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An Interview with Jo Mueller

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

University Libraries

University of Nevada Las Vegas

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University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2007

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

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

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Preface

Jo Ann and Hal Mueller arrived in Las Vegas in 1956 when he accepted a meteorologist position.

In addition to raising their two children, Jo was active in PTA, worked for Weight Watchers, and was a volunteer with League of Women voters.

She tells the story of meeting Hal and their whirlwind romance to the altar, moving to the Caroline Islands and eventually choosing Las Vegas over Seattle as their next career assignment. Las Vegas became their permanent home and Jo reflects on life and experiences here.

Oral History Research Center at UNLV



**Shake, Rattle & Roll:
Stories of Nevada Test Site Wives and Children Oral History Project**

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Name of Narrator: Jo Mueller

Name of Interviewer: CLAYTEE D. WHITE

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Jo Ann Mueller 8/26/11
Signature of Narrator Date

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Signature of Interviewer Date

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This is Claytee White. I am with Mrs. Jo Mueller. It is August 26th, 2011. We're here in the Reading Room of Special Collections at UNLV.

So how are you this morning?

I'm fine. Thank you, Claytee.

Jo, I want you to give me your full name and spell your last name for me.

J-O, capital A-N-N -- I go by Jo -- Mueller, M-U-E-L-L-E-R.

Wonderful. Thank you so very much. Now, when we officially put your name on this transcription, do you want us to use Jo?

Yes.

Okay, great. So, Jo, we're going to get started with you just telling me about your early life. I'd like to know where you grew up, what that was like, and describe your family.

Well, primarily I was born (and raised) in Hollywood, so I could be near my mother. She was an extra in Mack Sennett movies. It was a time that was not memorable to me because I was young. We left Hollywood area and wound up in Eureka, California. I remember Eureka because my folks took me to a boxing match in a big auditorium, and I couldn't imagine why people were standing around hitting each other and people were applauding and thinking that was fun. So I remember that very distinctly. And I remember leaving Eureka, being towed in a trailer, a small trailer, over a bumpy road and leaving Eureka. We headed for Denver, Colorado. I spent the pre-war years in Denver.

One of my little sisters was born in Denver. It was a big deal. My dad said we have a new baby and I thought, oh, great. My mother had always tinted her hair. She was always a red-head. From being in the movies then, it was the thing to do. My little sister was born in a Catholic hospital and my dad took me down to see. They showed this thing. I said, oh, that's it? The nurse who was a nun had brought to my mother this beautiful little red-headed baby and said, oh, Mrs. Fifer, she looks just like you; she has red hair. And my mother said, Sister, if you're trying to give me a red-headed baby, you've made a mistake because this hair came out of a bottle. To this day we always said we should have kept the red-head because my middle sister, you know how middle sisters are. We should have kept the red-head; we always say that to her. But she does look like my mother, so we're sure we finally wound up with the right one.

So how many children?

Well, my mother had seven. She only had four survive. I had an older sister who was born in Hollywood who died from spinal meningitis before I was born. My brother Ronald was born in Modesto, California. He was the only boy she had out of seven. He drowned at his high school class picnic, the graduating picnic in Big Sur. It just almost destroyed my mother, and us as well, because it was just so unfair. I was pregnant with my son, Bob, at the time in 1953. So it was really devastating to lose my brother, just before his graduating.

When we left Denver, we were on our way to Key West, Florida. My father was an upholsterer and he could work anywhere. We were in Corpus Christi, Texas, on Pearl Harbor day and I was reading the funny papers on the floor when my father said, they've bombed Pearl Harbor. Who bombed Pearl Harbor and what does that mean to me? And they said we have to cover our windows—we were on the bay—with sheets so that no light will show. I said, well, why do we have to do that, pop? Because there may be Japanese or German submarines who want to shoot us. Well, why would they want to shoot at us? What did we do to them? Anyway, that was my thought on that.

My father applied for a job for the federal government. We were on our way to Louisiana and had stopped in Port Arthur. My youngest sister Patty was born in Port Arthur while we waited. The funny story there was I stayed out of school so I could help my mom. And my dad decided that the laundry was the easiest thing. So my mother got up out of bed. When you had a baby in those days, you kind of pampered yourself. You don't do that anymore, but you did in those days. She went into the bathroom and found my father in the bathtub with diapers and jeans and clothes and a washboard and a cake of soap, doing the laundry, saying, you know, this is easy, what are you complaining about doing the laundry? She never, never let him live that down. We had scrub boards. Oh, this is easy. Doing the laundry is no problem. And I get a bath as well.

So before you left Denver, did he already have a job with the --

No. No. He just was a wanderer. We could do that. He owned a business in downtown Denver with another fellow and they did upholstery in downtown Denver. My memories of downtown Denver was going to the movies on Saturday and stopping at the tamale cart because that was a big deal. And we would spend all day in the movie.

Yes. What was your sister's name, the red-head?

Roberta should have been the red-head. Her name is Roberta. My little sister born in Port Arthur is Patty. And she's in California and Roberta lives here in Las Vegas.

Wonderful. Now, give me your parents' names as well.

Well, my birth father was Lee Dromgoole. He and my mother were together and ran a restaurant in Venice, California, right on the beach. Then my mother spotted my father somewhere or my father spotted her -- this is my pop -- and they ran off together. My father, my pop, left two children and a wife, because he was married. And my mother left my father --

Your birth father.

-- my birth father and ran off. They lost contact with their family. They wouldn't contact them because everybody knew the story. So I grew up not having aunts and uncles and grandmothers and grandfathers. And I've missed that. Every time Thanksgiving would come around, I'd say, why can't we go to grandma's house for Thanksgiving? Well, you know. But I did know from photographs that my mother had two brothers and that they had lived in Oklahoma. She was born in Missouri and they lived in Oklahoma the last time she knew about them.

