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An Interview with Patricia A. Merl

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

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

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Interview with Pat Merl

October 9 & 28, 2008 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee D. White

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Preface

Patricia 'Pat' Merl plans for college did not materialized after graduation from a New Jersey high school in the late 1960s. Instead she took a receptionist job. The by the age of 19, it was her interest in dance classes that would lead her to audition to be a professional dancer for the Rockettes of Radio City Music Hall fame. Her days and weeks were filled with rigorous rehearsals and performances, but it was also an exciting time for a young and spirited girl.

A side trip to Las Vegas in 1971 during her first ever vacation opened her to a new world of possibilities for a professional dancer. So without a job, she decides to remain in Las Vegas and explore the options. It became the beginning of a wide and varied career in the live entertainment industry.

Pat's dancing resume includes working in many of the Las Vegas chorus lines of the 1970s. provides a flavor of what the work was like then and how it changed during the era. She includes the story of Frank Rosenthal and how she quit to move to Florida.

Florida opened new opportunities for Pat and she describes how she moved into management positions. Eventually, her career brought her back to las Vegas with the Farrington Productions firm. She now is the Director of Gaming Outreach for the International Gaming Institute.

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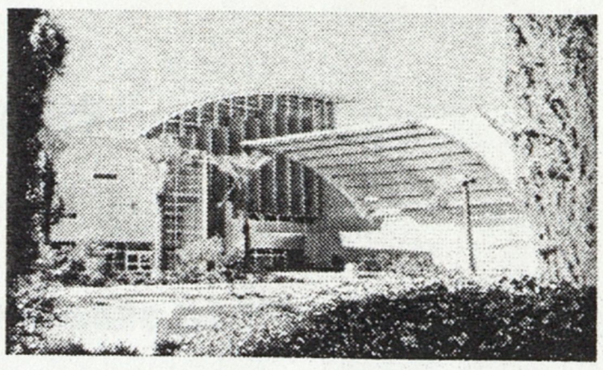

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Patricia A. Merl 10/9/08

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Clayte D. White 10/9/2008

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This is Claytee White. It is October 9th, 2008. And I'm in the office of Pat Merl at UNLV in the IGI Center.

So how are you today?

I'm great, thank you. How are you?

Fantastic. And could you please pronounce your name for me and spell your last name?

My last name is Merl. And it's spelled M-E-R-L.

And is your first name Pat or Patricia?

My first name legally is Patricia. But I think it's too formal.

So you use Pat?

Pat.

Okay, great. Well, Pat, could you tell me just a bit about your early childhood going back to New Jersey?

Basically, my father's an emigrant. And he married my mother, found her in Union City, New Jersey after he got out of the military. Anyway, they got married and a year later they had me. My dad's goal was to get into the countryside—he loved open spaces and country—and we were living in a real urban environment, city buildings everywhere. So their goal in the first five or six years of their marriage was to save and find a home somewhere that was out of the city. And they did. While they did that I stayed with my grandmother. And they achieved their goal and we ended up moving into the suburbs of New Jersey.

People think New Jersey is a dump and it really isn't. They don't call it "The Garden State" for nothing. There are some beautiful, beautiful small towns there add I feel very fortunate to have lived in what ended up being still a magnificent town now. And, actually, it's the home to most of the Wall Street stockbrokers.

What is the name of it?

It's called Westfield, New Jersey. And it has one of the most coveted communities called Wychwood Gardens, which is like one or two in the United States as far as choices of places to live for wealthy people. So we kind of slipped in under the wire. I don't know how that happened. My dad worked for the Department of Public Works in Westfield and used to commute from Union City to Westfield. And then we moved closer to his work and we got into Cranford and

lived there. And then in my senior year of high school my dad bought our last house in New Jersey and it was in the town of Westfield. So I was fortunate enough to live there for one year before I embarked on what ended up being a major career move in my life.

My dad is old country. And as a result I didn't get an opportunity to get the kind of schooling that I had hoped to get. I went to a wonderful private school when I was younger—they worked very, very hard to put me through that private school—and then I went to a public high school. I always wanted to be a teacher. That was the thing that I wanted to do. I used to pretend to be a teacher in my backyard with one big gigantic piece of slate blackboard that my father found in the town dump and put it up for me. And I used to teach my imaginary students outside for hours and hours on end for quite a few years. While I was going through high school I kind of assumed that I would go to college. We never really discussed it. And then one day I went home and started to talk to my dad about it and he said, "Patty, I can't put you through school." He says, "And besides that you're probably going to marry and have children and I only have enough money—and actually I don't have enough money for that, and that's to make sure your brother has the opportunity for an education."

I love my father. And I will never ever resent that decision. I respected it, but I was terribly disappointed. And had I known then what I know now, I would have been able to go to school. Then I was kind of pushed by the guidance counselors to go out of the college preparatory track and to move into the business track so that I could earn a good living if I decided to go out and work professionally.

So as a result of that I decided that I would just move forward on faith. I always trusted my parents. I moved forward on faith and I graduated from high school and went out and got myself my first job, which was as a receptionist for a trucking firm down at Elizabethport, New Jersey, one of the big shopping companies, distribution companies, and worked my way -- funny enough, I'm the kind of person -- I'm very inquisitive and I was always asking people what they were doing, why they were doing it and how they did it. And I went from receptionist to an assistant dispatcher for this trucking firm. And I moved from there into the accounting position and ended up doing some of the accounting for the firm and started to really enjoy myself. I thought it was a lot of fun.

But while I was doing that, to keep fit I took dance classes. That was my mom's idea. There was a little studio in our small town. And she said why don't we go there? And she loved my costumes. And I remember buying costumes and doing recitals. So it was a hobby and it was something I really loved.

I also was fortunate to have music in my background. My dad played accordion and organ. He taught me and we used to play together. So there was a lot of art and performance art in my background.

And I don't know—I had been going to this dance studio for years. For some reason one night after work—I used to go three nights a week—I noticed on the wall photos that were always there and I just looked at them and said how nice and went on about my dance classes. Then one night I looked at the photos on the wall and I asked my dance professor who are these women? And she said, oh, those are my Radio City Music Hall Rockettes that I teach. I had been going for years and never even saw this. So I said really? And she told me a little bit about each one of them. There were three of them. And something happened where it sparked my interest.

So a couple of weeks later I went in and just asked, Do you think I might be able to do something like this? And she said, well, you'll have to work a little harder than you are. You'll have to come all the time because there are certain skills that you'll need to do to know how to do; dance skills and abilities that you'll need to have in order to move into something like this or even consider auditioning for something like this. So I said okay and I started coming. And the things we worked on—the dance was there. To audition for Radio City you had to have some ballet background, strong ballet foundation, jazz and, of course, tap. That was the main dance form that they used.

And did you know any of those already?

Oh, yeah. I had been studying for years off and on. As I got older I started paying for my own. And that was one of the reasons why I started going so much more often.

That was another thing that my dance teacher afforded me an opportunity that I don't know if anyone else got there. I said to her I don't know if I can afford to come many more times than I'm coming. And she said I think we can work something out for you. So I guess she saw maybe there was a chance for me. We worked out a deal where I could take as many dance classes as I

wanted for a certain fee per week. It was very reasonable. And, of course, she had to kick me out of the dance studio every night so she could close.

Oh, isn't that wonderful?

Yeah. I still think of her. I love her.

I want us to go back and I want you to give me your parents' names and your brother's name and the age difference in you and your brother.

Okay. And there is something else that I will bring into that, too. My father's name is Charles William Merl. He just recently passed away, too. So that's a little wall, which I thought I'd get around.

And we never get over it.

Yeah. And my mom, her name is Anna Marie Merl. And thank God she's still with me. She's a vibrant, dynamic 81-year-old. I'm going to move her to Florida from North Carolina next week. We just sold the house in North Carolina. So I know I'm all over the place. But that's that.

And my brother Karl, his name is Karl Peter Merl. And he is 52 years old. And he was the one that we were going to get going through college. He was a very close friend, my brother Karl. He was my buddy, but we didn't spend a lot of time together. A lot of things happened while I was away eventually in my career that changed a lot of that anyway. So it's funny how the best-laid plans of mice and men you never really know.

That's right. Where did Karl go to college?

He never went.

You have to tell that story.

Yeah. There's a lot. And my father spent the last 20 years of his life apologizing to me. But I thanked him because I wouldn't trade my life for anything. I'm very, very happy with my life.

That's wonderful. Good.

Where was I? The dance studio. So I'm touched because my teacher—without her I wouldn't be where I am. She helped build my life for me. So I took some classes. It was about eight months.

And the way to get an audition at Radio City at that time was to write a letter requesting that you be notified the next time they have a major audition. And this is a long time ago. This is 1968. So I was at the trucking firm for a little bit over a year. Funny, I look back at the way I

thought or didn't think about what was about to happen. I got the letter from Radio City saying that there was an audition in August and I was invited to come. And I remember it was 10:30 in the morning. The letter, first of all, they spelled my name wrong, M-E-R-E, which a lot of people do. And, secondly, the letter said unless you're absolutely sure you have all the qualifications required to be a Radio City Music Hall Rockette, please don't waste your time or money coming to the audition. Well, tell that to any 16-, 17- or 18-year-old girl and I don't think they're going to see that part. They're just going to show up.

So I decided I was going to go. My dance teacher said she would come with me. Funny enough, Radio City Music Hall—well, New York City and Radio City were exactly 45 minutes by bus from where our house was in Westfield, New Jersey. I find that funny because it reminds me of that song "45 Minutes from Broadway" by George M. Cohan. And so I would think of that song when I would go in on the bus. So I went often to New York City, took some master classes every now and then. But it was the time when young women didn't travel around that much. It sounds ancient, but it's not. My dance teacher felt an obligation to go with me. So I took the bus in with her.

And the day before the audition—actually, it wasn't. I did give them a reasonable amount of time and I can't tell you how much, but it wasn't many days because it was a quick turnaround. I told my bosses at the trucking firm, I said, I won't be in on whatever day that was because I'm going to audition for Radio City Music Hall. I didn't ask them. I just kind of let them know. And I didn't imagine that they wouldn't want to let me go. So they kind of smiled and said, okay, well, we wish you a lot of luck. And so what's the deal? Well, I'll audition. If I get the job, I'll let you know. I'll be back. Okay.

So I go. And I go on the bus with my dance teacher. And we get there and I go upstairs to the audition hall. There is a gigantic audition hall with several hundred young women and we began the audition process. At that time you had to do a combination in tap and ballet and in jazz and, of course, you had to do the trademark kicks, many types of kicks. And you had to know them all, spring kicks and flip kicks and ground kicks and inward fan kicks an outward fan kicks and scissor kicks, just all kinds of ways of kicking. And they had to be certain heights. A very disciplined troupe. If they said eye-high, you had to do it eye-high and you had to do eight of

them eye-high. And they couldn't be nose-high or mouth-high. Everything had to be exactly precise.

There were so many girls there the audition lasted—it was probably about four hours. And I was just so wired for the whole thing. And when my name came up and it was time for me, I did my thing. I had watched at least 50 girls go by with just barely being able to do a step or two before they said thank you very much. They were very stringent with height requirements. And you had to be a minimum of five-foot-seven and a quarter. And I remember I was five-foot-seven and a quarter when I went to Radio City. I'm five-eight and a half now. I don't know what happened. But I think I'm going back to five-seven and a quarter. So I just made it. I passed that part of the requirements.

A lot of girls were dropped just in the measurement process. And then as they began to dance they were dropped for the way they danced, the way they didn't dance, the way they looked as they danced, all those things. And you never really knew. Sometimes you knew some of the reasons why. Other reasons were not evident. But I do remember girls flying from all over the country. At that time it wasn't international, but girls flying from everywhere, all over the country, and a lot of tears even when it wasn't your turn and how moving it was.

So I did mine and I was told thank you and sit down. So that was good. And the audition after four hours, the director of—well, the founder of Radio City was still there, of the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes. He was still directing the company, the line. And his assistant choreographer was there. And the founder at that point was probably in his late 60s. And the assistant choreographer, she was probably in her middle 50s. So it was the passing of an era that I was starting to watch and I got to witness. All of a sudden they said, okay, we'll be right back and they got up and left the room. And it was a big gigantic room. When they slammed the door, you heard this loud echo. And I looked around the room and there were two people, myself and another girl who happens to be my very close friend to this day. And I said, okay, I don't know what this means.

What is her name?

Her name is Sharon Jones. Her maiden name was Sharon Echols. We got in the same little changing room together prior to the audition and said a couple of words to each other about how

nervous we were. So we're sitting there. After about two minutes Sharon said to me did we get it? And I said I don't know, but I'm afraid to move. Are we supposed to stay here? And she said I don't know. But she stayed on her side of the room and I stayed on mine. And we sat there. And after what seemed like an eternity—it probably was 15 minutes—he came back and said, well, go get something to eat because you're going to start rehearsal in about two hours. Be back at two o'clock. And he slammed the door and walked away again.

So I went downstairs in the elevator with Sharon. And I couldn't bring myself to get out of the elevator because I knew I was going to see my dance teacher. And I was so emotional it was like I can't go see her now. I just need to not talk to anybody. I need a minute to absorb all this. So my friend gets out of the elevator and I hear my dance teacher say how many more people are up there? And she said, well, just one more. She's in the elevator. And she said Pat? And I stepped out of the elevator and I started crying hysterically. And I hugged her. She said it's okay, you can come back and we can do it again. And I said I got it, I got it. So she started crying too and so did my friend Sharon because this was the most exciting day of our lives. It's something she had hoped to do her whole life. This is something I never expected to be able to do.

So we went to have lunch and then back to rehearse. I opened two weeks later in the Hawaiian-themed show, and spent the next three years at Radio City learning a lot about dance and little did I know how much about life and people.

Oh, there are so many things. Before you continue you mentioned that sometimes you would go into New York for a master class. What is that?

Oh, that's a class that's taught by absolute quintessential dance masters and professionals. These are high-level classes. There are usually whole caravans of people that go in and take these classes. They're high-priced, but you're going to learn from the top people in the industry in that field.

How did your parents feel about you auditioning for Radio City Music Hall?

They didn't know. I felt it was okay if I didn't say anything. I was almost 19 years old. And I figured that I could take a day off from work and go into New York with my dance teacher and audition.

Were you still living at home?

Yes. When we got out I called my mother immediately. I was on the phone right after I finished crying with my dance teacher. And I called, "Mom, mom." And I couldn't get it out and I couldn't get it out. And she's like what happened? Trish, what happened? What happened? I got it, I got it, I got it. What did you get? Oh, mom, I'm at Radio City Music—and I told her the whole thing. There was like this dead silence. And I said I really don't have a lot of time to talk. I'm going to go to lunch and I'm going to come back for rehearsal and he said we'll be finished at ten o'clock. I'm going to take the bus home. Can you pick me up at 11:30 tonight at the bus stop? And my mom said okay and she hung up the phone. And I didn't see them until 11:30 that night. And I didn't think to ask them if it was all right. I just was on my way in my life. It just happened at that point.

Oh, that's fantastic. I want to know all there is to know about Radio City Music Hall. And the reason is I have another group of dancers that I interviewed a couple of years ago and one of them danced at Radio City Music Hall. And right now all I can think of is Margaret. I don't remember Margaret's last name. But I have a picture of her on top of the building.

Oh, wow. Well, she must be older than I am then.

She is. She's much older.

There are a lot of Rockettes that live in town that were in the troupe when I was in the troupe. So what would you like to know?

