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An Interview with Dorothy George

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 Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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Dorothy O'Donnell George 10/13/03
Signature of Narrator Date

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Preface

After serving as a nurse in World War II in Hawaii, Okinawa and Japan, Dorothy returned home to Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. She experienced a particularly bad winter and she set out for California but stopped in Las Vegas to visit the family of her traveling companion, a girlfriend from her home town. The girlfriend returned to Wisconsin and George applied for a nursing license and got it within three days. She never left.

Dorothy met her husband while working the night shift at Clark County Hospital. He would come in regularly to assist his patients in the births of their babies. Their occupations and their service in World War II drew them together in a marriage that has lasted over fifty years.

From 1949 to this interview in 2003, Dorothy George has seen Las Vegas grow from a town that she loved to a metropolitan area that is no longer as friendly. She reminisces about the Helderado parades, family picnics at Mount Charleston, watching the cloud formed by the atomic bomb tests, raising six successful children, leading a Girl Scout Troop, and working in organizations to improve the social and civic life of Las Vegas.

This is Claytee White and today is the 13th of October, 2003 and I'm in the home of Mrs.

Dorothy George. How are you this afternoon?

Just fine thank you.

Good. As you know we are here today to record your memories of early Las Vegas. But first would you tell me please your parents' names. Where did you grow up?

My father's name was John O'Donnell. My mother's name was Margaret O'Donnell and I grew up in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

How long did you live there?

I lived there until I was about 18 I guess. I graduated from high school then I went to the University of Wisconsin and from there I went to Rochester, Minnesota to St. Mary's Hospital and became an RN [Registered Nurse].

How many sisters and brothers do you have?

I had eleven sisters and brothers. I had four brothers and seven sisters. Three of them passed away shortly after birth, so I grew up with nine, with eight, eight siblings.

Tell me what life was like in your home town, what kind of recreation you had, the size of the town, just a little bit about your growing up.

A very small town. It was about 10,000 people. I grew up on a farm, and I lived there until I left home. Our recreation was made up of what we made for ourselves, games that we played and wintertime we skated, things like that.

Do we still skate?

Excuse me?

Do you still skate?

No I don't.

When you went away to college, did you major in nursing from the beginning?

More or less. I went there to go into nursing but I didn't care about the university hospital, the fact that it was so big and, and it was so impersonal, so I went into, my uncle was a professor of English there and I went into it when I was, it was what he wanted me to do.

So which languages do you speak?

At that time French and I did a little bit of Spanish but I didn't stick with it long enough to speak it very well or anything like that.

But then you decided to continue in the nursing career?

That's what I always wanted was nursing.

So how did you go about that?

My uncle unfortunately was killed in an automobile accident. After he was gone, I transferred to St. Mary's Hospital and took nursing at that time.

And you became an RN?

Yes.

Okay. At that point, did you leave that area of the country, to move here?

No. After I was finished with graduated from nurses training, the war was on and I became an Army nurse.

Give me your date of birth.

November 6, 1921.

So you became an army nurse.

That's right.

Good. So tell me about that experience. You were already an RN?

Yes.

Did you have to go through basic training?

Oh you bet.

So what was that like?

It was fun. (chuckle) We didn't do very much. We were there about three months I think and then we were sent overseas.

Where was that? Where was the basic training?

At Carson Colorado, Camp Carson Colorado.

At that time what did the average American, the ladies that you were in training with, you were in their sisterhood, what did they think of the war and America entering the war?

Of course they wanted, they were for our entry and many of them joined the services and I would say probably 75 % of our class went into the military.

Wow. That's great. Tell me about, did you have any experience with war bonds?

I recall the war bonds but I didn't ever buy any, but I do remember the programs that they had and the actors and actresses and so forth that had programs about them and re-visitations and that sort of thing

So tell me about your first assignment overseas.

Well I went to Hawaii first. We left America on a hospital ship, and went to Hawaii and took jungle training there and then went to the middle of the jungle somewhere. That was because we were going on forward and then we went to Guam where we stopped in town for a short time and then on to Okinawa and that's where we lived through the war.

Tell me what jungle training was like.

It was mainly tramping through the woods through the jungle through the water trying to hide out in places and that sort of thing.

Did you have some kind of a pack on your back? What kind of clothing did you wear?

We wore fatigues. Army fatigues and boots, and yes we did carry a pack and we carried a rifle with us.

So now in basic training, did they teach you how to fire a rifle?

Yes they did.

So go ahead and tell me about Okinawa and what that was like. Were Americans occupying the island by the time you arrived?

Yes.

So tell me about that experience, what your day to day life was like.

Well we were on the field where the war was taking place and then of course taking care of the soldiers as they were injured and so forth. And after that we moved back into the island at a hospital that was like a M.A.S.H. [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit. And I had charge of an orthopedic ward on the island and I took care of orthopedics and stuff like that for the soldiers. We had a tent. We had about twenty beds to a tent and we worked pretty much a shift, a ten hour shift in the hospital.

