip, a red chip, and for that we could stay there all day and have lunch. And so we spent a lot of time there.

What did the family do for entertainment, your mother and father separate from the kids and what did you do together?

We did very little together as a family. My father had no interest in doing family things. He did a few things with my brothers; he would take them golfing and stuff like that. But with me, no; my father and I did not have a relationship at all. But because my dad knew people, my mother loved to go to the shows. And so we went to all of the shows. And her favorite one was Gale Storm, who had the TV show at the time “My Little Margie,” I think. Oh, my goodness, we must have seen her—she knew my mother. And we would always sit right down front. And she would always say, “Hi, Agnes.”

So what did your mother drink during the show?

My mother didn't drink. My mother never drank, never smoked. I think in her entire life if she put in a roll of nickels, I'd be surprised.

Oh, wow. So what did they serve the kids during the show?

Oh, we had meals. We had full meals. I often said Bud and I just went for the food.

So where was Gale Storm appearing?

Mostly at the Thunderbird.

So we had the El Rancho. We had the Thunderbird. What other hotels do you remember, downtown and the Strip?

Well, I remember the Last Frontier because of the village.

Tell me about the village.

Well, they had an old-time western town, village. By the time I got in the eighth grade, which was about '57, even before that I think, '56, there was a riding stable way out on Charleston, like there was nothing out there. It's about where the water company sits today but on the other side of the street. And the guy that ran it, his name was Buck, and he would bring in these horses from Montana, mustangs, and we'd break them. How we would do that is we would get on and the horses would take off running and when they didn't buck us off, they were broken. I was thirteen.

And your parents let you do that?

My parents did not know. We cut school to do these kinds of things. I loved horses; I always loved horses. I had a friend in grade school, Deanna Humbert, and one of her relatives had a ranch out on Charleston, probably about Lamb, I'm assuming because there was nothing out there. But he had one of the Buttermilks, which was Hopalong Cassidy, because they had many horses. They all had to just look the same. So I got to ride that horse a lot. But I loved riding horses.

But anyway, back to the Last Frontier, what we would do is we'd take off with the horses and we'd have to go out in the desert—there was nothing there—and then over the railroad tracks and then we could see the Last Frontier village. And we would go and literally tie up our horses and walk around the village. If we had any money, we'd get something to drink or candy or something.

Did the person who you were breaking the horses for—did you know that you were working?

Oh, no. We were having fun. He was letting us ride these horses and that's what we wanted to do.

And he didn't pay you, of course?

Oh, of course not. No, no. We thought it was—I would mostly go out there with a girl named Linda Barnum. She was a change-of-life baby, I guess you would say; her parents were both well into their forties when she was born. Her dad was Indian. I remember he was a great big guy. She pretty much did whatever she wanted. And so I hung out a lot with Linda because we could do whatever we wanted.

So you were thirteen at this time. As you became an older teenager, what kinds of places did you go to eat, to dance and to have fun with other teenagers?

Well, when I got into high school, like we went as freshmen, they had a place out at Nellis Air Force Base called the Teen Beat.

How did you get to Nellis Air Force Base?

Well, we always knew somebody that was a year or two ahead of us that had a car. We would go out there on the weekends and that was a whole lot of fun. We always went to movies. We would go downtown to eat. There was the Melody Lane, which was next to the Fremont Theatre, which was right there on Second and Fremont, Third and Fremont. They had another place called the Circus Room. I think a variation of that still remains today.

Where was it located?

Right there on Fremont between Fifth and Sixth. And they had the best hot dogs in the world for twenty-five cents. And then the Orbit Inn, which was on I think Eighth and Fremont, had a little

coffee shop. And one of the gals that I went to church with—well, she was my Sunday school teacher—worked there as a waitress. So we used to go there a lot. Then when I went to work at the theater, of course, I was sixteen, and I did a lot of my eating at the theater.

What about the Blue Onion and the Green—

The Blue Onion was the Rancho hangout. Oh, the Green Shack. That was more of an upper-class place at the time. So we would never go there unless you went with your parents. I would go there with my dad and mom as a family. But as teenagers that was way over our budget. The Blue Onion we went a lot, when we could afford it.

And tell me what the Blue Onion was all about.

The Blue Onion had a restaurant inside and it also was a carhop place. Originally, the waitresses were on roller skates. I think they stopped that about 1960, '62, or somewhere around that. They just walked; they got rid of their roller skates. But originally they did. And from the Blue Onion, which was way down on Fremont almost at Five Points where Charleston and Fremont and everything comes together, we would start there and we would cruise all the way down Fremont and then we would go through the train depot and then come all the way back and end up at the Blue Onion.

Tell me how people who used to do that feel about Fremont Street today when you can't drive all the way down.

I was down there last year, maybe two years ago, with a girlfriend of mine, my very best friend all the way through school. She now lives in Colorado, so we went down there. And I wanted to cry, seriously. I looked around and thought it's just gone; everything is gone. And I remember standing there saying that and I was in front of some kind of a booth, and the guy said to me, "Well, there's some of the tile left in the back of the store from the El Portal." And I thought that

was no consolation. It was very sad. I mean now it's just an attraction. We remember what we remember and the rest of it is gone.

What was your best friend's name?

Bonnie Thompson.

You just said that you worked at the theater as a teenager.

I did.

Tell me about that work and what did some of the other kids do for high school employment?

I worked at the Huntridge—well, I worked at all the theaters, actually. I worked at the Huntridge the longest and then I went to the Fremont and then I went to the Guild. I can tell you when I went to the Guild it was way ahead of its time. Lloyd Katz, who owned the theater, he had a cappuccino bar. Like in 1960? Nobody did that. But today it would be standard. So he was way ahead of his time. He did a lot of artsy films. His offices were upstairs from the Guild.

Where was the Guild located?

On Second and Carson. Is that Carson, the one right off Fremont? I'm getting old.

So there is Bridger.

It wasn't Bridger, because I think Bridger is two streets down.

I think it's Carson.

Carson. So I remember when I was working there we didn't really have an aisle person. Like at the other theaters, there was somebody always worked the aisle that had the flashlight to show people where there were seats and things like that, but not so much at the Guild. I was on a break and I went in and this movie was playing; it was German and it was subtitled because these were all foreign and art films that he showed. Although it showed nothing except you knew

what was going on, this girl was being raped, that affected me so badly that I never went inside that theater again. I mean it was different times, really different. When I was fourteen years old and we were crossing the desert looking at Rancho High School out in the distance, we were still trying to figure out how babies were born. It was just different, totally different than it is now. I still remember that. I don't remember the name of that film and I never watched—this was in the opening. Like bushes were rustling and then these guys came out; I mean it didn't show anything, but I knew what happened. And it just...things you remember.