I want to know if you moved from home to New York. I want to know a typical day in the life of a Rockette. I'd like to know how you changed the scenes during the year.

Okay. The thing about Radio City was that once you went to Radio City there was nothing else in your life. Now when I look back on it, I parallel it to being in the military in many, many, many ways. I still draw upon experiences from that and I see how that made me strong in so many ways and how vital and valuable that experience was. That was a result of learning how to be around and live with and work with so many different kinds of people; how to prioritize your life to where what's most important to you; to never lose focus; to discipline yourself to do all the things that you need to do in order to succeed. It also taught me a lot about myself. And there are some good things and some bad things. That's why I say it's like the military.

In those days, you had a tremendous amount of respect, obviously, for anyone who was

your senior much less someone of such fame and notoriety as the director. You were disciplined to where when he walked in the room he didn't have to tell everyone to get quiet and get ready. Everybody just immediately shut up and walked up there and got in line and was ready to go. We were also disciplined in the way we dressed and the way we wore our hair. We were disciplined in our timing and when to be at work and when we could leave and what we could do. At Radio City if you went on vacation, you weren't allowed to ski or do anything that might cause injury. And that was your agreement that you would take care of your health and your well-being so that you were able to function and perform in your position. We weren't allowed to get suntanned, no tan lines, nothing that would differentiate you from the girl next to you. The goal was that everybody was to be one and the same. And I can verify that I did that very well because my parents used to say where were you? How can we find you? I'm 18th from the right or I'm the one in the—and so you would describe these different things. So the first thing about Radio City that I remember was having to get up very early in the morning for rehearsals.

Oh, you asked me about my transportation and my moving and those kinds of things. For the first three months I continued living at home with my family. There was not even a discussion about me moving into New York. So it involved me getting up at about seven in the morning and taking the eight o'clock bus that would get me into New York City about nine. And then I would walk to Radio City Music Hall, which is about ten blocks from Port Authority, and I would be there -- because you'd have to be there by half hour. That's the golden time for all the performers to be in. A half-hour before performance you must be there. A lot of people didn't understand why people had to do that. I used to be there about an hour and a half before to warm up, put my makeup on and preset my costumes. But half-hour was in case something unforeseen happened in the show. If somebody was out and adjustments had to be made, you were available for the line captain, which was the person who told you what you were going to do that show, and who would be able to tell you what you needed to do to make those adjustments.

I did that for about three months. And I got home just a little bit before midnight, 11:45. My mom picked me up at the bus at 11:30. I'd get home about 11:45. And we worked seven days a week. So you worked seven days a week for three weeks or four weeks, sometimes five weeks. You never really knew. They would put the days off once a month and you would never know

whether you were working three weeks, four weeks or five weeks until that schedule went up. You would get four days off each one of those three-week or four-week periods. And the rest of the days of that week you were on-call and you would have to come in if they needed you to come in for any reason. You never would think of calling in sick. You never would think of calling in hurt. The demand for that job was so tremendous that they would constantly remind you that there were thousands of people waiting at the door for your position. So there was not a lot of room for you to do anything unfavorable.

So after about three months I got to where I was so exhausted; I said I don't know if I can make it anymore. And my girlfriend Sharon was coming in from Long Island and she would take the train in and out. And my parents were concerned because I'm walking to Port Authority at 11:00 at night, not safe. New York was very unsafe at that time. So I talked to my parents. And we ended up, my girlfriend Sharon and I, getting a one-bedroom -- actually, a room at the YWCA. That was the way my parents let us leave. And we stayed at the YWCA for about a year. And then we finally made our transition into our apartment. And, again, we didn't live too far away. We lived on 45th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenue and Radio City was on 51st Street on Eighth Avenue, just long enough for us to walk that. We'd walk that every day to and fro.

So rehearsals at Radio City, would depend on the length of the show. Again, sometimes we'd do two two-weekers if it worked out that's what needed to be done. I don't know how those determinations were made, but they always came around the holidays in November and December. And I think it's because the holiday shows ran longer, uncharacteristically longer than other shows and by demand. I do know that's how they were scheduled. So I think those two-weekers fell in there based on box office receipts now that I look back.

Did you do more than one performance per day?

Oh, yeah. We did 28 shows per week, four shows a day, seven days a week. That's under the normal schedule. Christmas and Easter we did five shows a day, seven days a week. So that's why I said you had to be ready to dedicate your life because between those shows, one break, my girlfriend and I would walk home. We'd do our laundry. We'd clean the house. One break always every day you would take a dance class of some sort. A lot of people think once you get a professional job you stop. It's like anything. If you want to be good at it, you continue. And

dance is—obviously, you see how dance has changed. But to keep yourself in shape when you're doing something that's redundant and repetition, you have to constantly use those other muscles that are atrophying at that point in time because of what you're doing.

The shows ran about an hour. And at that time there were movies in between the shows. So there were five movies a day and four shows a day or there were five movies a day and six shows a day. The show would start before the movie. Our first show would be at noon. Shows on a normal day were at twelve, three, six and nine. And then Christmas and Easter it was nine, twelve, three, six and nine. And then rehearsals because the shows would change within 24 hours such as Wednesday night -- the weeks started on Thursday. I don't know why but Thursday would be the opening day and you would do the show. The night that the show closes is Wednesday night. And you have to be in for dress rehearsals 6:30, 7:00 in the morning because the new show goes in on Thursday morning. So while you're doing the old show you're learning a new show. And the new show rehearsals used to be at seven or eight in the morning. Most times it would be from eight in the morning to 10:30. That would give you time to run out and grab a quick something to eat and be back in time for half-hour. And by the way, you didn't eat too much because you couldn't eat and do the kind of routines that we did. So the rehearsals were once a week for two hours. Within four to six hours we would learn our show and it would be up to you to pick up quickly and to rehearse.

This gets real complicated. If the show runs four weeks, you will go into new show rehearsals the final two weeks of the four-week run. But the first three weeks of the four-week run you have a holdover rehearsal. And the holdover rehearsals says whether you're going to be in the same position and the same dance spot as you are the week you're performing it or if you're going to change your spot the following week because of the shift of people going off. And that was not done by height or anything. It was done by how many weeks you worked and whether you were crawling or not. So we would do holdover rehearsals on Tuesday mornings at eight. So Tuesday morning at eight you would find out where you are in the lineup next week on Thursday. You learned that spot, which is the same choreography, but maybe you'll be on stage right one week and stage left the next week. And if you're familiar with staging at all, usually whatever you do on stage right would start with the right foot, the right arm, your mirror image. You have to reverse

your performance if you're on the left side. You may be in the front line one week and in the third line the next week, which affects whether you do certain—staging and formation positions change. So you have to determine. So you learn that spot and then you go back within the hour and you do the spot you've been doing. And there's one week where you have a holdover rehearsals and a new show rehearsal. So you were going a lot.

So it was a good thing that you were young.

You know what's funny is there was a point where I went: did we really do that? And we got together in a reunion and I said sometimes I can't even believe we did that. Everybody said I know, but we did and we were so happy to do it.

And I remember how much I cleared at that time. Without rehearsal, I cleared $125 a week. That was for 28 shows a week. The five show weeks, I think, we got something like nine dollars extra a week for that. I was just so happy. And I didn't even know how much I was getting paid until I showed up for rehearsal. I was like ready for the job and my mother said how much are you getting paid? And I said I have no idea. I really didn't care.

How did that amount of money compare with what your father was earning?

That's a good question. I've got to think about that one. That's a really good question. I thought my father wasn't getting paid that much. He was a laborer. He did a lot of street work. He didn't think it was that much. So I'm thinking—but, again, he wasn't working seven days a week, 12 hours a day either. I wonder if my mother would even remember. I'll have to ask her that. That's a really good question.

That would be wonderful. Give me the director's name.

Russell, R-U-S-S-E-L-L, Markert, M-A-R-K-E-R-T.

And did I ask you your dance teacher name?

No. Joyce Christianson. And Russell Markert, funny, enough, was from Westfield, New Jersey, which I never knew until I had been there about a year. So it's a very small world.

It is. It really is. Did they have or did you have to have a special insurance?

First and last time until I ended up at the Lido here it was like being an employee of Radio City Music Hall, Incorporated. So you had benefits. You had vacation. You had one week's vacation the first year, two weeks the second year and that was about it. And you also had any kind of

benefits and insurances that you needed. So, no, we didn't do anything much more beyond that.

The other part was learning how to-- it became a family. A lot of the dancers ended up marrying musicians and stagehands. I know people -- actually the line captain she was dating the cellist. For something like 18 years they dated. And there was another woman—no, she doesn't live here—she dated-- we called him "The Button Man." He was the guy that worked on stage right that would affect that Austrian curtain that opened in the beginning of Radio City. He would handle all that and the elevators. And they dated for almost 22 years. People got married, but I guess they felt there was no reason to. I don't know. That was a long time ago.

Well, they didn't have time.

You didn't really have a lot of time.

Tell me about your makeup; how you learned to apply that kind of stage makeup.

Oh, that's funny. For some reason I knew how to do that and I don't know why. I think I learned in dance school or something. I just knew how to do that. And I remember the first day we were there. We came in early. And Sharon was sitting—they called them alleys. In the dressing room there were—let's see -- 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 -- 30 girls in one room. There were 36 girls in the line. There were 24 in one room and 12 in the other room. The small dressing room was the senior girs dressing room and 12 girls were there. And at 18, those senior girls looked like older women to me. And it turned out that some of them were—my line captain was 52 years old. She had just been pulled out of the line. We were the babies by far. There was a tremendous age span from about 18 to 62. And my line captain, she was in her early 50s at that time.

But I love the fact that a 62-year-old woman could do those kicks.

Oh, yeah. And you can. If you take care of yourself and exercise, you can.

Fantastic. So tell me more about the alleys.

You call them alleys in the dressing room and you sit in rows of about five girls and you each have your mirror with the little lights on it. When it was time for us to get ready for the show, I was putting on my makeup and we were all getting ready. And they give you a countdown for the show. Like over the loud speaker you'll hear 30 minutes to show time, half-hour to show time. That means you better be in your dressing room and if you're not, you're in trouble because they're going to come around and check it. And if you're late for a half-hour, that's ground for

termination. If you do that once, twice, three times, you're gone. That's a very stringent rule. And then you get a 15-minute call, you get a ten-minute, you get a five-minute, you get three-minutes and you get places. That means it's over.

So we're getting those calls and I'm getting myself ready and I'm in costume. And then all of a sudden we hear ten minutes. And my girlfriend Sharon goes can somebody help me? And we look down there and she's just staring in the mirror with this white clean, shiny face. Everybody's like, oh, my god. So all the seniority girls jumped up and ran over there and just started throwing makeup on her.

So you would learn by doing and by watching and by asking or just by dumb luck like I had. And I don't know why or how, but I did. Yeah, those kinds of skills; it's funny, you take them for granted until you show up and you learn eventually how to put makeup on. It's not just putting makeup on like you would for straight. It's to read features and with certain facial features how you have to highlight and de-emphasize and open your eyes. I have very heavy-lidded eyes. So my eyelashes didn't really go along the eyelash line. They went almost to the middle of the eyelid to give the impression that the eye is more wide open. Yeah, you can learn that. You just figured it out as you got there.

I want to know more about your favorite show, if you can remember.

That I did?

Some of the favorite ones that you remember that you enjoyed doing.

At Radio City?

Yes. And why you decided to leave Radio City

Okay. My favorite show at Radio City?

And your favorite costume.

Oh, my favorite costume, now when I look back on it, it wasn't the prettiest costume, but it seemed to be at that time the most glamorous costume to me. And it was because at Radio City we weren't allowed to have high leg lines. That's what they called them. And that means that your costume had to come right to where if you sit down, that's where the leg line was. Well, everybody ended up looking like they had these short little legs because the costume came down so long. Well, these costumes for some reason were just cut a little bit differently than the rest.

They were a little bit higher and they were flesh-colored and they had a rhinestone belt and they had this hat with big wide feathers. And we never wore stuff like that. Our costumes were more utilitarian. They were kind of spandex and bright colors for themes. But this costume I loved because I felt very glamorous and kind of showgirl-ly in it. And it was a lot of fun.

My favorite show—there were a couple actually. It all depended on music. And the costume for my favorite number was hideous as far as I'm concerned. It was pathetic. But we did a number to "Big Country." That tune is just magnificent and we did a number to that. And a lot of the number was done in a set, which really means without music. So most times you heard taps. And we did sounds that simulated horses running and different tempos and things like that. And the costumes were these white stretch pants with stirrups that had—we looked like palomino ponies with patches of black sequins all over. Then we had different colored polyester silk-looking shirts; and they were ugly colors, like fuchsia and bright orange. And then we had a necktie that we wore and a cowboy hat. And we had spats so it looked like we had boots on. It was just awful. But the number I just loved so much. That was my favorite number.

My opening show was a salute to Hawaii. And we wore ballet slippers and flesh-colored leotard tops, tank tops, with a white fringe, long skirt that looked like a hula skirt and these little flowers around our head. And I'm sitting there doing these Hawaiian arm movements saying, This is my opening show at Radio City? So I was not thrilled about that. But the show was magnificent. So there was that.

And the other number I liked was a number that was a combination of "Too Darn Hot" and "Baby It's Cold Outside." And that's when we were getting really hip and starting to do really great stuff. So that was another number I really liked because we had two costume looks then, which was unusual.

How often did your parents come in to see the show?

Not often, which I'm so disappointed about.

But your mother probably really enjoyed it.

And my dad did too. He loved it. They were so proud. And that made me feel good. So he just kept saying are you going to be all right with this? And I said -- well, I didn't think beyond then. I just said you know what? I'm going to take this for all it's worth and enjoy it and see what

happens. And so that's what I did.

You danced to live music.

Oh, yeah. We danced to a fantastic orchestra, a symphony orchestra. That was another thing I loved: every day at half-hour, they would play the overture. I would just listen to the overture and every day be so thankful to be able to hear that. Boy, they played some beautiful stuff, classical overtures. If I'm not mistaken, I don't know, it was a big orchestra, probably 60 pieces. And it was a pit. The audience was way far away. The pit was in front of us. And the beautiful music that they played. So I used to love the overture, hearing that.

That's great. How did you decide to leave?

That brings me to 1971. My girlfriend Sharon and I got our first vacation where we were able to go—now we're adults. Our parents were going to let us go somewhere, not just come home for the week. And we went on a cruise. Six of us went on a Royal Caribbean cruise to I think the Bahamas or the West Indies. We had two weeks' vacation. So we went on this cruise. And after the cruise we decided to come to California. I invited my girlfriend to come to California with me to visit my cousin Joyce. My cousin Joyce is a first cousin. My mother's brother married my father's sister. Yeah, everybody's got a family-- visualize it. And they had four children. And my cousin Joyce was one of those children who was married and had her family. And then my aunt and uncle also lived in California. I had never been west; that was the period of time of "go west, young man," and everybody after high school was traveling. I know this is like very long-winded, isn't it?

Wherever you have to stop, just let me know. This is not long-winded. I love everything you've said so far and I want to know every detail.

Okay. So we went to visit Joyce in California. And three days before we left she said, Patty, I'd love to take you to see Las Vegas. It's so close and God knows when you're going to get out this way again; you didn't make those kinds of trips often. You saved for those things. And my girlfriend was there. And she said, Sharon, would you like to do that? And we were like, yeah, okay, that would be cool. And she said, well, it's about a five-hour drive. We can go for two days and come back and then you can go home. But I just think you need to see it while you're here. And what a time it was. Were you here in '71? Oh, my god, what a wonderful time it was here. I

feel so old when I say that.