When you were in the field, that's where the tent was?

The tent was back away from the actual fighting field. The tents were a ways away from the field.

I see. When did you go back to a regular hospital?

When the war was over in 1945.

But not until then?

No, then I went to, with the Army of Occupation I went to Japan.

Agency Services/ or...

But before that, the most, the major medical facility in Okinawa was then like a M.A.S.H. unit?

Yes, uh huh. There were no buildings. They were all tents.

After watching a T.V. show like M.A.S.H for years, how close to the truth is that? To the truth, to the way it really was?

The way the war was being fought?

Right. When you worked in that M.A.S.H unit as a nurse, was it similar to what we saw on television?

Similar to it yes. It was not as much fun. (big laugh)

I can imagine! So what did you do for entertainment in that kind of a unit?

They had movies which were shown outdoors. They had a big sort of an arena like and we sat on the side of the hill watched the movie from there and we had a few parties under the tent, the hall. But mostly we played cards, when we had a chance we did our reading, that sort of thing

I see. How dangerous was it?

Well at first it was very dangerous. When the war was on but after, when the war was over of course it was not dangerous really.

So where the nurses were, you were really close to the action?

Yes, uh huh. We were, at first, when I first went over. But then we lived in what they called a nurse's compound which was fenced and we had tents that we slept in. Big long tents. And we were pretty secure there because we had guards around us all the time and I don't remember ever being afraid.

Now were you called WAC [Women's Army Corps] or WAVE [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services] or....

Just Army nurse.

Just an Army nurse.

A lieutenant.

Did you go in as a lieutenant?

Yes, uh huh. Nurses went in as lieutenants.

That's because you already had a four- year college degree?

Right. You're a second lieutenant when you go in; by the time I came out I was a first lieutenant.

Do you remember what the pay was like for women in the military at that time?

I don't really recall how much we got. It wasn't a great deal but we didn't keep any of it because there wasn't any place to spend it and our checks were sent home to a bank at home and so we had it when we got out.

But we had a few dollars we kept out. If you smoked, cigarettes were a nickel a package and you could buy beer occasionally. Of course I didn't drink so I gave it away to somebody else. There wasn't a great deal of anything to do except we would lie, you know the tents were on, were right on the China Sea or just a short back from the China Sea. So we could go sit on the beach and watch the water come in, the waves come in. Our unit was all destroyed when we had a major typhoon before we left for Japan.

What do you mean it was completely destroyed?

All washed up. We had to....

Were you on the island at the time?

Yes. We went up the, we had to take the patients down from the, if they were in traction, that sort of thing we took them down and put casts on them and took them up to the caves on the side of the hill, 'cause the water was so, it was a very severe, like a tsunami almost. Waves came in

and they were just enormous and we stayed up in the caves on the side of the hill until, until the storm faded, then we went back to see what was left and there wasn't anything left.

Did you ever think about writing a book?

I don't know how to write a book. (Chuckle)

Now what's that assignment, how long were you on Okinawa?

Until December I think. Around December of '46, '45 [1946, 1945] I'm sorry.

And you were sent there in which year?

In the summer of '45.

Oh so you were only there for a few months?

On Okinawa, uh huh. And then went to Japan with the Army of Occupation.

Oh good! Tell me about the occupation of Japan. Now you weren't near Nagasaki or...

We weren't too far from where the bomb had fallen, but this was after the bombing. We had a general hospital in Osaka and we went to Japan by way of ship and went to Korea. Landed at Seoul, Seoul, Korea. We were there about three days. And then went on into Osaka, landed at Yokohama and took a train near down to Osaka.

Now was Osaka occupied by American troops?

Yes.

Only American troops? Were there other troops from other countries?

No. Just American troops.

So tell me what that was like living there with an occupation and how were the Japanese people treated?

As far as what our treatment of them? Um, we had no real problem with them, because we were trying to be friends at that point and the hospital that I worked in had been a Red Cross hospital

in Osaka. But they had to restore all the plumbing and electricity and so forth, when they knew we were coming in, so that it would be useable, so that all had to be replaced by Americans, soldiers.

Now who were your patients in Osaka?

Wounded patients.

American soldiers?

American soldiers uh huh. Occasionally we had Japanese individuals who needed hospitalization, who needed treatment that they were not able to provide.

And that was provided with no problems?

Right. No problems at all. We actually became friends with them and were invited to their homes afterwards for tea and so forth. I think we became friends with the majority of the people within the short time we were there.

Was there a language problem?

Yes. We would have to know a few words that we learned because none of us spoke Japanese.

We didn't, it didn't seem to be a real problem.

Speaking of being an occupying force, we are doing the same thing right now in Iraq.

Right.

What do you think, if you knew people right now who have to go there to be part of the Americans to occupy it, what kind of advice would you give them?

