

R  
154  
N52  
A3  
2009

## An Interview with Donna Newsom

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

©Heart to Heart Oral History Project  
University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2009

Produced by:

The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries

Director: Claytee D. White

Editors: Barbara Tabach

Transcribers: Kristin Hicks

Interviewers and Project Assistants: Barbara Tabach and Claytee D. White

## Table of Contents

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Harold L. Boyer Charitable Foundation. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

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 *Heart to Heart* Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
University Libraries  
University Nevada Las Vegas

# Table of Contents

Growing up in the south; relationship with father; education through high school; experiences in Macon Hospital School of Nursing; details of life after parents' divorce; memories of nursing training.....1-15

First attempt at using anesthesia during surgery; graduation with RN degree at age 19; working as graduate nurse for one year; discussion of race relations in Macon, GA; psychiatric affiliation in Milledgeville; descriptions of insulin therapy, shock therapy, and physical care of psychiatric patients; further details of relationship with father; taking the train to Houston, TX; working at Hermann and Methodist Hospitals; memory of seeing Hedy Lamar in Methodist Hospital.....16-25

Working days at Southwest Blood Bank; detailed memories of living in boarding house; accepting job as nurse at Girl Scout camp near Denver, CO; recalling roommate Helen and the help she offered; road trip with roommate to Hollywood, back through Las Vegas, and finally to camp in Colorado; living in tent; accompanying injured Girl Scout to Denver General Hospital; heading back to Houston.....26-34

Meeting up with mentor (Helen) again; sponsored through teacher education in Austin, TX, at University of Texas; details on grades, classes, and support from Helen; last year of school work in Galveston; dorm and social life in Galveston; meeting future husband Sam; married at 24 with help from Helen; honeymoon in Colorado; comments on using Internet today and how Helen taught her to use library.....35-42

Comments on birthdays, photographs, scanners, and being introduced to real estate by Helen; teaching at Charity Hospital in New Orleans; Sam's three year residency in ophthalmology at Ochsner; leaving nursing and beginning ten year career in real estate; differences in Louisiana laws compared to other states; investing in real estate in Las Vegas through Helen; reflections on Sam's Navy career; more discussion on real estate career; Sam's second stint in Navy, stationed in San Diego; attempt to live in Oregon and opinions on Oregon law; invited by Helen to come to Las Vegas.....43-52

Details on working at Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital (now UMC); recalling shocking differences in medical practices compared to down south; memories of feeling absolutely safe in a Mafia-run city; comments on taking the train into Las Vegas and flying over the Grand Canyon; life today includes working for Salvation Army, attending OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) classes at UNLV, church work, and tutoring; mention of Liza Minnelli attending Paradise Elementary School, where OLLI classes are now held; mention of Liberace's compound on Swenson; contrasting Las Vegas and New Orleans; further details about OLLI.....53-59

## List of Illustrations

Following Page:

High school graduate, nursing school photos	20
Early 1950s visit to Las Vegas, early marriage	37
Donna as a young mother, wife, business and community member	49

## Preface

Donna Newsom shares the history of her life in great detail, beginning with her childhood in Georgia and Florida. The family moved many times, following her father's work opportunities. Donna had a close relationship with her father and recalls the many daring adventures on which he took her.

After graduating from high school, Donna earned a nursing degree at the Macon Hospital School of Nursing. She remembers dorm life, long hours, and the specific training nurses received in the late forties. Her career began at age 19 with a year of working at Macon Hospital as a graduate nurse, and then she made plans to leave the South.

Donna's memories include moving to Houston, living in a boarding house, her first date, and working at Hermann Hospital and then Methodist Hospital. She then answered an ad to work at a Girl Scout camp in Colorado, and her roommate there became a mentor and one of her staunchest supporters.

With help from her mentor, Donna went on to earn a teaching degree in Austin, Texas, met and married her husband Sam Newsom, and got involved in real estate. She relates the many experiences they had during Sam's Navy career, her teaching experience in New Orleans, and their eventual move to Las Vegas.