We're going to stop right here. We're going to have to plan another get together because I want to hear about the shows that you danced in here. Is that okay with you? Wonderful. I'm stopping it.

This is Claytee White. I'm with Pat Merl. This is our second session. It is October 28th, 2008. And we're in her office at UNLV. [Pat is currently the Director of Outreach for the International Gaming Institute.]

So how are you this time?

I'm great. Thank you.

Wonderful. The last time we left off as you were about to drive into Las Vegas. But before we start that, as I looked back over what we had talked about before, I don't know anything about your brother. And I'd love for you to tell me about him before we get to Las Vegas.

Okay. That opens up a whole other thing here in regards to my family. My brother is eight years younger than I am. And he is my blood brother. And the reason why I say that is I also have four sisters that are not adopted. They are foster sisters. And my family took in foster children most of my childhood, but these sisters stayed with us. As a matter of fact, three of them are still here. My other sister just passed away recently from breast cancer, which was pretty sad, at 41. But my other sisters are still here. So there's a tight-knit family of a lot of women and then my brother when he was a young man. But my sisters are younger than my brother.

Okay. So Karl with a K -- that's important. He always tells everybody that's with a K. That's the German spelling. Karl ended up kind of working as a tree surgeon. So he was working for the town of Westfield for a period of time. He ended up moving with his wife. He got married pretty soon after high school and moved away with his wife to Anchorage, Alaska, where they decided to have their family and spend their time.

He spent a few years there and met with an unfortunate accident. He was hit by a train and survived, but has a brain injury. He's physically disabled, but not like you would expect. That's kind of miraculous, too. Funny enough, he had a donor's card. And he was in the hospital on life support. And my sister-in-law went to the hospital and they said if he survives he'll be paralyzed

from the neck down and we don't know what kind of mental capacity he's going to have because his brain is pretty damaged. And she said, well, we're going to see if he survives. And they said he's donating his organs. If we're going to harvest the organs, we need to—she said forget about that; this isn't happening.

She called my parents and they flew out to Anchorage and spent -- my brother was in a coma for about three months. And they spent that time with him there. And I have always been known to be real chicken when it comes to stuff like that in respects that I'm not very strong when people I really love get hurt. If I have to be there, if there's nobody else around, I'll be there. But, otherwise, coping wasn't easy for me in that respect. And I was working Atlantic City at the time. And my folks went. And we didn't speak actually for about three months. We couldn't.

And it turned out that he survived. They brought him back home to New Jersey. Through the years, my dad kind of rehabilitated him because he was a medic in the World War II. So he just kept working with my brother and working with my brother. And if you met my brother now, you'd say, which everybody does, what a great guy, what a great guy your brother is. He seems a little slow, but he's got a great sense of humor. He is disabled in the regards that he has disability with his arm. He can't move his arm so well. And, also, he has some brain damage that's noticeable once you really get to know him. But he's doing okay. And he actually right now is living in the condo with my mom. I just moved her down to Florida. So they're living together.

His son he didn't see after the accident. His son was three years old when he had the accident. The wife kind of left my brother. And my mom was so angry at that. And I kind of went -- I don't know -- how can we judge something like that, that trauma? Who knows? You can't ask somebody so young. They were very young. I think my brother was about 30. So you can't ask somebody that young just to give up their lives because of a misfortune. It was sad because my brother was very close with his son. But his son now lives in New Jersey and my brother sees him. And they're very close like they used to be when he was a child. And the son is musically gifted. He plays fantastic guitar and sings and works. So we get to visit him.

So everybody's happy. Everything's turned out well. And my brother is alone in his life, but he has some great friends and a good life right now.

That's great. Now, tell me why he never went to college.

He didn't want to. I think my dad had dreams that my brother was never going to be able to fulfill in the respects that it wasn't his personality. It was something he was not interested in. And he did poorly in high school. And I think my dad just kept hoping. By then I was already gone and set in my career. It's funny just how things turn out and how you expect things to turn out. My dad just always did that. He had hoped that he would give his son what he didn't have as parents do. So he just didn't go. He wasn't able to go because he just barely got through high school when he went out and just started working. And that was that.

Now, we're on the road to Las Vegas. What is the year?

1971.

You've been visiting.

Well, we went on vacation, my girlfriend that I auditioned with. We decided to go on vacation. I think I mentioned we went on a cruise. And after the cruise we flew out to L.A. to visit my cousin and spent the time with her. And then she decided the last couple of days, uh-oh, I've got to get you to Las Vegas because in 1971 18-year-old girls didn't really travel across the country all that often. And she said, I don't know if you'll ever get back here, but you've got to see the city. So we drove to Las Vegas. She was talking all about how it was the diamond in the desert. She said, Patty, we'll be driving for hours and hours and you'll see nothing, nothing. It'll be so boring. It'll be dark. We drove in the night. And then, all of a sudden, there will be this twinkling diamond and there it is. You come over the mountain and there it is. So we're waiting and talking. And sure enough, I see the twinkling little diamond. And now I get excited because my cousin is saying this is like no place you've ever been before.

So funny how I was just looking on the website—I just found it as a result of this interview—called The Ashtray Project for all the hotel/casinos in Nevada. And I wanted to look at some of those old hotels because I had just had lunch with a friend of mine and he said, Pat, was it that way because we were young or was it that way because it was that way? And I said I'm still trying to figure that out. I think it's a little of both. But I think it really was that way in the respect [that this] magical moment in time, that this will never ever [be seen] again. I looked at some of those hotels.

And we stayed at the Landmark, which doesn't even exist anymore. Right on that corner is

the beginning of the walk bridge over to the Convention Center. There's an elevator there. And that's where the Landmark stood. It was at that time the tallest hotel in the city. I think it was about ten stories. Everybody would go to the top of the landmark at night and have a drink and look out over a panoramic view of the city. Well, we didn't even have a city. Basically, in the day it was gorgeous because you got to see the mountains. But at night it was little lights here, little lights there. I could tell you and you could see because the Strip wasn't even that long then. But it was beautiful. You could see the stars then, too. There was not so much light defusing them.

So we went up to the Landmark. That's where we stayed. We went up and we had a drink and talked about what we were going to do for the two nights we were here. And we went to see Bobbie Gentry [American singer-songwriter]-- I remember that -- down in the showroom. And I just loved the show because the showrooms then were very intimate, really. They seated a lot of people, but they didn't seat thousands of people. And no one was ever that far from the stage. And so I remember enjoying the intimacy of the showroom and seeing a big-name star at that time and just saying, god, this is fantastic. I can't wait to see the Strip because I know we're way on the outskirts of the Strip, which we were at that time. But then when you look at it, it's like a block and a half. Everything is so relative.

So the next day I looked out the window and I saw the Stardust. Now, my cousin Joyce is my first cousin. Her mother is my father's sister. And her father was my mother's brother. So this was like a real close first cousin. And my aunt and uncle, if I were with them, neither parent worried. Everything was wonderful. And she said we have to get to the Stardust. I want you to see some of these shows, Patty. You can work six days a week. You get a day off. You can be out at the pool in the daytime. You only do two shows at night. And from what I gather they make twice as much as you make right now. So I was like, oh, that's exciting. It was just another feel.

Now, Radio City is not theater. It's a music hall, actually. And so it's a cross between theater and production nightclub, supper club. So we really didn't fit anywhere. If you were a Rockette, it came more towards the technical side, technical training, things like that than a lot of the nightclub performers, but not as much as ABT, American Ballet Theater, and all these other dance companies. I told you about the leg line and the modesty and it was a family show and

those kinds of things. And we did stuff that was to George Gershwin. And then I find out later we did stuff to George Gershwin with Donn Arden, but just with a little bit, a little less costume on, a little more feathers. So that was the only change and the only difference. So I wanted to see what that was about.

Well, my cousin Joyce said I just want to let you know one thing. They work topless here. But, Patty, you don't even notice it. Well, I bet she didn't notice it. You don't notice. Okay. This I got to see. And she said, no, you don't. And she said the costumes are so beautiful that you really don't even see that anybody's topless. And I said okay.

So we went to see the Trop show, Folies Bergere, which is still playing now. It's a glimmer of what it was. Jubilee I think has maintained the integrity of the production pretty close to what it was when Donn Arden first conceived and directed it. It's changed a little bit. But I mean as far as remaining true, I think they've done a good job of it. Folies Bergere is really a far cry from what it was. But I remember that the showgirls were stars in their own rights then. Now, the terminology showgirl and then dancer—when people would say, oh, you're a showgirl, I would get highly insulted and say, no, I took dance classes; I'm a dancer. And then the showgirls—oh, you're a showgirl—they would say, yes, I am and they were so proud of being a showgirl because they were the stars and they got paid more money than we did. And I remember saying why do the showgirls get paid more money than we do. We get up in the day and take dance class. The showgirls are out by the pool showing. They're just present. And then I was told it's called extra talent. So the fact that they were topless means they got paid extra money to be topless. And they were kind of the stars of the show. Now, that whole nudity thing came from Paris. And they're called models and nudes and they are a lot taller than a lot of the showgirls were here. And the difference was they didn't move around as much as our showgirls did. I know the models stood perfectly still through the whole number. And then the showgirls would be the ones that would parade.

So we didn't have even models. We had showgirls. But we had two famous showgirls. And I wish that I could remember their names. I was trying and trying. I think one was Marge Grayson and the other I can't remember her name now. I will because they were very well-known. Anybody that's worked around the Trop will know who they are. And they were very well

endowed, like extremely well endowed. Like their endowments would enter the stage before they would when they were coming from the wings. And this I remember. When you perform you have a bookend or an opposite. And wherever your opposite is, you better be there or vice versa or somebody is not where they're supposed to be. Somebody's making a big mistake. And these two girls were bookends. And they would come out from opposite sides of the stage and come on to the stage. And I remember just being astounded because they were so well endowed. And then I found out later that there was a lot of silicone and enhancements going on long before breast implants. And a lot of these girls had these enhancements. As a matter of fact, you probably were most likely not to be a lead dancer if you weren't able or interested in working topless and interested in really developing yourself further physically to do that. So that was a limitation set on a lot of dancers. So the leads were women who were willing to go topless. And, by the way, I don't see anything wrong with any of that. Then they were also highly trained, they were Adagio dancers. They really did have a lot of training. And they should have been leads and principals.

So I saw those girls and I remembered being taken aback and just going, oh, my god, I don't know if I could do something like that. And she said, well, you don't have to. Other people are dressed. It was the beginning and I only see these gorgeous costumes. So after I saw the Folies Bergere and I talked to my cousin a little bit more about the money that she heard the people made, I said I want to go audition while I'm here just to get a feel for what this is like and what they're looking for. Now, Radio City was my first job, the same with my girlfriend. So neither one of us knew anything but that audition that we went for at Radio City. And that audition at Radio City you were not concerned about your makeup or your hair as much you were concerned about being able to do the choreography and the things that were required of you and being the right height. You didn't think much about glamour. Even though the Rockettes are glamorous in their own way, you just didn't concern yourself with that.

So I tried to get an audition at the Stardust. It turned out they wouldn't audition anyone unless they were looking for someone or putting on a formal audition. So I did say, well, could I speak to somebody who works in the show? And I spoke to the Adagio team. Funny enough, Jillian Hrushowy is still here. I'm not sure where she is. She used to be with the Legends in Concert. She's still here. And Jillian was one of the first performers I spoke to in town, and her

husband, Mitch. So I asked Jillian about a few things and got some feel for stuff. And I liked her very much, that wonderful English accent and that warmth. So I said I think I'm going to check this out at some point.

So we went on and saw a few other shows. And I never really got to see the Lido show, which I really wanted to see. But we didn't get to do that because we were only here a few nights. We talked about the visit and I said I've got to come back; I've got to come back.

Was your girlfriend interested in coming back as well?

Sharon? Sharon was the kind of person: I'd say, come on, Sharon, we're going here, and she'd say okay. So I didn't really ask Sharon. I just kind of knew what I was going to do. And she was always welcome to come along. So she was just there and enjoying everything, but not thinking like I was. My brain was going a hundred miles an hour.

So we went into the hotel and we got our sleep. We got up in the morning and went for breakfast and we started packing. And I just said how am I going to do this? How can I possibly just get back here a little bit to check this stuff out? And all of a sudden I kind of sat on the bed and said, Joyce, I'm staying. And she said, Patty, your mother's going to kill me. And I said, well, no, I'll talk to my mom. But she said you've got to go back to work. And Sharon is like Pat. So I said I know I have to go back to work, but I have two weeks' leave of absence yet. I'm not due back to work for another two weeks. So, Sharon, I'm going to write you my notice letter. Would you bring it back to work with you when you go and give them my notice? Because I know that there's thousands of girls waiting in the wings for that job, so it's not any hardship for them for me to be leaving, especially with a notice? I just all of a sudden went, "I need to be here." So I didn't think about how I was going to make it. I didn't think about how much money I had. I didn't think about anything.

Isn't it great when you just know that you're right?

Yes. And my cousin is like, Patty. And I said, no, it'll be fine. Well, I had a credit card. I had about $300. I had a little suitcase with my overnight clothes. And I figured what could happen? I had no place to live. I had nothing. And my cousin said are you sure? And I said, yeah, go ahead. I'll be fine. So she left. And I called my mom. And my mom was like, Patty, you're alone there. You don't know anybody. And I said I know, I know, but for some reason I'll be fine.

And so I hung up the phone and it was time to check out of the hotel. And I looked out the window and there was the Stardust I was facing. And I went, holy shit, I need a car because it's the middle of the desert. It's blazing hot. I remember that. And just thinking of walking from the hotel to the Stardust looked like miles and miles because there was nothing else there. The Somerset Shopping Center, which is still there and I think still called the Somerset Shopping Center—why do I remember that? That's where I got my car. That's what I'm telling you. When it's right it's right. I was looking and said I need a car. And I started to look in the phone book. And then I looked up and it was either Avis or Hertz, one of those big car companies, sitting right there. I could see it halfway to the Stardust. And I said, I can make it that far.

So I got down there with my suitcase. I went down there and rented a car, a little red Volkswagen—I'll never forget it—with my credit card. And I said to the guy, where do people live around here? And he said, well, they just built this really nice apartment complex. He said, oh, in the southeast they built this really nice apartment complex. As a matter of fact, it's totally furnished. They might have something there you could go in. And I said really? And he said yeah. It's called the Warren House Apartments and it's on Sierra Vista. And it's still there.

So I got in my little car. That's when I first saw the Broadway Mall, remember? It's not the Boulevard, but the Broadway Mall. And I came down DI [Desert Inn]. Then I found Sierra Vista. And I got an apartment on my credit card. I had my rental car. And I said, okay, Pat, you've got a week to figure this out. And I called my girlfriend Sharon. I said, Sharon, I got an apartment. Think about it. If you want to come, you can come. I'm going to get a car. I'm going to set up planning on you coming. You don't have to if you don't want, but I think it'll be a great opportunity and a really exciting experience for us. And I'll let you know how things are going. And she was like, okay, I'll let you know. She had our apartment in New York City that she had to find a roommate for. And I said did you get a roommate? And she said I don't know. I said, well, ask Linda Lauter. She's always been asking about the apartment. Sure enough, Linda Lauter moved in with her not two weeks later. I just started looking around.

Oh, I just remembered my first job here. I worked for Cashman Photo. And I was the worst camera girl they ever had. And they didn't hesitate to tell me that at the sales meeting. But they really liked me anyway.