When we moved from Port Arthur to work for the government in Louisiana, Camp Polk is where my dad worked and we lived in DeRidder, which is a ride down the road. We lived in housing. I had a family move in next door to us and she was from Tulsa. I asked her, I said, do you by any chance have a phone book from Tulsa? And she said, oh, I do. She said, I do because I brought it because I wanted to be able to write to my friends. I said, would you mind if I look at it? She said, well, no. So I looked up Breese, which was my mother's maiden name, and there was a Breese there, Jack Breese. So I wrote -- and it was a big deal -- I wrote a special delivery letter. Dear Uncle Jack, if you are my uncle, I'm not sure if you are, but you had a sister named Jean and you called her Yeanie, which is what she said, and you had lots of adventures together. If you are my uncle, it would be really nice to hear from you and this is our phone number in Louisiana. And I sent it special delivery because I had been baby-sitting and I had some money. And a special delivery letter was something, really, in those days.

We were sitting at the dinner table and the phone rang and I picked it up. He said, is this JoAnn? And I said yes. Well, this is your Uncle Jack. And I started tearing up and I handed the

phone to my mother. She said what's this, what's this? And then she got the phone. Then she started crying. She was afraid to ask about her mother and father because she was afraid they might be dead, and anybody else. And everybody was fine and everybody had wondered what had happened to us all these years. It was a marvelous reunion. They came down. In those days you couldn't get gasoline and you couldn't get tires.

Because this was after the war had already started?

This was in the middle of the war, yes. This was in 1943 or '44, maybe '43. They scraped together. They scrounged and they got gasoline and they got tires. I think they had truck tires on this little car they came down with. And they had to come down.

So who came?

My aunt—his wife—and my uncle. And they had to hear all the stories. I could never leave any of my family. I said how could you possibly have done that? Well, I didn't know the story; that they had both run off and left family behind. But it was a wonderful reunion.

Wonderful. Now, did you ever get the father's family together, your father's family, pop's family?

I have contact with a cousin of mine. The Dromgooles have a reunion every June, the second or third week in June. I have not been able to make that because it's only been a few years that I found this out. But I have stopped and visited with my cousin. And her mother, before she passed away, I saw her. She said, oh, I'm so glad we found you; you don't know how long we've looked for you, and that sort of mushy thing. But it was a marvelous time.

Wow. This is wonderful. So did you finish high school in Louisiana?

No, California. I graduated from Pacific Grove in 1948 and met my husband (Hal Mueller) on a blind date in 1950. In fact, I introduced him to my girlfriend. We e-mail every day because she was supposed to be his date and I was with a fellow who wanted to know if I wanted to introduce a couple of fellows from naval line school to a couple of girls. And I said, oh, sure, that would be fun. So I wasn't with him. But he pulled up in my driveway in a little Ford convertible. He got out of the car and took golf clubs out of the backseat. He was in civilian clothes. He was in the navy. And he put golf clubs in the trunk of his car. He was 15 minutes late and he walked up to the door. I was watching all this. He walked up to the door. And I said, you know, I usually don't

have anything to do with people who come late; when they say they're going to be at six, then they come at 6:15. Oh, I'm really sorry. So then we had to go and pick up (the others). He adjusted the review mirror and I sat behind him because, of course, I wasn't his date. We picked up Maurice and we picked up JoAnn. Her name was JoAnn as well. She lives in Palm Springs and we e-mail every day.

But I just celebrated -- August the 10th was the anniversary of our meeting. She said it was so obvious love at first sight. And it really was because those things really do happen. I can attest to that, and so can JoAnn. We had just the wildest meeting. And that was August the 10th. We were engaged September 30th and married December 4th.

He got orders to go overseas. It was during the Korean conflict. We were going to be married New Year's Eve and he called the first of December and said I've got orders; I won't be here New Year's Eve. The printers had called that day and said your invitations are ready. And my mother had laid out the white satin and tulle and she was going to start cutting out my dress, which she was going to make. I called and said don't do that; we've got a problem. The printer said, oh, don't worry about it; we have things like this happen all the time. I should have gone and picked up one of the invitations, but I didn't. He said, oh, no, it's not necessary.

I worked for the chamber of commerce and I was a lecture hostess on a tour bus in Monterey in the 17-mile drive in the Pacific Grove.

He called and he said I'm sorry. I said, well, we'll wait till you come back. Oh, no, no, no, we won't wait until I come back; we'll go get our license right now and we'll get married. I said well. We went and got blood tests, which you had to have in California prior to it, and license. He said I have to have permission from my family because I'm not 21. He was 20. He was going to be 21 in February and this was in December. He said I've called my family and they are sending permission for me to get married, and when that comes we can get married, according to the laws of the navy. So he called and said -- oh, he said I got permission. And I said, oh, good, we'll get married tomorrow.

So I called my church and said could you possibly marry us tomorrow? Oh, yes. I worked at the chamber of commerce. And I called the Butterfly Lodge and said would you have room available? Oh, JoAnn, of course, my pleasure to do that for you. Then he came out because he

worked 24 hours and then off 24. He came out.

Out from where?

From the naval postgraduate school in Monterey, he came out to the house. He walked in the door, and my mother said change those socks. He was wearing white navy socks with no elastic in them and they were hanging down over his shoes. She said you're getting married today. No, we're getting married tomorrow. No, it's silly to wait until tomorrow; we'll get married today. This is my mother.

I said, well, Yes, you're right. Why waste a day? So I called the church, and she said, oh, Yes, Yes, come on down. I called the motel, and she said, oh fine, I'll be ready tonight; I'll be ready; everything's fine; don't worry about anything.

We had already bought our going-away outfits for our honeymoon. So he had a suit there at the house. So he put his suit on and I put my suit on, my going-away suit. We rushed down and got a marriage license. At 5:30 we were at the church, which we had asked the minister if he could be there. We went in and my mother said you're not marrying that guy. I said huh? He didn't change his socks; look at him; he's all dressed up in a suit and he's got those crummy white socks on. And I said, well, I'm sorry; I'm going to marry him anyway.

He had been wearing my wedding ring around his neck and we went rushing downtown when we got marriage license and things, and I said, oh, you have to have a wedding ring. So we rushed in the jewelry store and found a ring that he liked. And we rushed back out. Then I said, oh, I've already called Jim and Mickey about standing up with us tomorrow. Well, Jim worked for the city of Monterey and he was hanging Christmas lights in downtown Monterey. We said there's Jim now; call and see if he and Mickey could come tonight. He hollered, Jim, can you and Mickey come tonight to the church? Yes, Yes, we'll be there tonight. 5:30. Okay. This was after noon. So we decided at noon to be married and we were married at 5:30, with all the rushing around we had to do. And it was marvelous.

