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An Interview with Daisy Lee Miller

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

African American Collaborative

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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A Collaborative Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2012

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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 *African Americans in Las Vegas: A Collaborative Oral History Project*.

Claytee D. White
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PREFACE

Daisy Lee Miller talks about being born and raised as an only child in Louisiana before moving to Las Vegas in her 20s. For a time, Daisy worked in the powder room at the California Club. It was while she was employed here that she realized she wanted something better, and she wanted to be a good example for her kids. Daisy began attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to get her degree. Daisy is very proud of the fact that she graduated from UNLV at the same time that her daughter graduated from high school.

Family has always been very important to Daisy, and she enjoyed spending time with her children while they were growing up. Sundays always found Daisy and her children at church while other leisure-time activities included trips to the lake or Mt. Charleston.

While going to school, Daisy worked at the Economic Opportunity Board in the family planning program. Following graduation, Daisy began working for the Clark County School District where she rapidly advanced from teacher to counselor to assistant principal. Daisy retired from the CCSD eight years ago after devoting 29-1/2 years to her calling.

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March 22, 2013
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee D. White

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Daisy S. Miller
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Claytee D. White 3/22/2013
Signature of Interviewer

Date

This is Claytee White. It is March 22nd, 2013, and I'm with Daisy Miller in her home in Las Vegas.

So how are you this morning?

Good morning. How are you?

Wonderful. So as you know we want to talk about your life, and we're going to start by talking about your early life. So first, would you give me your full name?

My name is Daisy Lee Miller.

Daisy, if you could just start by telling me about your childhood, where you were born then where you grew up.

I was born at a little place called Transylvania, Louisiana; that's where I was born. Then, from Transylvania, we moved to a little place called Tallulah, Louisiana. My family left Louisiana when I was in third grade and moved to St. Louis, Missouri.

Any brothers and sisters?

I have no brothers and sisters. I understand that my father, prior to being married to my mom, had a daughter. I know of her, but I don't know her.

Tell me about growing up in St. Louis, what that was like.

Growing up in St. Louis was fun. I had a friend; she had many sisters and brothers, but she was the youngest one, so they were all older than her. Her name is Norma, and we grew up as friends and sisters sometimes. So it was nice because all of her sisters and brothers were just so much older than her, and I had no sisters and brothers.

Great. Perfect. So you lived in the city of St. Louis?

Yes.

Where did you go to elementary school?

Oh, I went to—why would you ask me that?—Lincoln Elementary School. And then I went to

Vo-Technical School in high school; that's where I graduated from.

What did your mom do for a living?

My mom worked as a maid, and my father was a construction worker.

Great. And why did the family decide to move to Las Vegas?

Well, my mom and dad had been separated for quite some time, and we had family here. Mom moved out here and she remarried. I came to visit her and I ended up staying.

How old were you at that time, approximately?

I think I was in my early 20s.

You had already finished high school?

Oh, yes.

Did you start college back in St. Louis?

No. Believe it or not, I graduated from UNLV. And my daughter, my oldest daughter, Arletha, graduated from high school the same year that I graduated from college.

Oh, that's wonderful. So you came out here as a grown woman. Did you work while you were going to school?

Yes. Yes, I did. Believe it or not, I worked in the powder room at California Club.

Describe that to me.

The powder room?

Yes, and what you did.

What I did there was make sure that when the people came in to change clothes—they call it a powder room, but it was the bathroom. I had to keep the bathroom clean, the mirrors and all of that. That was the powder room. I left the powder room and I decided that I needed to go to school.

What kinds of tips did you get in the powder room?

It wasn't that much at that time. They'd leave you a dollar or 50 cents or something like that, but tips weren't that good in the powder room.

Okay. So then you went to—did you go to school full-time?

Yes, I did.

How did you decide what you wanted to do?

The powder room was not for me, and I wanted to be an example for my kids. I was very proud because I graduated from college and my oldest daughter graduated from high school.

With the bachelor's degree, did you start working before you got the master's?

No—yes, I would start work. What was my first school? My first school was Garside [Middle School], but I had had my training on elementary level. When the openings came I wanted elementary, but I ended up in junior high. I went from junior high to high school, and I went from teacher, counselor, to administrator.

Did you like teaching or counseling better?

I really enjoyed counseling. I did like teaching, though. Teaching was fun, but I was offered a position because I was getting my degree, my master's degree, and I ended up going from teaching, counseling, to administrator.

How long were you in the classroom teaching?

One year.

Okay. And then how long were you a counselor?

Probably about two years.

Then you became an administrator.

Yes.

So a principal, assistant principal?