So what happened was I wanted to get an audition, but I didn't know how to get an audition. In Las Vegas, you have trade papers that tell you when the auditions are. I wasn't in that network. I didn't know where the dance studios were. I was trying to figure all that out. So I said I've got to get something. So I asked around. Those were the days when Forest Duke had a column in the Las Vegas Review-Journal. And he was the entertainment columnist. It was Forest Duke's column that would tell you where all the auditions were. So I found this out from people and started looking and realized that I was in new territory, something that I wasn't familiar with at all. So I said I better just get some money coming in fast.

And I don't know how I did it; oh, I know, I met this really nice young guy who was talking about being in Vegas. We were talking. I don't know where I met him. I can't remember. But he said, oh, if you need a job, everybody gets a job at Cashman Photo because, you know, you don't get paid salary. You work on commission. It's real easy. And you can kind of come and go when you want. And the hours are flexible and it seems to work for a lot of performers. So I said, okay, I'll try to do that.

So I got the job. And my location was Caesars Palace. So I got put in a really nice place. Remember those old costumes, the Caesars Palace costumes before they put these little cheesy ones on? I wore one of the black ones. I got a picture in it with my long hair and learned how to take those photos. See, these are the things where I'm sworn to secrecy.

I don't blame you.

And I learned about selling photos in the Las Vegas showroom. Now, we didn't wear sparkly earrings or carry those big trays around. You just had your camera. But you learned the sales pitch, which I learned very well. And this is when they were in the showroom at these big, long tables with probably a hundred people sitting at a table. And you would get five tables, six tables like that. And you would approach every single person back and forth. Well, you would take a picture. And the whole thing was you'd say, hi, you look wonderful tonight. Isn't it a wonderful night? Do you a little small talk. And then you would say I'd love to take a photo of you. And they'd say, oh, no, no, thank you. And I'd say, well, really if I take the photo, the only obligation you would have is to buy one photo—at that time it was five dollars—and that's it. So they said, oh, really? Yes. And you would just give me the deposit and I will come back with the photo

after the show.

So I would do that and keep taking all those photos. Then I would go into the photo lab during the show, which was an hour and a half. And we would produce more photos than anybody had ever seen in their lives because if there were two people at the table, we wouldn't just get one eight-by-ten, we would get two eight-by-tens because we would say, well, here's your one eight-by-ten, but wouldn't you like an eight-by-ten? And then we would get two five-by-tens. And then we would get two wallet photos. And then we'd get two vignette eight-by-tens. It went on and on. Before you knew it you had a stack of photos like this. And your line was here are your photos and you show them the eight-by-ten photo. But that is in the middle of this pack. So they have to go through the wallet photo and the five-by-tens and the three-by-fives, all these vignettes and all these different kinds of photos for two people. And they get to the eight-by-ten and they say this is wonderful, yes, thank you very much. And they would take that.

That's not what you're supposed to do. What you're supposed to do is put this thing down, put the eight-by-ten photo on the top, and you're supposed to say here is your photo and your balance is $95. And I couldn't do that. And what would happen is they would bank on the fact that people would be so embarrassed and so shocked that they would just shut up and give you the money. And I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it. So I would say here are your photos. And they would look. Isn't this wonderful? And they'd take their photo. And I'd say for the package your balance is $95, but you really only have to take the one eight-by-ten.

So I starved to death in their job because I never sold any photos. And the Cashman Brothers said, Pat, you're the worst photographer we've ever had, not at taking pictures, but you are a lousy salesperson. I don't know why we have you here, but if you're willing to starve while working with us, that's fine.

Well, I lucked out and I auditioned for a job. My first job -- I was just looking on the website—Line Renaud produced a show in Lake Tahoe at a hotel called Kings Castle. Line Renaud was one of the principal singers, the "chanteuse," from France in Casino de Paris. She got older and retired; she's done film and she's done recordings. She's a beautiful singer. As she retired, she started producing shows as a hobby. She was married to a famous composer from France. So she produced the show called Flesh, which was in Lake Tahoe. And I ended up going

up there with my girlfriend who joined me. And we went up to Tahoe and we did our first show with Claude Thompson who was the choreographer. He's still alive, Claude. And Line's still alive. She was the producer. We had a magnificent time in a magnificent area of Nevada. Oh, my god, that is just sensational. So we were there just about six months. We enjoyed working there tremendously and living there and the experiences there. I can go on forever.

We went to L.A. to audition. We heard another famous producer in Las Vegas was auditioning. We went into Los Angeles for the audition. Here's when we learned about what it took to go to a Las Vegas audition and get the job. We walked into the audition. Everybody looked at us because we weren't dressed like everybody else. We had our little leotards that went down to our legs. We had our solid flesh-colored tights. We had our little character shoes on. All the other girls had a tank top, two-piece costumes way high up on their hips, and everybody wore boots, knee-high boots, black, brown, red, you name it. No one danced in dance shoes for rehearsals or auditions. They all wore these big high boots and lots of stage makeup. And Sharon and I had just a little bit on, a little day makeup. We were there and our hair was all pulled back. Everybody else had all these hairstyles, these big teased hairstyles. I mean we looked like oddities no doubt about it. They wanted to know where we were from.

So we walked in there. Barry Ashton is the producer. And it was Ashton Koshman Productions. And Barry had quite a lot of shows on the Las Vegas Strip. He came up to us and he said I hope you dance better than you look. And I remember that. And I said, ooh, I hope so too. So we got the job. We auditioned. We got the job. And he said don't let me ever see you look like this again. When you come to my rehearsals, you come appropriately dressed, you come in full stage makeup and you come with your hair combed. And I don't ever want to see you out of stage makeup again for however long I ever know you. And I worked for Barry for quite a few years after that. So we were shaken.

Even during the day if you're going out to lunch with a girlfriend, you were expected to wear --

In this town you had to watch. If you worked for certain producers and you were going to go somewhere where someone from the casinos might see you or someone from the public that you might encounter might see you, you needed to be glamorous. You needed to be a showgirl. It was

a branding almost. When you worked for Barry -- and Barry had a reputation. Oh, my god, you're an Ashton girl, you're an Ashton girl. It was a wonderful thing to be and something to be extremely proud of. But the Ashton girls, they were -- the dancers and performers don't do that now. I mean we did that with all the performers. At the Stardust we did the same thing. We dressed nicely. But Barry—that show ended up being at the Sands, in the lounge at the Sands. It was called the London Playgirl Revue.

And one other reason why he chose Sharon and me—yes, our skills, our dance abilities were there. We also looked like plain Janes, but we cleaned up well. When we put on our stage makeup, we looked like showgirls. But they also wanted people who had never worked in Vegas before. Vegas was that small of a town that people recognized showgirls that had been around too long or long enough. And they told Barry, we want fresh faces. See, this brings back all these kinds of memories about what fresh faces really means. Who could possibly think that the person in the audience said I'm so sick of seeing that dancer? It wasn't the people who were paying that got sick of seeing the performers. It was the maître d'. It was the hotel manager. It was the entertainment director. It was all the people who worked in the hotels. There's other theories as to why people needed to be changed out and why they wanted fresh faces. But that was more for them. I don't like anybody in this show, but maybe in the next show I'll have a girlfriend. And that kind of happened a lot in the business. So we were the fresh faces.

And this is a lounge show. And there were probably I'm thinking about 15 people. That lounge, which seated maybe 350, had a turntable on the stage. Louis Prima worked opposite our show in a lounge. That's the caliber of talent. Vic Damone sang in the lounge at the Dunes. I mean the talent was not only in the showrooms. The lounges were just amazing. So Louis Prima, his band would finish and we'd be standing on the turntable. And the lights would go out. The curtain would open. The turntable would turn. The curtain would close. And there would be the show. Tessie O'Shea, who was also a very famous English musical performer, she came. She was a star of the show. Trisha Novalotsav. Stars from England came over. And we were the production company behind them.

So we had the pleasure of doing that for just about a year, the both of us. And we learned about what it took to be a Las Vegas performer. You were strongly encouraged -- actually, it was

in your contract -- that you would enter the showroom, go through the showroom in full costume and makeup and your evening gown -- I wore evening gowns to work right up until -- I don't know -- about 1974. 1975 I was still wearing evening gowns and full costume and full makeup, stage makeup, and hairstyles.

So now, this was an evening gown from your personal wardrobe?

Yes.

Are we talking about to the floor?

Yes. We dressed to the tens, not to the nines. We dressed. Yeah, we had to take command of a room. Your job was you walk in that room and everybody better turn their head. And what would happen is we would create a buzz. People would say there are the theatricals; those are the showgirls. That was Barry's way of marketing his show and his caliber of performer. It was the casino's way of saying there's the glamour. You know, you could find stars sitting at the bar in front of the lounge talking. You could see that. You didn't need to talk to them. It was all alive and you were immersed in real entertainment, really immersed because you could see performers everywhere around you all the time. You were encouraged to frequent the places you worked whether socially but always to look the part. So we had to come for what was called the half-hour call. Well, we'd have to come a little bit before half-hour to spend a little time walking around the casino or maybe go into the coffee shop and have a cup of coffee or have a drink at the bar. Whatever you wanted that was fine. And just enough time for the people to start lining up. And then they would see you walk through that showroom. They weren't seated yet, but you would pass by the maître d' and you'd say, hi, Tony, how are you? Oh, that's the showgirl. And you'd go in. And it was like that everywhere. You'd find the showgirls everywhere.

What did that feel like?

That's I think what made it also magical because you were personified. When you were on stage, people you encountered you would connect with. That's the same with the lounge performers. When people went in to see Louis Prima, they loved when Louis said, hey, Jackie, how are you? And Jackie would say, yeah, yeah, I saw Tony in the—they'd do that stuff and people were connecting. And there was a personal thing about it. They loved the show, but they knew you and you were a person. I wasn't Pat, but I was the Ashton showgirl Pat. And they loved that. And

that was what Vegas had that it doesn't have now at all.

So at the end of the show, would you then go back into the casino?

Usually. They kind of encouraged people to hang around as much as they could. That's where a lot of the showgirls found their rich husbands. There are things where showgirls used to gamble between shows with different people and end up winning tons of money. A guy would say, here, gamble with this and throw my dice. They'd throw the dice. Play with his hundred dollars. People would walk away with tons of money just from somebody giving them a hundred-dollar chip to play and just be at the table and have fun. It was all that. It was all that. Now you don't hear sounds of human voices. You don't hear laughter. You don't hear excitement. You hear nothing but racket and electronic sounds. And it's just so static and so cold. So these are the things that I go, no, it was better then. Even though I was younger, it was better then.

Compare working in a Las Vegas show to working in Radio City Music Hall as a Rockette.

In Las Vegas you had a company manager. And you worked and you were disciplined. And people were there and making sure you did your job and you were proud of what you did. But at Radio City there was a camaraderie, which I kind of mentioned. I found that only in road shows after Radio City. When you're on the road with a group of people, suddenly they were your extended family. So Radio City was a lot more personal. There was a lot more camaraderie. And there was a lot more passion for the art and for the effort. And you lived it. And why did you live it? Because you lived it. Twelve hours a day you were doing it. And that was first and foremost before everything. So I found my life became a lot more fun here. I got out having the day off just to do whatever I wanted, to walk around and be with friends and take classes and things like that. I had more of a life of my own, a social life and friends that way. And the show became a part of my life, but it wasn't just my life. The industry was my life. So I found that.

And I found that people were different. The band was a little bit different. The orchestra at Radio City, they were all family men. It was just that they were more staid and more professional, where the nightclub and lounge and showroom musicians were more party kind of guys, more jazz type of musicians. So, a different flavor.

The other part of it was that Radio City was all there was; in the nightclubs and in the lounges, you started to learn about the industry, how big the industry was. No one talked about

getting another job. When's my next contract? Who hires this? Am I too tall to work for this guy? None of that. But when it came near time for the contract to come to an end, a lot of people were talking about it, where the auditions were. Oh, I hear Minsky's got a tour going through Playboy. Maybe you'll fit in there. I know somebody. And the networking was intense when you were working with one another. So you were kind of competing against each other, but you were always your own entity. And there was no getting around that. That didn't change.

And the money was better, but no security. When you're done with your contract, you're done with your contract. It doesn't mean Barry's ever going to hire me again. And usually you auditioned for every job you get. So you have to really time your auditions. And you hope that a show opens around the time that your show is closing. You can't quit your contract because the show's closing. So a lot of times performers would find themselves out of work for periods of time while they were looking for other work.

That's another thing. I was never out of work. It's just amazing. For six years I worked straight. And then finally I just said I've got to go home and see my family because I was always afraid to leave. When there was a job, I wanted to take it. And then after a while what happens is the different circuits get to know you and you don't have to audition anymore.

Did your parents ever come here to see you in that six-year period?

No. No. That was a time where you didn't get on a plane and fly that far and spend that kind of money.

Did you meet any of the European showgirls?

Oh, yeah.

Were they still under the kind of contract where they were here for a certain number of months and then they would go back to Europe?

They had visas. They were here on work visas. Yeah. The Lido actually was a lot European, not probably as much when I was there in 1977 as it was when it first came over in the 50s and 60s. But there were a lot of European girls. And they all worked on visas. But usually, I'd say 95 percent of them ended up marrying an American man and staying here. I think that really affected our population and our mix of our population were the Europeans that came in. A lot of the acts were European as well. So, yeah, mostly English, some French girls. I think we had one

Brazilian girl, one South American girl there. That was it because the shows came from Paris and the Parisian shows were cast predominantly English and French. But the English girls are the ones that came over because of the dance mistresses that booked these girls.

Like Madame Bluebell?

Like Madame Bluebell. Madame Bluebell worked with Donn Arden. There were the Bluebells and the Arden Boys. As Donn became the director for the Clarical family, which is the Lido de Paris, that show, that brand, he was the director-choreographer. He was not the producer. Then he would work with Bluebell. And Bluebell's name came to the show. And the Bluebells didn't mean anything in Europe. Everybody said, oh, you're a Bluebell. Well, to me, okay, I'm a Bluebell. That means Madame Bluebell is a person. And that means I'm not topless. Bluebells are not topless. Well, they're showgirls and they're Bluebells and they're topless. Okay. So what does it mean? Madame Bluebell, she branded the female dancers in the show and picked those girls and had that kind of look that she wanted just as Donn Arden did. I don't know the name of the female troupe or the male troupe like at Casino de Paris. I don't know how that worked. I just know that a lot of English girls were there as well. Then the Folies, had the same thing, a lot of English girls.

What was your favorite show during your years here before going on the road?

In Las Vegas?

Yes.

The last Lido show, the very last Lido [de Paris at Stardust] show before it closed. And I'm not saying the one that so many people remember that is not even reminiscent of Lido. But the one that opened—I think it was in 1978 because it was just sensational. The Lido was always sensational. I was always proud to be there. And I just loved it and I loved everything about it. But at that time I was there for an opening. I always wanted the experience of working with Donn Arden as he created a show, as a show was being born. And I was told by many people maybe you're better off not doing that. Donn could be an ogre. And I remember when he would come in to see the show. I joined the Lido from—I was in Hurray '76 at the Flamingo with Tibor Rudas, who was another famous producer at that period. He's the one that did the famous can-can number in the Folies Bergere with the Rudas Acro-Dancers. They were from Australia. And that number

was just breathtaking. That was just amazing. And so he put a show into the Flamingo and I was hired to work in the Flamingo. And from the Flamingo there was an opening at the Lido. And I took the opening job at the Lido. Now, this is in 1978.