It lasted until he passed away. We were married for 45 years. Celebrated our 45th anniversary in December and he passed away in February, two days before his birthday. It was just a marvelous time. But we spent the first year of our married life on the island of Truk.

Where's Truk?

Out in the Caroline Islands. He was in the navy --

The Caroline Islands are in the South Pacific, Micronesia. Because he got orders to go out. He was on Guam. And then United Nations had taken over the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, and they needed somebody to go to Truk. So they put out the word. And Hal said, oh, my gosh. And he sat up nights. Somebody was going to come to interview anybody. He was in aerography, which is meteorology in the navy. And he sat up and studied and read. And this guy came and interviewed him. He passed it. So he said I'm going to Truk and I can bring you out now. That was when I found out my legal history, when I had to get a passport. But we lived out on the island of Truk the first nine months.

So what was Truk like?

Well, Truk was a fantastic experience because I had never been on a South Pacific island, but if you're going to have a honeymoon. When I arrived there -- I flew into Guam first. And then from Guam to little Truk made once-a-week trips. They took the mail and then they'd come back to Truk, Koror, Yap and Ponape. They delivered the mail. And when we left Guam, we were up in the air and the pilot said we have some sort of engine problem. There were ten of us onboard that were going to the different islands. He said, now, we can go on or we can turn around and go back and you'll have to wait. And there was a sister, a nun, and a priest. Those are the ones I remember. They said, no, no, no, we'll go without the radio or whatever it was because we've got to get where we're going. And I said yes. So I got there and my honey picked me up.

The island of Truk had been surrounded by the navy. And we sunk the Japanese merchant vessels in the lagoon. It was a marvelous experience. Even to this day, people who like to scuba dive go out there because everything is pristine. These fantastic ships, you can see them looking down because the lagoon is beautifully clear water. The water was beautiful.

So we landed. Truk was our first stop. And everybody was happy that we landed okay. I didn't know what was wrong.

My husband had been allocated a Quonset hut, a piece of a Quonset hut for us.

Describe that, the Quonset hut.

Well, during the war the Quonset huts were all the thing because they were easy to construct in a short period of time and they were a corrugated metal. It's shaped like a dome. And then around

the bottom for circulation of air was screened in. In fact, if you sat on the toilet, the animals would come look at you. I'd say, well, okay, but I'm not used to this, but it's all right; they're not bothering me.

So how much space on the inside?

Well, it did have a bedroom and it did have a sectioned-off piece of kitchen and a little living room. But the hotel, the Truk hotel was where we spent most of our time.

It was an adventure. We had a maid. Her name was Nese-page. She was from one of the outer islands. I went to work for the government. I had a wonderful helper whose name was Yosida. He came in one day and said, oh, Mrs. Mueller, I went to my island for the weekend. He said, well, I'm getting married. I said, oh, that's marvelous, Yosida. He said would you like to see her? And I said, oh, I'd love to see her. Well, she's coming to the hospital later today from the island. And he said I'll come and get you when she comes.

So Yosida came in and said, oh, Mrs. Mueller, she's coming, she's coming up the road. Well, the Trukese didn't hold hands boy-girl. They held hands girl-girl. And here she came up the hill, three girls holding hands. I said which one is she? She's the one in the middle. Now, this woman in the middle was about eight months pregnant. And I said, oh, Yosida, you've known her before? Oh, no, Mrs. Mueller, no, I didn't know her; I just met her on the island. Oh. Oh, okay.

So I had to go get my friend, the anthropologist, and said, Frank, you've got to tell me. This guy's married a girl who's obviously eight months pregnant. Now, this is going to be a problem for him. Oh, no. He's so lucky because when we had the island surrounded there was venereal disease that rendered most of the young girls sterile. He said if he's got a pregnant girl, he's really lucky. And I said, well, but, Frank, he's going to say who's the father of this baby? No, he's not, because it doesn't matter. If he marries her, it's his child. I said, well, how wonderful to have that kind of attitude.

So you said hospital earlier. Did you work in a hospital?

No. I worked for the Supreme Court justice and the anthropologist. I did clerical work.

Our dear friend was the superintendent at the Truk hospital, which was a fun experience. One of the things that he did, he asked my husband if he would like to attend a birth. And Hal said, oh, I don't think so. He said, you really should; someday you and Jo will have kids and you'll

maybe want to see this. Well, they didn't come to the hospital unless they were having problems. But we didn't know that, or I didn't know that. Anyway, Hal went to this birth and this baby had been dead for some time. It had calcified and it was horrible. They had to operate and he said, we're never going to have kids. Nick said, yes, they usually take care of having the babies themselves, but this woman has carried this baby for 11 months and it's been dead for about five. How horrible.

Tell me a little bit about the government of Truk, how it worked.

Well, Truk was under the control of the United Nations Trust Territory. It was a marvelous experience. I was paid by the government, and my husband was as well. He got his resignation from the navy in order to go to work for the Trust Territories. He did meteorological work. I didn't know at the time that they were conducting tests out in the South Pacific. Fortunately, we were east of that and we would not have been affected by any of the radiation. But he was doing meteorological work. They send up balloons and they know how the winds are blowing and whatnot. It was a marvelous experience.

Unfortunately, I got asthma. We had only been there nine months and I was not doing well. They said I had to leave. So my husband and I left. The hospital administrator, our friend Nick, came with us. I had to spend the night in the hospital on Guam because the plane was leaving the next day. The plane came in and Eleanor Roosevelt was there. She was flying with her secretary back to Washington. She had been in, I don't know, China or somewhere. I'm not sure where she had been. But she came up to me and she said, oh, are you the young lady that we've had to bump somebody so that you could have oxygen? And I said I think I am. And she said, well, I wish you the very best, my dear, and I'm sure you'll get well soon. So that was an exciting experience.

Oh, that's great. Now, tell me how you and your husband got to Las Vegas.

Well, when we got back to the States, my husband wanted to go to college.

Now, he's still working for the U.S. government?