Yes. It is amazing. Some of your friends, what kind of work did they do?

Working in the theater was kind of the thing to do. You worked in the theater or you worked at Woolworth's. Woolworth's was a big employer. There was Woolworth's and there was Cornet's, which are both dime stores. Cornet's was on Fourth and Fremont and, of course, Woolworth's on Fifth and Fremont. So a lot of my friends worked there. But the mayor's daughter, Shirley Gragson, worked with me at the Huntridge. She used to come to work in her pink Cadillac, too funny.

I love it. What other department stores or dime stores did you have downtown, dress shops?

Oh, there were all kinds. Everything was downtown. There was C.H. Baker, the shoe store, which that was the ultimate; you had to get your shoes at C.H. Baker. There was Hecht's and Chic Hecht's. Chic Hecht's was more for the younger set and Hecht's for the older set, the father and the son. I'll just go down that side of the street first. And then there was Lerner's and Albert's.

What is Albert's?

Just like Lerner's, another dress shop type. And then there was Baine's and Fanny's, the two very

high-end stores. I remember saving two paychecks to buy an outfit at Fanny's. Then on the other side of the street you had Ronzone's and Johnson's, which was next door. Johnson's was a clothing store like Ronzone's. There was Christensen's, which was a men's store. Oh, and on the other side was Marv's—Merv's. Marv's or Merv's, which was a men's store, also. And then Penney's and Sears. So there was lots of the shopping.

Great. Where did you buy groceries?

We bought groceries at a place called Johnny's Market, which is now I think a triple-X store or something on Charleston. On Charleston and Eastern there was a strip mall on the southeast side of the street, which was anchored by Fisher's Pet Store. And then there was something there, I don't know what. I'll have to tell you this story, though. Then there was Sally's Liquor. And then there was the Lullaby Shop, which was a baby shop, then a jewelry store and then Johnny's Market. I may be leaving something out, but basically that's what it was. And we did all our shopping at Johnny's Market. Fifteen cents for a loaf of bread. So my mother would walk down and she'd usually take one of us so we could carry groceries back.

You carried groceries all the way back from—

Well, it was only about three or four blocks; I mean not long blocks. There was Ballard, Peyton, Houston, Franklin, Wengert; so that's how it went. But they weren't long blocks.

Tell me more about the gaming industry. Your father was working in the industry. What kinds of stories did he tell?

Oh, my dad told me no stories.

Okay. So did you ever hear him tell the boys, your brothers?

The boys have shared a lot with me. I mean that's how I found out about Uncle Itchy. He shared everything with them, but I didn't have a relationship with my dad at all. My dad like totally

ignored me like I didn't exist. I understand it now because when I was working at the MGM as a cocktail waitress—that was my seventies life—I had a floor man by the name of Clayton Graham, very sweet man. And he knew my dad real well; they worked together at the Showboat. My dad worked at the Showboat for a while. One day I was working in the dice pit and he clapped and I walked in the pit, because when the floor man claps that means he wants you to take an order from a table. So I walked in and he was standing there with his hands folded and he was just looking at me. I said, “What?” And he said, “Somebody just told me that you're the Mouse's daughter.” That was my dad's name, Mousey or the Mouse. They all had those names. And I said, “Yeah, I am.” And he just stared at me and said, “You know, I knew the Mouse for 35 years; I never knew he had a daughter.” I almost started to cry it hurt me so. But then Clayton told me, he said, “Don't you realize I just gave you the best compliment I could possibly give you?” I said, “How is that a compliment?” because I didn't understand this. He said, “Because in your dad's business you parade your sons, you hide your daughter. And the fact that I didn't know he had a daughter meant he was doing his job.”

Wow. Amazing.

So there you have it. I remember one time when I was in high school we went to—it was the junior prom, something, some dance and we went to the Flamingo to see the show. So we go and there's four of us. We walk in there and I see my dad down in the pit. And I'm saying, Daddy, Daddy. And my dad came flying across that casino and said get the F out of here. Okay. I mean it broke my heart, and embarrassed me. So we got in there and here comes a bottle of champagne. And I was maybe fifteen, sixteen years old.

And you got into where?

The showroom at the Flamingo because he had made our reservation. He gave us a bottle of

champagne. I mean we're kids. But I understand that now. He didn't want me being a visible being. So yeah, it was—

It was a strange life. But those men lived.

Yes. And the fact that he hid it all from me is a good thing. Now I wish I knew more. My brothers know more. But he was very old school. My brothers will tell me stories and it just makes my hair curl. But anyway, that's their story to tell.

Good. So tell me about your mother's work in the hospital. What kinds of stories did she tell about hospital work here in Las Vegas at that time?

She loved the Las Vegas Hospital. It was a family hospital; it was doctor owned. Originally it was Woodbury, Hardy, Sylvain and—not McDonald.

Martin?

No. One other one whose name I can't remember. She worked there from 1955—she went to work there because she worked at the Memorial Hospital first—until it closed in 1976. It closed because they could no longer meet code because it was built in 1931. The first floor of the hospital when you walked up the stairs there was a waiting room on the left and then there was the counter right in front of you and the doctors' offices on the right. The surgery room was in the basement. And all the doctors' offices were there. My mother worked the graveyard shift, third shift, which is what she loved. She worked it her entire life.

So we're talking from what time?

Eleven at night till seven in the morning. To tell you the truth, when Steven went to kindergarten he went to Crestwood School and we went to Sunrise Acres because Wengert was like the dividing line and then they changed it by the time Steven went to school. That's when we found out his mother worked. He didn't know Mom had a job because she was always there to get him

up in the morning and she was there when he came home and he was asleep when she went to work. He never knew she had a job [laughing]. You work?

But my mother had pretty much free reign. And Dr. Hardy, who was related to Hardy of Laurel and Hardy and looked just like him—they were cousins, but they looked exactly the same. He was a big, rotund kind of guy. He would call my mother at night. He would go down to the Fremont Hotel and play poker. He loved to play poker and drink milk shakes; that's what we did. So he would call my mother and say, "What's going on, Ag?" Well, this is happening and this person is this. He'd say, "Well, you take care of it." And that's just the way it was. My mother was the charge nurse.

All three of my children were born there. They had one labor and delivery room and they had a little nursery in the back that held about three or four babies.

Oh, that's great. I want to know about the opening of a hotel. So 1955, we had the Dunes and all of those places. Do you remember as a teenager or a young adult what happened when hotels would open, the fanfare? Did you ever participate in any of that?