Sam and Donna loved Las Vegas from the moment they moved here. She recalls many details of her employment at UMC, the differences in health care compared to down south, and the feeling of being safe no matter the time of day or night.

Donna stays active in tutoring, the OLLI program at UNLV, and working for the Salvation Army women's auxiliary. She and Sam also get together with his golfing buddies and their wives for dinners in their various homes.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



Use Agreement

Name of Narrator: DONNA NEWSON  
Name of Interviewer: CLAYTEE D. WHITE

We, the above named, give to the Oral History Research Center of UNLV, the recorded interview(s) initiated on 6/11/2009 as an unrestricted gift, to be used for such scholarly and educational purposes as shall be determined, and transfer to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude the right of the interviewer, as a representative of UNLV, to use the recordings and related materials for scholarly pursuits. There will be no compensation for any interviews.

Donna Newson 6/11/09  
Signature of Narrator Date

Claytee D. White 6/11/2009  
Signature of Interviewer Date

Library Special Collections  
4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 457010, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-7070  
(702) 895-7777

**It is June 11th, 2009, and I am in the home of Donna Newsom this morning in Las Vegas.**

**How are you this morning, Donna?**

I'm just fine. It's a gorgeous day and I'm just enjoying it so much. So happy to meet you.

**This is wonderful. And this is Claytee White.**

**So, Donna, tell me about where you grew up and what your family was like.**

Well, I grew up in the south. I've been out of the south for over 50 years. But, you know, when I'm talking people begin to smile and I know what they're thinking. They're thinking, oh, she has a southern accent. I've never tried to get rid of it, but I think just by being out of the deep south and hearing other people that maybe a little bit of the edge of it has gone away. And another reason I think so is because when I do go back to the south and I'm talking, they say you've lost your southern drawl. So they think I have. But people out here in the west recognize it.

By the way, there's one word, one southern word that I cannot talk without. I use it all the time. It just says what it says easier and better than any other word and that's y'all. Y'all is what we say and I love it. And if I really want to emphasize that I say all of y'all. And that really does not leave anyone out. It gets everybody.

But I spent most of my childhood in South Georgia and north Florida. They're very much alike, those areas there. My mother was a Georgian. She lived and grew up—was born, I mean, in South Georgia. And my father was born, of course, in north Florida and has many, many relatives there. So I'm just full of relatives on my father's side and I don't know all of them. I guess you might say my childhood was typical of the time and of the area that we were living in.

I don't feel that I had advantages in school like -- well, of course, like modern children have, naturally. But with moving around so much -- my father did construction work. And I used to say wherever the road went we went. And that was a lot of moving. Like every other man there we had a pickup truck. When it was time to move, well, everything was put in the back of the pickup truck and we all got in the front and we took off.

**What are your parents' names?**



Bonnie is my mother's name and my father's name is Clyde.

### **Bonnie and Clyde.**

Bonnie and Clyde. I know it. I know it. And so, you know, nowadays when I tell that to people, they may not have heard of the original, the famous couple, you know. But in (my) younger days when I would tell people my parents' names, they really knew who Bonnie and Clyde were.

My childhood was very interesting. We were always moving. I was born in 1932 during the Great Depression. We were living the same kind of life as other people there, which was just not having very many advantages. I remember one time we lived at an apartment house. It was called a garage apartment because it was right over a garage. We had the stairs going up to it on the outside rather than inside the building. Living there was really interesting. We were the garage apartment in the back area of a very big beautiful home in Bunnell, Florida. And the owner of the home was a pharmacist. He was the drugstore man. Of course, we called pharmacies drugstores in those days. And he was also serving as our doctor -- as everybody's doctor because if we had anything we would go down to the drugstore and ask Dr. Holden what to do for it. He was really giving us medical care and telling us what medicine was the very best to use. So that sort of stood out in my life.

But I loved to play. I loved to play with the kids in the neighborhood. And I loved to get lost out there because, you know, being in a different time it was safe. If you were ever lost because you wandered too far away from home, all you had to do was just ask anybody to take you home or else show you how to get there.

