

F
849
L35
M25
2010

An Interview with Margaret McGhie

An Oral History Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

© Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood
University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries 2010

Produced by:

The Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries, Director: Claytee D. White

Project Creators: Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm

Transcriber and Editor: Laurie Boetcher

Editor and Production Manager: Barbara Tabach

Interviewers: Suzanne Becker, Barbara Tabach, Claytee D. White

Recorded interviews, transcripts, bound copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through a grant from the City of Las Vegas Centennial Committee. Special Collections in Lied Library, home of the Oral History Research Center, provided a wide variety of administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized it was a special place that intersected themes of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gentrification. Patrick and Deborah learned that John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an enclave of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

The transcripts received minimal editing that included the elimination of fragments, false starts and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. These interviews have been catalogued and can be found as non-circulating documents in Special Collections at UNLV's Lied Library.

Deborah A. Boehm, Ph.D.
Fulbright-García Robles Scholar 2009-2010
Assistant Professor, Anthropology & Women's Studies

Patrick Jackson, Professor
John S. Park Oral History Project Manager

Claytee D. White, Director
Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries

Interview with Margaret McGhie

November 21, 2008 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Table of Contents

Introduction: born Dayton, NV, lived at father's ranch in Weeks, NV, father loses ranch during Great Depression, family travels around northern NV, graduated from high school in Fernley, NV, childhood memories of living on the ranch and moving about during the Great Depression, different jobs held by father until WW II	1
Memories of the Great Depression: homelessness, traveling from town to town looking for work	3
Graduates from business college, takes job with Soil Conservation Service in Caliente, NV, meets and marries railroad brakeman Charles (Lynn) McGhie (1942)	4
Family background: mother born in Wadsworth, NV; father immigrated from Lucca area of Tuscany, Italy (ca. 1915) and had many relatives in Dayton; many Italian immigrants came to Nevada, engaged in farming and ranching; maternal grandfather owned ranches and a dairy	5
Attends business college in Reno, NV; works as legal secretary for attorney Ioannes Lougaras; takes Civil Service job in Caliente, NV; husband drafted during World War II; leaves job to travel with husband	6
Charles McGhie's military service; Margaret McGhie's return to NV and work for a magnesium plant in Gabbs, NV; transfer to BMI (ca. 1944)	7
First impressions of Las Vegas and Henderson (ca. 1944): warm weather, clean air and water, kind and generous people, small population	9
Margaret McGhie goes to work as inspector for U.S. Navy rocket plant in Henderson. Charles McGhie returns from the war (ca. August 1945), resumes job with railroad. They rent a house in North Las Vegas, and then buy a home in the future John S. Park Neighborhood.	9
John S. Park Neighborhood: beginnings and early recollections of area	11
Birth of first child, Randall McGhie (1946)	12
Participation in recreation and sports: Old-timers' Club, Helldorado	13
Description of downtown Las Vegas (ca. late 1940s): stores, shops, cafés, courthouse, local activities (high school sports, movie theaters)	13
Participation in parent-teacher organizations, Girl and Boy Scouts, etc.; schools attended by children	14
Involvement in politics in the John S. Park Neighborhood. Margaret goes to work for First National Bank of Nevada (ca. 1965). Role of politics and accessibility of politicians in Las Vegas.	15
Evolution of the Strip from individually-owned hotel/casinos to Howard Hughes and the corporations. Entertainment on the Strip.	16
Relationship of John S. Park Neighborhood to the Strip	17

Advent of Howard Hughes and “corporatization” of the Strip. Impact of Las Vegas growth on John S. Park Neighborhood. Changes in the Neighborhood: smog, traffic, population	18
Significant events in the John S. Park Neighborhood: house fires, murder	19
People who lived in the John S. Park Neighborhood: Bunker family, Gallo family	20
Changing demographics in the John S. Park Neighborhood: more Hispanic residents, young families	21
Reflects on what she likes most about living in John S. Park Neighborhood: sentimental attraction to house, children grew up there, convenience for shopping	22
Thoughts on John S. Park Neighborhood historic designation and hopes that pride of ownership will continue in the Neighborhood. Comments on homelessness and crime in the area.	22
Final comments: paving of Charleston Boulevard; Mormon population, early Henderson, lives of her children	23

Preface

Margaret McGhie was a Depression era child who grew up in western Nevada, where her grandparents were ranchers. Her mother, a native Nevadan, married an Italian immigrant, and she recalls moving a lot. Margaret attended a business college in Reno and eventually moved to Las Vegas, where she worked for Basic Magnesium (BMI) in Gabbs, NV and then later for a remanufacturing company where she verified rocket measurements.

Only 16,000 people resided in Las Vegas in post World War II days when she moved there for work as her husband returned from military service. At the time lots for homes were selling in the new development of John S. Park. Using the GI bill the young couple became one of the first home owners on the street. The land had formerly been a ranch and orchard making it a beautiful spot. Due to post-war building material shortages it took nearly two years to finish the house construction. To this day Margaret lives in the home where she and husband raised four children.

