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An Interview with Courtney Mooney

An Oral History Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

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

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

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Interview with Courtney Mooney

July 30, 2007 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Suzanne Becker

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Courtney Maroney is the Urban Design Coordinator for the City of Las Vegas. Her job description includes a focus on historic preservation, which is her passion. In the past years she shared her thoughts and personal thoughts about John S. Park neighborhood. She moved to John S. Park in 2012.

As a professional who explains that "how I look at preserving old neighborhoods or buildings is more of a community preservation, not so much the individual building by the individual building's sake..." Courtney offers a big picture of the neighborhood's past, present and future. John S. Park, the vibrant John S. Park Las Vegas neighborhood, was built during World War II and has been affected by history of segregation and the issue of changing demographics and the way that went into the plan and requirements to be designed a historic neighborhood.

Courtney provides a summary of the story about the land, its ownership and what led to the formation of the neighborhood. From John S. Park to George Brinkley and John L. Lusk to Mary DeWitt and explains how the proposed development of the land differed from other communities being built with FHA standards and practices that declared Las Vegas a Defense City in the 1940s. She also the factors that made the neighborhood a historic neighborhood and the historic district designation, a vibrant neighborhood packed away, and is "a special place for people and new housing here." Other with community leaders, entrepreneurs, the writer and other workers.

She also mentions about the proposed revitalization of the Las Vegas High School neighborhood by a new walk-in while opening the John S. Park designation.



Preface

Courtney Mooney is the Urban Design Coordinator for the City of Las Vegas. Her job description includes a knowledge of historic preservation, which is her passion. In this interview she shares her professional and personal thoughts about John S. Park Neighborhood. She moved to John S. Park in 2002.

As a professional she explains that “how I look at preserving neighborhoods or buildings, is more of a community preservation, not saving the individual building for the individual building’s sake...” Courtney offers a big picture of the neighborhood’s past, present and future. John S. Park, like so many other Las Vegas neighborhoods, was built during World War II and has been affected by history of segregation and the wave of changing demographics, and the work that went into the plan and requirements to be designated a historic neighborhood.

Courtney provides a summary of the story about the land, its ownership and what lead to the foundation of the neighborhood: from John S. Park to George Franklin and John Law, to Mary Dutton and explains how the proposed development of the land differed from other communities being built to FHA standards and specifics that declared Las Vegas a Defense City in the 1940s. She lists the factors that made the neighborhood a logical and important target for the historic designation, a small neighborhood tucked away, that is “a snapshot of the types of people that were coming here,” filled with community leaders, entrepreneurs, blue-collar and casino workers.

She also mentions about the missed opportunity of the Las Vegas High School neighborhood for preservation while supporting the John S. Park designation.

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So, Courtney, thanks again for doing an interview with us. I definitely appreciate you taking the time. And, it would be great if you could begin just by telling us a bit about yourself, where you were born and when you were born, a little bit about growing up there or where you grew up.

I was born in Elko, Nevada, in 1970, and I think we only lived there a couple of years. My dad was working for the State of Nevada. He was a psychologist. He was like a roaming psychologist [laughing] in the early days. They gave him a Winnebago and he would go into rural areas of Nevada and treat people. And my mother was a psych nurse. She was a nurse but she specialized in psychiatric wards but she did regular nursing as well. They actually met at the Nevada State Hospital, apparently. The two of them have slightly different stories. I think they met there, I'm pretty sure, and somehow we were in Elko for a couple of years, and then we ended up back in Reno [Nevada] where the Nevada State Hospital is, and we only lived there for just a few months, and then my dad got a job at the State Disability Office in Carson City [Nevada], I think. And my mother just went on and off from regular nursing to psychiatric nursing for years, I think.

So I lived in Carson City. I think we moved there when I was about two. Maybe three. I apologize for not knowing all the facts. And then, my parents got divorced when I was six, and my mother met someone when I was about seven, and he was an airline mechanic, and he worked for Hughes Air West in Las Vegas, so they moved here. And then I lived with my dad, and he ended up marrying a woman named Sally Whipple. Her family is a big eastern Nevada ranching family. My dad was never really close to his

family, so I sort of got immersed into the Whipple family at a young age. So I always kind of call them my family.

So where did you hang out for the bulk of your childhood? It sounds like you were kind of traveling all over Nevada.

Yeah, well, my dad was really adamant about me being in one place as much as possible. But they also had joint custody, so I spent my summers with my dad and then my school years with my mom. So actually when I was seven, I went to school in Las Vegas. And we lived right by these white apartments that are just north of the UNLV campus.

They're on like Flamingo [Road] and UNLV. I know everybody is familiar with them because apparently everybody has lived in them. I remember distinctly that it had to have been 1977 because a woman came bursting through our door, and crying and screaming that Elvis [Presley] had died. That's like one of maybe three memories I have of that place. [Laughing] And my mom, I don't think she really cared that much, so that was very disappointing for that woman, I think. I don't remember. I don't even know who Elvis was. [Laughing]

Then I went back to Carson [City] and I mean I just sort of moved back and forth, but my dad never moved, because he wanted me to always have a home base. So he and my stepmother Sally stayed there, and most of my childhood memories are from Carson City. I had friends that lived in the surrounding areas, like Dayton and Virginia City, Silver City [Nevada].

So what was it like growing up in Carson City which is probably where you had the bulk of your free time as a kid, right? What was Carson City like at that point? Has it changed much?

I don't know. I mean I left when I was in high school so I don't know if it's changed in regards to activities for kids, you know. I know people say this all the time but things were a little bit different then. I'm not sure that I would let my children roam as free as I was allowed to roam free, you know. I had a great deal of responsibility. I mean, I was given a great deal of responsibility at a young age. We had friends in the neighborhood and we just, at all hours of the night, were roaming around the neighborhood, you know. We had curfews but it just wasn't the same. And it's a different neighborhood, too. I mean, Carson City is a different town than it is here. So, I look at the fears that I have, and relate it to my childhood, and I always think, oh, my gosh, if I stayed here in Las Vegas, I would never let my kids have that type of freedom.

Well, yeah, different times, different city. So what kind of stuff did you guys do?

For a while we had dirt bikes, so we did a lot of that in the surrounding areas. I remember spending a lot of time at my friends' houses and I mean just playing at houses. I don't remember spending a lot of time in parks or a lot of time in those types of activities. I hated sports. I'd always try to do it and then I just quit because I hated it. My best friend that lived down the street moved to Silver City, Nevada. She had horses, so we rode horses. But when they moved, and I got my driver's license, that was when all the fun started. [Laughing] That was when all the exploration and all the mining towns and, you know, riding the dirt bikes out into the middle of nowhere and that kind of stuff [occurred]. But I don't remember really having a lot of fun before then. [Laughing]

So how did that compare to the time that you spent in Las Vegas?

Well, my mother was very paranoid; so my sister and I didn't have a lot of freedom when we lived with my mom. She'd had a very rough childhood, so she was very aware of, a

little hyper-aware of dangers or perceived dangers. So, you know, we were on pretty short leashes, growing up. [Laughing] So I didn't get really to do much when I was living with my mom. We stayed at home a lot, you know. So it's kind of fuzzy. I guess if I really sat down and thought about it for hours I could probably come up with [some memories]. I rode my bike a lot. That's all I really remember doing—is riding my bike a lot, and trying to find ways to get away, like sneak out and explore, without my mom knowing, you know. [Laughing] But I didn't live with her as much as I lived with my dad. I was pretty much raised by my dad. My sister spent a lot more time with my mom.