I don't really remember any of that. All the hotels were just opening. I remember going out. My mother's favorite hotel was the Desert Inn because they had the dancing waters. You see, we just keep reinventing ourselves bigger and better because—

Yes, because dancing waters we think of Bellagio.

Yes. But this was dancing waters where it was just in the back near the pool. You would go out and you'd sit on the grass. And then when it got dark, the dancing waters, they had all the lights. It was beautiful and we would go do that a lot. My mother was all about going and doing especially when it was free. And we would take the bus out there. She didn't drive until after my dad passed away. We were big on the bus.

But the big fanfares really were movies, I mean for me as a kid. I went to work at the Huntridge Theater with the opening of Ben-Hur.

And what would happen with an opening like that?

Oh, my goodness, the TV stations were there. The stars were there. They were huge. And downtown, it was even bigger. When they did the original Ocean's Eleven, oh, my goodness, everybody was there.

Why did they have big openings like that in Las Vegas? Now, Ocean's Eleven I understand. But for Ben-Hur, why Las Vegas? Why not Los Angeles, New York?

Well, maybe they did have big openings in those places, but that was for us. We had uniforms. We got uniforms. We had light blue blouses and a deeper blue skirt, gold belts, gold shoes. This was for the opening of a movie. We had jobs; everything was reserved seating. So somebody would give us their ticket when we were working the aisle and we would take them to their seat. The concession stand was closed. There was an intermission and then the concession stand would open. So there were four or six of us that would be on the aisle, maybe two out at the concession stand setting up and getting ready. My future sister-in-law, my still very dear friend today, and I both worked the aisle and we knew the whole first twenty minutes by heart. She would be Ben-Hur and I'd be Messala or I'd be—and more than once we got told to shut up because we would recite the lines.

I will tell you a funny story. Our manager was a man by the name of Harry Zumar. And Harry was a scary person to us as kids because he was very matter of fact. But inside he was just really a sweetheart. One night—Ben-Hur had been on about a week I guess—I'm behind the concession stand and it was all glass on the top. Of course, we're mobbed because everybody's coming out to get something. At the end of the table is this [knocking] fifty-cent piece tapping

on this glass. Over here [knocking], over here. And I just turned and I said, "I will wait on you when it's your turn."

Okay. Well, who knew it was Ralph Pearl? So the next thing you know everybody goes back in and Harry's standing there, Mr. Zumar. Joyce. So I go in his office and he said, "Do you know who you just offended out there?" And I said, "An irritating man that couldn't wait his turn." He said, "No, that was a columnist." And he said, "We have rules; we take care of these people first," yada, yada, yada. And he said, "He demanded that I fire you." Really? So I'm looking at him. I'm thinking I'm getting fired. He says, "So this is what I'm going to do. Go home." He said, "As long as he doesn't see you for the rest of the night he'll think I fired you." And so I went home.

So years later, just to follow up on this story, when they rededicated the Katz Lounge, Honor's Lounge, Harry Zumar was there. He was 91 years old. They asked us to tell stories. And so I started to tell that story and in the back of the room Harry says, "But I didn't fire you, did I?" I mean here is a man 91 years old who remembered.

Wow. Oh, that's great.

Yeah, that was too funny. So you had to be careful.

Yes. I see. Now, when you said the opening of the lounge, tell me where this lounge is that you were just talking about.

Here in the Lied Library on the third floor.

Good. There were some families in town that everybody knew like the Binions. There are people that everybody knew like Jack Entratter. What kind of people were those and how they did interact with the community? And other people of that ilk.

It was much different than it is today. People were people. They walked the streets. They

talked to you. It wasn't really like—it's like Oran Gragson. I knew he was the mayor, but he was just Shirley's dad. It was the same way with most people. I didn't really meet a lot of the owners until the late sixties, probably. I went to work at the Aladdin Hotel. I think I was 24—no—I was still 23 when I went to work there, but I did turn 24 shortly thereafter. It was my introduction because I had been very sheltered from any of this and it was truly my introduction to the seedier side of life, if you will.

So let's talk about high school some more. So this class graduated in '62, the class of '62.

Correct.

You started high school in '58?

Fifty-seven actually, September '57.

Is the high school new now?

It was brand new. As a matter of fact, we were the very first full graduating class; we went from freshman to senior. And not everybody went to Rancho as a freshman because two junior highs, as we were called, had opened up. One was there in North Las Vegas and the other one was over on St. Louis and Oakey, in that area somewhere. J.D. Smith was the one in North Las Vegas. So all of the kids that I went to school with went to J.D. Smith as sophomores that lived in that area. See, actually I should have gone to Vegas High School, but because I graduated from Sunrise Acres, which was on 25th, which now we call Eastern, right there between Meadows and Stewart—the school is still there. It doesn't look any better than it did when I went there. And I don't even know if it's still a school or if it's administrative offices or what it is. But because all of my friends were going to Rancho, I went to Rancho. And all of Sunrise Acres went as freshmen.

To Rancho?

Yes. And all of the kids from Twin Lakes went as freshmen. But the kids from North Las Vegas area that lived in that area went to J.D. Smith and so they came as sophomores. I think it opened in 1953 or '4. But it was just like they started as sophomores and juniors. So we were actually the first full class.

I see. What kinds of extracurricular activities did you and your friends participate in?

We participated in everything.

Give me some examples.

I was very into sports. I played on every team that I could play on. In the eighth grade I was on the volleyball team, the basketball team, softball. When I got to high school, they didn't really offer that kind of thing for girls. But I was in the pep club. I had tried out for cheerleading and got bumped because my algebra teacher, Mr. Murates, flunked me.

He flunked you; you didn't flunk.

Well, he was a maniac. I would go into class—I had a boy that sat next to me; his name was Merle Hall I think was his last name. He taunted me. He was a junior and I was a freshman. Something that would never happen today, but I got locked in a closet. There was a closet in the back of the room and Mr. Murates would say, "Okay, to the closet." But I did redeem myself later in the semester and I passed that class with a C-minus. So I did get out of algebra, but that was the last math class I had ever taken until I came to college and then I needed a lot of help.

But I was in pep club. I got chosen as a freshman for the assembly committee, which was huge.

What is that?