I remember one time in our garage apartment the doorbell rang and my mother answered. There was a very nice man standing there in front of the door and he said, I wonder if I could have a cup of coffee. And she said, yes, of course. So my mother gave him a cup of coffee. I've thought about that many times because he wasn't asking for food. He was just asking for a cup of coffee. And a lot of people were going around asking for things then because of the hard times.

### **Did coffee curb your appetite?**

My mother drank one cup of coffee after another. She was a real coffee drinker. And she

instilled that in my sister and me. We both grew up loving coffee. Also my mother had to have it at just the right temperature. She liked it very hot and so I have still to this day preferred my coffee very hot. Sometimes I stand in front of the microwave and drink the coffee so that --

**Well now, the southern drink that I remember so well is iced tea. Tell me about that.**

Well, I think that when every southern family gets up—the mother, the wife getting up first, and one of the first things she does is to make tea and always to put sugar in it. It was always sweet tea. I didn't know that tea was any other way. I didn't really care too much for tea when I was a child. I was still enjoying the coffee so much. So I drank ever so little iced tea. And now as an adult I don't drink iced tea at all.

**Earlier you were telling me that the South is not your favorite place. Tell me about the southern culture.**

Okay. Having lived only in the south and only among southerners I did not know any other culture. I thought we were just like everybody else and everything we did was like everybody else. And it was much, much later when I left the south that I learned that there are variations. People can be very different and that was interesting to me.

But growing up in the south there was a very certain culture there. It was, of course, unwritten, but it was very strict. There were certain things that you did do and certain things that you did not do. For instance, when my mother got on the city bus on Sunday, she would never dream of getting on the bus without her white gloves on. So she wore white gloves always on Sunday. My mother seemed to just love everything about where she lived. She enjoyed cooking southern food. And being so poor my mother knew how to stretch a dollar. I have never seen anybody that could be so wise when it came to economizing. Those values were instilled in me. And still to this day I find myself just thinking how I can get a little more use out of something or how I can make something last a little bit longer. And I'm really happy to have those characteristics.

My father was a person that just enjoyed doing fun things, enjoyed doing daring things. He had many brothers and sisters and they all were kind of a bit like roughnecks. And my father, wanting me to be a boy because he already had a girl, would put me on

horses, saddles on horses when I was very young. Now it seems very scary. But then because my father did it and I loved him so much and everything he did, I thought it was fun and I thought it would be okay.

So my father's hometown in north Florida was Bunnell in Flagler County. And we were eight miles from Flagler Beach. We were eight miles inland in the town of Bunnell. So sometimes my father would saddle up horses and he and I -- and here I am very young, like five years old, six years old -- I would get on my horse and he would be on his. We would ride the horses all the way to the beach. Then we would play in the sand there on the beach for a while and then eat something from somewhere and then head back home.

But he warned me about something. And it was true. He warned me that the horses are tired, they've been out, they've had a long walk, and they're heading home now and they're in a hurry. So the horse you are on, Donna, was once a racehorse. He's older now and he's no longer racing, but he still has the race blood in him. So don't ever let your horse get behind my horse, try to keep him walking even with my horse because the horse will want to just take off. He will want to be the lead horse all the time and you may not be able to hold him back. So just try to keep even with my horse.

My father was always doing things with me that were scary. I loved him so much and I was having such a good time, but at the same time I was scared because I wasn't trained to do the things that he expected me to do. He was such a daredevil-type person. Both my mother and father owned motorcycles in their early life before my sister and I were born. And I had pictures of my mother and daddy each on their separate motorcycle. And, of course, it was the type motorcycle then that had the sidecar on it. So I'm glad I still have pictures of that. But my father would take me riding on the back of his motorcycle. And it was such fun and I wasn't too much afraid of that.