In Iraq?

Uh huh. Being an occupying force like you were.

I don't believe it's even comparable because we weren't, there was no fighting in Japan at the time and where there is in Iraq and I think from my stand point, we didn't have the problems that

they have over there and though the people were still stung by Hiroshima and Nagasaki , the bombing there. I saw the area and we were able to travel down there and see the area.

Where the bomb had been dropped?

Mmm hmm

What about the radio- active particles in the air?

It didn't even bother us. It was never discussed. I mean we weren't told we couldn't go there but we just took jeeps and drove down there and as we toured the area and we went past there but a....

Tell me what it looked like.

Like a big hole in the ground, a big huge area of devastation. It wasn't a very pretty sight but we all knew that had it not been done we would have been going into Japan not as an army of occupation, but as an army and we would probably not be here today. We had to do that because they were pretty well dug in along the coast and in caves and so forth. Going in there by ship would not have been easy.

How did your parents and your siblings back here feel about you being over there? Even in Okinawa. How did they feel?

My father was, didn't want me to go at all, period, course he didn't want me to go to college either. He preferred I stay on the farm, but that was what farmers did in those days. People stayed and so he was not in favor of me going but I....

How did your mother feel about it?

I think she would have preferred that I not go also but she didn't speak her peace very much like my dad did. (Chuckle) It was more Dad that didn't want me to go.

Did you have siblings who stayed on the farm?

For a short time one of my brothers stayed on the farm. He was the only one who did. The rest of them married and had families and they didn't a.... One of my brothers was in the service. The one that actually stayed on the farm was in the service for a short time but not very long.

Getting back to Osaka; how long were you there total?

I went in let's see, we went clear in December of '45, and I left in August of '46.

Okay, so about six or seven months. What were the living quarters like there?

We lived in part of what had been the hospital. It was a cement building and we had bedrooms and so forth, army beds, it was civilized.

Is there anything, any stories or anything else that you'd like to tell me about either Okinawa or Japan?

I think on Okinawa after the war was over, we made friends with the Okinawan people, some of them were of course not friendly but the majority of them that I met were very friendly, easy to talk to and a I learned to swim in Okinawa. I don't swim very well but the China Sea was right there and we were able to have some time off there on the beach swimming and so forth.

Any free time in Japan?

Oh yes. We had a lot of free time. We had worked eight hour days and we had time to travel around and visit various places in Japan. We went and spent some time up in Tokyo. On days off we could take the train up and go to Tokyo and stay with the troops up there. They had bases and Tokyo is a beautiful city. Loved it. Love to visit it. I would like to go back and see what it is like today.

So at the end of the occupation in August, you were released and did you return to the United States at that time?

Yes I did.

And where were you stationed?

I went out of the military at that time.

Okay so that's when you left the military.

Yes, uh huh.

What was your entire time in the military?

About a year and a half.

So you didn't have to do a minimum of two years, a minimum of three years?

No, not all. After I graduated from training at that time, civilian workers were frozen in their jobs because so many had gone they didn't want to deplete the nursing profession in the hospitals and that was why, in order to leave the hospital where you worked, you almost had to join the military to be released.

So where did you go when you returned?

The day after I came back, after I was released from the military, I went back to my home and I had a job waiting for me at the hospital. (Chuckle) It was a Catholic hospital and my older sister was a nun and belonged to that order of the sisters that ran the hospital. Our father had promised the superior that I would be able to come to work when I got back. He didn't ask me; he just told me. (Chuckle)

So of course you.....

I went to work. They were very short of nurses and they had a baby boom about that time and they needed nurses in the nursery and so I went to work in the nursery at the hospital.

Now after working in the orthopedic department and then going into the pediatrics, how did you like that difference?

Oh a difference! (Chuckle) But I love babies and so it was, the nursing care of babies of course was quite different but I had training at the hospital. I trained with the infants. I didn't have a problem taking care of them.

So you must have been at that hospital, this is '46 [1946], so you must have been there for about 2 years?

I went there in September of '46 and then left in February of '48. So about a year and a half.

You left there to come to Las Vegas?

I left there to go to California.

Oh, okay tell me about that; well tell me why you left the hospital.

I left, actually I left my home town because I had been out in the South where it is nice and warm and the winters are very cold and that was a particularly bad winter. It was an icy winter and my home town is built on three hills and I lived on one hill and the hospital was on another hill and you couldn't, because of the ice, cars couldn't go up and down so I had to walk to work.

What kind of hills are we talking about? How high are these hills?

Well they're quite high. I don't know the height of one but they're not like mountains but they're hard to get up and down.

How did you walk? Was there a sidewalk, a pavement or.....

There were sidewalks but the sidewalks were icy too so we walked on the side of the sidewalk in the snow and grass and the ice and then through the downtown and then up the other hill so I didn't want to spend my life doing that.