And so you went through high school here?

In Carson City.

At what point did you end up coming back to Las Vegas? How did you end up back here living?

I graduated from high school and I moved to Reno. Wanted to live in the big city.

[Laughing] And I went to community college and got a double-A degree. And after I graduated from community college, I wanted to live in Sacramento [California]. I'd only been there once and I guess I thought it was the greatest place ever.

So I moved to Sacramento. I had no job, no friends, no apartment, no nothing. I wanted to get out, you know, and explore. So my dad, he moves me there, and we get this apartment, he drops me off, and the next day he's gone and I don't know anybody, no job. I eventually got a job working for Sprint. I was a deaf-relay operator, which was a really interesting job. I was making \$7.15 an hour, which was a fortune at the time. I remember thinking, you know, how proud I was of making this money and working for Sprint. My goal was to go to school, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had my

double-A in humanities and arts, just something really general, and I had no idea what I wanted to do.

I was raised kind of in such a way that my dad and my stepmother really valued old stuff. When I was growing up we never had new toys. I mean everything was old. My dad didn't like plastic stuff, so we didn't have plastic toys and all that stuff. It was a little neurotic. He didn't like anything like that. He would give us motors to play with and stuff. We had like little mechanical things that we could take apart and put together, or he'd make us toys out of wood. Everything was hand-made. Or if we begged him, he'd get us some game from the thrift store, but you know all the pieces were never there. Everything was from the thrift store. He didn't trust anything new. He was almost a little bit Ted Kaczynski in a way because he didn't like technology either, but now he's completely the opposite. He was like the first guy on the block to have a computer in the eighties. So I can't explain that. I think he really wanted a boy [laughing]. He tried to teach me how to fight and work on cars. He was a great dad. But we just didn't have a very conventional childhood. We always had an old house. We always had really old cars. My first car in high school was a 1950 Plymouth. We had one door handle, and you had to pass it around to get out.

So that's kind of that value system that I was raised with that, you know; right or wrong, we just had a deep appreciation for older stuff. I thought I knew that I really wanted to do something with old stuff, but I had no idea, and I didn't even know that historic preservation was a profession. I didn't realize that you could make a profession out of saving old buildings.

So I'm in Sacramento, and I remember this very clearly, I'm sitting on my bed, talking to my stepmother, and she says, Well, why don't you be a preservation architect?

And I said, What? What are you talking about?

And she says, Yes, yes, I know, I have a friend, and he's a friend of your dad's, and he's a preservation architect.

And I thought, Well, that sounds interesting, but it also sounds really difficult.

So I talked to my dad and he talked to his friend and he calls me back and he says, Yes, yes, if you want to deal with old buildings—you know, because I said I really like old buildings—he goes, OK, if you want to do this, you have to go to architecture school.

And I said, I don't want to go to [architecture school], you know, I was terrible in math, I always failed it.

He goes, Well, just look in Sacramento and see if they have an architecture program. Well, they didn't.

So, then, my stepmother says, Well, they have one in Vegas.

And I said, I'm never going to live in Vegas, I hate that place. [Laughter] Those are the famous last words.

So she says, Never say never. I think that's exactly what she said. And since I was a resident, you know, it was cheap for them to pay for me to go to school.

So I moved in with my cousin on New Year's Eve '93. So that was my first night. I unloaded the U-Haul with my friend. She had a friend here who was having a New Year's Eve party, and then we went to the party. So that was my first night in Vegas. We watched a band that nobody knew about then but it was Soul Coughing, in somebody's living room. That was really good. I didn't know anybody but it was fun.

I started school, which was the hardest trial of my life up until then.

So you went to the architecture school here at UNLV.

Yeah, at UNLV. It was before they were accredited but they got accredited shortly after I graduated, which is good. And that was really, really difficult. It was difficult on many levels because of the math and the physics and all of that stuff that I had to do. I'm not a math person, you know, I'm an English-writing-reading-humanities [kind of person]. It was really hard. We had like four semesters of structures, and we had a very serious instructor who didn't let you get away with anything. I think two semesters of physics. So you know there was a ton of math. And then the time that it took. And the competition was hard. And I'm not a very good designer. I'm a much better critic. [Laughing]. Which makes me a good preservationist, I guess. But I'm not a very good designer, so I struggled a lot with coming up with good ideas so you could sort of get a decent grade and save face. Because the competition was just really tough. But I ended up banding up with the only three other girls that were in the program, and we're still friends today, so that's good. We all really helped each other and supported each other, which was cool. And I remember not sleeping for four days, catching a catnap under my desk, just, you know, the dedication, a lot of people having to drop out. But it really prepared me for graduate school.

So that's how I came to Vegas, was to go to school. And then, I wasn't really into it so much. I appreciated Vegas but I wanted to go someplace else for graduate school, and I looked into historic preservation schools, and I ended up going to Columbia [University]. I got a full-ride scholarship at Savannah College of Art and Design, and I

turned them down because I wanted to live in Manhattan and pay a lot of money.

[Laughing] So I got a graduate degree from Columbia in preservation.

Like you, I didn't know there was an actual program that would be in preservation.

Yeah. There's actually quite a few. I researched all the schools, and I wanted to pick one that worked with the community the most. And the irony is that at Columbia, you didn't work with the community at all. But in all of their brochures and when you talk to the counselors and everything at Columbia, they swore up and down that yes, they do all of this work with the community, and it's completely not true. But, nevertheless, I lived in the most hyper-urban setting, aside from San Francisco [California] or maybe Chicago [Illinois], so the benefit of living there and learning about how a real city works was invaluable.

I didn't really want to come back to Vegas but my boyfriend at the time had a band here. He had moved there for me and I figured, you know, now it's my time to sort of give back to him. So we came back.

And had you been hooked up with a job at all when you came back, or did you have an inkling that there was something that you could do here?

Well, I was working on my thesis, which was about Fremont Street, and protecting the process of change. And I had a couple of readers here in Vegas, and one was Frank Fiori, who had my position at the City [of Las Vegas] that I have now. He was planning on moving someplace else, and he really wanted me to have the job. So he was a big support for me getting that job. But he couldn't make any promises because you never know how things go. But he was putting in the good word for me. I knew I had a job with my old

boss who built architectural models, so I went back to him and consulted for a couple of years before I got hired. I knew it was a matter of time.

And when you guys came back, what part of town did you live in? What part of town did you live in when you were at UNLV? Were you down toward campus?

Yeah, I lived in a couple of places actually. I lived right behind the Lucky's on—now I'm not remembering the name of the street. It starts with an A. It's Flamingo [Road] and Maryland [Parkway] and it's not a Lucky's anymore but there's the Terrible Herbst car wash, and there's these apartments right behind there. When I first came to Vegas I lived on like Eastern [Avenue], behind the [McCarran International] airport. You couldn't even get a pizza delivered out there. There was nothing out there when I moved here, and now it's completely developed. And then I moved to the place on Flamingo and Maryland, and then I moved to Sierra Vista [Drive] and Paradise [Road]. I moved to the Diplomat, which was the coolest, swankiest apartment ever, built in the fifties or sixties, I think. It was a complex with an hourglass-shaped pool. There was rumors that [singer] Anne Murray lived there and all this stuff, so who knows? But anyway. And then I moved over with my ex-boyfriend. I lived right behind the university, or across Maryland Parkway, in these like four-plexes. They're stand-alone houses that have four units in them.