My father liked to drink beer. And some days he would drink too much beer and he would be a little careless. He would talk very loud and shout. And I knew he was drinking too much. And my mother would call me in the apartment and tell me I had to stay inside. And years later I realized it was because of my father drinking too much.

But one time he was driving a pickup truck and he asked me if I could climb up on the

cab, up on top of the cab. Well, anything my father asked me to do I thought would be fun. And so it was scary. I got up there and of course he stopped the truck. I climbed up and sat on top of the cab and he started slowly driving the truck. I was so scared because every time he would turn, even though slowly, I had nothing to hold onto. And so he started, you know, making right and left turns. And I thought I'm really scared, but how could I tell him? So I got so very scared because I was kind of almost lying down on there because I realized being up there with nothing to hold onto I was safer lying down. So lying down with my head very close to the windshield I tapped on the window and said I want to get down. He said aren't you having fun? I said yes, but I want to get down; I have to go to the bathroom. I thought that would make him stop. And it did. It did, yes. And then after that I told him I didn't want to ride in the truck anymore. And he said okay. That was fine. But my sister, who was about four and a half years older, did not enjoy these things.

**And her name?**

Betty. Betty enjoyed being around Mother and doing much quieter things. She liked to play with paper dolls. While she was doing those things with Mother, I was always out doing something with Daddy because I was the only boy he may ever have and I was supposed to be the boy. It was fun. And to this day I do have fond memories of that. But it was mostly scary.

**So where did you decide to go to school? Did Betty also go to college?**

No, Betty did not attend college. You mean where did I go to high school or to college?

**Tell me about high school and then about college.**

Okay. My parents divorced. It was because of my father's drinking. And he was drinking more and more. Of course, my mother had to protect me and had to keep me off of the cab of trucks and off of racehorses. So my mother moved back to her home state of Georgia. But this time we moved to a city in central Georgia, which is Macon. We moved to Macon, Georgia. Although that was not a city my mother had lived in before, we moved there because my sister had finished high school in Statesboro and decided to go into nursing school. And she would have gone into nursing school in Savannah because that was so close, but there was not an opening there. There was not a vacancy in Savannah. So we moved to

Macon. My sister was able to get in nursing school in Macon, the Macon Hospital School of Nursing.

At that time it was a three-year program and when you finished you got a certificate. You became an RN and you didn't have any college courses along with it. However, my sister's class did have a program, which allowed the students to go to another town in Georgia for three years and get some of their courses there, their early courses. My sister got to do that. That was Milledgeville, Georgia. And Milledgeville at one time had been the capital of Georgia before Atlanta. That was a long time ago. My sister did take classes there for three months and then she was back at the Macon Hospital. Betty was in the last class of cadet nurses because World War II had just ended. And so she was in that last class, which meant that if there was another conflict or another big war my sister would be in the Cadet Nursing Corps and would have to go.

But my sister enjoyed being a student nurse. She had worked hard. And when she got out of nursing school, she worked for a doctor in downtown Macon. He was a well-known ear, nose and throat doctor, Dr. Barton. And he has passed on now, of course. But right across the hall on the same floor as Dr. Barton's office was an insurance company. So my sister would be waiting on the elevator there where also people from the insurance company office would be. And that's how my sister met her future husband. He was working in his father's insurance company. And, of course, Betty was working for Dr. Barton as an office nurse. So Betty only worked a year and then she was married and became a homemaker and was very happy. And they have four children today.

When it was time for me to go to high school, I went to a very different type of high school than my sister had. Macon, Georgia did not have the boys and girls going to school together. I went to a very large senior high school for girls. And then far across town was the senior high school for boys. I don't know really why that was that they separated them. But because of the culture I felt like it had something to do with that. I feel like that the culture wanted to protect young ladies and did not want the young ladies to get into any situation that would not be appropriate and to have high school boys and girls together things might happen. So that was their way of just having the two different schools.

