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# **AN INTERVIEW WITH GORDON SMITH**

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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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**  
*Rancho High School Class of '62*



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Gordon W. Smith 1/29/2013  
Signature of Narrator Date

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## Preface

Gordon Smith was born in Utah, but moved with his family to Babbitt, Nevada in 1947. His father, a barber, moved the family to Las Vegas in 1955. In this interview, Gordon recalls school and after-school pursuits; changes in the town; summer jobs; and college. He also talks about his military service and returning to Las Vegas to take up the razor himself – starting a successful barbering business of over 30 years.



**This is Claytee White and I am with Mr. Gordon Smith. It is January 29th, 2013.**

**So how are you this afternoon?**

I'm doing great today. Thank you.

**Wonderful. The first thing I want you to do is tell me about your childhood. You can do it any way you want. Where you were born? Your family? What your parents did for a living? You can start there.**

I'll give you the best I can remember. I was born in Tropic, Utah, which is right at the bottom of Bryce Canyon, Utah. I started first grade there and then we moved to Nevada in '47 because after World War II—or they were getting ready for the Korean War, and so they were starting to make ammunition in Hawthorne at the ammunition depot, a Navy base. So everybody in Bryce Valley, because work was real bad, they moved up to Babbitt and Hawthorne, Nevada to go to work. My dad had cut hair aboard the *U.S.S. Twining* during World War II. So when he got out of the service, he went to barber school. And he was the barber on the base out there in Babbitt, actually. We lived there until after the Korean War when the ammunition fields went down and they pretty much closed down in Hawthorne; that was in the first part of 1955.

So then we moved to Las Vegas. And there wasn't a whole lot of places to live in those days. So we lived in the Kelso Turner; it was that place down at 12th and Mesquite. We lived there until my parents bought a house in North Las Vegas. And then while it was being built, I went to Fifth Street Grammar School in the sixth grade for a while. Then when Lincoln Elementary School was being built, they transferred me down to J.D. Smith because they were doing double sessions because Lincoln Elementary hadn't finished being built yet; they were still finishing it. Then later that year we went into Lincoln Elementary.

**So Fifth Street School, is it the building that we see today?**



Yes, it is. Yes, I was there in the sixth grade, the first part of the sixth grade.

**So when you see it today what do you think?**

Well, it was quite a shock to see the differences. But then again, when it was only 35, 40,000 people in the valley at that time you knew it had to grow, but we never dreamed it would grow like it did. It was something else. But I'd always sit up on the mountain up there and look down and I'd say, you know, one of these days this is going to be full. By golly, it did.

When I lived in Hawthorne a lot of my family lived there, too, because they had moved up there to work. So we had great times.

**So who? Your father's family or mother's family?**

My mother's family. My father's family pretty much stayed in Southern Utah. But as kids, you know how it is in the summer where you don't have anything to do? Well, we had lots to do.

We would load up a wagon and take it up to the old mines, the old gold mines and that. Well, when they were mining they would throw out all the stuff out over the hill there and there were big piles loaded with turquoise. So we used to gather turquoise. We used to play in the old dump and chase squirrels.

**What did you do with the turquoise?**

That was later; I saved it. In the early seventies I made turquoise jewelry out of all the turquoise I found there.

But in Hawthorne everybody played baseball. So at eight years old I started playing baseball. The year that we moved to Las Vegas we took first place in the area. We'd get in cars and drive to Yerington, Winnemucca, Elko, Carson City, Weed Heights [laughing], places like that to play ball every weekend. Then I was named to the Nevada State All-Star team, but I didn't get to play because my dad moved me to Las Vegas. So I didn't get to play in that, so I



was real disappointed.

**So how was the baseball team organized? Just a city team?**

Well, it was Hawthorne and Babbitt both. They would just put out notices and then you would go down—it was in Babbitt where you'd go down to the rec hall. It was just like the draft; you'd stand over there and then the coaches would pick the teams and they would pick the new players. And whatever team you were on, you stayed with them the rest of the time. So that's how you could develop into a good team because you got to learn how to play together. It was pretty cool.

But when I got to Vegas there wasn't any room on baseball teams because they didn't have very many. So it was in that fall I'd go over to the Dula Center all the time. We swam there in the summertime because I lived down on 12th Street. Bonanza wasn't open in those days. They had the Helldorado Village right there where Bonanza dead ended into Fifth Street. They had the Helldorado Village there and then you had the big park, you had the Dula Center, and then you had a library and the Boy Scout place. And it was all grass where the freeway goes over now. That's what all was there. So we used to play over there all the time.