He had resigned from the U.S. government. I had, of course, resigned because of my health. We flew back to San Francisco and then down to Monterey. My family lived in the Monterey peninsula area. So we went to stay with them. We bought a non-modern 27-foot trailer, which we

parked behind my folks' property. We spent two years. He was at Monterey Peninsula College. I had worked for the chamber of commerce and the tour bus industry before I left for Truk, and so I just went back to work for them.

It was marvelous to be able to do that. Then we had an earthquake. And I missed a period and I thought that, oh, well, it's because of the earthquake. Then two months later I still hadn't had a period and I still blamed it on the earthquake. My mother said, you know, maybe you better go see a doctor. We kid my son that he was the earthquake in our life because certainly I was pregnant. So we had our son, born in Carmel, in 1953.

My husband was still at the Monterey Peninsula College. Then he got some fellowship money to attend UCLA. He was anxious to further his meteorological career. So we spent two years at UCLA and I worked for Douglas Aircraft, which was walking distance for me. I didn't want him working two jobs and going to school, so I worked nights at Douglas Aircraft. It was exciting.

When he finished in 1956, he said we have two opportunities. We can work for Boeing Aircraft in Seattle, Washington, or we can go to work for the federal government in Las Vegas, Nevada. And I said, duh, we're going to Las Vegas; I'm not going to be in any more rainy area and I'm sure that's what Seattle is. So we pulled our trailer—

So what did you know about Las Vegas when you made that decision?

Well, nothing really. Our friend had said, when Hal was going to graduate, I'd like to take you guys for a weekend to Las Vegas. I said, nah, I'm not interested in doing that; we're too involved in moving and everything and with our son. So anyway, he said, well, you're going to love Las Vegas. And I said okay.

When we came there were no apartments available and there was nothing available because Las Vegas was just booming at the time. We had our 27-foot trailer pulled up and parked out where the weekend flea-market thing is there. I can't remember the name of that place. Broad Acres or something like that. We pulled that in there with our two-year-old son. He went to work for the Atomic Energy Commission.

Now, what area of Las Vegas was Broad Acres?

Just before Nellis on Las Vegas Boulevard. They have a flea market there that -- I think they still

have that every weekend. We were only at that trailer park for a short while because across the street they had trailer spaces with private baths. You had your own shower and bath and there were two together. You were parked here and the other was parked there, and you each had your own bathroom in this building, which I thought was a marvelous idea because there were a lot of non-modern trailers flitting around the country at that time.

And what do you mean by non-modern?

It didn't have a bathroom, no toilet.

Okay, I see. An old-fashion trailer.

Anyway, then we got pregnant there. My husband said we're not going to have another baby in this trailer. So we rented a place, Misty Place. I don't know whether you know where that is. You know where what's his name, the singer who has the property out -- Wayne Newton. He came to town as a teenager and performed.

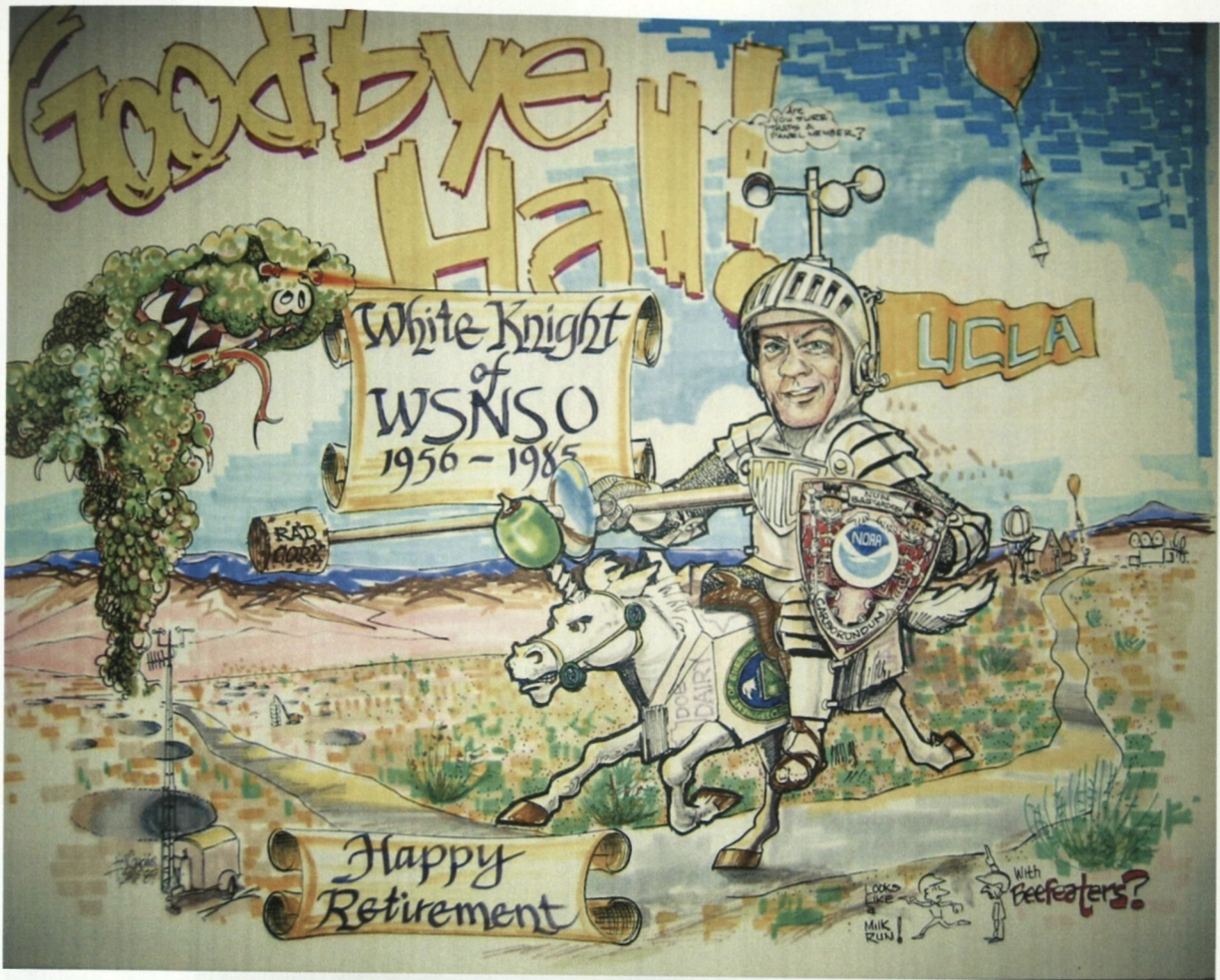
Mr. Las Vegas.