Apparently a lot of students have lived there.

On the other side of Maryland Parkway?

Yeah, across Maryland, behind like the Wendy's.

Toward like where the Freakin' Frog is now?

I think it's south of that.

OK. But in that area.

Yeah, tucked back there. And then, we had always wanted to live downtown. We had a lot of friends that lived downtown. But we didn't move here, into the John S. Park Neighborhood, until we came back from New York. And we actually sublet on Trop [Tropicana Avenue] and Jones [Boulevard] for six months until we found a place here.

But you knew, coming back in, that this was an area that you wanted to be in.

Yes. Yes.

You were probably not aware of geographical locations in the city as a kid. At some point, did you become aware of this area? How did you hear about it and decide that this was where you wanted to be? What drew you to it?

I think, aside from all the normal stuff you hear from people who live here like, you know, they don't want the cookie-cutter house and whatever, after living in New York, it was a culture shock for me to come back and live on Trop and Jones, because you're so far removed from anything that's even remotely urban. I mean, people would say it's urban because you've got these major cross-streets and everything but there was nothing you could walk to, you didn't know your neighbors, that kind of thing. As a kid, you know, I loved downtown. I used to make my parents take me down Fremont Street all the time when you could drive down it and stuff. But I don't think I really craved or understood or appreciated the area until I had lived in New York, and understood what a real neighborhood is. And, when I came back to Las Vegas, my ex-boyfriend and I, like I said, we had friends that lived here, so we really wanted to be here, for that reason, plus, for the reason that, you know, it's close to downtown, which everything is cool downtown. You've got all the old buildings and you can walk to the bar if you want to, at the time you could walk to the grocery store. When we first moved here, right next to the

White Cross [Drugs] there used to be a little grocery store. And it was a dump but, you know, during the day you could walk there and get something. And we knew our neighbors, we had good friends that lived in the area, and we could walk to their houses. If we wanted to hop on a bus, you know, we could easily catch a bus to take us downtown where we really liked to go to the diners and the casinos and stuff. And that was more important to us than anything, you know, just that proximity to friends, proximity to entertainment. I think I would've gone insane if I didn't have the connection with a lot of other people in the neighborhood that I do now.

And so how long have you guys lived in this house?

I've been here since I think March of 2002. I rented it initially, and then I asked the owner if he was interested in selling, and he said yes, and I bought it in 2004.

And so have your same neighbors lived around you since you've moved here?

Yeah. Yeah.

Do you guys all know each other? What kind of interactions do you have?

We do know each other. The neighbors just to the south of me, I've been to their house a couple of times for parties. They're an Hispanic family. When we first moved in, the daughter had just moved here, I think from Mexico, and she could barely speak a word of English, but by six months she was speaking English very well, and so we would communicate, because her father didn't speak English; so she and I would talk a lot about, you know, we would just chitchat or if she needed something or if I needed something, you know. And then I think she got married and moved out because I haven't seen her in a while. But I see her dad a lot because he is constantly working on the house. And so we wave at him all the time. He's a really cool guy.

The people to the north of me, we chat with them a lot. Their son owns a tow truck business. I think he has one tow truck, and so we give him business with our business, with the auto business. So occasionally we'll refer him to somebody and everything. And there's been times where both neighbors have been watching out for me. Like they will say, oh, we saw somebody in the front yard and we chased them away, or whatever. So they are really good neighbors to have. They're very cool. I feel very lucky because I hear horror stories.

Yeah, you've lived down here and you sort of work in this business. What's your take on the issue of crime in this area? I don't know, you've lived here now for like five years. Have you seen that change at all?

I'd like to say I think it's getting better. I don't notice as much foot traffic, as I did before. With me it's hard because I live adjacent to Rexford [Drive], and that's not a very good street, so we hear a lot of activity back there. We get some trash in our yard that I'm not sure where it comes from. But, you know, other than that, we've been broken into twice. I take that back. It wasn't me, it was the people that lived here right before me, that were renting before me, they got broken into. And then about a year or two after I moved in, I got broken into. And then when my ex-boyfriend and I broke up and I was living here by myself, I got a big dog.

Has that helped?

It has. Actually we had somebody on the back patio about six months ago. And we've since then got another dog. I'm sorry, not since the person on the back patio. But we have two dogs now, and they chased him off. And they didn't even have to go outside. They just barked and he took off.

I think, with this neighborhood, it's crimes of opportunity. I don't think that people target this neighborhood in a sense that they know that there's valuables in these houses. I think it's people that come off the street, and they are looking for opportunity. Because I've heard that they will come up and actually try doors and see if they're unlocked or not. I've never experienced that, but I can tell you that my dog will bark randomly at the door. I don't know what that means. We did have a scam one time where a girl came to the door and she was bloody and said that she needed help. And I didn't actually get to the door in time, but she went to the neighbor's house and did the same thing. We called the police and they picked her up and it was a scam. I don't answer the door if I don't know who it is. And that's the sad thing, because, if it's somebody who legitimately needs help, there's no way to tell if it's legitimate or not. I will call 911 for them, but I won't let them in the house. I tell everybody that stays with me, if it's a guest and, you know, we have roommates, I tell them, don't answer the door if you don't know who it is. I think it just makes good sense.

It does, you know, but really, that kind of goes with living, I think, in any urban environment, to certain degrees, whether it's New York City or Chicago, I think that's just something that's good to be aware of.

I think our neighborhood is pretty aware. We have the website or chat site or whatever you call it, group site. For a while there it was really active and people were taking pictures of people walking through the neighborhood and posting the pictures, and if things got stolen they would post stuff about what got stolen. It's subsided a little bit. We have a couple of neighbors. I don't know if you're familiar with Randy and Lynn. They live right down that side street. Griffith [Avenue]. And when I was living here by myself,

Randy would drive by and just watch the house, kind of all the time. He would always take this route so he could just take a look at it, you know, and make sure. So we always have neighbors that are [aware]. We all look out for each other. So I think that's helped the crime issue.

Yeah, I mean I think that's part of what neighborhoods and communities do. I mean I think that's a nice aspect, and it's too bad that it's sort of forced, in a sense, but lucky to have it. I always feel lucky to have it.

So, two things: Talk a little bit about how you ended up, then, getting into your job that you do now, and describe a little bit what it all entails. I think it's interesting and important to the story of this community.

My boss just asked me this the other day. He's like, why do you do what you do? And it took me a while to think about it. Well, I think it goes back to the fact that when my parents were divorced, and I kept moving a lot, you know, when I'd come back to Carson City and the same buildings and my same school, my house, the diner we'd eat at, everything was still there. And so it was a sense of security for me, because I didn't really have a lot of control of what was going on in my life, you know, I was moving around and various things, and so I think that being able to come back to the same neighborhood, and have the same friends, that was very important to me, and so it was definitely a sense of security.