The assembly committee planned all the assemblies for the year and you had to be appointed to this committee. Well, just by luck, because I got called out of class one day to go to the office—

well, right away I think I'm in trouble—and I walk into the assistant principal's office. His name was Mr. Richard. And there were all of these people, students sitting there that I had no idea who they were. This is how things have changed, also. I had to stand there and they said, what is your name? I said Joyce Rasmussen. And one of the guys said, “Joyce, would you turn around for us?” And so I turned around. And somebody else said, “Well, she looks pretty good to me.” This was my interview. The senior class president was Dave Rasmussen. Of course, he was head of the assembly committee and he heard there was another Rasmussen at school. So I got chosen. There were two of us as freshmen. So I was chosen to sit on the assembly committee. A girl I went to grade school with, Tina Tedesco, she was a little, tiny thing and cute. So they picked her, too. But not on our scholastic merit. However, that was a very prestigious thing to belong to.

I also was in the art club. I was in the German club. What else? Whatever there was to do, I was doing it.

What were some of your favorite classes and favorite teachers?

Wow. In high school? Well, we had a teacher for social studies, Mr. Bowers. He was very good-looking. So everyone loved him and everyone wanted to be in his class. I can't remember too much else about him except I met him later on and come to find out he was a horse person and we ended up riding horses together. But this is many years later, probably twenty years later. I didn't have a lot of favorite teachers. I was all about having a good time.

I took Spanish my freshman year and my teacher, Mrs. Anderson, also taught French. So if you can imagine, we didn't learn too much because she couldn't differentiate between the two.

My senior year I had a teacher by the name of—I can't think of his name—Dwyer, Mr. Dwyer. He would walk into class—it was a government class—and he would say, “Open your

book to page one eleven, read the chapter," [snoring] and he would sleep.

Was he also the coach, a football coach or something?

No, he was not a football coach. But he did sleep through class. I remember buying his tests. I paid fifteen dollars for his tests.

Because they never changed.

They never changed; he never changed his tests. I sold those tests when I graduated for twenty dollars, so I made five bucks. And I sold them to my brother; so that's pretty pathetic.

Yes, it is.

Now, I did not take home ec because I had been sewing since I was thirteen. But I did make extra money because all of the girls that took home ec, I remember, had to make a straight skirt with a pleat in the back and the zipper and a button in the back. Of course, nobody wanted to do that. So for five dollars I would put your zipper in.

Oh, my goodness. And that's one of the most difficult things.

So I put everybody's zipper in.

I love it. What age did girls start dating?

Oh, goodness. I would say when you went to high school. You were always going steady, but what did that mean? Not much because we would meet each other downtown at the movies, everybody paid their own way, and then the boy would sit next to you. There was a lot of making out in the movies, lots. Not today because people have places to go. And then we didn't have anywhere but the movies. So the back of the movie theater would always fill up first. If you turned around you could see four or five people making out.

How do you define making out?

Oh, just kissing. When I went to my five-year reunion and I found out that some of these girls

were sleeping with their boyfriends, I was shocked. Well, two of the girls were pregnant when we graduated. Well, who knew? I look at some of those boys and think, wow, I wish I would have known [laughing]. No. I was scared to death. I was scared to death. I lived in a household I wouldn't have lived to see eighteen.

What about the prom, what was it like?

I went to every prom and they were so much fun.

Was there a junior prom and a senior prom?

There was a senior ball; a junior prom and senior ball. We always had Sadie Hawkins, which was too much fun. You would buy your patches; you could get three patches for two dollars.

Explain that.

You had to tag—you had to catch a boy first and then—I mean it was true Sadie Hawkins in those days. A lot of people were going together, boyfriend and girlfriend, and so the guy would come to school with his patch on. But once you got patched, tagged, you had to wear that so other girls knew that you were taken. And a lot of guys, they were pretty fast if they didn't want to go with you. But it would have never occurred to anybody, once you were tagged, I don't care who it was, you were going with that person. And we all dressed alike, Bermuda shorts and knee highs. We had Bermuda Bounces is what we had.

What is that?

A Bermuda Bounce is a dance where everybody wore Bermuda shorts and long socks. Sadie Hawkins you all dressed like, you know.

Because you couldn't wear that to school, the Bermuda shorts?

Oh, no, no. You couldn't even wear pants. We were all in skirts and dresses. But Bermuda Bounce, that was a big thing because everybody wore their Bermuda shorts. We used to have

sock hops on the lunch hour in the gym. Everybody would have to take off their shoes and go in in their socks and dance. That was a lot of fun. We had the Sweetheart Ball.

Oh, wow. Which grade?

Well, every year there was the Sweetheart Ball and that was like the kickoff for the year. It was usually in September, October. And then the junior prom was always later in the fall and the senior ball was in the spring. Sadie Hawkins was in the spring, Bermuda Bounce, too, second half of the year. The first half of the year was pretty busy because of football and that was a big thing. You always had football activities.

So who were the rivals, the football teams?

Well, when I was in school there was only one other football team and that was Vegas High School. So the four years I was in high school we took state four years, so the Herkimer bone belonged to us.

Explain what that is.

It's just like—

The cannon.

Yeah, it's like the cannon for university. But it's just the prize that you got for winning and everybody wanted it. So we would play Las Vegas High School. Then we would have to go to Reno. We played Reno. We played Sparks. And then we'd play Santa Barbara. Those were the teams that we played.

So there were only four or five games and that was it?

It seems to me there were more than that, but we played people more than once. You didn't play somebody just once. Gorman was here, but they were a B team or a Triple A team. No. We were Triple A; they were Double A. They didn't play with us. They were a small school. They

played with Moapa and the cow county teams. They have since risen.

Of course, yes.

When I was a junior I believe they opened Western High School, but they didn't have any seniors.

Tell me about graduation-type activities. Did you have anything other than just the graduation ceremonies? Were there other activities connected?

The activities that went on with graduation were not with the school; they were basically with families. We had the graduation ceremonies, but then afterwards everybody went with families and friends and did their kind of own thing, as I remember it because that's what I did.

But nothing called Class Night where you had fun? You selected the people most likely to succeed and all of that?

We had those contests that went on during the year. We had Mr. Wonderful. We didn't have most likely to succeed or anything like that. But we did have the homecoming queen and king and Mr. Wonderful. I don't know what we called the girl.

Ms. Lovely probably.

Something like that.

Any special clubs that you remember that were popular at Rancho?

You mean not connected with the school?

Well, connected with the school, but maybe something different that you did, not so much an academic club. But were there other kinds of clubs, travel clubs where kids would go to Europe to study or anything like that?

Not that I can remember. We were pretty low tech. A lot of my activities were wrapped up in my church. Most of my friends, probably half, a little more than half of my friends were all in

my BYF, or Baptist Youth Fellowship group, and we did a lot with that. We had meetings on Sunday night, which we had a lot of fun with. We went to camp every summer. We traveled to different activities. Most everything I did was connected with that.