She recalls the neighborhood fondly and describes some of the activities that kept them busy, where they shopped, and how her children attended John S. Park Elementary School and then the local parochial schools. She describes how the town changed from a 10-minute cross-town drive and how the fact of living close to the Strip had little impact on their life.

People moved from the neighborhood as the city grew, she says, moving to newer and nicer homes in Spanish Oaks and then Summerlin. The John S. Park neighborhood has changed from a formerly large Mormon demographic to a notable increase of Latino population. She sees the historic designation as a signal of pride in ownership for residents.

Interview with Margaret McGhie

November 21, 2008 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Margaret, thank you very much for meeting with me today.

You're welcome.

I'd like to begin with, just tell me a bit about your history here. You mentioned that you're a native, so where were you born and when?

I was born in Dayton, Nevada. At first we lived at my dad's ranch in Weeks, Nevada, which is close to Fort Churchill [State Historic Park]. And then he lost his ranch during the [Great] Depression, so we did a lot of traveling around northern Nevada, different towns where he could find work to do, and finally ended up in Fernley, Nevada where I graduated from high school.

Where is that?

It's about thirty miles out of Reno [Nevada]. They call it a bedroom community for Reno.

Now tell me a bit about what it was like, growing up there. What kinds of things did you do?

It was idyllic, especially when we lived on the ranch. We were sort of pampered by all the workmen. My grandfather and grandmother lived in the old Buckland Ranch. My grandfather owned it until he died. So it was nice growing up there, but then during the Depression it was a little more difficult, you know. It seemed like we'd just get used to one school and we'd have to move, so it was starting all over again, making new friends and that. But northern Nevada was very nice, with one exception, the very cold winters up there. And we always played outdoors a lot during the summertime. We went barefoot and just had a great time.

Do you have siblings?

Yes, I had five brothers and sisters.

Oh my. Where are you in the order of things?

I'm the oldest, or eldest, whichever is correct. [Laughing]

So you had probably some responsibility for them, too.

I did. I had to help a lot. Two of my siblings have died. I still have a brother in Canada and a sister in Illinois and then another sister in Washington, D.C.

I was going to ask if you were all still here in Nevada but it seems like you've dispersed. And so you mentioned your father was a rancher, and your grandfather as well?

Yes. He raised cattle, and when they were at the Buckland Ranch they had an orchard. I remember a big cherry tree, right next to the house there, and they had apple trees and, you know, different animals, mainly cattle and horses.

And did you and your siblings help out? Did you have chores around the ranch?

Well, I think I was six-and-a-half years old when we moved from the ranch, and the sister who's next to me was two-and-a-half years younger than I, and then I had a little baby brother at that time.

So you were very young.

Mm hmm. So we just mainly wandered around the ranch and played with the animals.

We had a cat and we made a pet out of one of the pigs. [Laughing] I don't remember ever being unhappy there. It was just idyllic.

And so when you left there you went to?

We had to leave the ranch and we were homeless there for a while, so we lived with relatives in Dayton, and then my dad was able to get a job with the lumber mill in Loyalton [California], so that's where I started school. And from there we went on to Dayton and Carson City and Wadsworth and Fernley. We lived in all of those places while I went to school.

OK. And because of the times, you guys were moving around, and was your father getting different jobs at that time?

Yes. At first he took anything he could find, like in Dayton he was working in a mine, and that was not too pleasant. He didn't like that but he stayed with it until he found another job, which was in Loyalton in the lumber mill. But that was only temporary. And eventually he ended up with the Highway Department and he worked for them for at least six or seven years until World War II broke out, and then he was able to get a job with the Navy in Hawthorne, and that's where he worked until he retired.

Now this is during the times of the Depression?

Oh, yes. It was from about 1929 or '30 up until I graduated from high school in 1940 and I left home at that time.

So what do you remember, what are some of the things that stand out in your mind of just what that time was like?

Well, one thing I remember that sticks in my mind is our schoolteachers used to tell us that there were slightly over a hundred thousand square miles in the State of Nevada, and that the population was right around a hundred thousand, so there was one square mile for each person living in Nevada. Reno was the largest city and I think at that time it was around 25,000.

Living up there, did you hear a lot about Las Vegas at that time?

Not a lot. When I graduated from business college, I applied for a Civil Service job, and one of my applications came down to the Las Vegas [Army Air Corps] Gunnery School, which is now Nellis [Air Force Base]. And I remember getting a letter back, telling me that I probably wouldn't like Las Vegas. It was signed by one of the officers. For some reason he didn't think I would like it down here. So, in those days if you took the Civil Service test and you were one of the top three, they had to offer you a job, you know, or they had to choose one of the top three. So I guess he talked me out of it and I stayed up there until they offered me a job in Caliente, Nevada. I worked for the Soil Conservation Service there. That's where I met my husband.

And what is his name?

Well, his name was Charles McGhie, but everybody called him by his middle name, Lynn, Lynn McGhie. He worked for the railroad.

How did you guys meet?

Actually we met at a dance. I went to one of the local dances there, and I had gone with someone else but he kept asking me to dance. [Laughter] And after that we started dating.