**So Bonanza dead ended—**

Into Fifth Street. That was 95. When you come in from Reno, you come in what's Rancho Road now; that was just 95 then. Then it made a turn there at Bonanza and come down Bonanza under the underpass and then up—

**Where the railroad track is.**

—to Main Street and then down and it dead ended at Fifth Street.

**Oh, so there wasn't anything—I see. So Bonanza didn't go east of—**

There wasn't anything down that way; there wasn't much east of there at all. Twenty-fifth Street



was a dirt road then. But people coming in from Reno that wanted to go to Phoenix, they had to make a right-hand turn and go down to Fremont Street. And then Fremont Street was a street where you went out into the Boulder Highway and then on out of town.

**So describe Fremont Street to me in 1955.**

Well, Fremont Street then was like the malls are today. It went down as far as Sixth Street, as far as the shopping went because you had Sears and Penney's and then the El Cortez, naturally. But they had all kinds of your businesses up there and five-and-dimes. They had one place where you could get your orange Rufus; I know we liked that. There was a five-and-dime on the corner of Fifth and Fremont.

**Woolworth.**

Woolworth? Yeah. Because when we went to Lincoln and when we got to play basketball—we didn't have any basketball courts or nothing, just except for blacktop—so for us to practice we had to go up to the Fifth Street Grammar School gym and practice. So on the way back we would always stop off at Woolworth and go in and get us a bag of peanuts so that we could make the trip home because you walked in those days. But we never thought nothing about it because we just had fun. But there was a lot of homes back over there then, even where Fifth Street Grammar School. Fifth Street had a lot of businesses on it because you went down and you had the ice cream place where the milk place was and you had a bottling company.

**That's the Coca-Cola?**

RC. Coca-Cola was at Bonanza and Fifth. Then there was a wood yard there and then the Coca-Cola plant and then Cashman Cadillac and then you had the railroad tracks with the bus station. But the train station had a big park in front of it from where Main Street was and it had a big roundabout there and then you had the train station up there. It was just like the ones you see



in the old movies. It was pretty cool.

**Do you know anyone with photographs of all that?**

Excuse me?

**Do you have photographs of any of that?**

I had a lot of stuff because I started working when I was fourteen in a Foodland market on what then was College Avenue; it's now Lake Mead Boulevard. I saved up money and I bought me a developing kit so I could develop my own photos. I had all this stuff. When I got drafted I had it all in a big box, everything. I had all my memorabilia in there. But when I come back it was gone. So a lot of my history was, too, because I had a lot of pictures. I started taking pictures on them little black boxes.

**Oh, yes. And developed your own.**

In Hawthorne. Well, when I first started taking them, I just took the pictures and Dad had them developed. They were all blurry all the time, mostly, because it was hard to hold still in those days. Later on I really got into photography and I did some classes out at—this was later on, though—out at UNLV. The wife and I both have taken photography courses out there.

**And do you do any of it now?**

I still do my photography, but I don't develop anymore. It's too easy because it's all digital now.

**That's right. You started working at fourteen at the food market. And other kids this age range, your friends were working, also?**

Most everybody worked in those days, but they didn't have the minimum wage. In order for people to work up into a good job, you had to prove yourself first not only with school, but with your work ethics. If you didn't have good work ethics, then very few people would hire you in those days. They wanted to see what you've done.



So I worked in that all the way through high school and then I went away to Salt Lake and went to barber school. And I come back and I served not quite my full eighteen months apprenticeship when I got drafted. That was in November of 1963.

**Where did your father go to barbering school?**

He went to Salt Lake.

**So tell me about this school.**

Well, they have a couple of them up there at the time I went. I went to a different school than he did. But when I was there, there were three barber colleges. I went to Four South 6<sup>th</sup> East. It was an old Troy Laundry building, but it was like Vo-Tech out here. They had barbering, nurses, body shop. They just had a lot of—something people would go in to do their lifetime work. I wanted to go to college, but Dad says, no, you're going to barber school first. I'd say, well, why? He said, because then you'll always have something to fall back on. If you're not working somewhere, then you can still cut hair.

**That's wonderful. What great advice. So did you come back and go to college?**

I went to two years at, well, it was Nevada Southern at the time. In fact, the year I quit doing that and just went back into barbering full-time was the year they voted to change it to UNLV. I believe that was '68, '67, somewhere around there because I went there almost two full years.