And bouncing back to my girlfriend Sharon, she left here in—actually, the last time I saw Sharon was 1973. She just went off. Something happened. I don't know what happened. But we lost touch. And she went off. I didn't see her again. Then I heard there was an opening at the Lido. I went to audition and it turned out I was replacing Sharon. To this day I still don't know what happened. Something happened where she got a misunderstanding of what happened. I don't know. Just something happened in the relationship. And I was heartbroken about it. I spent a lot of time writing to her mom about it saying if you ever understand why, please let me know. She went off and got married and had a family and I replaced her. I remember my stomach dropped because I was like, oh, my god. And she said we have to get together for coffee. And I said absolutely. And we got together at JC Penney at the Broadway Mall. And we cried for about five hours and reminisced and talked and wondered where all the time went.

But I replaced her. The show had already been running; I got one of the worst spots in the show. And I remember the person who was teaching it to me. The person whose spot I got was moved into Sharon's spot. And I got this person's spot. And the line captain said to me I feel very sorry for you. This is one of the worst spots in the show, but Donn hated this girl and he would not give her a chance and he buried her in the back as much as he could, so at least you're here. And I was like, okay, fine, that's fine by me. You know, I'm here. I'm happy. So I did the show. And I loved it and I loved the modern twist on old themes, and the choreography and the staging. And it was different than Radio City because it wasn't as regimented. It flowed more. And the staging was like Bugsy Berkley. And everybody talked about that with Donn. He was just so brilliant with all of that. And I just wanted to see -- as I started looking and I was so tuned in to formations, I went, god, I would love to see this being developed, how this gets developed. And maybe someday I'll have that opportunity.

So Donn would come to see the show periodically. I had a male partner Tom, and I can't remember his last name, but his birthday was on the same day as mine. And we met each other on stage every night and we enjoyed dancing together. And I remember one night he said, oh, my

god, Don's out in the audience. Donn Arden's out in the audience, oh, my god. Oh, this is terrible. And I said, what's the matter? And he said, Donn keeps telling me it's time to quit. I could be fired anytime that Donn comes in here. Every time Donn comes somebody gets fired. This is all he's saying. And I was like you know what, Tom, I really can't get into all this because if Donn's going to fire me, I'd rather he just do it right now and get it over with it. If I'm going to go through that, I don't want to do this. So sure enough, Donn comes and there is disruption. He comes back and reprimands people. You're fat and you're old and you're this and you're that and get off my stage. That's what he used to do. And I was like this guy is nuts. I don't know if I want to do this. But I love this experience.

So through the time that the show ran, I had a tendency because of things changing so much at Radio City, to get kind of bored. After the second week I was like, okay, I know my spot and I just started looking around trying to pass the time and learning other people's spots. You know, I couldn't help it. If they were near me, I knew where they were going. So one day the company captain came up and said does anybody know the Russian dance? Does anybody know so-and-so's part in the Russian dance? There were swing girls. The show ran seven days a week. There were seven girls. Each day one girl had a day off. And the swing girl would jump into that position. So the swing girl would do six different positions plus her own. Well, she didn't have one, but she'd do the seven different positions. She couldn't do it and there were four groups and none of the swing girls could do it. And it was an important part. She was already doing one of the Russian dances. So I said, well, I think I can do it. I'm pretty sure. Well, my company captain said are you real sure? And I said, yeah, I'm pretty sure. Maybe if somebody ran down for five minutes and ran through it with me. So he said okay and he got the line captain to go down. He says run through it with her. And I said, yeah, I think I can do it. Let me see if I can fit in her costume. I fit in her costume. And I went out and did the number. Well, anytime they needed anybody extra after that he'd come up and say, well, do you know how to do this number? Well, yeah, I think so. So I got to kind of jump around. Even though I wasn't a swing and I wasn't getting paid for it, it broke the monotony for me.

So now it was time—see, this is the stuff I don't know if I should talk about. It was time to audition for the show, the new Lido. And I want to do this because I want to work with Donn.

Even if it's going to be horrendous, I want to get the experience. And we're all being told when auditions are. And at that point I didn't audition really for anybody. I got phone calls. Are you available? Are you available? Can you work? And I said I've been working here -- I guess it was at least six months, if not a year, and swinging all these spots. I never miss work. I'm an honest performer. Why should I have to audition? I was kind of insulted by it, not that I was doing any of that for that reason. And I said what is this all about? This is like a power trip or something and I don't know if I want to do this. So I just said I'm not auditioning. Forget it. I'll go somewhere else. So I didn't say anything. Everybody's supposed to sign up for the audition, and, sure enough, my company manager came to me and said you didn't sign up for the audition sheet. And I said, I don't think I'm going to audition, Michael. I just like let it go. What do you mean? And I said, I don't want to audition. I don't think I should have to audition. I don't want to put any pressure on anybody. I'm just going to get another job. If Donn doesn't know what I can do by now, he'll never know. And he says, well, but you don't understand. Donn hasn't seen you. I said Donn has seen me enough. Don's like an eagle eye. He can see anybody he wants to fire. He hasn't fired me. And you can tell Donn what I've done for the show; that I've worked very hard and that I've been here and that I'm a good performer and that I have faith in myself. So he says, okay, okay. So then he comes back and says you really need to sign up for the audition. And I said I'm not going to audition. I don't want to audition. Please just sign up and I want you to show up. Just come to the audition. I don't want to come to the audition. So back and forth. And I respected and liked Michael and I said, all right, I'll come to the audition. But I said, Michael, I will not audition just so you know, but for you I will come.

So I went. Sure enough, they call everybody on stage. Okay, girls, everybody come out on stage. And I'm like he thinks I'm going to do this. I said I'll go out on stage. And the minute the choreography starts I'm not doing it. I went out on stage and Madame Bluebell is checking everybody out and Donn's checking everybody out. Then all of a sudden, oh, Debbie, would you please do the first 12 counts of the audition. So Debbie does that. And everybody says, okay, let's give it a try. And I hear, Pat, would you come down here, please? I get called down. And another girl, Lori Palmer, come down here, please. Lori Palmer comes down. Have a seat, please. We didn't audition. And very few people from that cast stayed on. There's the moment where there's

just something—I don't know—if I listen to my inner self, something happens for me. I don't like it when I get out of touch with that.

That's right. And we all have that. And we don't listen to it enough.

I've stopped listening to it as much as I did when I was a kid. When I was a kid if something inside said you need to do this, I just did it because I just knew that's the way it was supposed to be.

And that's the way it is supposed to be.

I got the job. And Lori got the job. There was a pretty big cast overhaul. And I felt bad for a lot of the girls who did come for the audition. It's like if you don't want people, don't invite them. Just say you don't need to come for an audition. But I guess they wanted to give everyone the chance. So I got to do that show. And that's the show. That show changed my life.

So what was it like to see the show developed from the beginning?

Oh, my god, it was just sensational. The way he put the numbers together there would be groups of us. He would say, okay, dress group A. A, B and C were five-foot-seven and a half to five-foot-eight and a half. Then the next group was an inch taller. The next group was an inch taller or two inches or however the sizes were at the time. Group C was the shortest group. Group A was the tallest group of the dressed dancers, the Bluebells. And so he'd say Group A, you go with Rich. Group B go with Debbie. Group C go with this one. And we'd go in different rooms and we'd learn choreography to the same music, but we'd all learn choreography that was just a little bit different. And I know that, okay, this is what we're learning, but we must not be learning the same thing because they're in another room. And we'd all come together. And then we'd show each other what we learned.

And then Donn would say, okay, Group C, you know, stand over there and I want you to do that choreography, but I want you to come across the stage like this. And Group A you do this. And he'd start doing this stuff, staging, tell us where to be at what count and what time in the music with the choreography. And we'd all be doing a little bit different kind of choreography. And it just all happened. It all fit. It all worked. It was so exciting because at Radio City we were all doing the same thing, regimented thing. Now all this different movement and different costumes. It was just fabulous.

He would stage. Okay, here's your entrance number. Or show them an entrance step, Rich. So Rich would show us a step. Okay, you're going to do that 15 times until you get to your spot. And this was the moment that I knew that Donn liked me. All the Bluebells came in, half from stage left and half from stage right. And we crossed and we went around on the outside of the passarella and through and back onto the stage into the formation. He had us numbered out and he lined us all up. And he said, okay, do it and we did it. We all came to the formation where we were supposed to do the combination that we learned. We all stop. And he looks and he goes, huh, okay. Now he walks and he shuffles us around a little bit. Now we do it again. And we come out. Now I notice my position has changed. Okay. And he would always hold me back again. Well, long story short he wanted me to be front and center on the passarella. He figured that out until I got there. And when I realized that I was so excited, but I was frightened to death. And I went, oh, my god. So now it's time to do it and now I know where I'm going to end up. And everybody goes, oh, guess who Donn likes? Now they're riding with it. I said, okay, I'm going to do this right. So I come out there and I'm doing it. And I get to the edge and I go—and I completely blank out. I just stop. I didn't know my name. I didn't know the number. I didn't know anything. And I stood there and I went, oh, my god, I'm so sorry. I was like now what happens? And he howled. He thought that was hysterical, hysterical. That was a backhanded compliment for him I guess. Claytee, I could not remember the choreography even after that. He said everybody take a break. He was howling and I was like what's the step? What's the step? And I'm standing in the back and I'm telling Rich show me the step. It was gone. It was completely gone from my brain. Talk about mental blocks I was like this is it. I'll never remember that step again in my life.

And so that's what Donn Arden does to people, okay? But I remembered it. And I had some great spots in that show. And that show reached a level that it had never reached because that was that time when Frank Rosenthal was at the hotel. He was moving in his last shot at trying to work in that hotel without a gaming license. And he came in as the entertainment director. A lot of people thought that he would probably just come in and use that title and go on about his business. But he decided he was going to see what entertainment was all about and he got involved. The first time we met him was pretty close to opening.

Every morning you'd come into the showroom. You'd come in stage makeup—they're all the same—your flesh-colored, terribly uncomfortable elastic tights, three-inch heels, full makeup, full hairdo and you would be ready to go. And I think rehearsal used to start at eight for some reason, because I remember getting up when it was dark to go. Yeah, I think it was eight. You had to be ready to go. And the minute Donn walked in the door, you needed to be on stage. Nobody had to say, okay, Don's here; time to go. Like now you have to tell everybody what to do. Then we knew what to do. He better not catch us sitting there. If he says take a five-minute break, it didn't mean to sit down. It meant to figure out your choreography, practice, maybe go to the restroom, have a drink. But you needed to be getting better at what you were doing. And I think that's why he liked me because I was kind of obsessive compulsive. So I was always rehearsing and practicing.

But that was from New York.

No. Donn Arden.

I know. But that --

Oh, yes. All of this came from New York. That is the point. The awareness of people on stage, who they were, where they were, when they were there—all came from Radio City. The stamina came from Radio City. The ability to pick up very quickly came from Radio City. You didn't have to count things out. Halfway through rehearsal it was like, oh, Pat, would you reverse this combination to where the choreographer would do it one way and I'd do the stage left side, but I'd be learning it at the same time. Just abilities not because I was so special, but because of the training that I had and the situations I was put into.

So we were ready. And one morning Donn was very late. That was highly unusual. That had never happened that anyone knew of. People are starting to get concerned. I remember saying to somebody, god, I hope he's all right. And some of the older male dancers used to go, ah, so what? Who cares? Maybe if he's not all right, it would be better for us. You know, these little side remarks. And we're like I don't know.

So sure enough, we hear that—and we're all sitting waiting. Nothing gets out of control. We're all talking quietly. Sure enough, the showroom door opens and in walks Donn Arden, Frank Rosenthal and Allen Glick. Do you know who Allen Glick is? Okay. So Allen Glick was

the kind of figurehead for the Argent Corporation at the time that brought all the money in to get the thing going. And they all walked in single file. And Donn came—I don't know if anybody's ever talked about this. Donn came to his table. He would direct the show from king's row booth.

Most people don't know what king's row is because it probably doesn't exist in most showrooms anymore. But there was the pit. That was the closest to the stage down on the lower level. And then there was the next row that was on a riser above the pit, but there was nothing obscuring your vision, no one in front of you. That was king's row. And that center booth was always for the person who lost the most money or the person who had the most money. That's why he wanted me there. That's why he sat there and directed from there. That booth was the place. Everything had to look perfect from that booth. And he would direct over a microphone. So if he reprimanded you, it would be over the microphone. If he insulted you, it would be over the microphone. It was very cruel actually, the whole thing. But that's how it was.

So now he comes in that morning and he walks to that table. And Frank Rosenthal doesn't really introduce himself. But he says this is Mr. Allen Glick and the cast of the Lido show. Hello. Isn't that nice? Mr. Arden and Mr. Glick and I have been having a conversation and Mr. Arden has something he would like to say to you. And I need to say this because it's interesting what people did and how things were at that point in time and the perceived power of people. And Donn was a very powerful person to the dancers and to the performers and well respected and a brilliant genius. And he made Donn Arden apologize to the cast for the way he treated them, which was about one of the most cruel things you could do to someone of that stature. Donn apologized, but then broke down in hysterical tears. That moment, I remember that so clearly because it was so profound. And I said, oh, my god. I felt so sorry for him.

That took away his power.

But it didn't take away his respect, because when Rosenthal left, he didn't have to tell anybody to get up on stage. He didn't have to tell anybody what to do. We all just got up there and life continued. But Rosenthal said to the cast Mr. Arden will finish directing this show, but upon his completion he will be leaving and he will not come back unless invited. And that was that.

So we opened the show. And Donn left. And Frank Rosenthal started moving in and getting involved in the Lido.

Pat Merl and fellow Rockette Sharon in 1969 at Radio City Music Hall.

Pat used a break for a photo shoot in Central Park (New York City).

Rockette performances at Radio City Music Hall. Pat is directly in the center of second line.

Below: Pat is in backline, far left.

Pat wearing costume she wore in the James Bond movie, Diamonds are Forever, filmed at Sands Hotel 1971. Below: a 1972 photo taken while performing at Playboy Plaza Hotel (Miami Beach, Florida) Minsky's Burlesque.

1976 photos from her performance days with the Stardust Lido Show "Merci Beaucoup". With Pat in the bottom photo is Gordon Cornish.

1982 in a Miller Reich Production, C'est Si Bon, at the Sheraton Bal Harbour, Florida.

Left to right: Frank Rosenthal, Pat Merl and Rocky Lagundez on stage between shows at the Stardust in 1978. Show was "Allez Lido." Below: news clipping.

...que of Hallelujah Hollywood at the MGM Grand keeps a keen ... on 120 performers. She has worked for Donn Arden, the genius behind the largest extravaganza in the world, for more than 20 years. A boss at work, she likes to depend on her husband when at home.

...tter general. I ...confidence ...e of one's ...v man- ...er the ...n all ...dance ...She ...has ...ives, ..., but ...y and ...owded

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... to a musician at Fluff has learned to

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Company captain Rocky Fagundes and his assistant Pat Merl compliment each other at the Stardust Hotel where they oversee the Lido boys and girls every night.

Did he know anything about it?

No. No. Now, Donn left, but the company manager that I had from the old show was the company manager for this show. All the people that were in the show were Donn Arden employees for at least a year. The new people, minimal. But the older people had known him for a long, long, long time and those were the loyal people. I'm going, well, I've been here one year and now I'm on my second year. What is this all about? What does this mean to me? Well, I wanted to work for Donn Arden. I'm doing that. I wanted to have that experience of watching him create. I've done that. I want to earn a living. I'm going to do that. And I'm going to do the best show I can. And I hope that this guy doesn't destroy everybody's life and destroy the show. Well, he didn't. He tried to work with the company manager because he wanted to become --

A Donn Arden.