When I first started there, I was more than a year ahead of myself because of all the moving that we had done in small towns in Florida and Georgia and even out in Houston. The construction work had carried my father as far as Houston. So I had to change schools probably as much as seven times in elementary school, but not once a year. Sometimes I would change schools maybe two times in one year. So I went to about seven elementary schools. And when I went to junior high, we were on the road a lot and I was really in only one grade in junior high. So when I got to Macon and went to Miller High School, it was a huge school. I don't know how many, but there were hundreds of us because Macon was a bigger city than Statesboro. And I was approximately two years -- I was put in a grade two years ahead of the grade I should have been in. I was 13 years old. I should have been in junior high school. But they looked at the records and the principal of Miller High School, the senior high school, said no, this is where you belong. And I knew I didn't because I was 13 and the youngest student there was 15. So I was in a difficult situation. Of course, because of the culture I could not push the issue nor could I even question it. I do not have fond memories of the three years I spent at Miller High School. The work was unbelievably hard for me. All I did was study, study, study.

We were very, very poor. Of course, the divorce had occurred just a few years before I entered Miller High School. My mother had taken a job as a saleslady in downtown Macon. And my sister was married. So it was just my mother and me. And we lived in a very, very small, almost inadequate two rooms. We had two rooms. We had a bedroom, one bed. My mother and I slept together. Then we had a little galley of a kitchen, very small. We were on the second floor of this private home. The (owner) had rented out the bottom and they had rented another part of the second floor. The family that was on the second floor across from us had five children and we shared a bath with that family. So I have known some pretty hard times. But, yet, my mother provided. She provided the things that we needed. There was nothing that we had that wasn't a necessity.

I didn't have the advantage of going to church when I was growing up even though I was in an area where going to church was very, very important. The Baptist Church was probably the most dominant church there. But Sunday was my mother's day off. And that's

when she had to do an awful lot of work washing and ironing and shopping. We had no transportation. So another thing that was so much the culture there was little girls had to have black patent leather shoes to wear to church. I didn't have that. I had only one pair of shoes and they were brown oxfords. They were perfect for school but not for going to church, and I didn't want to be embarrassed with that. So I didn't grow up in the church.

But later on when I was 17 my mother and I went to a revival in Macon given by Billy Graham. I never heard of Billy Graham. But I was so moved by that. My mother had been baptized in her early life in the Baptist Church. So that was the event I will always remember because Billy Graham really spoke to me that night. So it was the beginning of a religious life that would follow over the years.

I felt very unfortunate not having been in high school where boys were because -- I had no brothers -- I did not get to know boys. I was not around them. I missed my father so much. Life was not fun for me. Miller High School was the most difficult time of my life in many ways. Being two years ahead of myself, being extremely immature, being very poor put me in a position to really not have anything that I would have loved to have had as a teenage girl. I went all the way through three years of senior high school without even being around boys. And I knew that some of the girls at Miller who were far better off than I was, they drove cars, some of them. Of course, many rode the bus. They drove cars and they were meeting boys; maybe at church or at other places. But I knew that they did date boys. And I knew that there was no hope of me ever dating a boy.

I was embarrassed every day I went to school. I was embarrassed for the way I looked. There was one picture made. And when I saw that picture I burst into tears. I did a lot of crying those years because I was basically rejected in high school and it was very painful. And I missed my father. My mother worked hard and did the best she could, but I spent a lot of time alone.

I had to ride the bus, the city bus, to school. We didn't really have enough money for me to ride the bus every day. So what I did, and my mother did not ask me to do this, but I realized myself that this is really making a big dent in our food budget if I have to ride the bus because my mother had to ride the bus to work and back home. So I thought of what can I do

to help? I had no time to really baby-sit and people might not have asked me anyway. I decided to walk down into what we called then the Negro quarters. I walked down there with a box, a cardboard box of clothes that had been given to me during the week when I would get off the bus coming home from school before I went in our little apartment. I wasn't interested in going in any sooner than necessary. I would walk several blocks, where the houses were nicer, and I would ring the doorbells and ask the people if they had any old clothes that they wanted to get rid of. I collected a good bit of clothes. And some of them would even say, well, not right now, I'll have to get them, but come back in a few days. I always said I would, which I did. So I collected these clothes in a cardboard box that I carried with me. Then on Saturday mornings I walked -- it was the longest hike you can imagine -- I walked into the Negro quarters. And they were many times sitting on their front porch or what we called then the front stoop, which was kind of a front step there. I would holler clothes, children's clothes, men's clothes, women's clothes, cheap. And some would motion me over. So I would go over there and just let them dig through the box. That was fine. And I picked up nickels and dimes and a quarter or two that way. And that was the money that I used to ride the bus.