**And so at one point—and then we're going to get back to high school—at one point you had your own barbershop?**

Oh, yeah. I've had my own barbershop since 1969. Well, not the last ten years [laughing].

**Okay. Sixty-nine up until?**

Up until 2002.

**Wow, a long time. So tell me about after you finished—Lincoln?**



Uh-huh.

**You went to?**

That was the year they opened up junior high schools in Las Vegas. So when I went back to J.D. Smith; that's where I went to the ninth grade. Then from there I went to Rancho.

**So tell me about Rancho. What were the classes there that appealed to you most?**

That appealed to me most? Well, in those days you took what they told you to take [laughing]. You had to have one study hall. You had one elective. I remember I took yearbook one year; in my junior year I worked on the yearbook that year. But other than that I took all the regular courses they had because I played football every year. So we got out the last period to go practice every day. But that's something I didn't never want to miss; I loved that.

**Tell me about your favorite or your most memorable teacher.**

My most memorable teacher? Jack Daley.

**Okay. Why?**

He just took an interest in everybody and helped them out. I had his wife for English and I really enjoyed her, too, because she was very well. I had some great teachers, though.

**Who was the football coach?**

Razmick, Chuck Razmick. Let's see. My sophomore year when we went over there they hired a lot of new coaches in Las Vegas and we had a lot of young guys, fresh out of college, a lot of them from University of Indiana. They had all come down. Jack Daley, he come down from Idaho, him and his wife. He was teaching health and he coached baseball, football. Razmick was just football and Tarton was baseball. I played baseball, too, because I liked being outdoors. Study just kind of was on the side [laughing].

**Now, I see a collection of chickens.**



That's the wife's.

**Did she grow up on a farm?**

No.

**Oh, wow. That's interesting.**

Because I spent my summers in Utah working on a farm all the time. Every summer I was up there.

**So that was because you had relatives there?**

Yes. Both my grandparents were from there and a lot of aunts and uncles that lived there.

**Oh, that's good. When you started Rancho, how did you get back and forth to school?**

For a long time we walked. Then as we got a little older then people started getting cars, so then we'd car pool. I didn't get a car till my senior year, about halfway through my senior year. But if we wanted to go places, you found somebody that had a car or you walked. When I was fourteen I was working and I got a moped from Sears. It was like a bicycle with a motor on it. I did that for a while. Then I got a Cushman Eagle. So we got around. Most of us kids had something like that.

**And after that you got a?**

It was called a Cushman Eagle. It was a little different looking and it had a bigger engine than the moped did.

**But not a motorcycle?**

No, no. I never drove a motorcycle.

**What did kids do while you were at Rancho for fun, group fun?**

What did we do for fun? We'd get on our little old motor bikes and we'd go to Moapa Valley, up to Warm Springs, and we'd go out to the lake on the weekends. We had friends that had horses



and stuff. Ned Lando had the ranch up at Mount Charleston that's now where I think they do the drug rehab there now, Harrison Springs. We used to spend a lot of time up there. In the fall we'd go deer hunting, which our coach didn't like because we always missed Monday.

**How did you get to Mount Charleston, cars again?**

No. Horses.

**You went all the way to Mount Charleston?**

Uh-huh. Over on the Westside there was a little town there called Vegas Heights and it was a community just like Blue Diamond here. A lot of the people there had horses and a lot of them we went to school with. So we would go up there on that because we didn't have car traffic. That wasn't available to us until we got older.

**Was Vegas Heights black or white?**

It was white then.

**Did you have black friends?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah, because we had the two high schools, so they would split the Westside up; part of them would go to Vegas and part of them would go to Rancho. And then in Hawthorne we went to school with the blacks, too. But when that closed down, a lot of them moved out here. So I had the same kids that I went to school with there that were in high school with me here.

**And you played football and baseball with some of them?**

Oh, yeah, a lot of them. I've always been friends with them.

**Did everybody participate equally? I'm sure that you had some Latino students?**

Yeah, we had quite a few here living in North Las Vegas.

**So did everybody participate in all activities equally and freely?**

Those that wanted to. There was nobody shut out of anything we did.



**I want to know about the dances. I've heard some wonderful stories about the Sadie Hawkins Dance. Tell me about that.**

That was where the girls got to pick the guys, ask the guys. Then you dressed up and they'd have bales of hay and everything in there. It was pretty good.

**So how did the girls pick the guys?**

They'd just come and ask you if you'd be their date for Sadie Hawkins.