I guess that persistence was good.

Mm hmm. He was very persistent.

Now, just to go back a little bit and I want to come back to that point, but you had mentioned when we were talking earlier that your father was also a native of Nevada.

No, my mother. My father came over from Italy in, I believe it was 1915. And he was just a boy, sixteen years old.

And do you know why they came from Italy?

He had brothers who had preceded him, coming over here. One of them eventually went back to Italy, but one of them stayed. And he had cousins. He had a lot of relatives in Dayton. A lot of people came from his section of Italy. It's the Lucca area, you know, Tuscany. A lot of the people who came to Nevada were from there. In fact, my sister just sent me a recipe book, and it was published by the University Press, I believe, but these are all people who had come from Italy, and it has a little history on each person, and one of these persons is related to us. I guess a cousin, yeah. [Showing book] She's I think right here. This lady here, she was related to my grandmother. And there's another one who's a cousin, but I don't know where it is. But anyhow, Reno had a lot of Italian people in those days. And so did Dayton. Dayton was almost all Italians, because they were into ranching and farming and that was ideal. They really cultivated that land and turned the sagebrush into farms and ranches.

Sure, and so much space, too. Now your mother was a native?

Yes, she was born in Wadsworth, Nevada. My grandfather had a ranch there, as well as several other ranches, and he also had a dairy. He used to furnish dairy products and vegetables to the residents of Wadsworth, and at that time it was quite a busy little city because the railroad yards were there. And later on they moved them to Sparks [Nevada].

What a very interesting history. And so, now, back a little bit to when you met your husband. Well, actually you mentioned that you'd gone to business college. Where did you do that?

I went to a Reno business college. And I worked for an attorney in Reno who was named Ioannes Lougaras. He was Greek.

And so what did you do for him?

I was his legal secretary. And I worked there until I got a Civil Service job because I was making only fifteen dollars a week on my first job. Of course that was sort of standard for those days. People weren't getting paid much more than that. And then I was able to go to work on my Civil Service job, I was making quite a bit more, and I stayed there until my husband was drafted into the service. And then I traveled around with him, over various parts of the country.

Now, do you remember what year that was that you met?

We met early in 1942 and we were married in September of '42. So we didn't know each other very long.

And at the time he was with the railroad? And what was he doing?

He was a brakeman.

And you had just started working for the Soil Conservation Service. Did you continue working for them?

I did for a little while. They transferred the office up to Ely [Nevada] and I moved up there, but eventually came back to Caliente when we got married.

And how long after you got married was he drafted into the service?

It wasn't very long. It was several months.

Can I ask how old you were when you got married?

I was twenty and he was twenty-one. We were young.

And so where did he initially go to when he was drafted?

Well, he was first sent to Florida, and several months later I got on a train and joined him there, and got a job.

Where in Florida were you?

I was staying in Jacksonville and he was at Camp Blanding, which is near Gainesville. And then later on he was sent to Fort Benning [Georgia] and I followed him. I went to Columbus, Georgia. Got a job there.

And were these still Civil Service jobs that you were getting?

No, no. I tried to get into Civil Service jobs but usually, by the time they got around to offering me anything, I was already working somewhere else. They're a little slow.

[Laughter] So I worked for an insurance company in Jacksonville, and I worked for Sears [Roebuck and Company] in Columbus, Georgia. And in Nashville [Tennessee] I went to work for the Methodist publishing company, and in Indiana for the State Board of Health. So I had a variety of jobs. And then from Indianapolis [Indiana] he was sent overseas.

Now he was in the [United States] Army?

Mm hmm.

And where was he stationed overseas?

First, he was sent to England, and then he landed in Normandy, a few days after D-Day, and he was all through the heavy fighting and everything, and ended up in Germany, at the end of the war, and was in the Army of Occupation for six months. And he was just getting ready to go to Japan when they dropped the bomb, so he got to come home.

Now when he went overseas, where were you living?

At that time, I came down to Las Vegas and applied for a job out at Basic Magnesium [Incorporated, BMI]. And they said they needed somebody in Gabbs, Nevada, so they asked me if I would be willing to go up there. And I did.

How was that?

I liked it. It was rather strange. It's surrounded by mountains. It's a valley and mountains all around. And it seemed to be protected from the really cold weather that was on the west side of the mountains, so it was nice there. I liked it. I worked in a department, it was called Plant Protection, and there were thirty men, and I was the only female.

Really! Now how was that?

It was great. I liked it. [Laughing] But they were all older men. I was just a young girl. They were too old to go into the service. At that time, many of the young men had either enlisted or been drafted.

You mentioned that you came to Las Vegas for BMI. But what drew you here?

Well, after the war ended in Europe, they closed down the plant in Gabbs. It was a magnesium plant. And so I hadn't decided what to do but one of the officials from Henderson [Nevada] was in the office one day, and he asked me what I was going to do and I said I didn't know and he offered me a job down here at BMI in Henderson. They used to call it Basic. And so I took advantage of that and came down here. Lived in one of the apartments they had for workers in Henderson.