Now, when I was sixteen I got a car because my mother, of course, I told you didn't drive. So she was so excited when I turned sixteen so she could get me some transportation and I would be able to take her to the store and take her to work when she needed it. The first car I had was a '52 Chevy. We called it "The Tank" because it was gray and looked like a tank and drove like a tank. I drove that for a year and then my brother got that car. When I was a junior I bought a '58 Opel.

Because you were working, earning your own money.

I was making my own money. My car payment every month was twenty-eight dollars. And that car, we ran it into the ground. I bought ten-cent reclaimed oil and put in it. It was a stick shift. So when it didn't start, we'd just push it and jump in and pop the clutch. I took that to Reno twice. We loaded up, five of us, in this little Opel, stuff strapped to the top. And we went to California in it. It never occurred to me. Today it would petrify me; no, you can't go in that car. But then I was fearless.

Tell me about things that brought the city together. Football, you had rivalries and all of that. What about Helldorado? And is there anything else like Helldorado?

Well, Helldorado was huge, huge. I marched in that Helldorado Parade as a seventh grader and an eighth grader. I was a majorette. I gave that up; it was too hot.

A little sidelight story, when I was in the eighth grade we had a sleepover at my girlfriend's house, Patricia Hennon, and somebody told us if you put peroxide in your hair it'll lighten it. So we all doused our head. Nothing.

We had little green and white corduroy skirts and they had straps on them and yellow blouses because our colors were green and gold at Sunrise Acres. And we had hats, green hats with little yellow touselles on them. I have pictures of those.

So we marched in the parade the next day. It was the North Las Vegas Parade. So we started out at Dula Center, which is on Bonanza and Fifth, and we went north all the way to Owens and then down Owens all the way to the end. And my mother was waiting for me at the other end with my brother. Of course, it was very, very hot. So we flipped off our hats. And I guess when I got to the other end my hair was white. My mother almost had a fit; Joyce, what have you done? And I had no idea what she was talking about because I hadn't seen my head.

But those were community things. And Helldorado was so much fun. Everybody participated. The stores all participated. Everybody wore western clothes. The parades were awesome. The streets were lined with people. You would go early to get a good place.

So now, at Rancho did you continue to participate?

No, I did not march in Rancho. No. I gave that up.

But Rancho participated.

Oh, yeah, absolutely. And I worked on the floats. Yeah, we worked on the floats. We didn't use flowers, of course; we used tissue paper and napkins, anything we could get with color and we would scrunch them and chicken wire. But we had great floats. But I worked all through high school, too. My senior year I had two jobs.

So the theater and?

Well, no, because I quit the theater in the beginning of my senior year and I went to work for the Credit Bureau of Southern Nevada.

Tell me about that job.

I put out the credit bulletin once a week. That means all week I would go around and collect information; some of it was brought over to us. Then I would put it together in the form of a newsletter.

So what is a credit bureau?

The Credit Bureau of Southern Nevada is today's credit rating service. We had had no computers. We had no anything. So everything was done by hand. Every week a paper went out to tell businesses what was going on—who bought what, who had power turned on, who got a divorce; all of that kind of stuff. And so it was quite a job. I printed it once a week on a mimeograph. I loved that job. Plus, I made a dollar sixty-eight an hour. My friends were making ninety-five cents. I was in the bucks. And then for the second half of the year I worked at night at the drive-in.

Now, did you feel you had to work two jobs or you just wanted to?

No. I just wanted the money.

You purchased the car. But what else did you do with the money?

I bought clothes. Everything went on my back. It's sad to say. I wish I could go back and buy property. But Fanny's was calling.

Yes. I understand.

And Ronzone's. I actually bought a coat when I was working at the credit bureau my senior year. I bought a coat at Johnson's and it was on sale for forty dollars. It was an eighty-dollar coat and it was on sale for forty dollars. It was a wide-wale corduroy and it was double-breasted and had a belt in the back and it was beautiful. I was the layaway queen; my mother used to call me that. I put everything on layaway. I came home and I showed my mother that coat. I was modeling it. She said, "Oh, my goodness, Joyce, how much did you pay for that coat?" So I lied

and said, "Twenty-five dollars, Mom." "Oh, that's so much money; that's way too much money." I thought if she really knew... and plus I got married right out of high school, so I had that to pay for.

So getting married right out of high school—you got married and when did you start in the casino industry, working in the hotels?

After my third child was born, which was in April of '67. I graduated in '62. So five years.

So you had three kids in five years.

I did.

And your body snapped right back into shape because—

Because I was a kid. I was young. Well, with Jennifer I was working downtown in the county clerk's office and I was working for Hoyt Sibley at the time at the Daily Fax. It's now called Nevada Legal News.

So Hoyt, would you spell that?

Hoyt, H-O-Y-T. Sibley, S-I-B-L-E-Y. I believe his son runs the business now. He hired me. He came looking for me because I was doing the weekly paper at the credit bureau and his was a daily paper. So it was very demanding work. I did love it. I liked working for him and I was out and about every day.

So I was working for Hoyt Sibley. You were talking about how I just bounced back. Because I had to go into court every day—I also did something else on top of collecting information and typing it into the Selectric writer. I did a jury investigation service for attorneys going into court. So what I would do is I would go sit in the courtroom and I would watch as jurors were being interviewed and I would take notes. I would write down if they were argumentative, if they were anxious to serve. I would write down if they'd been involved in an

accident, how they voted, all of this stuff that they would be questioned on that other attorneys had no access to at that time. So I would make up a book. When the jurors came out, I would do all the research on them and if they'd been in there before. We were developing this database of all the people that were eligible to serve on juries.

And so in 1967, you could not go into court pregnant; when you started to wear maternity clothes, you had to go home. It just wasn't allowed. And of course, I was pregnant. So I lost a lot of weight. I didn't eat the whole—and I would buy candy bars and then put them on my desk and then I'd just crumble them up and throw them away. And everybody would say you should stop eating that candy; you're starting to get fat.

Oh, wow. How smart.

Luckily, I carried her during the winter. So I wore big, bulky sweaters. I bound myself in. And so even Mr. Sibley did not know that I was pregnant. And so I planned out my delivery so that she would be born on Friday morning. I called in sick Friday morning and went to work on Monday.

Oh, my god.

Because I, by this time, was divorced. My husband was living with another woman, and so I had to divorce him. He was sick.

Yes. There was another problem.

Yeah, there were other problems and he found comfort elsewhere. So I remember going into work. She was born with a collapsed lung, dislocated hip.