**And did they have to chase you?**

We had deals on the lawn where we made them chase us, yeah.

**And the boys enjoyed that, also?**

Oh, yeah.

**Okay, good. I wanted to hear that from a guy. Tell me about the proms. Did you attend your proms?**

Every one of them.

**Was that a special time for young men, as well as young women?**

In those days it was always real special, yeah.

**And where did you get your—did you wear a tux?**

No.

**How did men dress?**

A lot of us couldn't afford a tux in those days.

**Right. So how did you dress?**

We had our church clothes. We had nice church clothes.

**So you just wore a regular suit. And the girls, how did the girls dress up for the prom?**

They always dressed nice.



**A party dress?**

It seems like they always had different dresses for the different parties [laughing]. But they always got flowers from all the guys, though.

**Oh, that's wonderful.**

They had a place downtown—I don't remember what the name of it is—that when the dance was around, they had plenty of corsages and things.

**So was it on Fremont Street?**

Oh, yeah.

**Oh, good. I have to find out what that one was called.**

I can't remember all the names.

**So Rancho had an open campus; you could leave during lunchtime.**

We did for a long time. Then in my senior year they pretty much closed it off; we had closed campus that senior year.

**So do you know why they closed it?**

No.

**What did most kids do on the lunch hour, young men?**

We'd run down to the Arctic Circle.

**What is that?**

It's like a McDonalds today. I can't remember his name. Archie. When Archie started the Arctic Circle out there in North Vegas, he was the first one to mass produce these hamburgers and stuff. He had bins that were warmers and he'd make them all ahead of time because he knew when we'd all be there. But most of the time we ate at the cafeteria. Once in a while we'd go out.



**What about the Blue Onion?**

The Blue Onion and driving Fremont Street. We'd do the circle at the train station. We'd drive down and then you'd drive through the Blue Onion over to Charleston and down to 25th Street and back up Fremont Street, especially on Friday nights and you had your Vegas and Rancho. You'd throw water balloons at each other. There was always a fight here and there. But one of our classmate's dad was a policeman. They had him stationed at the Blue Onion on the weekend. So Jack would maintain traffic and keep the fighting down and stuff.

**Why did the boys fight?**

I don't know; it's just one of those things. There are certain guys that just like to fight; that's all.

**You played sports. Did you have special rivalries with any particular schools?**

Vegas. Vegas and Reno because if you were the top team in the south, then you'd play the top team in the north for the state. Really there was only Rancho, Vegas and Reno; that was pretty much what they called in those days Triple A until my senior year when they opened up Western. But Basic had a little team in basketball and they had a little football team. And then Gorman was just starting and then Gorman had a football team and basketball because Bob, our ex-governor, he went to Gorman and he played there.

**Bob? I'm thinking Grant Sawyer.**

Miller.

**Oh, Bob Miller. Thank you.**

He was, I think, a year behind me and he was at Gorman. But because it was such a small town, we pretty much knew everybody. It's just like we used to play the Rancho-Vegas game on November the eleventh and they had a big parade and we would have floats. Each class would have their float and go down. They'd park them down along the football field because we always



played at Las Vegas High School. I can't remember if that's Eighth Street or Seventh Street there.

**At Bridger, in there?**

Yeah. Then each school would have a big bonfire the night before the game.

**Now, was this a homecoming game?**

Yeah, it was the homecoming game. Then about two years before us, when I was a sophomore, we started up the Herkimer's bone.

**Tell me about that.**

They still use it. I can't remember the kids' names now, but they were class of '60. They got together, a couple of guys at Rancho. They got together and they got this cow bone and they had it all cleaned and painted. And so the winner of the Rancho-Vegas game got—they called it Sir Herkimer. So whoever won the game got to display that in the school for that year.

**Oh, that's great.**

They still do it today, too.

**Oh, really? So where did the name come from, Herkimer?**

That's one thing that I just don't remember.

**So it's like the cannon?**

Uh-huh, it's like Reno's cannon, yeah.

**Okay, great. So yeah, Reno does get to keep it all the time, don't they?**

Yep.

**You were just talking about your homecoming parade and how great that was. Tell me about Helldorado.**

They used to have Helldorado come right down Fifth Street because we'd sit out on the lawn and



watch the parade go by because it went to the Helldorado Village. Then they tore that down and put Bonanza through. So they put Cashman Field in then. There for a long time it just stopped right there at the Helldorado Village.