I think about that a lot when I'm doing my work, because I think, how I look at preserving neighborhoods or buildings, is more of a community preservation, not saving the individual building for the individual building's sake, if that makes any sense. I mean, I think every little building is important, but people say to me all the time, what's historic

in Las Vegas? How do you even have a job? And I say, well, you know, we have what we have. Basically, the majority of the historic buildings that we have are World War II neighborhoods. And that has contributed significantly to what community we have here. People say we have no community but that's not true. This neighborhood is a perfect example. I'm sure the Scotch Eighties and Rancho Circle and those kinds of older, more established neighborhoods where families have lived there forever, their kids are raised together and they grow up and become professionals and establish professional relationships and carry on that sort of bond or that network. Saving a neighborhood is more important, I think, for quality of life and community aspect than it being historic. That's why sometimes I struggle with my job because, you know, I understand property rights, I was raised in Nevada, you know, my dad would like to think that he could just dump his engine oil anywhere he wants to, but he can't and he's bitter about it, you know, that kind of thing. And so I understand all of that side of it. But I also understand that the long-term consequence is bigger and more important than your individual property rights. And people at work say, oh, you're just a fascist, but that's not true, because I honestly believe that we're stewards of the Earth, down to our little house that we have, and we need to take care of everything that we have so that it lasts as long as it does. Otherwise, it has no meaning. And I think, for me, that's why I preserve.

I think that's a terrific explanation, and I really like the part of that that's community-oriented. I mean I think that's good foresight. It's a good vision to have for it. And so, I guess, is that something that sort of sits in the back of your mind as you go through and do your work and look at preservation issues?

Yes. My official title is Urban Design Coordinator. There's one little line in that that says something about, you know, must have some kind of knowledge of preservation. It's just one little line. And my boss, I think she was manager of Comprehensive Planning at the time, she's now Director of Planning and Development, her name is Margo Wheeler, she had a lot of faith in me. She came from L.A. [Los Angeles, California] and was very used to preservation, so she was extremely supportive of having somebody in that position that would sort of further the preservation goals of the City of Las Vegas. And believe it or not, there is a document with goals in it for preserving neighborhoods and buildings and things of architectural and historical value, which no one believes me until I show it to them but it's true. [Laughing]

And what you mentioned is so typical because when people think of Las Vegas they [don't think of preservation]. Is it hard to do preservation here? You mentioned that there's a document, but is it a smaller contingency of folks that are wanting to do preservation?

Yes and no. To get back to your earlier question, I think you were asking, is the community concept a big part of my job? Is that what you were asking?

Yeah, I mean how do those tie in? Because I really liked that explanation about preservation.

I think that's the underlying kind of fundamental thing in the back of my mind. Yeah, I do think it is, because sometimes I get irritated with some of the buildings that people want to preserve. [Laughing] I'll probably end up getting buried for this but I wasn't really that fond of the railroad cottages, personally, and the railroad cottages was a big deal. That was a big project that you would come into my office and mention it to me and

I'd burst into tears because I was so stressed out about moving these railroad cottages. And we had to get them moved. And there were a lot of people that didn't like the fact that we were moving them, that the City should just come in and buy all that property, which is completely naïve to think that the City's going to buy property that someone can build a fifty-story high-rise on and keep these little cottages. It's just not going to happen. So we were sort of getting attacked from all sides on that. And that's one of the really hard things about being a preservationist is, picking your battles, because nobody wants to move a building, you know, you want it to stay where it is and be all cute and you want somebody to come up with something creative. But the bottom line is, it's not going to happen, because the City can get however much tax dollars off of this gigantic high-rise, which, by the way, hasn't been built. So, you know, we moved the cottages, and to me, it's not really a lost battle because the cottages are still there. They were moved to the Las Vegas Springs Preserve and they're going to be interpreted in such a way that you understand that they weren't always there, you know that these are a vital part of the early history of Las Vegas, but they weren't at the Springs, they have nothing to do with the Springs but, you know, this is like an exhibit kind of thing. I'm hoping to be involved in that process. And so that's just a weird battle.

But for me, the bigger issue was bringing life into the downtown area, because if you bring life and it's a high-rise, [you can only benefit]. I'm a big fan of Jane Jacobs. I don't know if you're familiar with her. She wrote a lot of books about planning. She wasn't educated in planning but she grew up in New York and would write tons of books about urban planning, very traditional concepts of urban planning where you have what she would call "eyes on the streets" and you would have safety because you've got all

sorts of people living in the high-rises looking down on the street and you have bars open at all hours so you've got constant people on the street and activity, and all this activity is spilling out into the streets, making people drive slower. You know, it's just this whole like thing that works together. Well, to me, that's more important than a few little cottages. So, you've got this high-rise that's downtown, and I know people are really against it but, to me, had it been built (since it hasn't been built the point is kind of moot), you've got all this tremendous life on the streets that is going to save the really important thing, which is the neighborhoods. You want the value of land to increase next to your neighborhoods, and I don't foresee anyone coming into the John S. Park Neighborhood and wanting to buy it up for a high-rise. So, you can only benefit from growth in the downtown area. And you have to pick your battles.

And I think, you know, have the larger vision, be able to see the larger picture, which it sounds like you can, and it seems like sometimes, whether it's in development or any other kind of project, sometimes it seems like people just don't see the bigger picture, the longer-term implications. And so it sounds to me that that's sort of an angle that you take, which is good. And that's another question I had is I was wondering, from a preservation perspective, what you thought about the Manhattanization of this general area.

I think there's appropriate development and there's inappropriate development. A stadium I think is completely inappropriate. Bringing gaming into the Arts District is inappropriate. I'm all for a hundred great, groovy bars. I'm all for some great condos, if we can fill them. But with that we need to do other things as well that are important, like grocery stores and other amenities for people. So that's another tangent. Yeah, I think

there's definitely appropriate high-rise concepts. And I think the City's doing OK with what they're approving as far as making sure that there's retail on the bottom. Like with the entertainment district, they got rid of the distance separation requirements for taverns so you can have six or eight taverns in a row and you creating this sort of night-life thing and they're keeping the old buildings and they're encouraging developers and the people who own the bars to go into the older buildings and so you have that very walkable urban environment. I think we've got the right ideas. So I think downtown is just only going to get better. Because we're not going to always have that choice of going further and further out.

True. True. Which, you know, in Las Vegas, it seems like the ever-expandable city. You talk to people that moved here in 1960 and they'll say, oh, I remember when Maryland Parkway was just being developed and it didn't even go all the way through. Or the parameters of town were like, you know, Eastern [Avenue] was really far out. And we just keep going.

You mentioned the Arts District briefly. I'm just wondering what your perspective is on the relationship between the Arts District and the John S. Park Neighborhood. I think I mentioned when we were talking about John S. Park, we sort of expanded the boundaries to include Las Vegas [Boulevard] to Maryland [Parkway] and Charleston [Boulevard] to like Saint Louis [Avenue].

I think that they're all like vital components of the bigger picture. John S. Park, you have to have residences in the downtown area, and the Arts District, you have to have an arts district because, well, the whole concept of the Arts District or any arts district is providing low-income housing for artists. And everyone knows, you know, the whole

buzz is the creative class. You want to bring the artists into the downtown area because those are the people that are going to make your downtown hip. Well, there is definitely some truth to that. There's a lot of truth to that. It's not a flawless concept but it works pretty well. I think the Arts District is totally vital to having a downtown that people are going to want to come to. And young people, old people, I think generally people tend to gravitate towards art, whether it's performance art or fine art or whatever, and so a successful arts district is vital to a successful downtown. You can have all the other things. I think you really need an arts district.