Mr. Las Vegas, yes.

Anyway, Newton's property was right across from where we had rented a place. And a pilot owned I don't know how much of the property. But he came over and asked my husband, because we were renting this little house, he asked my husband if he would be interested in buying his property. He had a one-bedroom and a magnificent tree, because that was a wonderful -- still is. It has ground water not far below. There were lush trees and there still are on Newton's property. My husband went over and looked at it and he said, honey -- less than \$10,000. He said, honey, we can't do that because it's only one bedroom and we can't afford to buy the property and build at the same time, so we can't have that place. I never even looked, but I've got to write Wayne Newton a letter and say I'm happy that you're going to have to tours because I'm really curious about what that place was like inside.

But anyway, then our daughter, Susan, was born (1957) in Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital.

Susan is a graduate of UNLV and has memories of me waking her up so she could sit on the floor and feel the shock wave from early morning tests at the test site. Now she lives in Redlands. She had worked for the University of Redlands and now she's retired and is a docent at



Personalized artwork to commemorate Hal Mueller's retirement in 1985. Below, Mueller children, Sue Mueller McCue (born 1957) and Bob Mueller (born 1953).





Jo Mueller, center, with her sisters Roberta Peters, left, and Pat Kieffer, right.

the Lincoln Shrine Museum where my son-in-law is the archivist. It's marvelous. If you've ever been to Redlands, you have to visit it. It's made from big money from the east for people who wanted to winter in California. And they came out and built beautiful mansions and orange groves. Redlands still has that. If you ever get to Redlands, be sure and go to the Lincoln Shrine Museum. It's one of the finest Civil War collections west of the Mississippi. So they're really proud of it.

So tell me when you first came how much help did you get settling in and finding a place?

Did you get any help from the Test Site?

No, because it was not necessary because we had our trailer that we lived in. And then we were looking for places, and my husband said, oh, there's a little house for rent -- he was checking the papers -- at the corner of Sunset and Pecos that we can have, which was a reasonable price. We lived there comfortably when we brought our little baby home. It was only a one-bedroom, but we had our son fixed up in the living room.

But the neighbor down the street, the Badiks, he worked for one of the hotels. And they got a chance to go to Cuba to work there. They said, would you like to rent our house for the same price that you're paying there? It was a big three-bedroom, beautiful home and w. We said we said are you kidding? Yes. Well, they got in Florida and that's when Castro took over and they didn't make it. So they had to come back and we had to buy a place.

We bought a little house on 22nd and Bonanza area. It was a new house that the people had built. The builder had gone broke, which was unusual at that time because there was such a demand for housing. But we bought a little house on the corner for \$13,000. And we were thrilled to death to have it. It was in a nice location. We were happy about that.

So what were your earliest memories of social life here?

Well, the Test Site people, we did get together because we all had the same things in common. We were raising a family and working for the Test Site and our husbands happened to be gone often. So we would get together.

So who were some of your early friends?

Well, Jan Kennedy. They came early. They weren't there in '56. But Phil Allen and his wife, Jean; he hired Hal. They were here. In fact, when Hal took over as head of the organization, Phil

had gone to the hurricane center I think in Oklahoma is the reason he took over. They were, oh, such a lovely bunch of people.

When you say that Hal was head of the organization, what do you mean?

He was the meteorologist in charge, Mickey, Mickey Mouse.

Mickey Mouse, what does that mean?

Well, we called him Mickey. M-I-C, MIC, for meteorologist in charge. He was the MIC.

Oh, I see.

Jan Kennedy, they came. The Quinns, Virgil -- Gene and Janan Quinn came. Let's see who else? Isn't that awful? I don't have a good memory. I'm 81. I'm allowed to have senior moments.

Oh, no. Your memory is fabulous.

How did your husband like working at that location at that time?

He loved it. At first the location was on Main Street. It was a little office. Then they moved to Industrial Road to the big complex. That's where he finally wound up before he retired.

So he never had to go to the Test Site?

Oh, yes. Yes. That was one of the jobs. When there was a test, he would go. It was one of those funny instances because you were not supposed to know. You were not supposed to let the neighbors know. Nobody was supposed to know. This was all very hush-hush. But when they had a large test, we had to announce it because otherwise there would be someone on the Dune's crap table saying they rolled a seven. So we would have announcements of large tests. And they would have a countdown and the radio carried them. If it went, it meant that my husband would be coming home. And if it went, I would run out and look at the pool to see how much water was splashing and we'd say how big it was. But that meant to me that my husband would be coming home. Quite often, the weather delayed projects. They usually conducted tests primarily predawn because those were usually the best atmospheric conditions for a test.

But anyway, he really enjoyed his work because he was into science and things like that. He enjoyed the camaraderie because they worked with different countries around the world. Even the Russians came in 1988 after he had retired. But he went out for that experience as well because it was marvelous to work with other countries. He enjoyed that. He enjoyed his work. He enjoyed being the boss, too.

I have in the car his farewell thing. We had an artist who would do, when people were retiring, these magnificent things. It's so like my husband. It shows a white knight on a horse, you know, with all sorts of things. I brought that in case you wanted it.

What is it? Is it a painting?

It's a painting. It's a farewell painting. Would you like to see it?

Yes. Is it something that's small enough for us to scan in our scanner?

I've got it with me and I want to get a frame for it. It's about—maybe 18 by 12, something like that.

So I want to talk about your husband. Most of the time he was downtown?

Yes.

Okay. How long would he have to stay? When he knew that a test was going to take place, how long was he away from home?

Well, that would depend upon the weather. If they were able to conduct the test in a likely manner, maybe he'd be there just a day. But sometimes they were delayed. And sometimes they would be delayed for some other reason and he would come home in between. But usually they just stayed out there.