**And the village was right there at the end.**

It was right at—

**Bonanza and Fifth?**

Fifth Street still went out into North Las Vegas. Main Street come down this way and Fifth Street come down this way. And then when they got down in North Las Vegas they come together, just like they do today, Las Vegas Boulevard.

**Oh, so we are talking about that far out.**

Yeah, but we were up there.

**So the village was up near—**

The village was right where Bonanza is. It dead ends right into where the village is, just above Cashman Field.

**Okay. What kinds of things did you do in the village? What did high school kids enjoy about the village?**

I never got to go in it much because I was just little then; I was in the sixth grade at that time.

**Didn't they have it every year?**

Yeah, they had that every year. We'd go just to the parade.

**And you never participated in the parade?**

No, I never did.

**If I had to ask you right now your most vivid memory of Rancho High School—or what are the stories that you tell when you're sitting around talking to your friends about Rancho?**



Mine is mostly taking State Championship.

**Okay, good. Tell me about what that meant and what happened.**

Well, it was when I was there. I played the four years; we took state three years. I don't know; we talk about friendships and things, some of the pranks we used to pull, I guess, and the senior lawn. We had lots of good fun on the senior lawn chasing the underclassmen out and making sure nobody but seniors was on our lawn. Then the juniors had a lawn and the sophomores had a lawn.

**Oh, so everybody had a little piece, a little territory.**

Yeah. And you had a big piece here and then you had the office here and then you had sidewalk for the buildings here and then you had a sidewalk for the buildings here. Then ever so often there was a sidewalk that went across. So you had three different lawns there. So ours was the senior lawn.

**The one closest to the building?**

Yep. And we had tree plantings that we did out there. At lunchtime after you'd eat and stuff, you'd spend a lot of time on the lawn, and before school. After school we were always playing football most of the time and baseball.

**And when football season ended you start baseball. No basketball?**

I played basketball for a while, but I was too little for basketball. I got beat up too much.

**I see. I can understand.**

I liked football where I could hit back.

**Yes, yes. So after high school you went to barbering college. You went to the military at what point?**

It was after I had spent about a year in my apprenticeship, maybe not quite that because I



graduated in May from barber school and I got my draft notice right after Thanksgiving, right after Kennedy was killed.

**So we're talking about 1963.**

Uh-huh. I always remember the letter. It says, "Greetings from the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy." But I went in May, but I wasn't looking too good in May because I had gotten in a big fight out at the drag strip with three other guys and I got the worst out of it. So when I went down for my physical, they told me, they says, you go back and come back in two weeks. They didn't want to take a chance that something was hurt bad. So it was in March when I actually went back into the service. After basic I was put in the medical corps.

**So where was basic training?**

Basic training was in Fort Ord, California.

**Is that Army?**

The Army, yes. In those days when you were drafted you just walked down the line and they'd say, you're over here, you're over here. So you didn't have a choice; you just went where they told you to go. But I went to medical school in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Then the night before we graduated was when the Gulf of Tonkin happened. So everybody knew then where they were going. So we had graduation Friday and then Saturday we went to Fort Polk, Louisiana.

**So how long was the medical training?**

It was about ten weeks.

**And you learned how to do things like set bones and—**

Well, mostly ours was treating not as much bones but emergencies, how to treat combat wounds and how to give shots and how to take blood and do all that stuff because we did that on each other; we practiced on each other, which was fun [laughing].



**So you left there and went to—Pope? What was it?**

Polk, Fort Polk.

**In Louisiana.**

In Louisiana.

**And that's where you went from there to?**

I stayed in Louisiana for the whole two years I was drafted. And the reason why is because I was in the 91st Medevac. Well, 91st Medevac at the time, it was real boring. We had a South Polk and a North Polk and we had a big warehouse up at North Polk where we kept our hospital and it was in (Conark cans), they were like the backs of trailers, only they're a little bit smaller. You just went up there and sweep the floor and move your (Conark cans) on this side of the building and then move them back. It was just up and back and up and back twice a day. So I went to my CO and I asked him if I could transfer over at the hospital, TDY, temporary duty, and he said sure. So I went to work in the hospital. On my first day, I just walked on the ward and there's a little colonel that was in there and he was doing something and he hollered at me to get him some things and I said, I'm sorry, sir, but I don't know what you're talking about. He was cussing me out; now, what are you doing here for? And I said, well, I just walked on for my first day of the job. He says, well, you want to learn? I said yeah. So from then on I was his go-to guy. Smitty, here, Smitty come here. And I did things that most people didn't do with the rank I had.