Well, he knew he couldn't be Donn Arden. You're going to find this interesting because I found it very interesting. He just wanted the show to go on. And his impression, because this is what he told me directly, which is very funny because it's kind of an insult, but I understood where it was coming from, he said why would a man in a position such as Donn Arden step all over people who are just small people? He said it's like stepping on an ant. What threat would you people be to him? And he said I didn't like what I was hearing about the way he was treating you when you were just small people. Now, we're talking about a big mobster, okay? So to him it's like -- he doesn't get it. And he said I wanted him to feel what you felt. And I said, yeah, but that was really uncomfortable for everybody. And I said the man deserves a lot of respect. He said he has my respect, but not in this situation, in the way he behaved with the performers.

So because of the loyalty that the company manager had and a lot of his friends, they were resisting working with Rosenthal and trying to pull as many of the cast out of there as they could and get them into the MGM show at that time, which was Hallelujah Hollywood. I was asked to leave because I loved that company manager. I was asked to go over there. And I said I really can't and the reason why I can't is I don't want to work in a factory. And that show is so gigantic. This is as big as I want to get. The Lido was pretty big. I came from a chorus line of 36. But I mean the Lido was 70-something people in a show. And I said I don't want to get bigger than this. And I don't know how long I'm going to stay and thanks a lot, but I'm not going to go over there.

So I didn't go. And I said why don't you stay here? As a tribute to Donn you could maintain this. His name is still on the program. The audience doesn't know it. And we could still have the show and do him credit. And he said no, no, no. And he had his thing. And I said, okay, I respect that.

And then one night during a quick change I was running upstairs and Michael was coming downstairs and he looked at me and said I just got fired. And I'm running up to do a quick change and I'm like what? And up there I'm changing my stuff and now my mind is reeling. I'm back on stage. What happened, right? So I come off and he says I was told to take my stuff and get out. And I said, who? Rosenthal. Michael could be stubborn. So he went head to head with him. And Frank just said, well, you can pack your stuff and go. So we went.

So we went back upstairs for the finale and I hear over the loud speaker, "Pat Merl and Rocky Funundez, would you please come downstairs?" We're like come downstairs? We're in a quick change. We've got the finale. We've got to go downstairs? So we go downstairs and we go in Walter Shaner's office—that's our stage manager—and in there is Frank Rosenthal. And we're sitting there and he says, "Effective immediately you two are taking over for the show as the company manager." And Rocky and I looked at each other and we're like—I actually said, well, you know, this is a quick change and we need to get on stage for the finale. Can we talk about this later? And he says, okay, yeah, go ahead.

So now what happened, which I should have known, is he was kind of lining people up and figuring things out. We get back and that night he says, okay, well, I want you to start looking at some of this stuff.

Well, when Frank Rosenthal took over, immediately the whole climate backstage changed in the respects that suddenly there was a security guard backstage, which we never had. And there was a red phone that was put on the wall that was a hot line to security and from security to wherever. And we always used to have whomever we wanted backstage. At the stage door, now you were checked who you were when you came in and it was restricted entrance. Different people started getting phone calls. I don't know. Susie Q, you have a call downstairs on the red phone. And Susie Q could go downstairs and it would be one of the guys, one of the Rosenthal group calling for different people. Why don't you come out—you know, usually it was Frank. We'd like you to come out to the superstar lounge and have a drink and talk to everybody and get

to know each other. And the girls would come upstairs, oh, they invited me out for a drink, the European girls. I went, oh, this ain't good. I don't want to do this crap. And this went on for a while.

Was it just a drink?

Well, for some, yes; for some, no; and for some, they didn't go. It was the defining moment for a lot of people in the show. And I said everybody's going to get their call I know it because it's going to go right down the line here.

Then I got my call. And I was like, well, this is it, I'm not doing this and I might as well cut to the chase, I'm not going out there, I hate going to the bar and I'm not doing it as I'm walking out the dressing room because I'm really upset and I don't want to deal with this. I go downstairs to security guard. I said, yeah, I know. Hello. Hi, Pat, this is Frank Rosenthal. Yes, I know. Pat, I'd like you to come out after the show to the bar. I want to have a drink with you. I want to talk with you about something. And I just went I'm not doing this. So I said, Mr. Rosenthal, with all due respect, I have a personal life and I have things I have to do after the show and I really don't drink anyway and I don't hang around the bar. If you want to talk to me about business, that'll be fine; I'll be happy to meet you in the coffee shop tomorrow morning. The security guard is going don't do this. He's giving me the signals, right? And I'm just like let him get rid of me now instead of it being painful. Well, I can feel my heart pumping and I could hear my heart pumping. And I said I'll be happy to meet you if it's something to do with the show and talk to you, but could we do it in the coffee shop in the afternoon or maybe before half-hour? He started laughing and laughing. He just thought that was hysterical. And he said, sure, I'll meet you in the coffee shop. How's that? So I thought I didn't get out of this, right?

So he met me in the coffee shop the next day. And we sat and we had a coffee. And he said I want to talk to you. Now, this is out of context because this was building up to that night when he called me and Rocky down. He said I want to talk to you about helping me with the show. And I said I don't know what help I could be to you with the show. And he said, look, I'm the entertainment director and I don't know one blankety-blank thing about entertainment. But you're going to help me and you're going to teach me. So I had a little respect for him because he admitted. He says I don't know anything. But he says anything I set my mind to do and learn, I'll

learn. But I need somebody to teach me and you're that person that can teach me. I want you to teach me everything you know about that show.

I respect that.

I know. Well, I do too. I respect both of them in different ways. And you know he just passed away recently, right?

Yes.

And I know people were going yippy-aye-yea. Yeah, he was a cold-hearted, tough person, but people that knew him respected him. I want to tell you something. I don't know what he could have done for this world if he decided to be a good guy. He was a brilliant man. He wasn't afraid to say he didn't know anything, you know. He didn't have to be.

I didn't want to work with him, though. I just wanted to have my job and go home. And I said I don't know, Mr. Rosenthal, I don't think I can really help you. I think I was like 25 or 26 then. I said I don't have that much experience. And I was kind of doing the whole thing. And he said, yes, you do. And he proceeded to tell me everything I did up to that point. So he said I do my homework. He said I don't just pick people out of the clear blue. And the same thing, he said I knew if you were in that spot there was a reason. I knew that. And that got me going.

So I ended up working pretty closely with him to bring the Lido to a level that it hadn't been brought to. He is responsible for raising performers' salaries. And I think they haven't been raised since or maybe they've been raised once since. He felt the performers deserved more money. And he immediately raised salaries. People were fighting to get into that show because it was the best paying show in town. He also had a vision. His idea of beautiful girls was a little bit different than maybe Donn and Bluebell's. He made the line taller. He made the line slimmer. And he said, I want a line of male dancers that look like a line of male dancers. So, he did that too. He said you guys have to clean up or ship out.

And he also changed acts in the show. And one of the first acts that he decided he wanted to be in his show was Siegfried and Roy. He talked about them one night to me. He called me up to his office. He said those guys down the street -- now, this was also I think a vendetta against Donn. It was like a little war going on here now. He was going to show Donn. But Siegfried and Roy were also very, very good, even at that time and they didn't have a budget or anything. They

were great. And he said those guys down the street, what do you think it would take to get them? And I said, the same thing it takes to get anybody else, a good contract, opportunity for them to have their own spot in the show, which they don't really have. Donn never believed in acts being the stars of the show. He always used to say the show is the star. The acts are there to support the star. But Siegfried and Roy had done about all they could do on that level. It was time for them to bust lose and he recognized that. And so he says, well, let me think about it. But you're saying that I could get them? I said, yeah, it depends on when their contract is up, but, yeah, you could get them.

So sure enough, the next day he calls me and says I've got a plan. I'm going to offer them—and he starts talking about the deal that he's going to offer them. Did you see "Casino" where he gives the Siegfried and Roy impersonators the key to the Rolls-Royce?

Yes. But I didn't know what was going on.

He said, well, I think I've got an idea of what I'm going to give them. He told me. And I said, oh, that'll make them stars I'm sure because they won't be held back. They'll be free to to what they need to do. He says you think they'll take it? I said I'm pretty sure they'll take it. And so that's when he selected Bernie Yuman, who is their manager to this day, and said, Bernie, I want you to go over an offer them this deal. Bernie was at the Stardust at the time. And I don't know what he was doing, but he was there. He told Bernie to go over and talk to them and offer them the deal. So needless to say, they made the deal. And that's where they were dubbed "The Superstars of Magic" and they were at the Lido.

So they came, which gave our show a tremendous boost. And he pulled back some ice skaters that we had. Same thing; gave them new costumes and what they needed to do. And he expanded the show into something that was a little bigger than it was before just because he had no budget worries. He could do whatever he wanted. He had carte blanche. I'm sure Donn would have done that too if he had the budget. So he loved the show.

And to me "Casino[the 1995 Martin Scorcese movie]" didn't get it quite right, because I think part of his demise was that he became so in love with entertainment; so enamored with entertainment that he became a little more high profile than he should have been because you saw "The Frank Rosenthal Show" and all this. And he became more interested in the show and loving

the show so much. He was too high profile. I don't know. There was a contribution there.

I remembered just kind of wishing that I could leave because things were getting rough then. That's when the feds came in. He was in court with the Gaming Control Board and all that stuff was going on. Most of us were dancers. We were in dance class. We weren't watching the news. We were doing the show. And we knew something was going on, but didn't have an idea of really the depth of it. Some people did, but not many. The stagehands, I think, were thinking about it, worrying about it. It just got uncomfortable and I was telling him I wanted to go home. Can I go to Florida? I think I want to leave. I'd like to talk to you about maybe leaving the show and going home. Oh, no, no, you can't leave yet. You know, we have a lot we have to do. It was kind of that "offer you couldn't refuse" thing. And I was like I want to get out of here. I do want to go home.

Now, all along had you realized that he was mob?

Yeah. It was not hard to miss.

How did you know? How did people know?

I remember one thing. I didn't know anything about it. I remember seeing a memorandum posted backstage, which I thought was real interesting—I never noticed anything like that; a hotel memorandum posted backstage that talked about Frank Rosenthal coming in as food and beverage director. I was looking at it. I said who's Frank Rosenthal? This one girl from North Carolina said if that guy shows up, I'm out of here. Life's going to change around here. I said, what do you mean? She said, he's bad news, man. These are the kind of guys you don't want to be around. I'm going to get out of here. I'm leaving if this guy shows up. I said okay, you know.

Then he showed up. And his entry with Donn Arden, that was somebody who obviously was going to let everybody know who's the boss. That's not a corporate executive move. That was—I went, okay, I get this story now. And there were some—his cronies, just their behavior, their attitudes, their style of dress, their posture, their demeanor. It all kind of said these are not the kind of corporate executives you've met in the past. Also, there was a lot of -- I can't explain it. Well, I can explain it. I can't articulate it. You were afraid not to do what you were told to do. There was that sense of if you didn't, watch out, there could be problems.

Prior to living here back in '71, '72, had you heard that the mob controlled Las Vegas?

No. I heard about Bugsy Siegel like everybody does. No. But I didn't think -- well, actually, I guess I first started to surmise that when I did get my so-called audition for the Stardust when I came back from Tahoe. I still wanted to kind of go to the Stardust. And that was a time that Frank Sennes and Rocky Sennes were here. And I remember they said, oh, you want to be in the Lido? You have to talk to Frank Sennes. And I'm like who's Frank Sennes and why do you have to talk to him? They said everybody talks to Frank. I said okay and I went to talk to Frank about being in the Lido. And it became this kind of personal interview sitting in a hotel room. Well, I just didn't know what it was about. I was just answering his questions. And then finally he said, oh, okay, well, we'll be in touch. And I left and I never heard from him again. And then I found out that was the audition and I didn't make it. I never had another audition like that.

No dance steps?

No nothing.

What were you supposed to do?

Talk. So then I went, oh, god, you mean you've got to deal with all these creeps? So that was the sense. And then when I saw Frank Rosenthal, I went, okay, we've got an issue. And then when I saw all the people in the casinos and the casino would hop to when he showed up, I said this is above and beyond.

So I finally got to leave because I said when do you think I could go? I knew he was in trouble. I knew he was a little spotty showing up, you know. And he said, look, look, let's make a deal. Any night that you look out the curtain and I'm not out in the king's row booth, you can go. Give your notice and you can go. And I was like okay, all right. So what do you mean by that? Well, if I don't show up, you can go. Well, this is all during the time that he's going to these hearings. Not too long after that -- every night I'd look out the curtain with my friend Rocky. Take a look. There he is. Okay. And then one night I looked and he wasn't there. And I said, Rocky, he's not here. And he said, well, it's only 15 minutes to show time. No, Rocky, he ain't here. Rocky, he ain't here. [It's] time for the show. I said, Rocky, he isn't here and I'm giving my notice. And Rocky says, who are you going to give your notice to?

Because you're actually in charge, aren't you, you or Rocky?

I said I don't know, but I'll figure it out. So I was standing there talking to him and I said I don't

know. Who's the boss now? Who's in charge? I knew some of those thugs were in charge, but I was like, I'm not talking to them.

All of a sudden I'm looking and I'm looking and a male dancer comes in, who will remain anonymous. He was the only male dancer I knew that came in a three-piece suit to do the show with a briefcase. And I said, Rocky, I'm giving my notice to him. And Rocky looked and he went, you know what, you've been a thorn in his side—I was in the way. The minute I got out of the way—so I walked up to him and I said, well, you know, I noticed that F.R. isn't around and I wanted to talk to him. But I kind of wanted to go home. And I did the thing about I miss my family. And I don't know what's going to be happening. I was just wondering if you could take my notice? Can I give my notice to you and would you tell F.R.{Rosenthal]? And he said sure. He said you can leave tonight if you want. And I said, no, I don't want to do that; I'd really like to give a notice and make sure everybody knows what needs to be done. But if you would take it as a two-week notice I would really appreciate it. And he said, oh, yeah, no problem, but if you want to leave earlier, just let me know. He wanted me gone a long time before that.

So I went back to Rocky and said I'm out of here, man. I'm free as a bird. I'm leaving in two weeks. I'm gone. So I left. Rocky stayed behind. That's when Frank got kind of blackballed and thrown out of the Stardust. Then there was a big upheaval and a lot of interesting things that happened that I'm not aware of, but I have a sense of what came down. And Rocky kind of ended up getting ousted from there, which was good for him because he was a great guy. Rocky was a great guy—is a great guy. So I got in my car and drove back to Florida where I always wanted to be.

When you say back to Florida --

I've been trying to live in Florida since 1971 and I just can't seem to find work. From New York I went to Florida for three days before I went on a ship and fell in love with it and said I'm living in Florida. I'm living in Florida.

Miami?

Miami Beach. I have tried off and on. I've either lived in Florida or in Las Vegas for the majority of time that I wasn't on the road. So I went back, but that was short lived. I got back out on the road again. But that little period of time—those are my Vegas shows. And then Hurray '76,

which Rudas was the same way. You had to be dressed to the nines for him as well. Rudas is the guy who created The Three Tenors. He's a brilliant Hungarian promoter. And he's the one that got Pavarotti singing crossover opera. These people are brilliant. They're not the run-of-the-mill people. And that show was wonderful, too. I enjoyed that because it had a theme for--

Now, where was that?

That was at the Flamingo, Hurray '76. It had a bicentennial theme. I just loved that. We had some actors from the show. Benjamin Franklin was the host of the show. He tied it all together.