And what year was this?

About 1945, I think, when I first came.

And so what were your first impressions of Las Vegas? What was Las Vegas like in 1945?

Well, I liked Las Vegas. The first time I ever came through here, it was February and it was warm, just like it is today, and I thought, oh, how wonderful, because I had come from cold Reno. But I liked Las Vegas a lot. I still think back to those days and how nice it was because we had clean air and our water came from artesian wells, you know. It was

very nice. And people were very kind and generous. There was a whole different attitude then than there is now, I think.

What was the city like at that time?

It was small. There were about 16,000 people. And I think we only had one stoplight in the whole city, and that was downtown. [Laughter]

Now, when you first came here, you were working at Basic and you were living in the housing over there in Henderson. What was Henderson like at that time?

It was a busy little town. All the houses were company houses. The apartments were mainly for the single people who worked as stenographers and secretaries and so forth. Just a few married couples, I guess, were living there. At the plant itself, there was a cafeteria. That's where we ate most of our meals.

It was a fairly large industry for Las Vegas and for Henderson at that time.

It was. And later on, a remanufacturing company came in there, and they were making rockets for the [United States] Navy, and paying quite a bit more than Basic was, so I applied for a job with them, and got a job there, and worked there until my husband was on his way home.

What kind of job did you do there?

I was an inspector. I had to measure the rockets and make sure that they were exactly right.

So you got to see all that stuff up close. And what year did your husband come back?

Well, it was late in 1945, about August. I may be wrong on the date that I first went to Henderson. It might've been 1944. I probably have a record of it somewhere.

So he comes back in 1945. Did he come to Henderson with you?

Well, I went back to Caliente where his folks were living, and he took off a month or two before he went back to work, but they saved his job for him, so he went back to work for the railroad. I think that most of the employers did that in World War II.

So he was working at the railroad. Now how did you end up back down in Las Vegas?

We rented a house in North Las Vegas. His brother bought a lot on Sixth Street. They were selling these lots for something like \$750. And his brother kept talking to him and saying, You should buy a lot. And so one day, we went to see Franklin and Law, the builders for this area [John S. Park Neighborhood] who were selling the lots. And Mrs. Juanita Law said that they were no longer selling the lots without giving them an option to build on the property, so in order to buy a lot we had to offer them the opportunity to build a house. [Laughing] So we were just kids and we said OK. And it worked out good. Because of the GI Bill, we were able to get the house, have it built for nothing down.

A couple of questions. When you came from Caliente and you were in North Las Vegas, had you come down just to be with family or was there a job down here?

No, no. He worked out of Las Vegas when he came back. We could've stayed in Caliente but I was not too fond of that place.

OK, so you were wanting to get out of there and so he came down to work out of Las Vegas and stayed with his brother?

Well, no, we didn't stay with his brother. We rented a house in North Las Vegas. Then about a year later we had our first child.

Just to back up for a minute, you looked at the lot on Sixth Street, is that right?

Well, it included all this area. They had purchased their lots on Sixth Street, but those were all sold out.

OK. But this lot here is what you [purchased].

There was nothing here, you know, so we were able to pick out which lot we wanted.

And was this the original lot that you picked out? And this is the house that you had built.

Mm hmm. Originally there was a farm here. This little park down here, the [Mary] Dutton Park, it was named after the Duttons. They had a ranch here and an orchard and they grew vegetables. From Ninth Street up to Fifth Place, I believe. And between Charleston [Boulevard] and Franklin [Avenue]. They had come here, I think for health reasons, from North or South Dakota, I forget which, but there's a whole history about them, too.

So when you purchased this lot, how many other houses were on this street at this point?

The Gibson house. That was Fred Gibson. I believe he was a vice-president of Basic Magnesium [Incorporated, BMI], or president. He was in charge of the plant, in Henderson. And the house next door hadn't been built yet. This house they started on shortly after we moved in, so they got them built pretty fast, but there weren't too many houses on this street when we moved in.

And this was 1945, '46?

Forty-seven. They started it in 1946 but, because of the war, materials were hard to come by, and so they were a little slow in building it.

So you've been living here basically since the inception of what we now know as the John S. Park Neighborhood. What are some of your earliest recollections of this area?

Well, everything beyond Franklin [Avenue] on that side was desert. And then when they started building around, they brought in Army surplus buildings for the school, until they could build a permanent school. And since then, that school has been torn down and it's now an Edison school. This is a fairly brand-new school, the John S. Park [Elementary] School.

It was a nice neighborhood. There were doctors and dentists and quite a few railroad people who lived in this area.

So it sounds like, when you first got here, the neighborhood was just starting to become populated, but there were already a number of people in this area.

A lot of young families and children.

And then you mentioned that you shortly after had your first child, after you got here?

He was born in July 1946.

What is his name?

Randall McGhie. We call him Randy.

And your husband was still with the railroad at this time?

Mm hmm.

And did you do a lot of activities?