But he come to me one day and he says I want you to go to your CO and tell him you want a permanent transfer over here. And I says why? He says, just go do it. So I went over and the CO said, no way, we're not giving any transfers. And I said, well, how come? He says, I can't tell you. So I says okay. And I went back and told the colonel. Two weeks later I had my



transfer papers. So this colonel wanted me over there because in two weeks the 91st went to Vietnam. So that man kept me in the States.

**Did you stay in touch with anyone in the 91st who went?**

I have a little bit. There's a couple of guys. But it's not very often.

**Did they tell you what it was, what you would have encountered?**

Most of them don't want to talk about it. What I've learned about it is what I've read because they were up at the top, close to the DMZ. So they was pretty tough on them up there.

**Yes, yes. They probably saw every kind of injury there was to see.**

Oh, yeah. Well, I worked on them, too, because—

**That's what I was going to ask.**

See, the Medevac, what they did is they brought them in from the aid station and they'd bring them to us. And then we always got the critical ones. And then we got them ready to go to the United States.

**So where were you?**

I was in the United States. But the way it worked, they had the battlefield medics and then they had the aid stations and that and then you had your Medevac hospital. When they were ready to transport, then they shipped them to a base closest to their home. So I would get them.

Sometimes it would be just a day or two after they were wounded and sometimes it might be up to a month, depending on what they had and how bad they were. But anybody that had a real bad—it wasn't just flesh wounds or nothing; it had to be broken bones and internal organ damage and stuff. I worked what they called septic surgery. So that was where they came to is my ward.

Then I had a thirty-bed ward that I took care of. So I got to see all those. But I got to see them go home, though.



**Yes. That's good. We always heard a lot about Agent Orange and what damage it did to our young men.**

We didn't get any of that. I didn't see any of that at all. All mine were actual combat wounds.

**And so when you got out of the military you came back to Las Vegas?**

Yes, I come back and went back into barbering. Then I started at UNLV—well, at NSU. I was taking premed because I thought I wanted to do that. I worked at that and there was no way I could keep up with that because I had gotten married and had a little one and I was working two jobs. I opened the McDonalds on Maryland Parkway at Flamingo when there was nothing out there then except for dirt.

**So which side was the McDonalds on?**

It's on the west side of Maryland Parkway just before you get to Flamingo.

**Oh, it's still there now.**

It's still there. Yeah, I helped open that. How I got that job is because one of my customers was the manager up there. He worked at the one there on East Charleston and they were transferring him over there to open that up. So he asked me if I wanted another job. I told him, I said, I'd love another job. So he fit my schedule in with my classes. Then on the rest of the time that I had free then I cut hair. So I worked seven days a week. But Sundays and Mondays it was like I had a day off because I only worked one job. After two years of that your body burns out.

**That was a lot and taking care of a family as well.**

Uh-huh. And I had another one on the way. So I went back into barbering full-time. That's when styling started.

**Oh, okay. Not just cutting, but—**

Yeah.



**And did you get into that as well, styling the hair?**

Oh, yeah, I got into it. I loved that.

**Oh, wonderful.**

I loved that. I took a couple of different methods with the Roffler and the Sebring methods and I sold Sebring products and I was also an instructor. My partner and I were the first ones to really, really get it going. We were over on the Westside of town. About every other Wednesday I'd spend in Long Beach at the barber school down there teaching. We had a perm thing that come out and I was one of the first ones to really get into it. So the school had me down there teaching their students how to do it.

**So now, perm, for men?**

For men and women.

**Really? Are we talking about black—**

That was back in the days when everybody wore afros.

**That's what I was going to ask you next. So are we talking black hair?**

We just did—yeah.

**So you can give me a haircut.**

Yeah. We did perms like crazy for in those days the afro like. But my partner and I, being that we were in it first and we were out the Westside of town where it was really growing—

**So where was your shop located?**

You know where the Statute of Liberty is on West Sahara?

**Yes.**

Well, we put that up.

**Wow. So is the barbershop still there that you owned?**



The place is there, but the barbershop isn't. But we started out over in the Westland Mall, which is on that big corner there at Decatur and Charleston. We started out in there where Macayo's is, just down the sidewalk. We could look out our front window and see the sidewalk where everybody went into Macayo's there. We worked there for a long time and then we bought our own building and ended up retiring.