Is it because you bound yourself?

Because I bound myself up, of course. She had to stay in the hospital. I came in home. I was only in the hospital a couple of hours and then I came home, but I couldn't pick her up until

Monday. So I remember asking Mr. Sibley if I could take a long lunch. And he looked at me and he—"You called in sick on Friday? Do you know what a bind that put us in? I had to be here." Well, it just meant that he couldn't go play handball. "You put us in a terrible bind; we were late getting the paper out. And now you want a long lunch hour?" And I said, "Well, you'll understand when I get back."

So my mother took the bus downtown and met me at the hospital and we picked the baby up. Then we walked back over to the courthouse. I remember I had her wrapped up. I walked in the office and I laid her on my desk and I took the things off and Hoyt's over there. "What is that?"

I said, "It's a baby." "Where did it come from?" I said, I had it on Friday."

Oh, my goodness, he felt so bad. He felt so bad because here I am in a skirt and high heels and he's got me running here and running there and going here. He felt so bad.

So I worked about two more weeks and he—our office was like this; it was like this huge, big room. We had our desks. He had his desk over here. All the printing equipment was over there. And so he said, "Come here, I want to talk to you." He said, "I'm going to lay you off." And I thought my world had come to an end, seriously; he could tell by the look on my face. He said, "No, I've done this research." He said, "How much do you pay for a babysitter?" I said, "Twenty-five dollars a week." I paid \$25 a week and she didn't raise my money when I had the baby. She was my neighbor and she loved kids. So I said, "Twenty-five dollars a week." And he said, "How much do you take home?" And I said, "A hundred and five dollars." I took home a hundred and five dollars a week. He said, "Okay, I've done this research." He said, "You have three children." He said, "If I lay you off, you go on unemployment, you clear ninety-five dollars a week." He said, "You will make money." So I said, "Really?" And he said, "I'm

going to have a hard time replacing you.” He said, “I’m doing this because I want you to be home with your baby.” That was the sweetest thing anybody ever did. And I did; I got my check every week for ninety-five dollars. I made money and I was home with my babies. So that was wonderful. He was a great boss.

That's wonderful. Amazing. And then the next job, when you decided to go back to work, that's when you went to—a

Yes. When I decided to go back to work, I had made up my mind that I was not going to work during the day because I wanted to be with my kids. I mean my baby-sitter told me when the kids took their first step, when they got their first tooth. I said this is my last baby; I want to see her do these things.

So I had a friend who was working at the Aladdin Hotel as a typist behind the front desk and she got me a job. I went to work at five at night and worked till one in the morning.

Working at the front desk in the hotel side?

Right. I started out as a typist and then I went to desk clerk and then I learned the cashiering end of it. So, yeah.

Wonderful. So tell me a little bit about being a cocktail waitress before we get back to the high school.

Well, that's interesting. First of all, I went to real estate school. I actually got a broker's license in 1971. But you know what? I hated it. My husband was all about if you're going to work, make the most money you can. He said you've got to go to broker's school; be a real estate agent. This town is growing. You'll make a lot of money and you need to get out of the hotel.

So I did; I had a study group and I worked and took this test and ended up passing it. And I just went to him and said I hate this; I'm not good at selling; I'm not. I'm not good at retail;

I don't want to tell somebody they need to buy this. I'm going to tell them the truth; this house is garbage; you don't want it.

So maybe that was the wrong business for you.

Yeah. It's just not something I had any desire in doing. It wasn't just passing the test; now you have to look at all these plat maps and you have to learn the area. I didn't want to do it.

So he kind of let me alone about that for a year and then he said, well, why don't you be a cocktail waitress? I'm not going to be a cocktail waitress. Are you kidding me? I don't know gin from bourbon.

So at this time I was working at the Circus Circus as the head cashier for the hotel. We all went to lunch across the street at the Algiers, which was the place to go.

Oh, really?

Yeah. You didn't want to eat in the Pink Pony at the Circus Circus because just when I worked there we were closed down by the health department three times. So when we could go out we did. We had the paper and we opened it up and there's this full-page ad for workers at the new MGM Hotel and Casino.

Is this Bally's?

What is now Bally's, but at the time MGM. So my girlfriend Judy said let's be cocktail waitresses. I kiddingly said, okay; let's go do it, because I had no intentions. Who's going to give me a job?

So we went and applied and I made it to the—of course, I lied on my application; I told them I had experience, which they didn't have the facilities then that they do now to check. So I said, oh, yeah, I worked for my uncle's bar, and I lied. So she got me all fixed up and I went down there. We spent all day just trying to find me a bra that made me look like I had cleavage.

I swear I had skin from my elbow right here.

Anyway, I went in for the interview and passed the interview and they sent me a letter to tell me that I had been hired. I didn't know what to do because here I am; I'm the head cashier at this hotel. So I went up to the comptroller and I said I've been offered this job; I don't know what to do; I don't know if I should take it. And he said I'm leaving next week to go to the Thunderbird, so he said I think you should go. So I said okay.

So I took this job. The first day I was a nervous wreck. Of course, my husband, he'd been working in the showroom forever and he knew all about this. So I'm trying to learn drinks and I don't know what goes in what. It was a real learning curve, but it was the best job I ever had in my life.

Tell me how you had to dress.

Well, when I went in for my fitting, I stood there and she gave me this hanger and I continued to stand there. And she said, "What, what do you want?" And I said, "The rest of my uniform." She said, "Oh, no, that's all, honey." We had little pillbox hats, like we were pageboys, little pillbox hats. We had collars, we had cuffs, and a corset, pretty much. The corset had a little skirt on it because, after all, it was 1973. But we couldn't get in it ourselves; we had a matron that worked in our dressing room and she would get us zipped up. Before we could walk out of the room, we had to show her our lips, our fingernails. So we used to walk out like this [demonstrating] because she had to make sure you were clean shaven, that you had on red nail polish and that your nails were groomed and we had to wear red lipstick. Let me tell you I looked like a clown because I don't wear lipstick.

What kind of shoes?

They bought our shoes the first year we were there. They were black dyed shoes, cloth. And

they only came in medium width and I have very wide feet. After about three weeks I would go home crying. My feet would bleed. They were so bad.

How high were the heels?

Two inches.

Oh, okay. So that wasn't so bad.

It wasn't the height; it was the width. After the first year my feet were starting to toughen up finally and they decided that it was too much money, so we had to buy our own shoes, but they had to be black, two inches. So at least I could...