I wanted to ask at what period were you on the road and with whom?

That's the hard part. I've got to think here. And I'm losing this. That's why I'd like to have it written down because I'm like was this before that? So I went from Radio City to Lake Tahoe with a little bit of Cashman in between. And then from Tahoe I did London Playgirl Revue at the Sands. And then from the Sands I went to -- and I was looking to see if that was still around. It's a supper club in Montreal called the Casa Loma and I got a job there as a principal dancer. I was there for about four months and that was my first taste of Montreal. I'll never forget that. So that was just four months. So that brought me into about 1972.

And then I got hired by Rudas in Montreal to work in his show in the Bahamas at the Paradise Island Casino. So I left Montreal to go to the Bahamas. And I was there for probably about six months. And the contract was up and we got our tickets home.

And home is Las Vegas?

New Jersey. I was going to go home to my family. This is after all these years being away from my family. I said I'm going to go home to see my family. And I said I wonder if I can get a stopover in Miami Beach on the way home? And I went to the airport and I said could I put a stopover in here? And they said yeah. And I said, okay, I'd like to stop over at Miami Beach. And at that time it was flexible I guess because they said no problem.

So I landed in Miami Beach. I didn't know anybody there. A friend of mine from Radio City, [had] a brother who I knew worked in sales at the Carillon Hotel in Miami Beach. And I'm at the airport. I call up, hey, Joel, it's Pat Merl, Marilyn's friend from Radio City. Oh, hi, Pat, how are you? Listen, I was wondering could you get me a room in the hotel maybe for a night or two? I want to kind of just look around Miami Beach. I haven't been here [except for] one day out and

one day in for the cruise. I don't know. I just love it and I'd like to get it to see it. And he said, sure, I'll put you up a couple of nights. He said I'll take you around. I'll call my wife and tell her I'm going to be a little bit late. I'll take you and show you a couple of places and show you around the city. So I said okay.

So he picks me up and he puts me up in the hotel. The next night he said I'm going to take you down Collins Avenue. He takes me down Collins Avenue and he walks me into the Playboy Plaza, which is on Collins Avenue and 54th Street. We go in to see the show. He says there's a cute little show in the Playmate Lounge. We go in to see the show. And I'm sitting ringside center. And the curtain opens and out comes this guy I worked with in Lake Tahoe. I only worked with two guys in Lake Tahoe, okay? And I went, Don, Don, it's me. And he's like, Pat?

So he finishes the show. He comes out and he goes what are you doing here? I said, you know, Tahoe and how I'm here. And he says are you looking for work? We need somebody in the show. I said are you kidding? He says no. He says, as a matter of fact, we're going to run short starting tomorrow. Maybe you can pick up some of the numbers tonight and we could get you in the show tomorrow. The next day I moved into the Playboy Plaza Hotel, which is right on Collins Avenue on the beach. My room faced the beach. It was the lanai room and I lived there for like a year and a half. It was a Minsky show, Minsky's Burlesque. I worked for Harold Minsky. And that was my first experience with Harold Minsky's Burlesque Show. I had a ball in Miami Beach. And, again, I met one of my closest friends still to this day in that show. And we were bookends. So we got to know -- and we looked similar. Harold liked us because we looked a lot alike. I worked there for a while.

After that I went to Puerto Rico to the Catano Holiday Inn, which was in the Catano area of Puerto Rico. And I worked for a production company. The guy's name was Ron—I don't remember. (This is what I mean. This is really scary.) At any rate, he was a June Taylor dancer for years. And the June Taylor Dancers used to perform down there with "The Jackie Gleason Show." That was all filmed there. And actually Jackie Gleason had one of those lanai rooms that was turned into a bar-suite for him. And he was in one of those lanai rooms for years. So we did his show. I did that for about a year. That's '74-75.

Then I came back and Harold Minsky called me and said we've got another show going out

on the Playboy circuit. It's a year's contract. Would you want to go? It starts in Chicago. And so I said yeah. So I came to Las Vegas to rehearse and stayed with my aunt and uncle, my cousin Joyce's mother and father. They moved here in that interim. I stayed with them during rehearsals. And then I flew out and went on the road with Minsky for a year through all the Playboy circuit all over the United States. And that was wonderful.

So I didn't get home. I got home between Montreal and the Bahamas for one day. I went to Newark Airport. And then I came home and stayed the night and went back. And I didn't get home yet. And that was 1975-76.

Then I got Hurray '76 with Rudas. Then I went to the Lido and I did that. And the night that I gave my notice at the Lido, my last night, the phone rings.

See, I forgot this show. I worked at the Carillon, that hotel—see, it's so funny, that hotel that my friend was the sales manager for. I ended up doing a show there for three months -- that's why I forgot about it -- just before Puerto Rico. That was with a company called Miller-Reash Productions. And then they had a hotel fire and the whole backstage area went on fire. So I went to Puerto Rico.

Oh, I quit the Lido. It's my last night. The phone rings downstairs, not the red phone, the public phone. Pat Merl, telephone. I go downstairs. Pat, it's Linda. And it turns out it's Leonard Miller from Miller-Reash. His wife's calling. And she says we're in Las Vegas and we want to say hi to you. We're on our way to Tahoe to open a show at the Cal-Neva. What are you doing? How are you doing? Well, Linda, I'm leaving tomorrow. I'm going back to Miami. You're what? I said I just quit the Lido. Lee, Pat quit the Lido. Tell her I'll meet her in the coffee shop in an hour.

We go to the Stardust coffee shop. And Lenny says I want you to come work for us. I want you to be a company manager for us. We've got this show in Tahoe and I've got three other shows and I've got something down in the pipeline. I'm going to need somebody to travel around and troubleshoot these shows. And basically that's the reputation I earned after becoming a company manager. They call them show doctors. If somebody's got a problem with their show, I could go -- personnel, staging or lighting, whatever -- and fix it. What I would do is just go around and fix personnel problems or choreographic problems or whatever. And I did that for

Miller-Reash on and off for about five years. Sometimes I'd just say, Lenny, I've done this about two years. I need a break. I'm going to go do somebody else's stuff. And I'd come back. That was one of my most favorite jobs of all times. I lived on a plane from that point forward. If it didn't fit in a suitcase, I didn't have it needless to say. I had one very big suitcase, though, a big red one. Within the first six months of me working with Miller-Reash, they had 26 shows running at one time. And basically what I would do is get on a plane and go wherever I needed to go and stay there and manage the show and watch the show until Lenny would call me and say I need you to go here, I need you to go there, this is what's happening there. And that was my life. I really didn't know where I was going to be from day to day, but I knew I was going to be in one of his shows. And I traveled around a lot doing that.

That is amazing. It sounds exciting, too.

Yeah. I loved that. And I did that right up until about 1982. And I managed a couple more shows here. I managed a show here at the Aladdin for Miller-Reash. So I came back here. And it was pretty bad here, too. The economy was pretty bad. Do you remember? It was kind of like this, '81-82, very bad. I was like this isn't happening. This is when I thought it was over for Vegas. I said unless somebody figures something out, this isn't happening. I guess it was '81 because Steve Wynn when he built the Mirage that kind of turned the Strip around again. So I was packing up to leave and get out of here and I was heading back.

And I went back to Florida. I said, okay, I'm going to get a place. And I bought a house—not a house, a condo. I said, okay, I'm doing it, I'm doing it. I was there about six months. Then I got the call from Lenny. Not even six months. I think it was about four months in my house. I got the call from Lenny. Pat, I just picked up Royal Caribbean and Carnival Cruise Lines and I've got about 12 shows on each of those ships. I need you to come out here and help us get that stuff going organize it, cast it. Okay, Lenny, I'd love to do it. I'll be out there.

So I went out for about a year. Then I saw Lenny was getting sick. He looked like something was bothering him. I said, uh-oh, things aren't looking good here and I don't think Lenny is going to be doing real well. I was talking to my girlfriend. I said he doesn't look well to me at all. I said I think I need to figure out what I'm going to be doing. And he ended up passing away of a massive heart attack about two years later. I just saw it coming. I had known him for

so many years.

I'm sitting at my desk and I get a phone call from my girlfriend Ingrid. I met Ingrid in the Montreal show. Lenny asked me to restage her act. It was the Osmani Sisters, three female jugglers. And he said you've got to fix these girls. They came out of the circus. They need new costumes, new staging, new lighting. That was one of my things. So I went down there and fixed their act for them, which was a benefit. When they left they had that act and they didn't pay for anything. You know, they just learned a new act.

But the woman I became very friendly with said, oh, my god, Mr. Vargas would love to have somebody like you on his circus. And I said, well, I don't know anything about circus. She said, oh, but he would love you. And she had worked for him since she was a kid and ended up buying his circus when he passed away. And now her daughter runs the circus. I said maybe someday, Ingrid, but I don't know anything about being a promoter or anything like that. And she said, no, I want you to come in and direct. And I said not with Deonne there. She's doing that. But maybe market someday.

So that day she called and said we need a marketing director for the season. Do you want to give it a try? And I was like I don't know, I don't know. And she said, oh, come on, give it a shot. Okay. So I went and I went as a marketing director for Circus Vargas, which was the world's largest traveling big top. That's what it was billed as. Ringling [used to be] and they retired their tent. The tent seated 2200 people. Then I lived out of the trunk of my car and traveled around. We did 92 cities a year. It was amazing. That was another job I just—I'm a true gypsy. They don't come any truer.

I have a proposal right now from two ladies who are circus people.

No. Who?

Do you know Jan Biggerstaff?

Yes. Jan Biggerstaff told me 15 years ago when I came here, Pat, you need to do the oral history, but I don't know anybody.

Well, we're getting ready to work together right now. She has already purchased her piece of equipment. We're trying to put a proposal together because there are over 100 circus entertainers who live here in Las Vegas.

I know.

And we're going to do a project.

Well, would you like to know where I promoted the circus from when I came to Las Vegas? Jan's office, Jan and Bill. Bill has—what do you call it?—show programs with me in them.

Oh, no. I can't believe this. So I'm helping her put together an oral history project. She just needs some funding. That's what we're trying to get now. She's going to different places to try to get funding so that we can have someone help to transcribe all the interviews and do things like that.

Oh, my god.

This is a small world.

Oh, entertainment is an extremely small world. Jan and Bill know all about Circus Vargas. They did all our coupon-ing for years. When I quit the circus, Roland said please—Roland's the 11 that bought the circus. He married Ingrid. And Roland said please just do Las Vegas, just do the Las Vegas date. And I said I'm never going back to Las Vegas. I'm done with Las Vegas. I'm going to Florida, Roland. Roland lives in Sarasota and so does Ingrid. And I said I'm not going back to Vegas. He said, Pat, just do the one location. And I said fine. He said I've got you all set up. You can work in the Biggerstaff's office over on Graphics 2000. And I said all right. And I've been here ever since because then I got involved with the university [UNLV] and getting my degree. And I'm not leaving until I finish it. Jan Biggerstaff, give her my love.

I definitely will. I will tell her that you're right here. She's going to be amazed.

But I think she knows I'm still here. I think. I don't know. Yeah, I think she does because the last time I saw her I was here. I was in the dean office. But I don't know if she knows I'm here now.

I will let her know. She's wonderful. She's just wonderful. She's on a cruise right now.

Well, good for her.

Yes. So now, once you got back here with Circus Vargas, then you took that job.

No. I just did the location, which was six weeks.

Then how did you get with UNLV?

Well, there's one other big job that I had. And that was with Farrington Productions, which is a very, very big production company -- it was a very big production company here. I worked with

Blair Farrington briefly at the Lido. And I worked with his wife at Hurray '76. And they had a small production company. They got the Rio show in the sky. So I came on as their general operations manager and production manager because suddenly they went from 30 employees to 255 employees. And I said I think you need an infrastructure. And Blair is just a choreographer-producer and doesn't know about infrastructure and doesn't care. So I said I think you need some stuff like that. So, I ended up working for them and worked my way up to vice president of operations and marketing. And then—I don't know—there just is a point where it's time to move on. It was probably one of the longer jobs I had. I was there five years.

And I also fractured my leg. I had an accident and I decided to just stop. I was losing touch with all of that. And I went I think I'm working too many hours, too hard for too many people. I took a year off and I feel thankful that I was able to do that. And I healed. A lot of people thought I wasn't going to walk again. I mean I really hurt myself badly. I fractured my tibia plateau and they usually don't heal very well, if at all, unless put in a rod. And I said I'm not getting a rod. I'm just going to get this better.

So for one year I just kind of read and exercised. I was in great shape and I was happy and all that stuff because it was about me for one year. And then that's when I got the phone call from the professor who said you need to be teaching here. Well, I was teaching here. I started teaching here in 2001.

And what were you hired to teach?

I was hired to teach entertainment operations and production. I do that. I teach media and entertainment. And I teach event and entertainment marketing, which is the course I'm teaching online now. And I was one of the first professors to teach online, too, in the Hotel College. So I've been doing that for a while.

Then I got hired on as -- let's see. I worked for the grad studies department in Hotel College for John Bowen to help him promote the executive master's program. And then he, dirty rat, went off to become the dean at Houston in the hotel college. So he was gone. What do I do now? And then—do you know Annette Kannenberg, the business manager for the hotel college?

No.

Well, she came down and said I want you to come up and work in the dean's office because

Cynthia's leaving and I want you to come up and do that. So I got up into the dean's office and worked there for a while.

And then one of the grad students that I helped when I was working in the grad studies department came and said, you know, there's an opening at Wynn with your name on it and I think you really need to take it into consideration. And I said I don't know if I want to go into industry now. I've got so much planned. So he kept calling me and said just put your resume together. And I said, oh, god, don't ask -- can you imagine putting my resume together?

No.

It's awful. It's awful. And I said I don't want to do that. And he said, well, I'll help you. And he was calling back and forth. I said, Dan, I appreciate it but -- and then one day I got a phone call. Hi, my name is blah-blah-blah and I'm from Chris Flatt's office at Wynn Las Vegas in hotel sales and marketing department and Chris would like to interview you for a position here. I was like, Dan, you gave them my resume.

So I went in. I met Chris Flatt. She is the executive vice president of hotel sales and marketing for Wynn. I met her for three minutes and said I need to come work here with this lady. This is somebody I need to know and have in my life for some period of time, one of the greatest human beings I have ever met. I just love her. When I left—and I left for this job, which was back more in line with what I hoped to do at this point in my life—it enabled me to be with my dad and my family when they needed me. So we're still friends and we always will be. And then that's kind of how I ended up back here.

That is amazing. I love it. I want to ask just a couple of questions. Along the way did you see black women enter the dancing, the shows?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

When did you start seeing that?

Well, I managed an all-black cast in 1979. It was called Satin Sweet. And I took them through the -- see, there's a lot of jobs I forget about until you bring them up. I want to tell you I didn't tell you about half of this stuff.

Oh, I know. I know.

It was called Satin Sweet. It was an all-black cast. It was for Miller-Reash. There were two

shows in San Juan, Puerto Rico. See, I had forgotten about that because I did the one at El San Juan. Then I left and came back and did another one at the El San Juan. And then this one was at the Palace. I did that and I took them on a tour of the West Indies. That was '79. I'm trying to think. '79 is the date that rings a bell for me, but I'm not sure that's exactly right because I know Miller-Reash used a lot of black dancers. I'm trying to think of who I'm forgetting. The twins. The Lumpkin girls? They're twins. They live in town here. I'm trying to think. That was probably in '79, too. That was up in Valley Forge.

What was I doing in '78? Lido. Did we have any black girls there? No. No.