I don't blame you at all. So you decided to go to Los Angeles?

Another nurse and I decided to leave the hospital and go to California. I had written to California for my nurse's license to practice in California and it was very difficult to get a

California license at that time. Always had been. You had to wait quite a while for it to be approved.

Did you have to take a test?

No I didn't. Just send my credentials. By the time we left Chippewa, we had not gotten our license yet. We came out by train. The nurse I traveled with; her cousin was here as a pharmacist.

In California?

No here in Las Vegas, so we stopped to visit with him, he and his family.

What was the name of that family?

King. Elliott King. They needed, since I didn't have a license for California and they needed nurses here, I decided while I waited for my license I would work here and then go on as soon as I got my license. Well it took about three days to get a Nevada license.

It was very quick.

What about the friend that you were traveling with? Did she do the same?

No she went back to Wisconsin. She didn't, she couldn't, I went to work at, first I went out at Rose de Lima Hospital but I had to take the bus. I didn't have a car. I didn't drive a car at that time. The bus left, my shift was three to eleven. The bus left at 2 o'clock. That was the time for discharge from the hospital was 2 o'clock in the afternoon. If I would get out to the hospital and they had discharged a lot of patients, then they didn't need me that day. I would have to take the bus back to Vegas.

How far was the hospital out?

Fifty miles.

Which hospital was that?

Rose de Lima.

In where?

In Henderson.

Oh in Henderson, yes.

At that time, the only hospitals here were, was Clark County Hospital and Las Vegas Hospital.

Those were the only places to work. Mary Kennedy was the supervisor of nurses that was at Clark County Hospital and she had a spot for me in the O.B. [Obstetrics] ward, in the nursery.

So how long did you have to stay at Henderson?

You mean till the bus came back?

No, how long did you work there?

Oh, a week. Not very long.

Oh that's good.

I got a job at county. I could work every day at Clark County Hospital.

Wonderful.

I had to have money to live on.

And who did you live with?

I lived with her. We first had an apartment and then when she decided she didn't like working on the ward that she was put on, part time, and she wanted a day shift and of course there weren't any day shifts available, me I didn't care. I'd work nights. (Chuckle) And so that broke up our relationship.

But she went home?

She went back to Wisconsin.

To those cold winters.

To those cold winters.

So tell me what it was like at Clark County Hospital.

Very different from hospitals I had worked in. Very small. The O.B. ward I think had probably 25 beds or more. It had a four bed ward and we had two bed rooms and part of it wasn't even 25 because we had the nursery there also, and the delivery rooms and so forth. I worked nights in the nursery and I also worked nights back in the delivery room because we only had two nurses at night and I took care of the nursery and the delivery room and the floor. Eventually another nurse came to do the nursery at night and I worked in the delivery rooms.

Is this where you met your husband?

Um huh.

Tell me about that.

He did a lot of deliveries at the time working for the county hospital. He did a lot of maternity cases, deliveries of course, there were a lot of deliveries at night. He was always very dedicated to the patients who were broke when they came in to deliver, he would be there. If it took six hours or whatever, he stayed with the people.

Tell me about them.

There were a lot of blacks. (Chuckle) Visiting, talking and so forth.

So when did you get married?

In October of 1950.

And where is your husband from?

(Unintelligible response)

How did he get to Las Vegas?

It's funny but the same way. He came out of the military. He was in Air Force and he was on his way to California also and stopped here. He was on the train also. In those days when the train came through they had to stop and put coal in because the engines up over the pass and so they were here a few hours and he went over to a hotel and one of the bell hops there noticed the caduceus on his uniform and asked him if he was gonna stay here to practice medicine and he said he was on his way to California. He talked him into staying a few days because they needed doctors here so badly.

A bellhop!

A bellhop. Uh huh. So he stayed at the hotel for three days and he went down to the drug store and actually talked to the pharmacist who was the one I, my friend came was with. (Chuckle)

So that last name was King?

King. Elliott King. He talked to him and he told him that they needed doctors very badly. So he decided to stay a few more days and look around. That's why he stayed here. He didn't ever get to California.

Now tell me, in 1948 when you arrived, tell me what the town looked like.

The town was actually pretty wonderful. I arrived here and everybody was wearing shorts and sandals and I had my winter clothes (shared big laughs), because I had come from white north.

That's right because it was in February.

It was February, right. But it was a warm February, a beautiful February. Small town, small western town. The population was between 12, 15 thousand at the time. I loved it. It was the size town that I liked and you got to know people and you walked down the street and everybody knew you and you knew everybody. It was time to settle down.

Watching some of the old westerns on T.V, I know it's 1948 but did we still have any, when you think about the gambling that was downtown at the time, did it make you think of those old western shows that you see on T.V.?

Somewhat but not the same as Gunsmoke or anything like that, (chuckle), but it was, it definitely was western. It was, the people were gambling but there weren't any balconies or gunshots.