And he went on locations. They went to Mississippi when we were doing peaceful uses for atomic energy. He went to Mississippi and he was there for a while because they had weather problems there. He went to Colorado for the -- Mississippi was the salt thing. Colorado was where they were seeing how they could get down to oil shales, a shale project. He was there for a while.

He went to Alaska for the Cannikin, which was the largest test conducted on the North American continent. They were there for about three weeks because they were conducting this test in October or November and it's Alaska. You know, it was snow; things like that. And the Greenpeace people were parked out in the bay because they didn't want the test to be conducted. We'd announced that it was going to be conducted and that it was going to be large and they knew that. Well, the wind was blowing a hundred miles an hour the wrong direction and it kept doing that. I think they were there about three weeks. And all of the sudden, his buddies came in and said, Hal, we have a two-hour window. And Hal says, oh, I have trouble believing that; I couldn't

get from the shed up here to the control point, the wind's blowing a hundred miles an hour. We have a two-hour window. And Hal said, are you guys sure? He looked at the information. He said okay. He said get everybody in here; we've got a two-hour window. They said, Hal, we can't have a two-hour window; the wind's blowing a hundred miles an hour the wrong direction. He said if my guys say we've got a two-hour window, we've got a two-hour window. They got everybody there. The winds stopped. They conducted the test. Then the wind started up again. But they did it well. It was his biggest and proudest moment. Meteorologists have fun being right when they're right.

Yes. Now, tell me something. When he traveled like that, to Mississippi or Alaska, did you know in advance where he was going?

Yes, I knew where he was going. I didn't know what he was going for, (but) I knew where he was going to be. And he would call every night. He was very family-oriented and he would call every night no matter where he was to tell me what he had done that day and see what we had done that day.

So what kinds of things did the wives do when the husbands were away like that?

Well, we were raising families, so we did primarily family things. I was very active in PTA with both my kids. I was the president of the PTA there and the president there and I was area council president. I was offered a job on the national level, but I didn't take that because I didn't want to travel. But I was on the state board as well. I loved PTA because it was an involvement with my kids.

And I lectured for Weight Watchers. I had a weight problem and I went to Weight Watchers. Then I said I can do this. So I lectured for Weight Watchers for about 12 years. I did that because I needed enough quarters in a row to get Social Security. We wanted to be able to get Medicare and things. So I did that for 12 years and I loved that as well. I loved the interaction with people. That was a proud time for me. I enjoyed that.

Fantastic. Were there any special expectations of the Nevada Test Site wives?

No. I think the thing was that they impressed that we keep our mouths shut and we don't talk about when our husbands are going or where they're going or how long they're going to be there. But that was easy to do, to keep your mouth shut, when you're involved with your family. And all

of the families had families. So we were all busy. We got together every once in a while socially and that was a fun thing to do. I didn't as much as with the other wives. They had like a group. But I didn't because I was lecturing for Weight Watchers and my time did not coordinate quite often with what they were doing. But a lot of them did get together and they played bridge and did things like that. But I didn't do that because I was --

Because you were working and most of them didn't work outside the home.

That's right. That's right.

Tell me about other organizations that you joined because I think you were part of the Women's Voters League.

Yes, League of Women Voters. As I said that was a fascinating time for me. We've never been really political in our family. We decided we would register as independents. You couldn't vote in Nevada -- you couldn't get a ballot in Nevada for independents. You had to be a registered Democrat or Republican in order to be able to have a say-so in the election. So my husband registered as a Republican and I registered as a Democrat. So we were able to pick and choose.

Through PTA I was involved with the gal that you're going to go see in Pahrump. We had kids in middle school together, in junior high school. She sent out the word that I might enjoy being on the League of Women Voters. And I did that for a while.

And that was Pat van Betten from Blue Diamond you're talking about.

Yes.

So tell me about the work that --

Jean Ford was the one who was in charge. Yes. Jean Ford. Jean Ford was marvelous. Her two daughters were in school the same time my daughter was, too. But anyway, she was a wonderful lady. I remember we were fighting about getting a library. And she went to bat for the library and I did as well, and the same way with public transportation when we came to town. The taxicabs owned the business and they were not anxious to have bus service because it would take away from them somewhat. Jean worked really hard, as well as a number of other people, to get us bus service. We're real thrilled that we got that and the library. It was marvelous to have the wherewithal to fight city hall somewhat.

Oh, that sounds great.

The Nevada Test Site women, some of them started a social club.

Yes.

Now, were you able to be a part of that with your other activities?

No. And that was because I was working.

Okay. Sometimes that social club would have a big event during the year in the evening where people would dress up. Did you ever attend any of those?

I'm sure we did. The one that I remember was Ink Gate's house. He was a test manager at the Test Site. His wife, Esther, was a marvelous lady. They had a marvelous get-together in their condominium that was fun. We had lots of people from Washington, D.C. and whatnot who happened to be there. I remember that one well.

Esther was a poet. She wrote a marvelous book, *Softness in the Wind*. It's marvelous; I haven't seen that book lately. I wonder where it is. But anyway, she had cancer and she wrote this book of poems about her experience. Please Lord, let me wait to see the -- what was the plant that she wanted to see bloom? The wisteria. Let me wait until the wisteria blooms. Please let me be here when the wisteria blooms. And she was. She did live. After he resigned from here, they went to Texas. Last I heard she had been doing well and Mahlon was doing well. But I have not heard anything more about them from there. But her book was just beautiful.

Wonderful. Where did your children go to school?

My son went to Halle Hewetson, which was in the Bonanza and 21st Street area, in that area. My daughter started school there as well. We lived in that neighborhood.

Then we bought a home in the Winterwood area. They built a golf course and my husband loved it. I said we're going to go out and look at those houses; they're having a grand opening. And on weekends we would run around and look at new houses because they were doing a lot of building in the 60s. We would just try to get ideas. And we had looked at the Sproul homes on the west side of the city and liked them, except we decided the living room was too small and it didn't have a fireplace. But when they had the grand premier of the Winterwood homes, Nellis and Sahara area -- they had built those out there and they were building the golf course -- we were the first people there. I said they're going to start showing them this Saturday morning and we're going to be there. And we were there. We bought the first house sold outside of the salesman

who bought the lot next to us. And then you picked your house. We picked the house. I said, okay, those windows have to go and the fireplace is going to go right there, because it didn't have a fireplace. And my husband got one of those metal fireplaces and put it, took the windows out. So we had a wonderful fireplace and we still have that. That's one of my favorite parts of that house.