My husband was quite an athlete. He was on the state high school basketball champion team from Panaca [Nevada], the one in 1939, and they had beat out all the large schools

to win. And he played baseball. He played on local teams here until he was thirty-five or a little older. And so part of our recreation was going to his games.

And did he play like in the area here? Was there a place [to play]?

Mm hmm. They had city teams and they had quite a large recreation department downtown. The Squires Park area had a softball field and we used to go down there and he played softball. In the wintertime he played basketball.

And also local, around here, there were places that he could do that?

Mm hmm. That was our main recreation. There was a club that the railroad people had, the Old-timers Club, and they had dances and picnics and things and we took part in that. The town used to have like the annual Helldorado. That was always exciting. There were parades, usually three or four parades on succeeding days.

What was the downtown area like? Was that where the main hub of activity was?

Yes, there were some nice department stores down there. Ronzone's [clothing store], which later became Diamond's and eventually closed. There was a J.C. Penney store and a Sears store, and a lot of small shops, dress shops and drug stores and little cafés. It was very nice. The courthouse was a lot smaller downtown, and it was surrounded by a big lawn, and large trees. There used to be a lot of cottonwood trees.

Were there a lot of activities that went on, a lot of things to do downtown?

Well, you know, they were mainly local things, like we used to go to the high school basketball games and football games. There were three movie theaters, I think, downtown. At least two. There was one on Fremont Street and one I believe on Second Street. And then later on we had the drive-in movies, and when we had the children we used to go to those. There was one off the Boulder Highway, and there was that one out

in the northwest. I think the one in the northwest, off maybe Rancho Road [Drive] or Tonopah Highway [U.S. Highway 95].

As the neighborhood grew, I suppose you saw a lot of activity happening. Were there any kinds of social events or activities that happened within the neighborhood, community events kinds of things?

Most were community events, you know, like just going downtown and having dinner downtown. You know, I wasn't really a very social person because I was so busy with four children. I did take part in the parent-teachers organization and Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

What schools did they go to?

They started at John S. Park [Elementary School] but then I enrolled the two oldest boys in St. Joseph's [Elementary] School, and later on they transferred to St. Anne [Elementary School] when that was built, and went all through St. Anne's and [Bishop] Gorman High School.

What about the politics of the neighborhood, and I guess by "politics" I mean what was the political climate like around here? Did you ever get involved in politics and stuff?

Oh, yes. We knew a lot of the politicians. We went to political rallies and that, and it seemed at that time most people were Democrats in Nevada, before Ronald Reagan [Republican, U.S. President, 1981-1989].

Ah, so Nevada was a more Democratic state.

At one time, right. Then I went to work for First National Bank of Nevada, when my children were a little older. That was around 1965. And I met a lot of the politicians then.

I think that's one thing that's very interesting about Las Vegas at least is, I mean even now as the city is big, there still seems to be a very strong political climate. City politics play a very big role here, and the politicians seem somewhat accessible.

They are. When I worked in the bank, Governor Grant Sawyer, he was a former governor [1959-1967] at that time, he was one of my customers and very friendly and nice and I really liked him. And a lot of the politicians that were, you know, not so high up, I can't think of anyone in particular right now, [were the same]. Many of the lawyers used to come in. Richard Bryan [Governor, 1983-1989; U.S. Senator, 1989-2001], when I first went to work, he was a lawyer in the Bank of Nevada Building and he used to come into our branch every once in a while. Very friendly and nice. Everybody liked him.

It's a small community in a way.

It really is.

And what were the local politics like in this neighborhood? Did you have a sense of that at all?

You know, it just seemed to me that things were usually pretty well run in the City. We had some good mayors. Mayor [Bill] Briare, whom I remember particularly. He wanted a high-speed train built from Las Vegas to Los Angeles [California]. He was way ahead of his time. That never materialized but it would've been a good thing.

At that time, when we first came here, there were two hotels on the Strip, the El Rancho [Vegas] and the [Hotel] Last Frontier. The El Rancho [opened in 1941] was the first one. And it wasn't until Howard Hughes came that the corporations started coming in and buying up everything on the Strip, and just changing the whole atmosphere of Las Vegas, you might say, you know. Before that it was much friendlier.

Can you talk a little bit more about that because the Strip has become such a huge part of Las Vegas, and this neighborhood is in very close proximity.

Right. And some of those Strip people used to live in this area, too, you know, on Fifth Place and Sixth Street.

Did you know many of them?

I didn't personally know any of them, you know. I know that you could go into any hotel and see a floor show for the price of a meal.

Did you go?

Oh, yes, we used to see a lot of shows. For the price of two drinks, you could see the second show. So they were practically free. But we saw people like Red Skelton and Joe E. Lewis. Some of the people you've probably never heard of, but they were popular at that time. The Harmonicats [a mouth organ trio]. And once in a while you'd see one of the Hollywood stars. They used to wander around. They seemed to like Las Vegas and they came here a lot.

So when you first got here, the Strip was not really the Strip as we know it today.