Assistant principal.

You were assistant principal for the rest of your career.

Yes.

How many years are we talking?

All total of my education 29 and a half years.

Fantastic. Now, when you were going to school to get your bachelor's degree and your daughter was in school at the same time, where were you living, and how did you support your family?

Believe it or not—that's a good question. I don't know how I did it, but I did it. There was an area called Winslow Park and that's where my kids grew up and we stayed there for a while.

Then I moved to Chason Street.

What part of the city is Chason Street?

Chason Street is off of Washington and—it's just a real little neighborhood and I can't tell you exactly where that is.

So is it near Bonanza?

Oh, no. No. It's going west.

Okay. So near Lorenzi Park, on the other side of Lorenzi Park?

Other side of Lorenzi Park.

Okay. So I know where it is. Okay, great.

What was Las Vegas like for a young woman with kids at that time, when it comes to entertainment, church, family life?

My mom was here. I went to church. I still go to church. My kids, they go to church. Well, when

they were kids they all went; as they grew older they had their own lifestyle. But I can say the four of my kids, I've never had any problems with them. So that makes me proud.

Oh, yes.

I enjoy going to church. I enjoy my kids. I enjoy family, and our family is sort of close. We just get along.

Wonderful. What about entertainment? Did you find that you enjoyed Strip entertainment, the entertainers that came to town, the performers, or was it more going to Mount Charleston or things like that?

We did that. I did take the kids; we would go to the mountains, and we would go out to the lake. And yes, my cousins, three or four of us, we would go to entertainment out on the Strip to some of the shows. That was enjoyable. But I enjoyed taking the kids to the mountain or out to the lake. We would always do something, something together.

Tell me about the work that you did at EOB, the Economic Opportunity Board, and how that fit in with the other work.

I don't even know how I got to EOB to tell you the truth. I ended up being the family planning coordinator; that was the title. People would come to the family planning program to get information on birth control. They had doctors that would examine them and give them the medication, well the pills, not medication but the birth control pills. And that was that. I can't tell you how long I stayed there. I was there for a while because I ended up getting my degree, and I ended up in the Clark County School District.

This was before Clark County?

Yes.

Give me some of the community people that you met working at EOB.

Oh, god. Verla Davis, David Hoggard, and I'm seeing Sylvia; I can't think of Sylvia's last name. Those were the top people.

What did Sylvia do?

Sylvia worked with David Hoggard, and they were the top administrators. David Hoggard was 'the' administrator and then there was Sylvia and Verla Davis. Yes. I was over the family planning program. They were up there, but my area was with the family planning. Then, when I left there, I don't know who took over. That's when I went to the Clark County School District.

Do you remember where EOB was located at the time?

On Owens in the shopping center. Right on—I can't give you the address right now—it's between H and J Street.

So is it the John Edmond shopping center today?

Yes.

So at that time it was probably Nucleus Plaza or something else.

That's what it was, Nucleus Plaza.

It was Nucleus Plaza, okay, good. How large was EOB, how much office space at that time?

Because we're talking probably now about, what, 1960?

It may have been in the late '50s or the '60s.

So when did you retire from Clark County School District?

I've been gone now about eight years.

So eight years ago would have been—let me see if I can do some subtraction—would be

2005, maybe?

I think I left before. I would say maybe '03.

Okay. So if you left in '03 and you were there for almost 30 years . . .

Yes, 29 and a half.

So you must have gone there—1973, maybe?

Seventy-two.

Seventy-two. Good, wonderful. So 1972. So we're talking about the late sixties that you were at EOB?

Yes.

Perfect, perfect. In the late '60s, '68, '69 in some of the high schools they began to have riots here, Rancho High School. Did the community hear about any of that?

I was at Rancho at one time, but we didn't have any riots at Rancho.

Okay. Was this after you went to work for—

Yes.

Okay. So in 1969 there was a riot on the Westside. Do you remember that?

I heard of it, but I wasn't involved at that time.

Do you remember the fire that destroyed some of the shopping center?

Vaguely.

So that must have been—it was 1969. Okay. How much do you remember about John Edmond?

Just the name and that area was his, the shopping center.

So even when it was Nucleus Plaza did John Edmond own it?

I'm not sure about that.

Okay. So getting back to Clark County schools, were you in the high school as a counselor?

I was a counselor at Rancho High School. I went from counselor to administrator.

So tell me about being a counselor in a high school in Las Vegas in 1972.

It's fun.

Tell me what the work is composed of.