(Chuckle)

You mentioned earlier that you liked the size. What do you think about today's size?

Terrible. (Chuckle) I don't like it at all. I still like living here but I don't like the size of the town. I don't like what's happened to all of our water prices and all the other utilities and things that have had to try and grow and to keep up with everybody that was here and I don't criticize because they can't do everything everybody wants them to do. I actually think they do a tremendous job, considering what they have to deal with.

I think you're right. Being at the hospital at this time and getting to know people here in Las Vegas, did you join any organizations?

I joined the Nurses Association. Eventually I joined activities at my church. The Women's Guild.

Which church?

Our Lady of Las Vegas. At that time of course it wasn't built yet. It wasn't built until 1957. It was St. Bridges Church which is at 14th and Stewart. That was the first church I belonged to. I lived on 17th Street. Back tracking. After our friend went back to Wisconsin, the nurse that I worked with at night was from a family of four girls and three of her sisters had gotten married and were no longer at home. She and I got along very well together and her parents invited me

near Eastern, Eastern and Charleston. We had a three-bedroom home. We loved it and

to live with them. That's where I lived until I got married. They were wonderful people. She's married and lives in California now. Both Papa and my little brother are deceased.

But can you imagine someone today inviting you to their home to live?

No. Not at all.

Tell me how your parents were looking at all of this. You moving to the West, stopping in Las Vegas, deciding to stay here. How did they see all of this?

My father was horrified that I was moving into an old gambling town. I tried to convince him that he'd gambled everyday of his life on a farm. That his crops would grow, that the weather would be right for his crops and so forth. He said he'd never gambled a day in his life.

Did they ever come out to visit?

Yes. They came out several times to visit. They would come out on the train. Same one I rode out. They'd stay with us a week or two and he'd play some slot machines when he was here. Before he died, the last time he was out, he said, "Dorothy you were right. I did, my farming was a gamble. You don't gamble any more than I did." So he realized the way I had looked at the farm was just as much a gamble as it would be playing slot machines.

And I guess once they visited, they began to see what a nice family you lived with?

I think by the time they first came out I was married. They didn't come out when I was living with her. But they loved my husband the same as I did and they loved to come out and we'd go back there and visit them.

Tell me about the houses that you and your husband lived in. Where in the city did you live?

We first lived in an apartment building on Maryland Pkwy, close to Fremont Street. In March of '51 [1951] we moved into our first home which was on Houston Drive down in Crestwood, down near Eastern, Eastern and Charleston. We had a three-bedroom home. We loved it and

enjoyed it very much. Then we, he had developed asthma quite badly and we didn't, in those days we had swamp coolers, so we moved over to Twin Lakes. Houses there had been built with air condition units. We wanted to see if it helped or not. He decided he would maybe like to go back to Maryland to work in his small town. We only stay there about three months and came back to Las Vegas.

Did you sell your home and everything to leave and go back there?

Yes we did and when we came back, we moved here.

Was the hospital air conditioned at that time, Clark County?

Swamp coolers.

Swamp coolers in the hospital also. When you went back to Maryland for that three month period, why did you decide so quickly to come back?

We missed Las Vegas and everything that we had loved here. We decided to come back.

Were you happy about that decision?

Yes I think so. (Chuckle)

Do you have any children?

Yes.

How many children do you have?

Six.

If I wanted to do something about the history of medicine in Las Vegas, what kind of changes did you see in your department while you were there? What kind of things would a historian write about that you saw happening there in the hospital?

Well it was very different than what I had been used to because I'd always worked in a Catholic hospital where the nuns were in charge. But I liked the hospital. It was small and nursing care is

pretty much the same regardless of where the hospital is. Of course there weren't nearly as many tests that could be done in those days that were to help people. Occasionally we had people on our ward that were not obstetrical questions, there were severe asthmatic cases and they would have the oxygen tent as compared to the way they give oxygen today. Very difficult to work with. If I go to a hospital now and walk into a room and see those, it's way out of my field. I don't know what's going on even without asking a lot of questions. I think doctors were more dedicated to the people. There were a lot more family doctors in those days and very few specialists. The family doctor treated the whole family and got to know them all. They became friends even, which I doubt today. I don't know because I'm not in practice today. There are so many more specialties today, yet medicine is piece meal. Take care of a part rather than a person.

How did most people pay for their medical care at that time?

Cash, very little insurance of any kind. Course there were welfare people, same as there are today, but the majority of people, even in the office, paid when they came. It was five dollars a month or whatever and doctors accepted that. Today of course, it's insurance. Today you call for a doctor's appointment and they immediately ask you what insurance you have. That would not have even been a consideration I mean it was: "what is your problem?" would be the questions that you ask. To me, that's the big difference is the personal attention people get. In those days, it's not true in many cases today. Not in all cases.

Earlier you said that you remember the Nurses Association. Were you a member of any other groups or clubs?