**So did you ever work on any of the celebrities who came to town?**

Not the movie stars or nothing like that. I didn't work on them, but my partner worked on like Jerry Herbst and different people like that. He had a circle of friends—(Beales Glassman) and one of the guys that used to be the president of Valley Bank. Those guys came into our shop. My one big thing of fame was in 1969 when I was down on East Charleston where Fremont and Charleston come together. There was a little shopping center there; it was originally the very first shopping center in the state of Nevada, Crestwood Center. It had a grocery store and a jewelry store and a shoe repair and barbershop and beauty shop and furniture store. Well, in November of '69 they put in the first X-rated movie place. Well, then from there the businesses just started moving out. So that became porno center. So then I moved across the street from the Blue Onion on Fremont Street. Then in '73 I went with my partner; we went up to it was called Gentleman's Choice in those days.

**And that was the one on Sahara?**

That was the one on Charleston. Then we went over to Sahara and that was Hair West.

**So did the two of you remain partners for all of that time?**

Uh-huh, until he died, yeah.

**Oh, my goodness. And how did you decide to move to Blue Diamond?**

Mary wanted to move. She was looking for like Boulder City and that. I had always wanted to



live here because I had a lot of my friends I went to school with lived here. And so I said, well, let's go look. Boulder City was way out of our price range. But we found a little place down here on Cerrito Street in '84. So we bought it and have been here ever since.

**This is a beautiful home.**

Thank you.

**From 1955, you came here when this town was run by families.**

Yes. And the mob [laughing].

**Thank you. So over the years how did it change from mob ownership to corporate? What did you see?**

Well, the big change was Howard Hughes. Howard Hughes came here every year, maybe twice a year at the DI and he had his own floors and everything. Well, he came here one year and they said, sorry, but we don't have room for you. He said why? They said, well, the golf tournament is here, Tournament of Champions, and there's no rooms. So it ticked him off, and so he went and bought the hotel and kicked the Tournament of Champions out. Well, he did so well, they liked him so well, then he started buying up—I don't remember how many he ended up with. He even had some up in the Reno area. But that was the start of the corporations. And another thing, too, is that they were breaking down pretty good on the mob stuff with the Stardust and a few places. So people just come in and it's a whole new ball game now.

**So for someone who was living here and working here, what changes did you see during this transitional period? Were there any obvious changes to residents?**

Yeah. They made the hotels bigger and plusher, drawing more customers in. Before, it was a place where just mostly locals and a few California people would come up and the high rollers from all over. But they started building it up and then having more for people to do and it



brought more people in. The more they built, the more workers come in. The more workers they had, the more businesses had to open up. So I don't know; there was a ten-year period there where it just tripled in size. It was just amazing.

**And what about the feel of the city? How did you feel when you would go into your old favorite places?**

I don't like it now. Before, I mean you knew everybody pretty much; it didn't matter where you went you'd run into people you knew. Nowadays you hardly ever see anybody you know anymore. And most of the people here, I don't know, to me they're not as friendly. They may be, but they're not as friendly to a stranger as what they used to be. My dad had somebody especially from the Air Force base for dinner every Sunday or a customer that had just moved to town and didn't have anything. He'd bring them out to eat and he'd clean them up so they could go get a job, buy them some clothes. He helped a lot of people like that in this town. But that's the way a lot of people were in those days.

**Now, did you have brothers and sisters?**

I have three sisters.

**When your father would do things like that, what did it mean to the four of you?**

I don't know; that's just the way we were raised. So it wasn't anything new to us or anything. It's just that we loved it.

**Did you carry it on, in either of—**

Oh, yeah. I still do it. When I was down at Number six Cerrito down there, I had a couple of friends that didn't have anybody. So there was one Easter I invited a friend over and he was a Jewish guy. He didn't have any family. He had just moved up here from L.A. So I said, you come over our house for Easter. Well, I cooked Chinese for Easter. He says, Chinese for



Easter? I said yeah.

**I love it.**

Well, if you go down that hall you'll see a few memorabilia. We've done that every year since. Each year now we do it with a different theme, like a different country. Well, it's gotten to where it was just one started that out. We have 40, 50 people every year now, people that don't have anything else to do for Easter. And those that have little kids we have the egg hunts for them. Most of those are all big now. That just carries over from your growing up and the things you did and the things you were taught then. Any time we can have somebody over and I can cook for them, I really enjoy it. Mary does, too.