The work that you do as a counselor . . . you have a list of students and you keep track of their grades, their records. You bring them in if their grades are low and you talk to them about it. The purpose of the counselor is to be there for that child if that student needs help, and they come to you if they're having problems in the class; if they're having problems with the teachers, if they're having problems at home. They are welcome to come in and talk to the counselor. If that child is having problems at school, then you contact the parents and have the parents come in and you meet with the student and the parent and you talk to them. If that child's grades are low, and especially if they are getting ready to graduate, you want to make sure that they are on top of it so that they have all the credits that they need in order to be able to graduate. So you call them in, you go over their transcript with them and tell them what they need, the requirements, in order for them to graduate.

What does it entail for those kids who want to go to college? How do you do that kind of counseling? How do you know which college is better for this child? What do you do when it comes to college related?

You give them a variety of colleges for them; you don't tell them, but you can provide the information. The way I worked it was that they would talk to their parents about it. If the parents wanted to come in, we would all sit down and have a family meeting or discussion.

Did you help them complete college applications, do reference letters and all of that?

Yes. You get a reference from your teacher, from your counselor and, of course, you need information from the parents. Believe it or not, some don't want to give information, didn't want to. So if the parents refuse to fill it out, there's nothing we can do. That wasn't an everyday

thing, but there were some rarities in there. Some people thought, well, that's my business; I don't need to tell that. And certain information on that form is a requirement; they must fill it out.

Like financial information.

That's right.

Then you became an assistant principal.

Yes.

What is that work like? Because we know what principals do; we have no idea what an assistant principal does.

The same thing the principal does.

So give me some idea.

You have a certain number of teachers that are on your list to do. You go in, you sit in on the class, you write them up, positive, negative and what you see going on. You have so many teachers that you work with and the other administrators have so many teachers that they work with.

How does Clark County help teachers to maintain their level of professionalism, developing their skills, things like that?

There are classes that they can take. They can always go back to college. There are always some types of meetings or something going on just in the district itself. So if you want to do it, you can do it.

Okay. I wanted to talk about your mother just a little. Your mother worked at the Test Site at one time.

Yes.

Tell me about a woman going back and forth to the Test Site to work. What was that like for her?

Early morning they would leave and drive up to the Test Site.

They?

They. It was like a group of people, so it was not just one individual going. They worked together, they rode together, going and coming back. They would leave early in the morning and come back in the evening.

And she would get home at what time after working all day?

Probably somewhere around—depended on traffic. It could be anywhere from six to seven in the evening.

She worked as a maid out there.

Yes.

What did she say she did all day, and where and what kind of maid work is possible at the Test Site?

That's something we don't talk about.

Not even that?

No. She was a maid, but everything was confidential.

I knew that Area 51 was confidential, but I didn't know everything was.

Well, the area that she was in; let me put it that way. It may not be all over, but it was confidential.

Wow. Isn't that something?

Yes. But she never talked about it.

Just amazing. Were you ever in a union? When you were a teacher were you in the union

then?

No.

I want to talk about your church activities. The church is really, really involved heavily with black life. Give me an idea of the importance of church life.

I don't know exactly what you want me to tell you about that because it's different everywhere you go, I believe. I think it is important that you be involved in the church. There are lots of activities that can go on; especially when you're dealing with young people. There are activities that the youth can still be involved with.

What does it do for the family to have a spiritual life?

I think that's individual because it's hard to say that you will be just like Jane over there or Paul over there. So that's an individual thing.

When we go to church on Sunday mornings it does something for you. It uplifts you. It makes us feel good inside. We connect with a spiritual element. I'm trying to get at how important that connection is all week long, not just on Sunday morning. And I want you to talk about what that does to help a family in Las Vegas, in any other place, what that spiritual connection means.

Well, that is really an individual thing simply because the whole family doesn't necessarily go.

Exactly.

There may be just one person out of the family going; it could be the entire family going. So it is hard to say that you do this and you do that because if you're going because someone is making you go, you're not getting anything from it. When a child gets a certain age and if they don't want to go, you don't. When they're young, you take them. When they get a certain age, some of them continue to go all the way and then some just drop out. You can make them go, but what

are they getting from it? So it's better to let them go on their own. Once you have brought them up, then it's on them. That's my opinion.

So how did the church help you as a young woman, older woman, middle-age woman, as you progressed through the years, through jobs? How did you feel the church helped you?

Well, with me I enjoy going to church. My mom was a churchgoer, so I went with her. When my kids were young they went to church. When they got older some of them left the church, some of them went to a different church. But as long as you are going to a church and you believe in God, you don't have to be in the church all the time. I have some that go every Sunday. I have some that don't go every Sunday, but they are still involved. So I think that with the church and once your kids get a certain age when you have given them the foundation, it's up to them what they want to do at that point in time.