Do you still live in that house?

Oh, yes. Yep, yep, yep. I'm still there. I did spend two years—my kids decided I didn't need to be in a house all by myself and it was too much work, the pool and everything—they talked me in to going to a retirement community. I was there for two years. I had horrible people renting my house, and I said, no, I'm going home.

And there was no reason for you not to be at home.

They wanted me to be in a retirement community. It was a nice experience, but I had to go home. And I was so happy to go home.

They may have to take me out of that one on a stretcher, but I'm going to be there. I love my home and I have nice memories and wonderful neighbors.

That's wonderful. So how close to Nellis Air Force Base is that home?

Well, a lot of the military personnel bought homes in Winterwood because Nellis is -- oh, we're at Nellis and Sahara. So it might be three miles. It might be three or four. Not far.

Is that where a lot of the Test Site families lived?

No. We had Test Site people scattered all over, which was fun. When the office was on Main Street, we had people who lived in that immediate area. When it moved to Industrial Road, we had people in that area. And we had lived at 22nd and Walnut for a number of years until we bought the place at Sahara and Nellis. And so we were convenient to downtown, to the office as well. But when we bought out there, we were as far away as -- but he had a straight run right up Sahara to Industrial and right down Industrial. So it was not inconvenient.

And then he was on the golf course.

Yes, and he had the golf. He would come home early enough; he worked 7:30 to 4:30. He would come home. And in the summer, we bought a membership on the golf course and we would play four holes after he came home, the ones right out -- because we live right on the golf course.

We're on the tee. And we would play four holes when he would come home. He really loved it. I was not a golfer, but I enjoyed the walk.

Oh, that's great.

So it was fun.

Tell me more about your career working for Weight Watchers.

Well, I had a weight problem and I said, well, I've got to take care of that. I heard about Weight Watchers. So I went down. At that time they were on Charleston near Maryland Parkway. They had a little office there. Reva Schwartz was the director. I went in. I was in her class I think. I said, you know, I can do this. So I told my husband, I said, (our) son has graduated high school and (our) daughter was getting ready to. And I said, I think I'd like to go to work for Weight Watchers. Really? And I said, well, you know, it helped me. I said I can do that. And I really enjoyed it. I'm a motivational speaker. It was marvelous to watch people lose their weight.

One of the fun memories that I have of that time. Men always lose weight faster than women. It's not fair, but it happens. And the gentleman came in and said, oh, Jo, I have to share this with you because you would understand it and nobody else would. He said, I've been golfing in this foursome for ten years. He said, I teed up the ball and I could see the ball. His belly had dipped. And I said, ah. And the guys said, are you all right? I said, oh, yes, yes, yes. They didn't know. But he said you appreciate that. And I said, oh, absolutely. And he went on to get his lifetime membership. He lost probably 60 pounds. But that was an incredible story that I always remember.

Oh, yes. Oh, Yes. That's great.

I could see the ball. I could address the ball. Hello, ball. Oh, there you are.

How did your husband and his friends react to the protesters at the Test Site?

You know, they felt, as we all felt, that there was a reason for that. There was a reason for the testing and it had to be done. We knew that they were the best at what they did. So there was pride in that. I think as any new position that you take, if you have pride in what you're doing -- and they did. And they had lots of successful events. Of course, before we came they had a bad leak that went to St. George. I think after that they worked so hard to make sure that there weren't any problems because we didn't want any more down-winders. And we didn't know at the time.

My one concern in later years was that we had Anderson Dairy deliver milk every day in the little Anderson Dairy milk box. I didn't think about the fact that the cows were eating from grass that could have been contaminated. So that has always been my main worry. I worry about my two kids, whether they ever have any problems with radiation. But they haven't.

How did those men feel as we began to learn more and more about the damage of radiation?

You know, we learn from our mistakes. As a society, we always have.

Right. I mean at first they didn't know either.

Yes. I think that my husband's concern was, when we were away from the Test Site, when he was on location, he would worry about the effects they would have there. If we were going to have a big test in Mississippi for the salt mine project, they were worried that there would be blue collar workers who would come down and say, hey, look what you did and you can't do that. So they were successful tests. So they said this is a good thing; we're doing something good.

They were thinking about building another Panama Canal area, the whole bit. There were things that you could do with nuclear. We wanted to send a nuclear-propelled rocket to the moon. The Russians had an accident with one of their satellites that had nuclear deposits in Canada. And we sent our search-and-rescue team because we didn't get any help from the Russians in the footprint, and Canada was like, you know, ten thousand miles. And they went up looking for it. And they did find it. They did find the radiation there and they did contain it. They did take care of that. But those are the things that you worry about. They said, no, we're not going to use a nuclear-propelled rocket engine because if we had an accident think of the effect that it would have on the whole world; look at how stupid the USA did. So we didn't. They knocked that project off. That was a big part of the Test Site at that time, and we built this beautiful facility for it. But we didn't complete it because we were --

Which beautiful facility?

The nuclear rocket, NRDS it was called, nuclear rocket development station. And they built it with a -- come down to our atomic museum. We've got a big display on that.

Oh, yes. How do you feel about the museum?

I love the museum. As any museum, I'm so happy that we had the foresight to save materials and save things so that people know that it was a good experience and it was an important experience

that we were involved in. That's nice to know that we've got that saved. I volunteer on Saturdays and Sundays. Quite often someone will come in and say, oh, I worked with Hal and I was so happy to have had that experience. It's nice to run into people who worked with Hal. We had people visit from Japan quite often. We've had protesters at that building. Until this year, at Easter time they would have a walk out to the Test Site in protest. But they didn't do it Easter. They did it on the day that the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima I think this time.

Yes. I think so, too.

I believe that was when they did that. But anyway, it's nice to have the collection because we have lots of wonderful things.

Good. What kinds of family vacations did you take during these times?

Oh, my husband's family lives in Minnesota and we would take different routes to go back to Minnesota to visit his mother and his sisters. That was usually our vacations.