And at the time—here's a great story—at the time it was very difficult to find a C width, very difficult. Very few places made them. And when you bought them they were expensive. So I went in one day to the Broadway, which now is Macy's. I was sitting in the shoe department, which was right downstairs. I said bring me everything you have black in a C width. So I'm sitting there and this woman is sitting next to me and I haven't really paid too much attention and she puts her foot out and she puts the shoe up and she says, how do you think this looks; do you think these look good on me? I said, yeah, I like them. I said, they look good on you. I said, stand up and let me see. It was Barbara Streisand. So things were much different in those days; I mean the stars got out. I can't remember whether she bought the shoes, but I was pretty impressed. She was smaller than I thought she was. I guess when you look at them on screen they're bigger than life, and I think she's shorter than I am.

So yeah, we got to buy our own shoes. So that was a good thing; at least I could buy a C.

And Broadway started bringing in more variety?

They did. They did.

And this was the Boulevard Mall?

This was the Boulevard Mall, right where Macy's is today was the Broadway. That was the anchor, the Broadway on one side and Sears on the other.

Wonderful. Anything else that you thought was like a landmark, earth-shattering while you were a cocktail waitress, things that most people don't know about? When somebody flirted with you overly so, how did you get help? Did the person in the pit help you?

Never. We were not thought of well. First of all, we were making more money than anybody in the casino. I worked in the dice pit; we made between two and five hundred dollars a day. So they would have no pity for us in any way, shape or form.

Of course, the things that we wore were corsets and they had stays in them. And when you're carrying a tray on this side with ten, twelve drinks...the stay went through my skin and I was bleeding. I went down to the bar manager whose name was Lenny Agnello, who was a vile human being, and I said, "Lenny, I think I need to go have this looked at because I can't get it to stop bleeding." And he always had this big cigar he smoked. He said, "If you're not back on the floor in five minutes I've got seven hundred girls waiting for your job." And he wasn't kidding. So I just stuck toilet paper and went back on the floor. They really cared not for us at all. So there was certainly that.

The money was phenomenal and we got to meet a lot of wonderful people, not just where I worked in the dice pit. I met a lot of players, big players who were wonderful, wonderful people. My husband always told me—because he made very good money, too; he was a showroom captain—he always said—he was twenty-two years older than I was. So he said we can save this money for when I'm gone or we can enjoy it. And I said let's enjoy it. So we did; we raised thoroughbreds, which was extremely expensive. But we had the money. I have lots of win pictures and I have lots of memories and I don't regret a minute of it.

Fantastic. And we want some of those photographs for your oral history.

Oh. Great.

Were you in the union?

I was.

Culinary union?

Culinary union, yes.

Did they protect cocktail waitresses in any way, any extraordinary way?

No. No. I never went to the union with anything and I can tell you that the first year I worked there I got twenty-six warning notices. I got a warning notice for everything because Lenny Agnello, the bar manager, thought I had been juiced in and he hated people with juice because the food and beverage manager was a man by the name of Danny Litwack. And I knew Danny; we worked together at the Circus. But Danny didn't even know I applied for the job. Did not know.

He just assumed.

He assumed. And so the whole thing came to a head because—I got off at seven o'clock; I worked eleven to seven. And I started out in the oyster bar; I did not start out in the pit. I was serving oysters. The assistant bar manager, Milton Scafica, came up to me and said, "Marshall, they called and you got a call and your daughter has been taken to the emergency room," Gina. So I went flying out of there.

Well, we had to sign in when we got there and we had to sign out, in the bar office. I think I went by the dealers' room with no clothes on because I wanted to get to the hospital. I got to the hospital and they said, oh, no, we sent your daughter home about four o'clock. Well, John was giving her her insulin and he had made a mistake and overdosed her and she went into

shock. So they called an ambulance and they got her back on track; she went home. So I asked John, I said, "When did you call the hotel?" He said, "Two o'clock."

And what time did they tell you?

A quarter to seven. And I still didn't say anything. The next day I go to work and Milton comes up and he says, "Go by the office on your way out." So I went by the office and they fired me because I had forgotten to sign out, which he knew I would, knowing the circumstances.

So as it turns out that night was my friend Judy's birthday. And so Danny, because she was having an affair with Danny, Danny had arranged for all of us to go to the steakhouse—I've forgotten the name of it—for dinner for Judy's birthday.

Not Hugo's?

Oh, no, no, no. This was Delmonico's; something like that. Anyway, we were all in there and Danny came in and sat down next to me and he said, "How are you?" And I said, "I got fired today." I never asked Danny for anything. I got put in the oyster bar; I stayed there. I figured my chance will come. So he said, "Come to my office." So I told him what happened and he called Lenny on the phone. The veins in his neck were out to here as he was screaming at Lenny. And he said, "Do you know that if this girl gets an attorney we will lose everything? Do you realize that?" He used some real choice language. And he said, "If she's not on the floor tomorrow at eleven o'clock, you're fired."

So I go in the next morning. I have to go in the office and I sit down and look at Lenny. And I said, "Lenny, do you think for one minute if I used Danny for juice that I'd be in the oyster bar?" Seriously. I never asked him for anything. He never knew I was even coming here. Yada, yada, yada. So about a month later the job came up in the dice pit and he gave it to me.

So things worked differently then. We were just a commodity. We were abused to a

certain extent. We were not protected by the union. The union would tell us look at the money you're making; that comes with a price.

Do you think it's different today?

As far as—well, first of all, some of the cocktail waitresses that I went to work with in 1973 are still there. So that should tell you that—but I don't think they're being hit on.

Maybe not that part.

I don't think anybody's trying to use and abuse them.

I think you're right.

We all stood up for the union and we believed in the union. I think they still do today, although the union has lost so much clout. In 1976, of course, we went on strike. And our union representative came in about six o'clock, and I had an order on my tray, and they said, put the order down and walk out; you're out of here. And we all had to walk. And we didn't question that, not for a second. Today I think they would question that.

Even when I was the Teamsters when I was working at the Las Vegas Hilton and I was a Teamster there was talk of a strike and there were many people who said I'm not walking, because there was too much of a pool for them to pull.

When we walked out in 1976 we were united. So those poor dealers were changing sheets. The Culinary and the Teamsters went out with us; we were united in that. So they had no front desk.

So only the dealers had no union.

Only nonunion employees. We had a great time, though. Of course, I'm not like some—I'm not a maid. I'm not somebody who's struggling to make their payments. And my husband was still working. The Aladdin and the Las Vegas Hilton both signed contracts with union; we'll do

whatever you say. And the other Strip hotels said no, we're not doing it. So they got all the business.

When you said earlier that this was the best job in your life, what did you mean and how do you describe that?

You mean cocktails?