Forgetting about the kids, what did it do for you over the years?

Me, I enjoy church. I'm involved in some things. I'm not involved as much as I once was because you can overload yourself.

Give me some ideas of the things you were involved in at your church.

At this time I work with the young people. There are other areas there that I work with, but as I get older I'm dropping some of the things.

And letting some of the younger people do it.

That's right. I think there's a time and a season for everything.

Yes, yes.

I enjoy going to church. I enjoy the things that I do, that I'm involved with. But I'm not as involved as I once was and I'm happy.

You have been active in two of the main institutions in black culture, or any culture; the

school and the church.

Yes, and the family planning.

Yes. How does it all fit together? How did what you do and what you've done—school, church, family—benefit the larger community over the years? How did you see all of that coming together?

Well, I tell you what; let me give you an example of what happened to me a few months ago. A young man came up to me—I was at a meeting—and he said, “Ms. Miller, you don't remember me, do you?” And I said, “No, I don't.” And he told me who he was. It made me feel so good that he remembered me. We were in a meeting, and I was sitting on one side and he was on the other side. Then he came over and he tapped on me and introduced himself and told me who he was and all of that. It really made me feel good because I saw so many kids; no way that I could remember all of them. But for him to remember me—and that had been quite some time ago. I've had that happen to me.

One young lady—I was in the mall. She was walking one way and I was walking the other way. She stopped and she looked. She said, “You're Ms. Miller.” And I said, “Yes.” And she had her kids with her, and she introduced her kids to me. Things like that just make you feel good that they remember you. So I enjoyed what I did when I was there. Then when my students remember me that really makes it special.

Perfect. I'm going to ask you about some of the people in the community, like yourself, who were considered community leaders. I want you to give me some memories that you have about these people. You've told me a little about J. David Hoggard and Verla Davis. Do you remember Mabel Hoggard?

I was never really that involved with Mrs. Hoggard, but she's a special person.

And she was a schoolteacher.

Yes, yes. The school was named after her; a very special lady. But I never really worked in the same vicinity with her.

Who were some of the people—did you work with Lubertha Johnson at all?

No, not really, but she was sort of involved with that program that David Hoggard had, and all of that was sort of tied together because it was federal money coming in, Lubertha Johnson.

She was with Head Start.

Yes, she was over Head Start.

Did you know Barbara Kirkland?

Yes, I know of her.

Okay. Who were some of the women that you considered friends over the years, some of the other educators?

I would say Eva Simmons. Verla Davis, because she was over one of the programs when I was in the program. I could probably think of a lot. Maybe they'll pop up in my head.

Okay. Eva Simmons helped to start a group called Les Femmes Douze, the ladies twelve.

Did you ever attend any of those activities? Were you ever involved and how?

Well, I was involved and then I just sort of dropped. Recently I've been going to a few of the events.

Tell me a little about the organization as an outsider.

As an outsider I see the members; they're friendly. I think that they are caring. I know that every so often they will call me. That means a lot to me. Eva, she will check on me and several others in the group every so often.

Could you tell me a little bit about Les Femmes Douze and what they do for young women

in the community?

I don't have all the experience with that because I was never involved with that part, but I know what they do. They take the young ladies and they train them and they teach them and then they bring them out, yes, because two of my daughters did.

Which two daughters went through?

My two oldest kids, Arletha and Patricia.

Do you remember any of the activities when they were going through the process with Les Femmes Douze?

Not really.

Give me some of the organizations outside of church and outside of your work that you were involved with in the community over the years. Anything memorable?

Once I left the family planning program I was in school; I was going out to the university. Then when I got my degrees I was involved in school. So I didn't have a lot of time. I had family and school.

No sororities or anything like that?

I was in the sorority. I was Delta Sigma Theta—I am Delta Sigma Theta.

Okay, yes.

I was active there for a while, but you have to adjust some things, and I had to make a decision.

Although I would go to some of the events, but I had to drop something.

Before that, before the dropping, when you were active in Delta Sigma Theta, just give me an idea of what the Delta Sorority does.

It's a sisterhood.

What does it do for the community, for somebody who doesn't know anything about Delta

Sigma Theta?

Delta Sigma Theta will help other people that need help. They don't go out bragging; they do what they're going to do and it's over.

Do you remember any projects that you participated in when you were active?

Off the top of my head right now, no.

Okay. When you came to Las Vegas in the late '60s, early '70s—you were here then, going to school, doing all those things—do you remember what Jackson Street, that business area, do you remember what it was like and can you describe it, some of the businesses?