No. They gradually built more hotels. The Club Bingo was just a nightclub, and then later it was turned into the Sahara Hotel [and Casino]. And then I'm trying to think whether the Desert Inn [Hotel and Casino] came first or [another]. I think the Desert Inn. And there were some others. And then the Flamingo [Hotel and Casino], but [Benjamin] Bugsy Siegel didn't invent Las Vegas, you know. If you see the movie [*Bugsy*] it looks like there was nothing but desert out there and that's not true. And actually someone else [Billy Wilkerson] had started to build the hotel and then they were unable to finish it and

I think he came in and kind of took over. And he was only here for a short time before he was murdered.

It seems like you're right. In popular history it seems like he was here for a long time and built it up.

What has been the relationship of this particular neighborhood to the Strip, do you think? I know you said that some of the people that worked on the Strip lived in the neighborhood, which makes sense.

At first, though, there weren't many because there were only like two hotels on the Strip, and a few small motels, you know, and there wasn't much of anything else. Right behind us was an elderly couple and he had worked for the Silver Slipper [Hotel and Casino] for a long time. He was a dealer. And I remember them saying once that they lived on their tips and put their paycheck in the bank, to save for when they retired. In those days they didn't declare their tips. The IRS [Internal Revenue Service] hadn't heard how much money they were making.

The relationship to the Strip: most of the time, it has been that we live a separate life from that, you know. We went out occasionally to see a show or go to dinner, but for most of us it wasn't very relevant.

You mentioned that when Howard Hughes came in, that's when things started to change. What were some of those changes that you saw?

His corporation was the first one to come in and buy up hotels, and I think he bought several of them, the Desert Inn and the Silver Slipper and I don't know which others. And then he bought a lot of land, too. He bought all of the land where Summerlin is. So he's responsible for a lot of the changes in Las Vegas, I think. And I think when other

companies saw that he was doing well here and making money and that, they gradually started coming in and buying up properties.

And as the Strip changed and I think Las Vegas started to grow and change, how did that impact this neighborhood, or did it?

I don't think it did. You know, for a while, when they started building nicer homes in areas like Summerlin and Spanish Oaks, some of those areas, some of the people moved out of here, and for a while the neighborhood kind of deteriorated. But then, gradually, younger people started buying homes and fixing them up in this area, so it's still pretty nice, I think.

What are some of the biggest changes that you've seen?

Well, the biggest changes are with the environment, the smog and the traffic. You used to be able to drive from one end of town to the other in about ten minutes. You can't now. But those are the biggest changes, I think. And just the fact that there are so many people here. Whenever we went to any type of affair, to the movies or a basketball game or anywhere, we'd always see people we knew. Now you can go out and be among strangers and never see anyone that you know.

Are there still folks in the area here that you have known, that have lived here since around the time when you first came here?

Not a lot of them. Mrs. [Sue Ann] Porter down at the end of the street, on Park Paseo, she's been here a long time. And Judy Smith next door has lived there, well, I would say twenty or thirty years. I just don't know of anybody else who's been in this neighborhood for a long time.

So having been here and seen it develop and grow, what do you think are some of the most significant events that have maybe happened in the history of this neighborhood? Anything that stands out to you?

Well, I don't know. We've had a couple of fires. Judy's house next door was one, and she was in there sleeping but the neighbors across the street happened to see flames coming from one of the windows and they went over there and woke her up. And the house has since been rebuilt. But other than that, what else? There was an incidence of someone looking in a back yard over on Eighth Place and seeing a hand sticking out of the ground. A man had been murdered and buried back there. That was, I would say, three or four years ago, probably. Not too long ago. He had been renting a room from the woman who owned the house, and I think it had something to do with drugs. Anyhow, she killed him and buried his body but she didn't do a very good job of burying it.

You know, we led pretty normal lives. Our children grew up and played with each other. There didn't used to be a fence around the school, and there was a basketball court and the boys used to go over there and play basketball with all the different kids who lived in the neighborhood. I think the Greenspuns lived in this neighborhood for a while.

It sounds like that that's very much like the stories you were just telling where neighbors have a lot of contact with each other. You actually know your neighbors.

Was that the case? It sounds like your kids played all over.

It was. Now, there was one family that was a railroad family and their name was Wildey, and they lived about three houses down and across the street. And I think that she is still alive. It seems like my son told me that she's around a hundred years old now. He used to play with Michael Wildey, who was his age. And he doesn't live in Las Vegas but he

works for the railroad and he travels here occasionally, so he and my son Tim see each other once in a while.

There was a family around the corner named Gallo, and their children used to play with ours. And the Bunker family. Merle Bunker. She used to have a TV show. At first it was called Miss Nancy and then they changed it and she was Cinderella. And she used to come on every day I think about four o'clock and the children used to love to watch her. But anyhow, she had about five children and my daughter played with her girls. She had two girls who were close to her age. Later on they moved to Mesa, Arizona, and she has since passed away.

Perhaps not historically speaking it wasn't, but now, to have a neighborhood like this, I mean I still see kids playing together a lot but I think the city has changed a great deal.

It's still a nice neighborhood. I have good neighbors. The people who had the house next door put it up for sale and they have a renter now but she seems to be very nice. She just moved in just recently. And Judy Smith next door is retired from teaching. I've known her for a long time now. It's just, I would say, a normal neighborhood.