My husband was active in the Veterans of Foreign Wars and I became a member of the auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

What is the auxiliary called?

Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

What are some of the activities first of the Veterans of Foreign Wars? What are some of the activities that you participated in?

They do a lot of community service of course mainly it's veterans in the hospitals and so forth and the veterans' families and its baskets and food at Christmas time. We took flags to schools, had scout troops and a lot of work that they do is, it involves the veterans themselves that need help, the veterans who have had injuries in the war, disabilities as a result.

Tell me about the Nurses Association. What kind of activities did you participate in through that organization?

I didn't go to too many things. They had meetings and discussed nursing activities and so forth.

I wasn't extremely active in that one. I had too many other things to do.

Did you have to keep up your training by going to workshops and seminars and all of that?

Not in those days.

Did you continue to work after your children were born?

I worked in my husband's office, part time.

So you left the hospital at some point?

Yes, after we got married. Then I stayed home and I would help with the office when he needed help.

Those nights when your husband was at the hospital, he had a private practice as well?

Absolutely.

Now what is his specialty?

Family practice.

Does he still practice today?

No, he is many years old, almost 91. He still has his license. He goes to the seminars up at UMC [University Medical Center] every Friday to keep up his knowledge of things that are going on today.

I wanted to ask you about some of the things here in the city. For instance there was supposed to have been a racetrack here in Las Vegas. Do you remember the Joe W Brown Racetrack?

I remember it being here. We never went to it. But it's where the Las Vegas Country Club is today, near the Hilton Hotel. We were not race fans.

Tell me about your recreational activities once the children began to come. What kind of things did you do with the children, what kind of things did just you and your husband do?

Most of our activities with the children were at home or going to parks and up to the mountains and out to the lake.

Was that Mt Charleston?

Mt Charleston, yes.

But because of his, he was in solo practice and because he did a lot of obstetrical work, it wasn't easy to leave for activities a lot at home. When the children got of age, there were in scouting activities and that sort of thing. I had Girl Scout troops and helped with that. I used to go camping with the Girl Scout troops. Went up to Foxtail Camp in the summertime as the nurse, camp nurse, but most of our activities were pretty well centered around here.

One of the things I noticed as soon as I came in was your beautiful backyard, and you lived here at that time as well?

Yes.

So did you have cook outs and picnics here at the house?

Yes. A lot of cook outs. A lot of barbeques and picnics in the backyard, swimming, and the kids would swim and then we would barbeque and that sort of thing. We enjoyed our home activities.

Did you have a lot of children in this area at that time?

No, not a lot. As a matter of fact, an elderly couple lived at the corner that is now a business but they had no children and where the Temple Square is now at the corner, that was vacant for many, many years and the house across the street didn't have children. There were children next door. Our children played with them. Once they started school, then they had children that would come and play, but there weren't a lot of children in the area. Next door there's no children and next door to that there's no children.

When I first walked into the house, I asked if you thought that this area, as beautiful as it is, is gonna go commercial. What are your thoughts about that and what have you heard?

We haven't heard a great deal. Of course we get the letters from the city every time they start asking about building various things. Charleston of course is seedy, seedy at the corner here.

More and more commercialization is moving in. I think eventually it will be.

What are some of the things they have thought about for this area?

There was a pharmacy that they wanted to put at the corner here. A big pharmacy, a Walgreen's I think, wanted to build there at the corner. At one time there was, they wanted to put a, I think it was a 7-11 across where they, the big, I call it the pumpkin building. The orange building at the corner. They've had, they wanted to put a nursery back here behind us at one time. Day nursery that would eventually become that sort of thing. But other than that sort of activity I haven't heard of anything. Walgreen's was the one thing that was very commercial. In fact, when they were considering that, they wanted to buy our house and move our house to another location, which we declined thanks.

He belonged to the Kiwanis Club. He belonged to all of the medical facilities. He was state president of The Nevada Medical Society. He was on the staff at UMC and Sunrise Hospital. He was head of the staff, chief of the staff at UMC.

Does that mean being in all those organizations and being a doctor that you had a pretty active social life?

Um, somewhat but we're not social. (Chuckle) We had our own friends that we socialized with and we're not social butterflies. And as I said before, with him being in solo practice, he did a lot of deliveries and probably, we figured up one day it was about 6,000 babies he delivered here in town when he was active and that took a lot of time.

Now tell me, was his practice, were his patients integrated?

Were they what?

Integrated. Black and white.

Oh very much, very much. In fact he delivered babies in the homes on the Westside many times during his practice.

How did he recall the Westside? What did it look like?

He didn't have any negative thoughts about it at all. He went over there in the homes and took care of them. He did a lot of house calls anyplace in the city where his patients lived. He has no problem going over on the Westside today. We used to go over to the Variety Day Home after he retired. His sister, Diane who was in charge over there, used to call him and ask him to come over and do some exams for her clients. We never really had any clue or worry about it.