**Oh, good. That's wonderful. I'm glad. I'm sure you would not have been drawn to each other if you weren't that same kind of person.**

Well, see, Mary had a different upbringing than I did because she was an only child. She just had a few friends in L.A. When she moved up here she only had one real friend, but she lives in Portland. She's a nurse in Portland. So Mary didn't have a lot of friends. But now she's got thousands of them.

**I love it. That is great. That's the way we should live. What about your three sisters, do they still live in Las Vegas?**

I had one pass away two years ago now. One lives in St. George and one lives in Provo area. My mom passed away here about three years ago. My dad died in '69.

**So that's been a long time. I think I have asked you most of things that I wanted to cover with you.**

**What do you see as the future of Las Vegas?**

What do I see as the future? Well, a lot of the old-timers are going to move out. Of course, I'm



not ever going to move out permanently, but I'm not at a point in my life now where I can spend the summer somewhere else. I'm presently fixing a place up in Utah. A lot of the people I know now are doing the same thing and spending their wintertime here.

I see Las Vegas as becoming one of the big—I don't know if you'd say industrial, but it's going to be big other than gaming before long. It's starting to happen already. You can see how downtown is growing, Bobby Bigelow with the space industry. You don't know about Bobby Bigelow?

**I don't think I know Bigelow.**

He was one of those kids—when Rancho and Vegas were in—from Bonanza to Fremont Street was a no man's land. So anybody that lived in that corridor could go either to Rancho or Vegas. So a lot of the kids would go back and forth, and Bobby was one of them. He went to school with us. He was in real estate, his family was, and they owned a lot of property down along Paradise and stuff. So Bobby built the hotel up at Mount Charleston. The one down low, he built that because we had one of our reunions there. He had a brilliant mind. He started working on space projects. So he just got a big contract from the federal government now—or I should say from NASA—and they're going to use his products in space now. He's developed a system for—you know they're making the space stations?

**Yes.**

Well, they've developed their own rocket to go up where they've taken some old rockets and fixed them up. They're delivering these things into space now. But that's Bobby Bigelow. He's got a big, big place out in North Las Vegas.

**I had no idea it was from here. I've heard so much about this.**

Yeah. And they're building that stuff right there in North Las Vegas. So he's got quite a few



employees out there. And central valley's moving in.

**Oh, yes, Tony Hsieh downtown. I agree.**

I've got to tell you one story about Bobby Bigelow and Steve—oh, darn. My mind goes blank on Steve's name.

**You'll think of it.**

When we were in school, College Park – a street now called Lake Mead Blvd – came up and dead ended at the railroad tracks. Then you'd turn right and there was a little hole under the railroad tracks and it had a little street through it and that was Miller Street and that went up into Vegas Heights. Well, right where that dead ended the American Legion, they had their meeting hall there. Well, that became kind of a dance place for everybody on Friday nights. Well, it got to where they were doing something and we couldn't get in there anymore. It was Steve Miller. So Bobby Bigelow's mother built us a place on Paradise right there near UNLV. There was nothing out there in those days. They called it the Teen Beat Club because we had a bunch of members from Rancho High and Vegas High formed a band called the Teen Beats, and so they played. Well, when Bobby's mother and them built that out there, then him and Steve Miller became their managers. The Teen Beats, they did very well; they recorded a record or something. (Don Fraza), one of them, he ended up playing music the rest of his life in the San Diego area. And (Larry Chernoff), he still plays for the Umpas here now. That was one of the things that the kid's did in those days. And thank God they had parents that helped them out because it kept us out of trouble. We had very little trouble in those days. If you got caught doing something wrong, you went to the juvi. And when you went to the juvi, they shaved your head off; shaved your hair all off your head. So when you went to school—ah-ha, you've been to juvi. So people didn't want to get embarrassed. So they didn't do much.



**So where was juvi located?**

I don't remember where it was in those days.

**That was just for boys?**

Well, I don't know. I think they had a place for girls, too. But I don't know. It was mostly boys that I saw.

**Wow. That's interesting. I've never heard anybody talk about juvi.**

I think it was down on Bonanza Street where all that juvenile stuff is now, but I'm not sure. I never did go there, so I don't know.

**So if you had it all to do all over again, what would you do differently?**

Probably study more [laughing].

**That's a good one. I really appreciate this so much.**

Well, thank you. I enjoyed it.

**Good. That's wonderful. And thank you for all those stories about school because usually when you do projects like this we talk to more women than we do men. So it's wonderful to get a male perspective. So thank you so much.**

**[End of recorded interview]**



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