In the neighborhood, have you seen a lot of changes take place?

A lot of Spanish or Mexican [Hispanic] people have moved in, Latinos or whatever, I don't know if they're all from Mexico. I notice that there are more and more moving into this neighborhood.

And so that's a relatively new happening.

Yeah. Most of them kind of stay to themselves, so I don't get to know most of them, but there's one on the corner, Miguel Martinez, and he's very friendly and I've gotten to

know him, but some of the others who live further down the street I don't know. The Huntridge area I think has more Spanish-speaking people, and that's the next street over, Tenth Street, where Huntridge starts, from there across Maryland Parkway down to Fifteenth Street. The Huntridge is actually older than this area.

And they started building that area first, right?

That was built during World War II, when they needed more housing for Las Vegas.

Now you mentioned the shifting demographics of the neighborhood a little bit. Have you seen the types of people that live here? Just even since I've been in the neighborhood, I've seen a lot of houses go up for sale, a lot of different people moving in and out. Do you think the demographic characteristics of the neighborhood have changed, meaning different types of people moving in and out, or has it remained the same?

Well, I don't really know about that. It's different people, different occupations, but there are still family people moving in, people that have small children, not too many on this street but I think maybe on the other streets around here. I see them walk by on their way to school.

So it sounds like you're still fairly close with your neighbors.

With some of them. The houses directly around me.

So what is it that you have liked, or even still like the most about living in this area?

What stands out to you?

Well, it's probably a sentimental attraction to this house and my children all grew up here. It's convenient, it's very convenient to drive to stores. It's sort of central. If you look at a map of Las Vegas, this area is almost exactly in the center.

Fairly recently, the John S. Park Neighborhood got a historic designation. What do you think about that?

I think it's nice. I think that it made people take a little pride in their homes. If you walk around, you notice that a lot of people are making improvements.

I've seen a lot of that happening. That's great. Are there things that you hope don't change? I mean given the amount of changes that we've seen, what would you hope wouldn't change about this area, about this neighborhood?

Well, I don't know how to answer that. [Laughing] I just hope that it continues to have tenants and owners and renters who take pride in their homes and take care of their yards, because it's a rather pleasant place to live. We do have a little bit of crime in this area and there are homeless people, like next door there was a lady sleeping in the yard the other day and somebody called the police and they came. We have little incidents like that. And I suppose that's true of just about any part of town.

Yeah, I mean I think that this area has a really very interesting history, and I really appreciate you sharing your memories and your stories with us.

Well, you're welcome. It's nice meeting you, Suzanne.

Very nice meeting you. Is there anything that maybe we didn't talk about that is an interesting story or pertinent to know about the history of this area?

Well, I can't think of anything. One thing I didn't mention was when we first built our house, Charleston [Boulevard] was a dirt road. It wasn't paved yet. I think the only business that was open on Charleston close to here was the Huntridge Theater.

And so when did Charleston become a main road?

Well, as soon as they started building houses here, then eventually they got it paved.

That is interesting. I have a question about the church that's just right up here.

What is the history on that? How long as that been in this neighborhood?

The Mormon church. That's been there for quite a few years. I can't remember exactly what year it was built. But there were a lot of LDS [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons] people in this area.

And was that just because this is where a lot of folks settled, or was there something that attracted [them]?

Well, at one time, a large part of the population of Las Vegas was Mormon. You know, I'm thinking of some of the people, the Bunkers and the Adamses and the Ashworths, who all lived in this area. Richards. There were quite a few Mormons.

And so did that give the neighborhood part of its character, too?

Well, it could be. You know, the Mormons make good neighbors. The Schwartz family who used to live next door to me at one time were wonderful neighbors. Very generous and very nice.

I'd heard that there was a large LDS population here. I guess they were a big part of settling this area here, too.

Oh, yes. At one time, you know, a lot of the City officers, the commissioners, were Mormon. Even still, I think, many of them are.

Well, that's a very interesting history, I think, very interesting history of this area.

It is. We didn't used to have much of a history when I moved here.

Yes, Las Vegas was still relatively new. And I think this is interesting because you worked in Henderson. Was Henderson considered to be far away from Las Vegas?

Was there anything between here and Henderson?

There were a few bars. [Laughing] There was a little town called Whitney. And there was another area, I can't remember the name, a few stores along the way but everything behind these businesses was just desert. There was nothing there. And that's all built in now. Henderson didn't exist until World War II. There was nothing there.

I guess it's kind of all grown together now. That's interesting.

When I worked in Henderson, and I did have a brother-in-law and sister-in-law who lived here in Las Vegas, sometimes on the weekend I'd just get on the bus and come and visit them. I didn't have a car at the time.

When that gentleman originally sent you that letter, right after you got out of business college, and said, oh, we don't think you'd like Las Vegas, was he wrong, or was he right? [Laughing]

I think I probably would've liked it. Although seeing where Nellis is and everything, there might've been a transportation problem and that, unless they had buses that went out there every day from town. I don't know.