Do you remember an area of the city called Market Town?

Yeah.

Tell me about that area.

The grocery store was Market Town and the White Cross Pharmacy was there and there were a lot of nice little stores in that complex. It was not too far, at that time his office was at 6th Street right across from Marie Callendar's [restaurant] so it wasn't far from Market Town and when I worked in his office I used to, oh that was Oakey wasn't it? Market Town was at Oakey. I'm thinking of a different area. I shopped at Market Town frequently when I worked at his office. It was not a negative place at all at that time.

What kind of transportation systems do you remember here in the city other than the bus that you used to have to take to Henderson?

Well I took a bus a lot of times to work at The Clark County Hospital. At the time, to show what it was like, the overpass was not built at that time so there was the train went right straight through the town. When I would go to mass on Sunday morning at St Joan of Arc downtown, if the priest got through with the mass over at 6:30, if he got through by five minutes to 7, I could catch the bus and get out here before the train came across the tracks. But if I had to wait till the next one, the train would often be on the track and they were never in any hurry to leave. They'd go forward then they'd back up and go forward. I was always late for work because there was no other way, there was only one way to get across, unless you wanted to go all the way around by Bonanza Road. The bus system was pretty good in those days, but I didn't drive, I didn't have a car.

Did you have a car before you got married?

No. I went to driver's ed [education] training at Las Vegas High School downtown. The first Las Vegas High School on 7th Street, 7th and Carson? Anyway that's where I got my driver's Ed training and then I got a car after that, Christmas present.

Wonderful! What a great Christmas present! Now, at that time most of the goods came into Las Vegas probably by train from Los Angeles, a lot of the fresh produce. Did you have a lot of it? Was it as abundant as you liked to have had it?

I don't ever remember it being not enough. I was always able to get food. I was close to the Safeway [grocery] store and they had a lot of fresh fruits and meats and so forth.

Over the years, how have you seen race relations change in Las Vegas?

Oh they changed a great deal. When we first came, the Westside was pretty much all black and they stayed pretty much there and we stayed pretty much here I guess except when he'd make house calls and so forth. Instead they all became personal friends. Of course we saw the entertainers on the Strip were not able to stay at the hotels and I always considered that not good. They eventually were able to stay at the hotels when they came to entertain. I think most of the restaurants, black people did not go to the majority of the restaurants. That would never have bothered me if they had. Doesn't today, didn't then. I've seen that they're able to be with the united group rather than segregated the way it was which is the way it should be.

During the '60's and probably into the '70's, most of the country had problems with the Vietnam War. There were war protests in some of the cities. Did you see any evidence of that here in Las Vegas? Ever hear about anything?

There were a lot of people who made comments about it. We had a lot of friends who were in the Vietnam War. We were not impartial. Most of the ones we knew were there because they wanted to fight for our country. They weren't bitter about it at all. I used to ask some of them. My husband did a lot of pilot physicals and some of them had been in the Vietnam War. I would ask them if they had problems when they came back, these were private pilots not just airline

pilots, they said no they had no problems, they weren't mistreated or anything when they came back. I really didn't see a lot of mistreatment from a personal point of view.

Did you see any kind of or read about any demonstrations here in Las Vegas?

No I don't remember any. I don't think I have selective memory but....

Tell me about the Howard Hughes days. Being somebody who's involved in your family and your husband's business, did you even know that Howard Hughes had come into town?

We knew he was here, yes. It wasn't part of our lives. We didn't concern ourselves with his activities. We knew he was at the Desert Inn. We read about activities. We knew some of the people that took care of him, like Dr. Butler for instance, who was his physician, one of his physicians. Bob Mayhugh who was one of his cohorts, but we weren't concerned directly with him as an individual.

When he came here, some people have said that was the end of mafia control, the beginning of corporate Las Vegas, people living here. Did you see any difference, did you notice any difference, did you care, and did it mean anything to you?

We noticed a lot of difference with the hotels on the Strip. Under the old system, mafia control, we knew the people who were in charge of the hotels and they were very friendly with local people. You could go out to the hotels and be in the dining room and the head of the hotel would walk through and stop at the table and say hello and so forth. You always felt welcome when you went out there. After the corporations took over, it was a different story. They were more interested in the tourist attractions because they were the ones who were going to satisfy the shareholders. They were going to leave the money behind and so forth. If you called for a reservation, they would ask where you were staying. That was frequently a question.

Sometimes you could get a reservation, but sometimes not. That was true for some of the

restaurants as well as shows. We rarely ever go to the hotels or anything today. Most of our eating places are in the neighborhood, individual small places. Haven't been to a show in years. It's just a different world apart from us today as compared to the old days.

Do you think that most Las Vegas residents, your friends, your church member friends, even the larger group that you are a part of feel the same way?

Do I think what?

Do you think they feel the same way about the Strip today?