It was probably more in the '50s than the '60s.

Okay, good. Good.

It was like downtown because it was segregated. They had the clubs on the Westside, but it did outgrow. So we had people, entertainers that came over on this side. But it was segregated to a point.

So tell me about the other businesses on those streets, like E, D, Jackson Street. What were some of the other businesses that the community could—you could go to a black business and get various services? What were some of those other businesses?

There was a grocery store. There were the cafes. I can't tell you about how many or what it was, but they had things over on the Westside that people didn't have to go out there.

Would you like to see that area alive and active again, filled with businesses?

I think it would be nice. I think it would be good for the community because some people cannot go to the Strip. And they still have some clubs over here on this side and they have some restaurants that you can go to. I would like to see it grow more. Yes, we still have some things over here.

In 1960 the Strip was integrated. The president of the NAACP at the exact time of the integration was Dr. McMillan. Do you remember anything about that?

Vaguely. I know it was Dr. [James] McMillan and I can't think of—he passed away a few years ago. Oh, I cannot think of his name right now. But it was two of them that was really—

Charles Kellar?

Charles Kellar was involved, too.

But this was somebody else?

Kellar and it was Reverend—Reverend, Reverend, Reverend. What is his name?

Prentiss Walker?

Walker was the one. Prentiss Walker, yes.

I'm trying to think of the other early ministers.

Dark complexion. I can't think of his name right now. If you talk to Frank, he can probably tell you because he was close—

Jesse Scott.

Scott. That's it. That's it.

Yes.

That's who it is, Jesse Scott, but Walker was in there, too, because those two were very ambitious about that, yes.

Do you remember the reaction to any of that from the public, from the community as you were in and out of the community?

Not really because during that time I had my kids, I had college and I had work. So I didn't have a lot of involvement at that time.

One of the things that were always a little unequal was housing. Housing was not

integrated until later. The Westside sometimes didn't have enough housing. What was that situation like in the community? What were the discussions like about housing?

To be honest with you about that from my point of view, my mom lived on Madison Street; that was a black community. I bought a house in Winslow Park and I went from Winslow Park to Chason Street. So the segregation—once people started moving out of the Westside—and believe it or not, the whites started moving in, too; some of them moved in on the Westside.

Where?

In the general area—you don't see them as much now because they have moved out. When you look now, they tell me—I am not in that area a lot—but they say that some of the whites are moving back into the community.

I wouldn't be surprised. I mean we have parts like Bonanza Village.

Tell me about Winslow Park. Where exactly is Winslow Park area?

Oh, how can I tell you how to get there? It's been so long.

Is it near Berkley Square?

It's past Berkley Square. It is west of Berkley Square.

Is it on the other side of Martin Luther King or on the east side?

No, no, no, no.

So it's on the west side of Martin Luther King.

Yes.

Okay. Near Lake Mead?

It is between—yes, it was past Lake Mead.

So north of—

West.

West of—so it's in the northwestern portion of the community.

Yes.

Okay. One of the things that happened after you were—in college, finishing college, 1972, Ruby Duncan and a group of women led a movement called the Welfare Rights movement. It was a movement that was happening nationally. What are some of your memories of some of those activities?

I wasn't really involved with that, but what Ruby and her group did was excellent, excellent. They made a lot of things happen because of those welfare women. I'm proud of them because they opened a lot of doors for us.

Do you remember any of the activities or any of the doors that they opened? Anything specific at all? The Strip, tell me about that.

Well, I really wasn't involved with it, but it opened a lot of doors that we could go into at that time. Because I was going to school and raising a family, I wasn't involved with that organization.

Exactly.

Ruby and her group, they opened up a lot of doors. They really did.

Next month Ruby and I [laughing] are going to be guests at a book club. This book club just read a book that was written about Ruby and her group called *Storming Caesars Palace*. Are you aware of that book?

No.

Oh, good, I'll have to loan you my copy of that book.

Can I buy one somewhere?

Oh, yes. It's called *Storming Caesars Palace*, written by Annelise Orleck. I'll write it down

before I leave.

Okay.

We're going to talk about the movement and Ruby is going to give specifics.

Is she really?

Yes.

When is this going to be?

I'm going to give you the date and I'll give you the location and everything before I leave.

Okay, good. I haven't seen Ruby lately.

Yes. I haven't seen her in a little while either.

I had her number and I've misplaced it because we went to the same church, and I haven't seen Ruby for a while. So I really need to call her.

Now, are you aware—I don't know if I should ask you this on tape, but we can erase it.

Well then, cut off the tape then.

[End of recorded interview]

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