How it ties in with the neighborhood, I mean half the artists live here. [Laughing] And so, of course they're going to live here because they're creative individuals and don't want to live in a cookie-cutter house. So, you've got the housing for the artists, and I just think they all tie in together. You can't have one without the other.

In the time that you've been here or been familiar with the neighborhood even, has it changed, and if so, what types of changes have you seen?

I think it's changed. There's been a lot of young professionals moving in. I think a lot of gay couples. And young families. But yet you still have this sort of ethnic diversity, which is very cool. I don't feel like people are getting shoved out. I don't feel like it's gentrified to the point where you're losing that important diversity in the neighborhood. And I think that's a good thing, too. I think if property values continue to rise exponentially, as they eventually will again, you might be at risk of gentrifying the neighborhood, which I don't think is a good thing, because I think right now it's lively. I mentioned living behind Rexford [Drive] which has its good and bad moments, but it reminds me of living in New York because I lived in a Dominican neighborhood, and on

the nights they had the baseball games, till three o'clock in the morning it sounded like there was a live band in your living room. But it was all part of living in New York and living in the city. I don't even know if I could sleep, if I didn't hear helicopters.

[Laughing] So I think it's part of the vitality of the neighborhood. So I think it's changing in a good way, where you are getting more people who have more money to sort of fix up the homes, and that's a good thing, but you're not losing some of the vitality.

Now you mentioned the diversity and the different types of groups of people that live in the neighborhood. Do you know of or have you heard of any types of experiences of discrimination or anything like that?

No, I really haven't heard anything like that. This neighborhood, the John S. Park Neighborhood, is different but, historically speaking, a lot of neighborhoods in Las Vegas that were built during the war [World War II] excluded African Americans and Hispanics. So that's kind of interesting that you mention that now. Of course that's obviously done with. I remember we had a community meeting at the Mormon church, and I think it was like an annual neighborhood meeting. I can't remember what the reason was. But there was a large group of Hispanics that came, and they were all sitting against the wall, and everyone else was sort of mingling, you know, and there was obviously the language barrier, and I really wished that I knew Spanish at that time because I wanted to include them more in what was going on. I thought, OK, this is a very important moment, right now, because we have this chance to kind of include them now in this meeting, instead of letting them sit there, and then go home and go, why are we ever going to go to another meeting, because nobody talks to us. So I thought, gosh, I wish I knew Spanish because I would somehow try to wrap them into it. But I don't know how to really

improve upon that, other than make that special effort to reach out to the Hispanic community. I don't think there's racism or exclusion so much so as there is just kind of not really going that extra effort to include them. But I could be wrong. There may be efforts out there I'm not aware of.

And, you know, as you mentioned, I think language is definitely a barrier. I mean that's one of the unique aspects, I think, too, about this area is just that so many different types of folks live all around, and that's what makes it feel like a neighborhood.

But you have the same concerns, no matter what, and so that's why it's so important to make sure that everybody is included.

And so since you guys have been living here, what have been some of the larger issues that have affected the neighborhood, or that you think have impacted the neighborhood?

Everybody talks about the crime, but not recently. I don't think that is as bad as it used to be. It really depends on even what part of the street you live on, in this neighborhood, you know. Like we have a lot of foot traffic. My neighbors or my friends that live a few blocks away don't have any foot traffic.

The bigger issues I think that people in the neighborhood are concerned about, I think, are mostly what's going on outside of the neighborhood, what's going on in the downtown area. Were you living here when they were talking about the high-rises on Las Vegas Boulevard?

Yeah. Yeah.

That was a big battle. And it's hard for me because I have to stay out of it, because I'm a City employee, so I don't go to any of the meetings and I don't get involved in that because I can't do anything about it, and if I go to the meetings, inevitably I get accosted in some way, shape, or form. So, you know, I just stay out of it as much as possible. But I think those types of things [development issues] are a really big concern for the neighborhood.

Initially when the residents approached the City about becoming an historic district, one of the main concerns was commercial encroachment. And I think that was coming from Charleston [Boulevard], because some of the homes that are just barely inside the neighborhood are offices. So that was a huge concern, was they wanted to get designated so that they could make sure that they didn't become like the Las Vegas High School neighborhood. So, the great thing about this neighborhood is it's so tight, and it's so full of lawyers and politicians and all these people that have an influence and actually can make things happen. And they communicate so well, you know, so they get things done. And that's why they're more concerned with other things besides trash and whatnot because again they're seeing that bigger picture.

Yeah, and I mean that's interesting because this neighborhood has such an interesting history of the influential people in Las Vegas who have lived here. So who do you think of being some of the most important people in the neighborhood, whether now or in history, that have sort of shaped it and [made] it into what it is today?

There's a lot of people that came out of the woodwork for the high-rise issue. There's a lot of people that have come out of the woodwork for a lot of other issues that fought

vigorously for the historic district designation, because that was kind of a bloody battle. [Laughing] You know, I don't want to leave anybody out, but the people that I dealt with mostly, when I was writing the nomination report, were Mary Hausch, who is on the Preservation Commission; Bob Bellis, who's been tremendous in organizing the neighborhood's efforts, above and beyond the historic district issues; Yorgo Kagafas, he's my counterpart at the City of Las Vegas, but he actually wrote the John S. Park Plan. He worked with the neighborhood to do the neighborhood plan, which a component of that was the historic district designation. One of his great talents is keeping things on track. He starts a plan, he finishes it, and he covers all the bases and does everything exactly the way you should do it. He's very good at that. And I think without Yorgo, the neighborhood would not be where it's at today. And Yorgo is very good friends with Bob Bellis. So the two of them, I think, were very instrumental. [Attorney and poet] Dayvid Figler, who speaks in support of a lot of neighborhood issues. [Clark County Commissioner] Chris Guinchigliani, who lived here. And Marie [Horsley]. When I was doing the historic district designation, she was always in support of it and would answer any question I had about the history of the neighborhood, so she was very helpful. And I think there were a lot of people like Marie that were very supportive of that issue, the historic issue. There were a lot of people that weren't in support of it, too. But that's another story.

But, you know, like I said, I don't want to leave anybody out because I can see people in my head and I can't think of their names. Jenelle, I can't remember her last name, lives on Griffith [Avenue] and Fifth Place, she is an attorney and when the neighborhood was fighting the Stratosphere [Hotel and Casino] stuff, she was very

involved in that. And I think that the increase in property values has been like the silent supporter of the neighborhood, too. [Laughing] So, you know, that's where everybody contributes, in their own way because the more you improve your private property and the more you improve the neighborhood, that's a definite support. Oh, and you know, Bob Coffin, too, of course.

Now you mentioned, when you were talking about preservation, that there was some opposition to it. What was some of that opposition centered on, or what were some of the reasons?