Oh, Donn Arden, "Hallelujah Hollywood." He had a featured line. It was called the ebony line and they were a featured line. And they were sensational. I mean he featured them. And there was—I'm trying to think—12. And that was in "Hallelujah Hollywood." I can't tell you what year that opened.

Then where else? I'm thinking also the "Moulin Rouge" had a black girl in the line, not downtown, the one that was over at the Hilton, the actual "Moulin Rouge" from France. And that's why I keep wondering about those French shows, if they had any, because they had them in Paris. I know that. I'll have to think on that more. But that's the first time I remember.

This is wonderful. So what I'd love to ask you to do is get some of your photographs together, just a few, just maybe five, six, ten.

Of what?

Of you in a costume, of you when you were a Rockette.

What about other people in the pictures? How does that work as far as --

Well, we've never had anybody ask about this before. So I don't think there's a problem. I will find out.

I'm guessing because it's not being sold, that it's on a library shelf—

That's correct.

-- for reference. I have pictures. Boy, do I have pictures. Thanks to my mother. She used to constantly say I haven't seen any pictures.

Now, there is a connection with you from North Carolina. Tell me about the North Carolina connection because that's where I'm from.

Where?

I'm from a little place called Ahoskie, North Carolina.

I don't know where that is.

Sixty miles south of Norfolk, Virginia.

Okay. Do you know where New Bern is?

Oh, yes. Just a few miles—40 miles south of there.

That's right. Here's the connection. My boyfriend Dan that I'm with now, we went to school -- not together, but went to school in New Jersey. We met when we were in school. I met him in his senior year. He met me in my junior year. He's the one that went off to the Navy. His mother was born and raised in New Bern, North Carolina. And when the father retired, he fell in love with New Bern and he said I'm going back. Oh, it's a great place. He said I'm going back. So he brought the whole family and they moved there. When Dan got out of the Navy, he spent a year stalking me at Radio City. And then he went to move to New Bern.

Well, my dad, when he realized that he was getting older, he wanted to get everybody settled. And he said, Patty, I need to move out of Florida. And I didn't want him to, but I knew why. It was getting real expensive. And the house was big and they needed to scale down. And then I was just seeing Dan at that point. This makes me sad. And he said what do you think about North Carolina? I always liked North Carolina. He was there in the Army. And he said I'd like to maybe go look for a place down there. What do you think? And I said I don't know too much about North Carolina, Dad, except New Bern and I was there and I think it's a great little town and I think you'd probably really love it there.

In his mind right away it all clicked; wouldn't this be nice because Dan and Pat could visit both parents when they're down here? He was thinking -- that's my dad. And Dan's father passed away. So his mother's just down there. He said, well, maybe we'll move down there and then you and Dan could come home for vacation and you'd be able to see everybody. And I said, well, I don't want you moving there for that, Dad, because I think you know me. He says I know, I've been trying to catch up with you my whole life. And that's what's so sad. He just did. He just did. And in Florida he thought that was going to be it because he knew I wanted to be there, but I never got there. So he bought there and we never made it. But Dan's mom is still there. So that's the

New Bern connection and the North Carolina connection, which is a deep one because I love Dan's mother, too. As a matter of fact, I saw more of Dan's mother when I was going out with Dan than I did him. She's a wonderful lady. I just moved my mom out of there. God, that was hard. So that's New Bern.

So does Dan live here in Las Vegas now?

Well, see, that was the thing. When Dan and I hooked up , we started talking, not anything else. There may be hope for us after all. Maybe we can get together. And I'm like, Dan, I've got a really full life and I'm really happy and I don't know if I want to be getting together with anybody. I think you're great. I'm really thrilled talking to you. And he said, yeah, but don't you want to know? I said I do know. I care about you, but you can be there and I can be here and we can see each other every now and then. I don't need to get all bogged down. I said besides that I'm leaving. I'm going back to Florida.

And then he came five years ago, just showed up. He said I can't wait anymore. I want to see if it would—I've got to know, I've got to know. And I'm like, well, just wait until I get out of here, you know. No. I've got to know. Don't you want to know? So he came and we knew that we cared about each other. Then we bought a place here and now I'm stuck. I rethought it. That's when I said, okay, I'll go back to school. That's when I accepted the job at the university. My year hiatus began when we got together. And I said, you know, if I didn't take that year off, we never would have gotten together.

Yes. This is meant to be. Your whole life has been.

Hasn't it?

Yes. Oh, this is fantastic. I really appreciate this.

Well, I love talking to you. I could hear you talk to me. Oh, yes. Tell me about your stuff. I think you're great, too.

We have to stay in touch. And we will. I'll have this transcribed and get it back to you.

You'll get some pictures to me. So we'll be working together for the next few months or so.

So I can just fix that up a little bit with some names and dates and stuff?

Oh, yes. Please. And thank you for today.

Oh, god, you're welcome. I just appreciate your time and patience.

This is wonderful. This is what I do for a living.

But Jan Biggerstaff is the one that said to me, Pat, they're doing oral histories of showgirls; you need to be interviewed. She told me that 15 years ago. She tried and it didn't work. And I came and heard some of the stuff, you know, when you were first getting the program going I guess.

That's right. Probably five years ago.

Well, that was January. No. It was longer than five years ago.

Well, that was probably some other -- maybe Reno. I'm not sure.

Whenever it was, it was a presentation at UNLV and she was involved. She said they're doing oral histories and you've got to do it. So I find it real interesting.

Oh, I know what that was. That was the first project we ever did when I was a student in the history department. I remember.

Oh, my god. I came over to see it. She said you've got to come over and see what they're doing.

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COURIER-NEWS

PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY, FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 1968

Telephone 757-4000

Ambition Realized: Girl Is a Rockette

WESTFIELD — Success came yesterday to Patricia Ann Merl as she realized a cherished ambition of dancing with the world-famous Rockettes in New York's Radio City Music Hall.

The 20-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Merl of 592 N. Chestnut St. made her initial appearance with The Rockettes in the production number "Luau of 1968," dancing the hula.

Miss Merl has sung professionally with a band, plays the accordion and organ and last spring appeared in the Mountainside Music Association musical "Lights Up."

A graduate of Cranford High School, she was formerly employed as office manager and bookkeeper by Rite Way Rental in Elizabeth and in the accounting department of the N.J. Bell Telephone Co., Cranford.

Studied 2 Years

She studied dancing for two years at the Joyce Academy of Theatrical Arts, Garwood, before auditioning for The Rockettes on Aug. 19.

Miss Merl, who was crowned Miss Newark last September, had been one of 10 finalists in the Miss Union County pageant held in June at Scotch Plains, and also was a finalist in the recent Miss New Jersey contest sponsored by Hoffman Beverages.

Mrs. Merl said, "I am thrilled at 'Tricia's' success. This is what she has always wanted — to appear with The Rockettes. She has paid for all the dancing lessons herself."

Family to Attend

Mr. and Mrs. Merl, and their son Karl, 13, plan to attend the performance today. They also have four foster daughters, twins, Donna and Diane, 9; Kim, 7, and Robin, 3.

Mrs. Merl says Karl is not interested in dancing, but she plans to enroll the girls in dancing school next month.

Another member of the household who plans to attend the show tomorrow is justly proud of her namesake's achievement. She is Patricia's grandmother, Mrs. Patricia Corbisiero, who said she was "simply delighted."

A NEW ROCKETTE — Miss Patricia Ann Meri of 592 N. Chestnut St., Westfield, who made her debut with The Rockettes yesterday in Radio City Music Hall, New York, is shown as she was crowned Miss Newark last September.

SUBURBAIN NEWS SEPTEMBER 11, 1968

PATRICIA ANN MERL

Patricia Ann Merl Now With Famed Rockettes

When Patricia Ann Merl of Westfield celebrated her 20th birthday on August 1st, her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Merl probably bestowed many fine gifts upon her. The same held true for her brother and four sisters. However, although she obviously appreciated all these tokens of affection, the surprise which gratified her the most came a few weeks after her birthday celebration. It was then that she received word that she had been chosen as a permanent member of the world famous Rockettes whose precision dance routines at New York's Radio City Music Hall are in a class by themselves.

For Patricia, who lives

(Please turn to Page 30)

Pat Merl

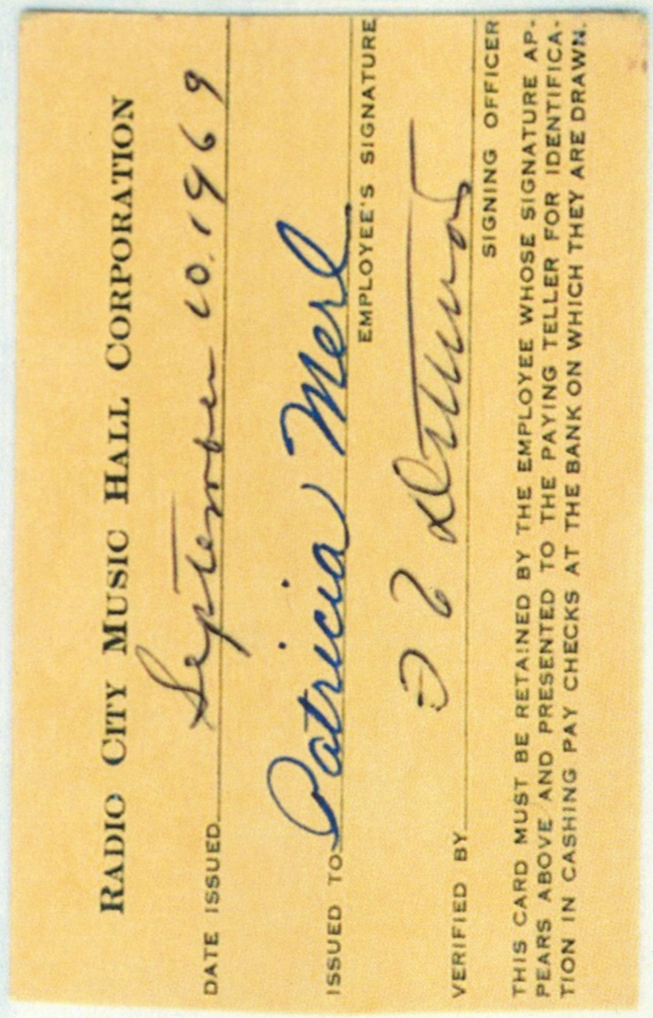
(Continued from Page 29)

with her family at 592 North Chestnut Street, this is the culmination of a life-long ambition. Even before her selection as a Rockette, she had gained many awards and accolades. It all started when Pat was awarded English and History honors at Cranford High School prior to her graduation. In September of 1967, she was crowned "Miss Newark" and made appearances during National Policeman's Week, as well as appearing at the Soap Box Derby and for Public Service Electric and Gas Company. In April of this year, Pat appeared in a musical at Mountainside's Deerfield School and later that month reached the finals of the Lion's Club Talent Show by virtue of her fine dancing.

In June the vivacious miss was one of the ten finalists in the Miss Union County Pageant and followed this up by being judged one of the finalists in the Royal Crown competition sponsored by the Hoffman Beverage Company.

While all this was going on, Pat held down positions as an office manager, specializing in book-keeping and accounting. However, dancing was her first love so she took advanced lessons at Joyce Academy Of The Dance and Theatrical Arts in Garwood. It was through the Academy that an audition for the Rockettes was arranged. That did it and Patricia Ann Merl had her belated birthday present

Last week she made her first appearance as a full-fledged member of the renowned Rockettes. The theme of the show was "Luau of 1968" as the Radio City troupe went Hawaiian. Actually, any theme will be fine for Pat. For Hula or Tango, Flamenco or Fox-trot she'll be dancing them as a Rockette. It all goes to prove that even when "You Dream the Impossible Dream" it just might come true, after all.



RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL CORPORATION

DATE ISSUED October 10, 1969

ISSUED TO Patricia Merl — EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURE

VERIFIED BY D C Williams — SIGNING OFFICER

THIS CARD MUST BE RETAINED BY THE EMPLOYEE WHOSE SIGNATURE APPEARS ABOVE AND PRESENTED TO THE PAYING TELLER FOR IDENTIFICATION IN CASHING PAY CHECKS AT THE BANK ON WHICH THEY ARE DRAWN.

Gay Guys Asks How To Turn Rockettes

Members of the Gay Activists Alliance, a militant group of New York homosexuals seeking gay liberation, wrote to Radio City Music Hall last week requesting information about becoming dancing Rockettes.

The Music Hall's reply listed such requirements as age, height and weight, but failed to make mention of sex.

The would-be gay highkickers in the proper age-height-weight categories are now expected to make formal application and will reportedly seek legal action if they are discriminated against because of their sex.

Firebombs found in Radio City

NEW YORK (AP) — Cleaning women found two incendiary devices fastened beneath seats in the Radio City Music Hall early yesterday and hastily summoned police located a third in the world's largest theatre.

Bomb squad detectives deactivated the devices and there were no injuries or damage. A few hours later all 6,200 seats were filled with a Mother's Day crowd that was generally unaware of what occurred earlier. The devices were about the size of cigarette packages and each contained two flash bulbs, two thin batteries, a pocket watch and black powder.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

ROCKEFELLER CENTER • NEW YORK

August 1, 1968

Miss Patricia Merl
592 North Chestnut Street
Westfield, New Jersey 07090

Dear Miss Mere:

This is to advise you that an audition for the Rockettes will be held on August 19, 1968 at 10 AM o'clock.

Unless you are positive that you have all the necessary requirements, do not waste your money and time to attend the audition. Please keep in mind that an audition does not necessarily guarantee a position.

Please report to the 44 West 51st Street Stage Entrance and bring your tap shoes and rehearsal clothes. It is also necessary that you advise us whether or not you will attend.

Yours very truly,

Russell Markert

Russell Markert
Director of Rockettes

RM:gm

Inter-Department Correspondence

The Entire Lido Cast

Date March 15, 1978

: Frank Rosenthal

ct: Pat Merl

PLEASE POST

Effective immediately female dancing line captain, Pat Merl, will assume the authority and responsibility as the Assistant Company Captain for this the 12th edition of Lido de Paris.

Miss Merl, will continue her artistic responsibilities and will additionally coordinate directly to her immediate supervisor Company Captain, Rocky Fagundes.

Good Luck Pat.

Frank Rosenthal
Director of Entertainment

FR/kd

cc: Allen R. Glick
Frank Mooney
Bob Stella
Art Garrelli
Murrey Ehrenberg
Burt Brown
Rocky Fagundes
Paul Bruce
Walt Shaner
Pierre Guerin
Burt Brown
Foudil Abadou
Madame Bluebelle
Michael Lapin
Jay Brown

Inter-Department Correspondence

To: The Entire Lido Cast, Crew & Wardrobe

Date September 26, 1978

From: Frank Rosenthal

Subject: Rocky Fagundes & Pat Merl

PLEASE POST

Please be advised that Rocky Fagundes, will assume the authority and responsibility as Lido Company Manager effective September 26, 1978. Additionally Miss Pat Merl's title will be changed to Assistant Company Manager, effective immediately.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully,

Frank Rosenthal
fkd

Frank Rosenthal
Director of Entertainment

FR/kd

cc: Allen R. Glick
Frank Mooney
Bob Stella
Murray Ehrenberg
Art Garrelli
George Miller
Rocky Fagundes
Pat Merl
Paul Bruce
Walt Shaner

STARDUST

PAT MERL
ASSISTANT LIDO COMPANY MANAGER

(702) 732-6111 LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89109

FORM NO. 1013-K STANDARD FORMS CO. — PHOENIX