Did he get to travel to any places outside of the U.S. where the same kind of testing was being done?

Oh, yes. Yes. He did the South Pacific when they conducted the tests there. I'm not sure where that test was conducted. But I was able to meet him in Hawaii, my first trip to Hawaii. And that was fun. I bought a nightgown and some perfume to go to Hawaii. He was thrilled about that because they were there for a while. He traveled to Europe and England. He had some nice experiences with the professionals. And they in turn would come here and we would entertain them. It was fun to have that kind of interaction, to meet scientists who were involved in things like that. It was an exciting time for us.

Yes. So were there any demands on the wives of these scientists to ever entertain at the last moment?

No, I don't think at the last moment. When we knew someone was coming, we would usually prepare something. One of my fine experiences about that was with the weather bureau, which has a western conference they have once a year. We went to Salt Lake City with the weather support nuclear office. We were part of them. We went to Salt Lake City when they were having a flood. And a funny experience there was in front of the bank they had bank bags that said First National Bank full of sand to keep the -- and I said are those full of money? I want to know. And

to keep the water from going in the door, do you put your bags of money out there? I found that really entertaining.

That's great. How have your feelings about the city of Las Vegas changed over the years?

You came here in --

In '56.

-- 1956. So what were some of the changes that you saw?

Well, the university, the office was in a trailer and the road was only paved halfway because we were living at Sunset and Pecos at the time. We really watched the area really grow. We used to come in from California -- we would go visit my family in California -- and you'd see this little jewel. And we had a little light on top of Sunrise Mountain, which we don't have anymore. The vandals destroyed it. We'd come up over the hill and say, oh, there's home, like a little pearl. Well, now the pearl stretches out and it's become not a pearl but a giant cosmopolitan area.

I've never doubted growth because it brings things with it. Unfortunately, my biggest complaint is when I decide to go somewhere in my car, all the million people in Las Vegas decide to go the same place at the same time because every car is on the road. I don't understand that.

Okay. Did your family have close ties to any church in Las Vegas?

Well, yes and no. My husband's mother wanted him to be a Lutheran minister. So we went to the Lutheran church in the neighborhood. He said, you know, I'm not interested in raising my son as a Lutheran. He said, it's too strict for me. I was a member of the First Christian Church. He said, let's go to your church. And we went out to my church. And he said, you know, I'm not that interested in that. He said I can't tell you why; I don't know why. But Reverend Schuller came on, the Glass (Crystal) Cathedral. And we would watch that every morning. It came on at six in the morning or something. We would watch that in bed on our bedroom television. And he liked him. He liked Reverend [Robert H.] Schuller. That became our church experiences over the years. I carried through on that until Reverend Schuller retired. And I didn't get the same thrill from his son or his daughter. Because it is different.

It is completely different.

Did Las Vegas change your family traditions in any way?

No. I can't say that it did.

Holidays?

My son was two when we came and he had neighborhood experiences. This was our first experience with the LDS people and we had a lot of those in our neighborhood. My son experienced them saying, oh, we have to go to church and we have to go to this, his little friends. He said I don't think that you should feel bad about going to a church, should you? I mean shouldn't you be happy to go and happy to do things? And they were saying, oh, we have to go. We can't do this because it's Sunday. We can't do this because of that. You know how kids are. And so his experience was, no, I'm not interested in that.

We made lots of friends and I still have lots of LDS friends. And they've never pushed. I think any religion, as long as it makes you a better person, is wonderful for you and for the whole community. I believe that strongly. And I've never had any bad experiences.

As the group, as the Nevada Test Site wives and family, did you have any experiences with the racial activities, racial integration that took place here in the 60s and 70s?

You know, I was working for a PTA with Kenny Guinn, [who was our superintendent and later Nevada governor...]

He came to town when I was area council president and he became my vice president. And at that time we had some marvelous, marvelous black friends on the PTA, on the board. We were having racial problems at that particular time. O.L. Jefferson came to me and he said, Jo, we don't all look alike to us; we know who the problem people are, and we'll take care of it. And I remember that so well because I thought he was so right. You go to your own church and your own people and you tell them that. We don't all look alike to us and we know who the problem people are. And I thought that was marvelous. O.L. Jefferson, he was on my board as well at that time. It was a scary time because, you know, kids involved. It's frightening. But it all worked out. And I said thank goodness. We have dear friends who worked for the Test Site and some of our best friends and still are Christmas card friends; that kind of thing.

Up to this point whom did you see as some of the Las Vegas leaders over the years? You've already mentioned Kenny Guinn. Any other people you considered leaders of the community? You mentioned Jean Ford.

There were so many different—there were so many changes in things. Let's see. I was trying to

think of who was the sheriff at the time.

Lamb.

And who the district attorney was at the time. There was one election that I felt was -- I said something -- this is not right because I don't know anybody who voted against this guy and the other guy got elected. That was the first time that I thought there might be voting irregularities in the machine. I can't think of his name. I don't know if he was a district attorney or what. But anyway, that was my one time to question because I said, oh, I think those machines had to be wrong because I've talked to everybody I know and everybody voted for you and the other guy won. I don't understand that. Funny you remember those.

It sounds as if you've enjoyed Las Vegas.

Very much.

If you had to write a book right now, what would you call it, about your life in Las Vegas?

Home Means Nevada.

Oh, wonderful.

And I love that song.

That's wonderful.

My kids think since I've retired I should be in California with them. And I said nope, you can come visit me.

Wonderful. I enjoyed this so much. Is there anything else you want to add? Is there anything else about a wife of a scientist we didn't get to talk about?

No. But if I think of anything, I can give you a call because I've got your phone number. And I did e-mail my kids. My son works for Apple. And I did e-mail my kids and say if you have any memories about the testing program, let me know. I will tell them. If you have an e-mail I will tell them if they have some stories they'd like to share with you that they can e-mail you. [After graduating from UNLV, my son, Bob, worked for Computer Science Corporation in support of the Department of Energy and the testing program from 1981-1987 when he and his wife, Kathleen, relocated to California, where they still reside in Santa Cruz. They provided me with my two grandsons Max and Peter.

Thank you so much.

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