I think people were really afraid of the fact that there was going to be an extra layer of review on any kind of changes that they wanted to make to their houses. And again that's perfectly understandable. It wasn't helped by a certain individual that was distributing misinformation, and photocopying signatures on a petition. There was some definite things that were a little nefarious. [Laughing] And that particular individual remains very vocal to this day. So, without giving credit to that individual, you know, I don't want to give too much credit, but they definitely managed to turn a couple of people who were in support of it. They made them oppose it. And that was kind of a bummer because there was one woman that has lived here forever, and we talked a lot about the historic district, and she even helped me do some research and she was really into it, and then, at the last minute, was swayed. So, that was disappointing. And it was because of misinformation. I don't necessarily know exactly what was being distributed. I just heard from some of the residents, you know, they would ask me, well, is this true? And I'd say, no, you know, that's completely not true. A really basic example would be that you couldn't paint your house pink or whatever color you wanted to paint it, and that's not true. So, I think there

was a lot of panic going on, you know, about stuff that just simply wasn't true. And, I think, another thing is, it's really difficult, I think, for some people, that bought these houses new, to accept the fact that they're historic. And I can understand that, too, because I think about buildings that were built in the Seventies and I think, that's not historic, but you know, they're clearly examples of a certain architectural style, or something going on in the world at the time, or some sort of concept or thought. I'm just not appreciating it because it happened during my lifetime.

And what constitutes "historic"? How did it come to be that John S. Park became designated an historic neighborhood? And what qualifies it for that designation?

There's a couple of different designations. There's listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and there's listing on the State Register [of Historic Places] and the local City of Las Vegas Historic Property Register. So actually there's three different [designations]. But State and National have the same requirements. Both of them, your minimum standard is that you have to be at least fifty years old or a great portion of a district has to be at least fifty years old. Now you can get around that because the Morelli House is designated on the City Register and the State Register, and it's not fifty years old but it proves extreme significance on another level. So, you can get around that. But, generally, fifty years old is the cutoff date. Who came up with that? I don't know. Nobody really knows. [Laughing] It's like the secret of the \$68,000 question.

But, when I was hired to do the nomination report, you start out doing an historic resource survey and inventory. So you send somebody out, a qualified consultant, to survey a district, and that means you go to the Buildings Department and you look up the records for each and every house, to find out what permits have been applied for, for

what changes. And that helps you sort of be able to look at the building and say, oh, you know, in 1968 they added a garage, or whatever. It also helps give you kind of a history of owners, because the owner would be listed on the permit. And then of course you do the deed research to get the owners. You also research the plat itself, the boundaries for the neighborhood, and then you'll find out the developers, and then you'll research their history, and are they significant in any way? What did they contribute, besides buying a bunch of property and subdividing it? The history of the land, even before that. With the case of John S. Park, there was a huge chunk of land owned by John S. Park. Mary Dutton, I think, bought land from him, but Mary Dutton had like twenty-five acres, where she was keeping bees, and she was selling the first commercial flowers in Las Vegas, and had an orchard.

So you research all [of that]. Everything contributes because it tells a story about the neighborhood. And then you try to establish significance based on its associations with either people, architectural styles, or significant historic events. For sites or resources that are much older, you would attach significance to the historic value or the value to yield information about history that isn't available today. So we're talking about prehistory stuff. Graveyards have a whole different set of significance criteria, because there's no buildings, and graveyards themselves have their own developments as far as landscaping, so can you tie it to some significant landscaping movement?

With John S. Park, you had a lot of really influential people that, whether they did it together or not, they managed to create the neighborhood. So you had John S. Park himself. And actually the neighborhood, the two plats are Park Place, which is the western section, which is pretty much Fifth Place, and then you have Vega Verde, which

is the majority of the district, and that's like Sixth Street to Ninth [Street], and Charleston [Boulevard] to Franklin [Avenue].

And so you had John S. Park who lived there initially and then sold the land, to [George] Franklin [Sr.] and [John] Law.

So he just lived on this land.

Yeah, he lived on a bunch of property. And he ended up selling it off. His wife passed away and he was very depressed and didn't want to live there anymore. It's been a while since I wrote the report but he ended up being depressed and selling all the property off. Sold a bunch of land to Mary Dutton. She actually filed with the FHA [Federal Housing Administration] some subdivision designs. She wanted funding to do a subdivision and they kept turning her down. You know, the speculation is that it was because she was a woman. It could be. I don't know. Maybe the designs weren't up to standards. The FHA had very specific standards about how they wanted subdivisions to be built and houses to be built and that kind of thing.

So Franklin and Law, they got together, and George Franklin [Sr.] was actually a guy who was working for the FHA at the time and he was doing loans. So he already had a connection with the FHA. So they filed their plats and they started building on the property. And it was kind of semi-custom because you could bring your own house in, or you could buy, or you could use one of their plans that they had for you. And they started right at the beginning of the war [World War II]. So I think in 1942, maybe one or two houses were built, something really small like that. And this is where the John S. Park Neighborhood is separated from neighborhoods like the Huntridge and the Biltmore and Mayfair because these homes were built very specifically to the FHA standards, and the

house couldn't exceed a certain value. Otherwise the soldier or whatever couldn't get an FHA loan.

Right. So it was basically for the GIs coming back.

Basically, and civilian employees, because we were declared a Defense City in the forties, so there was a lot of opportunities for soldiers and civilian employees of like Nellis [Air Force Base] and Basic Magnesium [Incorporated, a.k.a. BMI] to get housing, unless you were African American, of course. But if you were a white soldier, or an employee, you had these great opportunities.

But Franklin and Law—they wanted to build something a little bit higher standards than the housing that was going up for the Huntridge and Biltmore and Mayfair [neighborhoods]. So their houses turned out to be a little bit more expensive, so they couldn't get FHA loans for the majority of the homes. They couldn't secure those for the homebuyers. So that's kind of what sets John S. Park apart and why it looks a little bit different than the other neighborhoods. So you have these sort of custom-ish kind of neighborhoods.

But the thing about John S. Park is, at the time of the survey, the contributing, which is the buildings that were pretty much intact, they hadn't made any significant changes to them, so the contributing versus the non-contributing was something ridiculously high like 75 or 80 percent, which is really, really high. We had a consultant do a survey of the Huntridge and I think, out of 400-something homes, I think she found four buildings that hadn't been changed. So, you know, that is your typical neighborhood. That is a typical progress, or evolution over time, is that you have a lot of changes.

Now, with John S. Park, you almost had no changes, or the changes that you did have were totally contextual, not on purpose. So let's say you had a cute little sort of U-shaped ranch house here that was totally original, and this one over here was an L-shape, but at some point in the fifties they added another leg onto it, so it looks just like this one. And so it was not intentional, but it's just how it was. It evolved in a perfectly contextual way, without even having oversight or Preservation Commission review. [Laughing] And so, you know, that was one of the big reasons that it qualified.

Another reason was just that there had been some very important [residents], not necessarily your huge bigwigs, because I think it was really an upper-income, bordering on blue-collar kind of neighborhood. You had some people that were very significant. But, generally you had people that were maybe in the higher level of their corporation or their job or whatever, but you also had the soldier, living next to that guy.

So it's always been a community that's consisted of a variety of people. It's always been a mix.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yeah. Well, because they weren't huge homes. So, if you really wanted to buy a huge home, you would buy one somewhere else. Actually Las Vegas High School neighborhood had some large, very impressive homes, and I think that's where really the sort of bigwigs kind of lived, you know. Because you had the high style there.