Yeah. Because at that time it would've been really far out.

But then if I had come here, I wouldn't have met my husband [laughing], and I wouldn't have four wonderful children now.

Do they still live in the Las Vegas area?

I have one who lives here, Randy, my eldest, and he has a bike and skateboard store. It's on Fort Apache and Flamingo. And I have a son who works for the railroad like his father did and he lives in Cedar City, Utah. And then I have a son who lives in Reno, and a daughter who is in Sudan, Africa.

Wow! What is she doing there?

She's a legal officer for the State Department. She works for USAID. And she has been with USAID for six years now. In fact, yeah, it's almost six years. She started out in Kenya, and then after two years they sent her to Bangkok [Thailand], and now she's in Khartoum in Sudan. She'll be home for Thanksgiving, so I'm looking forward to that.

Oh, that's great. That'll be nice. Well, again, thank you so much. I very much appreciate you taking the time.

You're welcome. Now tell me something about you. [Laughing]

Absolutely. What would you like to know?

INDEX

B

- BMI, 8, 12
- Buckland Ranch, 1, 2
- Bugsy* (film), 17
- Businesses
 - Diamond's, 13
 - First National Bank of Nevada, 15
 - J.C. Penney, 13
 - Ronzone's, 13
 - Sears, Roebuck and Co., 13

D

- Developers
 - Franklin and Law, 10

E

- Entertainers
 - Harmonicats, 16
 - Lewis, Joe E., 16
 - Skelton, Red, 16
- Entertainment
 - Huntridge Theater, 23

F

- Fort Churchill State Historic Park, 1

G

- GI Bill, 10
- Great Depression, 1, 3

H

- Helldorado, 13
- Highways
 - Tonopah Highway. *See* U.S. Highway 95
 - U.S. Highway 95, 14
- Hotels/Casinos
 - Desert Inn, 17, 18
 - El Rancho Vegas, 16
 - Flamingo, 17
 - Hotel Last Frontier, 16
 - Sahara, 17
 - Silver Slipper, 17, 18

L

- Las Vegas Army Air Corps Gunnery School. *See*
 - Nellis AFB, NV
 - Loyalton, CA, 3

N

- Neighborhoods
 - Huntridge, 21
 - Summerlin, 18
- Nellis AFB, NV, 4, 25
- Nevada Cities/Towns
 - Caliente, 4, 6, 10, 11
 - Carson City, 3
 - Dayton, 1, 3, 5
 - Ely, 6
 - Fernley, 1, 3
 - Gabbs, 8
 - Hawthorne, 3
 - Henderson, 8, 9, 12, 24
 - North Las Vegas, 10
 - Panaca, 13
 - Reno, 1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 25
 - Sparks, 5
 - Wadsworth, 3, 5
 - Weeks, 1
 - Whitney, 24
- Nightclubs
 - Club Bingo, 17

P

- Parks
 - Mary Dutton Park, 11
 - Squires Park, 13
- People
 - Greeks, 6
 - Hispanics, 21
 - Italians, 5
 - Mormons, 23-24
- Personalities
 - Adams family, 23
 - Ashworth family, 23
 - Briare, Bill, 16
 - Bryan, Richard, 15
 - Bunker family, 20, 23
 - Bunker, Merle, 20
 - Dutton, Mary, 11
 - Franklin, George Sr., 10
 - Gallo family, 20
 - Gibson, Fred, 12
 - Greenspun family, 20
 - Hughes, Howard, 16, 18
 - Law, John, 10
 - Law, Juanita, 10
 - Lougaras, Ioannes (Reno attorney), 6
 - Martinez, Miguel, 21
 - McGhie, Charles Lynn (husband), 4, 6-8, 10, 11, 13
 - McGhie, Randall (son), 13, 25
 - McGhie, Tim (son), 20
 - Porter, Sue Ann, 19
 - Reagan, Ronald, 15

Richards family, 23
 Sawyer, Grant, 15
 Schwartz family, 24
 Siegel Benjamin (Bugsy), 17
 Smith, Judy, 19, 21
 Wildey family, 20
 Wildey, Michael, 20
 Wilkerson, Billy, 17

R

Recreation
 Old-timers' Club, 13

S

Schools
 Bishop Gorman High School, 14
 John S. Park Elementary School, 12, 14
 St. Anne Elementary School, 14
 St. Joseph's Elementary School, 14
 Soil Conservation Service, 4, 6
 Streets

Boulder Highway, 14
 Charleston Boulevard, 11, 23
 Eighth Place, 19
 Fifteenth Street, 21
 Fifth Place, 11, 16
 Franklin Avenue, 11, 12
 Fremont Street, 14
 Las Vegas Boulevard, 16
 Maryland Parkway, 21
 Ninth Street, 11
 Park Paseo, 19
 Rancho Drive, 14
 Second Street, 14
 Sixth Street, 10, 11, 16
 Strip. *See* Las Vegas Boulevard
 Tenth Street, 21

W

World War II, 3, 10, 21, 24
 D-Day, 7