Yes.

Well, it was the best money-making job I ever had in my life. It was not the best on my body. It was not the best on my mind.

We had to be weighed every week; this was another thing. They don't do that anymore; that's gone with the wind. However, at that time we were weighed when we got hired and we could not fluctuate more than five pounds. You could go under because they don't care if you were anorexic; you just couldn't go over. Of course, we went on this fantastic diet and I got down the thinnest I'd ever been and then they weigh me and they tell me I can't gain more than five pounds. So it was very hard on my body because I did a lot of drinking and not too much eating.

I chose to quit. First of all, I promised my children who were really embarrassed that I was going to be a cocktail waitress. They did like the money and they liked the perks, but they didn't like the fact that their mother was a cocktail waitress. So I said I'm going to do it for five years and I'll retire. I didn't quite make it five years; I made it four years and eleven months. Drugs were just starting to come in. A lot of the people that I worked with subsequently got fired over drug-related issues. I remember when I was working there one of my friends, we were both in toilet stalls in the bathroom and she said, "Joyce," and she passed me this little spoon with this white—I had no idea what it was. It was coke. But I had no idea. So I said, "Thank you,"

poured it in the john. That was becoming prevalent. We had a floor man in Pit One, which we called it, who used to have parties and it was drugs of choice. And so it was time; it was time for me to get out.

Oh, my. So things had changed, a lot.

Yeah, they really started changing.

So getting back to Rancho—and we won't talk about your career pathway unless there is something you want to add to that before we finish—we talked about subjects, we talked about clubs and all of that. Tell me about race relations at Rancho starting in—what is it, 1958?

Fifty-seven.

Fifty-seven. So tell me about race relations.

Well, there was no high school on the Westside; all black students went to Vegas and Rancho. Because I went to grade school with black kids, it didn't mean anything to me. I was shocked actually. I remember one time—and this was when I was still in the eighth grade—going down to Dula Center and they were having a dance down there. They used to have dances. And they wouldn't let the black kids in. I was like why not? I didn't get it. I never experienced that in my life mainly because my mother's very best friend growing up was Jewish, her boyfriend was Jewish, she had a very bad experience with that. She didn't understand people not accepting everyone. My mother was adamant that everybody is equal; you judge people on how they treat you, not anything else. And for her it wasn't black; it was Jewish. The Jewish were persecuted, terrible. And so because she had witnessed that firsthand she was real adamant about that.

I had friends in grade school that were black. So when I got to high school—and I think it was my junior year—I'd have to look at the yearbook to check this out—but our president was

Gayland Gee, who was Chinese; our vice president was Stafford Simms, who was black; our secretary was Linda Ballinger, who was a Mormon; our treasurer was—I can't remember his first name; his last name was Hirsch—he was Jewish; and there was a sergeant of arms and I can't remember, but he was different in some way. So we had this plethora of people from different walks of life and I don't think we ever really thought about it.

I remember one time I had a girl, Betty Washington was her name, and she was beautiful I remember. She was black, but she had long hair and she was so pretty, beautiful figure. I remember one time asking her if—and I think it was the Sadie Hawkins—if she was going to go to the dance. She was in one of my classes. And she said no. Because there wasn't a lot of black kids, but the ones that she would want to go with were tagged. And it would never occur to her to do—I mean there was no interracial things at that time. And I remember feeling so bad about that.

So later on, in the late sixties, early 70s, Rancho is one of the schools where there are race riots. How did you feel about that when you heard that? What did you think?

Well, first of all, I didn't believe it. You hear about that and you say, well, no, we didn't have any of that stuff. But the whole climate, it was changing in the United States. And it was push comes to shove; things had to change and were changing and then you had the people that didn't want change. At first I didn't really understand that because we didn't have problems with it.

And neighborhoods change, that is another thing. You get a different clientele, if you will, going to the school. We didn't have mobs. We didn't have gangs. And those things began to develop and people were claiming territories. It's kind of a shame, but that was just the beginning and it has just escalated from there.

Exactly. We started by talking about downtown. What do you think is the future of

downtown? Have you heard about Tony Hsieh and the new things happening on Fremont Street East and what is going on down there?

I have. It can't be anything but good I believe because it got so dilapidated. Once you got to Fifth Street and you started going east it was just going downhill at a very rapid pace. And I think the fact that they're wanting to rejuvenate that whole area is wonderful.

Have you been down there recently?

I have not.

You have to go.

I will go.

You have to go. My favorite restaurant now is east of Las Vegas Boulevard.

And what is that called?

Le Thai.

Le Thai. Thai food?

Yes. Can't go right now because most of the eating area is outside, so a few months out of that.

Well, when you go back to when I was growing up it was all motels. It was just a different—it's like the town that I lived in is gone, like I live somewhere else now.

Exactly. So my last questions are—I want to know what you see as the future of Las Vegas? And I want education, politics and gaming. In those areas what do you see as the future for Las Vegas?

Politics?

Uh-huh. Education and gaming.

Politics is kind of tied to all of that. It's tied to education. We need a better educational system.

We are at the bottom on the educational scale. And politics gets in the way of that; it really does. We need to go back to better values. Our politicians have to have better values. I don't know what the answer is; I really don't. Sometimes you listen to the campaign trail and then they become an elected official and you don't see any of that. Maybe it's our fault; maybe we don't take an active enough role. When my kids were in school I was very active campaigning and looking for the best for my kids. But now that my kids are out of school I don't do that so much anymore.

Yes. And as someone who came back to school late in life I know you value education.

I do.

So what can UNLV do?

UNLV has to develop a better retention policy. And I'm not real sure how they're going to do that. I think that right now students are going to CSN for the first two years because it's so much less expensive than coming here. A lot of times students will leave CSN and go to another state, to another school. Students that start to come here leave for whatever reason. I think we are still an affordable university in the scope of universities. There are some people that say, well, we have to have a better basketball team, we have to have a better football team. Like it or not, sports is a huge part of why kids come to school. It just can't be overall education. We have to be stellar in something. And we are stellar in the hotel school; that is, we rank right up there. People want to come here in the hotel school. We have to figure out how to do that for the liberal arts school and for fine arts. It only takes money.

Yes. So do you think the UNLV concept, the new concept of having the big stadium, sixty thousand—

I think that's going to help us, yes; I absolutely do. I think the more you get in the national news,

the more people see your name, the more desirable you become.

Right. So Joyce, I really appreciate this. Are there any closing remarks you'd like to make, anything else that you've thought about that you forgot to talk about?

No, Claytee. I could talk all day.

I know that.

I think I've said enough.

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

All right.

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