So what kind of area was this considered, do you know, in the grand scheme of the city in say the Forties and the Fifties and the Sixties? Like what was its reputation? I mean we think we can look at cities and sort of pick out like, oh, this was sort of a ritzy area back in the sixties, but do you know what kind of reputation [this neighborhood had]?

I can only guess. My uncle has lived here since the Forties and he said it's always been a nice neighborhood. I can only guess that it's just been a sort of nice, kind of, you know, blue collar-ish type of neighborhood.

I don't think it started to really decline until I hear horror stories about the Eighties and Nineties. But, you know, the whole United States was declining then. So I think it's always just been kind of a nice sort of middle-of-the-road sort of neighborhood. I don't think it's ever been really that special.

You know, the Las Vegas High School neighborhood is really a lost opportunity for the City because that neighborhood was a gem, at one time, an amazing collection of the best homes we had here in Las Vegas in the Thirties, and that's severely impacted right now. It had been severely impacted before I moved here, or came back from New York. I didn't really appreciate it until I started working at the City and looking through all the records and realizing what we had lost, and that is a real shame. That neighborhood, if we had kept that up, would be really amazing. Apparently the City fought that for several years and they just gave up. The residents didn't want it to be an historic district. Apparently it was a much bloodier battle than John S. Park. Like it went on for years, and there was a lot of misinformation and a lot of finger-pointing to this day. I mean the preservation community and people that worked for the City at the time. It's still ugly, and bitter. People are still bitter about it. With the kind of development that is allowed in that neighborhood now, had we started in the beginning and thought about how we were going to allow [development] or what types of development we were going to allow, if you're going to allow development, I think we could've been a little more creative, than what is being allowed there now. And it's just a shame to me but, you

know. That neighborhood is a real loss. I think, some other neighborhoods might not be as big a significant loss, I mean excluding John S. Park because John S. Park is also a really incredible intact neighborhood. I think, you know, of all the great neighborhoods in Las Vegas, that was probably the greatest. Everybody that was anybody lived there.

Yeah. It definitely sounds like it had a lot of history to it, and influential in the development of the city. And Las Vegas High School, I mean so many people went there.

Now everybody that's anybody lives in Rancho Circle or Scotch Eighties. The mayor [Oscar Goodman] lives over there. But that's like the today version of the Las Vegas High School Neighborhood, you know, the same kind of people.

It's that forethought, I guess. You don't ever think about it till it's too late sometimes. Well, gosh, we've been talking for a while, and I don't know how you're doing. And I appreciate it. I mean this is fantastic information, so I really appreciate you sharing it with us. Is there anything that we haven't talked about yet that you feel is important to talk about in relation to understanding the history of this neighborhood or the significance of the community or a piece of the story that maybe we've missed?

A lot of people ask me about why John S. Park is so significant. There's really nothing sort of outstanding about it. I mean there was no mob character that lived here. There was one gentleman that lived on Seventh Street, and I can't believe I'm not remembering his name, because I think he was part-owner of one of the casinos and reputed to be in the mob but, you know, it's just one of those things. Tony Spilotro [a well-known Mafia

figure in Las Vegas] didn't own a house here, as far as I know. So, the real good stuff isn't in this neighborhood.

But, again, I think that that's sort of missing the point, you know. The point is that it's a very stable community, it's been here since the Thirties. On Fifth Place we have houses from the Thirties. It's outlived the development pressures of Las Vegas High School neighborhood and the general downtown area, because it's been kind of tucked away and, you know, you have people that have lived here, that grew up here, that now are raising their kids here. And you had a lot of different factors that combined to make John S. Park significant, from the fact that it has perfect examples of early ranch houses, which you may think is all over Las Vegas, and in some ways it is, but not as perfect as it is in John S. Park. And some people think, who cares about ranch houses? Well, you know, someday, somebody's going to care, and it may not be you or me because it's our generation, but someday somebody's going to say, well, this is how the blue-collar family lived in this [city]. It's very important.

What we have is very important for the reasons that we have it. World War II had a huge impact on this community. I mean we doubled our population. We had people coming in from all over the United States to work at Basic Magnesium and at Nellis, soldiers coming in and all this, and the tremendous housing boom. Apparently before they built all the houses, people were living in their cars. They were so desperate to have jobs. There was rent-gouging, because there were like three or four families in a hotel room, so the hotel owner was charging skyrocketed rates. So you hear all these stories about how people were just desperate to come here, and you know you have people from all over, all kinds of people coming here. World War II was probably one of the biggest

events to occur in Las Vegas that created what it is today. It wasn't the Strip [Las Vegas Boulevard]. After the war when the country was so giddy with winning and money was flowing, that had a huge influence on the Strip, but I think World War II and definitely the dam [Hoover Dam] being built because of all the people that came here. We sailed through the [Great] Depression because we were getting so much federal support. But World War II was just really the biggest thing, and that's why we have the amazing neighborhoods that we have. This is our community. It's not 300 years old. It's sixty years old. But, that's still a couple of generations.

So basically building a neighborhood, building a community, building homes for the folks that were coming in, during and post-World War II eras, that is what built Las Vegas, is what you're saying, that the John S. Park Neighborhood or building the homes in this area really started to give people places to live, bring more people in, allow people to work.

John S. Park is just a really good example of the impact that the different people coming to Las Vegas had. World War II had actually a negative impact on John S. Park because the homes weren't getting built as fast. You had a hundred-and-something homes built within six years, as opposed to 600-or-something homes being built in one year, for the Huntridge neighborhood. So, it was definitely different, but John S. Park, I think, had a much more diverse demographic. I think it's almost a better snapshot of the types of people that were coming here, than some of the more [homogenous neighborhoods], where you just had sort of civilian employees of Nellis or more military kind of focus in some of the other neighborhoods.

That's a great history.

It's a great neighborhood.

And so what does living in this neighborhood mean to you? Especially because you probably are one of the handful of people that really have a full knowledge of the history of this area. What has living here meant to you?

I feel very fortunate to be here. I have to have that diversity in my environment. I couldn't live, I really would go insane, living in a new sort of tract development. So, to me, being able to ride my bike to my friend's house, or walk to the bar. I work half-a-mile from here. I think that that is the most important thing to me about living here, is the community that you have here. And again, I didn't know I really appreciated it until I moved to New York, and I would be walking down the streets, and I would see people at the cafés that I go to school with, you know, they're eating outside, and you know, I never took that for granted. Like, running into somebody you know, or going into the same deli and knowing the person and chatting with them or whatever. You don't really chat in New York with the deli person. But, you know, that recognition, that familiarity, that stability. I think that is the most important thing to me.

I could live in any old neighborhood, right? I mean because any old neighborhood is great. You've got all the great homes and you have the great families, and all of that is very important, but this neighborhood, because of its diversity, again you have the diversity of the types of homes, you have the diversity of the people that live here, you have this really kind of kooky, fun history, and all of that, I think, contributes to a pride, a sense of pride in the neighborhood, that you're kind of feeling like, you know, nyeh, nyeh, you guys in Summerlin, you don't know what you're missing. [Laughing] Even though I own a house, there's a sense of ownership that goes beyond that.

Community.

Right. I hate to keep going back to that, I know it's a cliché, but it's really what pushes me in my work, because that's like the fundamental thing. Because if you don't have community, you don't have anybody with ownership in their neighborhoods. And then if you don't have people with ownership, you have people that don't care, and then you have anarchy.