Many of them do, yes. But now the younger ones are a little different. They go to the hotels. They go to the shows. We find better places to put our money. (Chuckle)

And the shows are so expensive these days.

They are very expensive; \$100 for a show will buy groceries for somebody for a month or two months or whatever. It just doesn't interest us to that extent that we want to do that. We find other things to occupy our time. We have friends that we go out to dinner with or they come to dinner out. You can play cards and you can do all sorts of things that you don't have to be involved with the, even the movie theaters; today you got tapes to put on your VCR and I go to California, just sit down and watch a movie without leaving the house. I think that probably tells my age but, that's the way we feel about the situation.

Any of your children still live in Las Vegas?

One.

Just one?

Uh huh.

And the others are around the country?

more pleasant things.

Yes, uh huh. Maryland, Georgia, Texas, Anchorage, Alaska. The one in Anchorage, Alaska is a surgeon. And the one here is a school teacher; teaches out of Henderson. The rest of them are scattered around. One works for Waco, Texas city and one's in the banking industry. Two of them, one is in the nursing profession and one of them was a doctor back in Maryland.

So you had one that followed you and one that followed your husband.

Right, exactly.

The daughter that you have here grew up here in Las Vegas?

Yes she did.

How does she see Las Vegas today? Does she see the changes like you do?

Very definitely. Yes. She would like someday leave and go to a small town, small area, rather than here. She liked the smallness of the area before, now to see her friends, they're everywhere.

It takes too much time driving to see them. She would most definitely like a smaller area. She liked Oregon when she was there. She liked Montana.

Do you think you may lose her to one of those smaller places?

She'll probably stay here until we're gone. (Chuckle)

When you think about Las Vegas today, or during the years that you have been here, how do you think the other parts of the country see your city?

My family, some of my family have been out here several times. They love to come out. They like the weather out here, but they always go back home. I think they see it pretty much as a gambling city, more so now than they did before. The hotels, everyplace you go, there are slot machines and so forth. They kind of like the more quiet peaceful area. I'm sure they read about a lot of the shootings and the things that go on here but they don't talk about it. We talk about more pleasant things.

Is there anything else that you would like to add, something that I didn't hit on, something that's been very, very important to you since you've been here? Anything you would like to add to this tape?

We've met some very wonderful people here in Las Vegas. Many of them came here for the same reason we did. They like the climate. That I wouldn't change. We would like it to be different than it is today. We would like it to be smaller, easier to get around, more control of things in the city. Politics have gotten too big. I think the bigger it gets, the more you have things go wrong.

You don't live that far from the Mayor [Oscar Goodman]. How do you like the way he governs the city? Do you think he's a good mayor for Las Vegas?

I wouldn't say that. I think he means well. I think he's trying hard to make it a good city. I can't compare him to previous mayors. They are all different. I just think there's too much politics, rather than personal things they used to be involved in and took care of. Caring for the city, I think he is trying but he's got a lot of people to deal with. A lot more organizations and a lot more commissioners and all that sort of thing that he has to be involved with.

When you see developments like the Fremont Street Experience, and now there's the Neonpolis, what were your feelings about those kinds of developments, when you heard about them or went down to see them?

I didn't care for them. I liked Fremont Street the way it was before. I really can't see that the Fremont Street Experience has added a great deal to the downtown area at all. Neonpolis I have not seen; haven't been down there. I don't know that it's going to help the city. As I said before, if I go to a restaurant I like to go to a restaurant here. I don't want to go down and have to park and get involved with all that activity down there.

What do you see as the future of Las Vegas?

I believe it's going to probably go on the way it has been progressing. I don't think it's gonna ever go back to what we had before. As the storybook goes, you can't go home again and I think that's pretty much the future for our city. I think we're destined to keep growing and growing and growing and there can't help but be more problems with water. I guess they're gonna keep building and building and building, everybody needs water.

My last question is about something from the olden days. I want to ask you about your impressions of Helderado parades.

We loved Helderado. It was a time of the year that everyone looked forward to. I can remember walking down Fremont Street and seeing those initials on the sidewalk, don't be a bare faced maverick. And the men all wore beards and everybody dressed in western clothes. They'd be arrested and put in hoosegow ["jail" from the Spanish word "juzgado"] if they didn't have their beard or didn't have western clothes on. The parades were beautiful. The hotels at that time each had a float in the parade. They were comparable to the Rose Parade. They were beautiful. Everybody seemed to go and there were a lot of barbeques and things around town where you got together. That was a wonderful time of the year. All the school bands came out and marched in the parade. We had a kids' day and the kids all got dressed up and decorated on little bicycles or whatever. It was really a very inclusive town activity where everybody participated.

Could we ever go back to that?

Not in today's world, no. I don't believe so. I don't think that the way the town has developed that it will ever be as personal as it was at that time.

I really appreciate this so much. Thank you.

I've enjoyed reminiscing.

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