Right. Well, thank you so much for taking the time. I know it was long.

I told you, I could go on forever. [Laughing]

It was great talking with you about this stuff and getting your perspective because you are so connected to it on multiple levels, and it's good, it's good to hear it, and I just think the history of the area is very interesting, as well.

Sometimes when you know the history of things, you become a lot more critical, though.

How so?

Well, it can be a good and a bad thing in a sense that sometimes you notice things. When I was building architectural models, I couldn't look at a building without figuring out how I was going to mold some part of it. It was just like I would start working through this process. When I look at a building, I know sort of what social forces kind of shaped a particular style of the building. A building is almost like a reference book to me. I look at it. It's like a book on a shelf because I think, it tells me what was going on. You can look at a building. I always say, oh, you know, if there's anything I can do, I can date a building. And my mother would say, well, why don't you date a man, you know?

[Laughter] But you look at a building, in any particular setting in a town, and you can see what sort of influenced that building, and in turn what influences have occurred in the

town. So, like the Post Office [historic building in downtown Las Vegas], for instance. It's a post office. Its style is Neoclassical. It was very prevalent in the Thirties. And you know it's a federal building, so you kind of get the idea that, well, because it was a post office, it was probably built by the [Department of the] Treasury, which is the case, and you know, well, in the Thirties, you were also having this other architectural style emerging, which was this modern international style with no ornament on it and very sleek and plain and austere, and you get a sense that the government was still trying to push this kind of more grand style on the public, and is that what the public wanted? And then you see its location in the city and you're thinking, well, how did it end up there? It's very important, so that part of town must've been very important at one time. You start thinking about all of these things and, on the one hand, being able to interpret it is fun; on the other hand, it can be sort of maddening because you're very critical. When you can compare it to other things that you're aware of, you become critical of that example. So, living in John S. Park, you're kind of like, well—I don't know, it's not going to come out right, so I'm not going to say it. [Laughing] I'm going to have to think about that. I had this concept in my head but I can't seem to be able to put it into words. It's not going to come out right. [Laughing]

To me, what you were saying thus far makes sense.

Well, it's the same with anything. If you know about anything, you're going to be more critical or something, or more hypersensitive to certain things. I'm sure people who write are a lot more aware of what's good and bad writing, and people who are artists can tell you what's good and bad art. I mean it has nothing to do with personal style. So, I think it just goes with anything.

I think it goes with having knowledge of any profession, too. As a sociologist, I have a hard time sometimes either watching a movie or being in a group setting or something and not thinking [about the group dynamic]. And it sounds like it's something akin to that, when you know the history and when you know the examples.

I had another point but it's not coming to me. Well, you know, maybe someday it will.

I'll call you. [Laughing]

That's how it works. Yeah, I definitely appreciate it. I think we've covered a pretty good deal of the information about the neighborhood and about the history and things that are sort of important to understanding the inner workings of it, and community. I appreciate it.

No problem. It was fun.

Yeah. It's good. It's good to hear everybody's stories.

I think about stuff all the time and I never think that anybody's ever going to [care], you know, like it doesn't matter, because you have a certain job to do and all of your thoughts, all of your esoteric ramblings in your head or whatever, you know, they don't mean anything to anybody.

Well, now we have them on tape.

I know. [Laughter] I mean, you know, it's the thought process that I suppose helps you do a better job eventually but, you know, hypothetically that's the point.

I have one question. We're going to circle way back around here. You a while back mentioned when you were a kid, you used to come down to Fremont Street, and then you were talking about a grocery store that used to be over there next to White

Cross [Drugs], and I'm just remembering, especially since you did kind of spend some time here as a kid, if you remember any of the significant businesses that were in the area, like whether they were on Charleston [Boulevard] or maybe over off of the Strip or on Sahara [Avenue] or something.

I remember Sunrise Hospital because my mother worked there. Specifically I remember Fremont Street, so I guess you could say, you know, a collection of businesses. On my birthdays I wanted to be driven down Fremont Street with an ice cream cone. I remember that specifically.

What was it like when you could still drive on it?

It was awesome because the street is so narrow, so you've got like a crazy flood of lights. Not like the Strip. It's just not. The Strip is so spread out that it's just not as compact as Fremont Street so, you know, it's like a million Christmas trees. When you're a kid, it's the most amazing thing in the world. In the Seventies, Fremont Street was really hopping.

What kind of stuff was going on?

Well, there was tons of people on the street. The thing about Fremont Street, with the signage, because of the close proximity of the frontages of each of the individual businesses, the competition to be noticed by the pedestrian and the automobile really inspired the signs to get bigger and bigger. In 1905 you had the painted sign on Fremont Street. Then it went to the board that was perpendicular to the wall. Just like any other main street, you know, it evolved in the very same way except that Fremont Street kind of embraced neon like no other city of its time, and so you had neon getting taller and bigger and being on the roofs, and then eventually it was wrapping around the entire façades of buildings and underneath the awnings and all over, in every aspect,

everywhere you looked, and it was still like that in the seventies. So it was really spectacular.

Any particular signs or images stand out?

The Binion's [Horseshoe sign] was always my favorite. And the Fremont [Hotel and Casino] was pretty, and the Golden Nugget [Hotel and Casino]. They had like the wraps, with the big bull noses and stuff on the sides, and on the corners. I really just remember Binion's, and they still have it, but they had like the chasing neon tube lights underneath the canopy, and so, when I was a kid, I thought that was the coolest thing. We'd drive by on the highway and I could see the dice rolling on the back of the parking garage. I remember that.

I remember my school. I went to Elbert B. Edwards [Elementary School]. It was on Charleston [Boulevard] and Lamb [Boulevard].

We went to McDonald's a lot. That was like a treat. I think it was the one on Charleston [Boulevard] but who knows? I don't remember.

I don't know if I remember specific businesses. I wish I did.

Well, as a kid, too, it's like you don't necessarily have a consciousness of stuff like that. You tend to remember the things like the big, cool signs. And getting an ice cream cone.

Yeah, because your sphere of reality is about right here. I can remember the places I lived. I can remember people. I remember swimming at the pool in the apartments by the university. The crazy Elvis lady. She just burst into the apartment, you know, she was hysterical. So that's how I always remember when Elvis died. [Laughing] I think that's like the quintessential experience if you're going to live in Vegas, though.

Well, it is. I mean, like I remember when Elvis died, except for I was at camp.

Were you raised here?

No. No. But, you know, I was a little kid and I came home from camp and it had been a [big story]. Like, Elvis? OK. I don't know. But apparently some big event happened while I was gone, and it was Elvis, dying.

Right. I can remember asking who's president, it obviously wasn't the same year, but my mother saying, Richard Nixon, and he's an idiot. [Laughter] And to this day, my mother still forces her political views on small children. She holds her grandchildren captive.

[Laughing] George Bush, and he's an idiot.

Well, any thoughts to wrap it up with?

I think I got the stuff that's most important to me as far as preservation is concerned, and as far as the neighborhood is concerned. I mean that's the most useful for your project, right?

Absolutely. Vital useful.

Right. I think I covered it.

Yeah, you did. Thank you. We'll stop it here.

OK.

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