**Where did you get that idea?**

It came from -- not the idea. But my mother had a way of living with every problem and resolving it and not complaining about it. My mother, who had so little, was one of the happiest people I've ever known.

At one time I said to her, momma, nobody ever comes to our house, to the apartment. She says no, they don't, and I'm glad they don't because I'm too busy anyway. And she was always cleaning something that wasn't even painted, like the windowsills. Maybe a windowpane would not have ever been in the apartment. But my mother created a way to patch the area. She was always coping with and dealing with ways to get by. But she was so happy about it. She was always humming a song or just saying, oh, now look at this, Donna, what I did here. And I was always so impressed with her particular style of creativity.

But when I would stand on the corner to catch the bus to go to school, we were at an intersection and there was a traffic light. When the traffic light was on red and the cars



stopped, I looked around and I looked at the car. I looked inside the car. And I saw my classmates one time after another. They saw me standing there, but they never caught my eye. They had stopped for the red light. Sometimes there would be two sitting in the front seat and they would be laughing and enjoying themselves and driving a big beautiful car. And Macon, Georgia had the strongest caste system I have ever heard of since then. In other words, you are top of the class or you are much lower.

And this was instilled in me, the pain of rejection, because in the small towns I had lived in -- my father's hometown, small, little Bunnell, Florida and my mother's hometown, small, little Statesboro -- were so friendly, so nice. Of course, I had families in each one of those towns, but everybody else was nice and friendly. I did not know what I had done when I got to Macon. I was 13. I didn't know what I had done for people not to speak to me. At first I really thought that these classmates that I recognized in the car should ask me to ride. But they didn't. And I got used to it and lived with it.

But something that was kind of funny to me was I think the one who drove the most beautiful car, who was the most beautiful lady of all my classmates at Miller, in Spanish class sat in the seat right in front of me. And, now, her name was Beverley. Beverley did not speak to me because I was, you know, so much lower class-wise than Beverley was. But when we would have a pop quiz, Beverley never had a piece of notebook paper. The teacher always said get out a sheet of paper. That was the way she told us you're going to have a pop quiz. So Beverley, the lady who did not look at me, although she knew I was standing there waiting on the bus, did not turn her body around to face me, but she reached her left arm back of her. I didn't know what she was doing. And so she had to turn sideways enough just to tell me what she wanted. She never faced me. She said paper. I said oh, oh, sure. So I gave her a piece of paper to take the pop quiz. But the funny part about it, the strange part about it was that wasn't a one-time thing. That happened every time we had a pop quiz. She just put her arm back on top of my desk and I knew then. So I immediately gave her a piece of paper.

**How did that make you feel?**

But the irony of that -- you know, life is crazy. Life is very crazy. And culture has -- ever since my childhood in my adult life culture has always been so amazing to me. I love it so

much. I wish I could have gone to college and majored in sociology. I would have loved it.

But I graduated. I passed every course. I know I studied more than anybody else. There was one picture made that was the graduating class. We all stood together, and because I was the smallest, I was placed center front. When I look at that picture, all I can do is break down and cry. Here is this little girl standing there with clothes on that are so small for me. I had worn them so many years. The hem was way above my knees. Every other girl standing on the front row had on a beautiful long ballerina skirt with ballerina shoes because that was the culture. That was what was in style at that time was ballerina shoes, no socks and a full long ballerina skirt. Here I stood with this print dress on, on the front row of that picture. And I never wanted to look at that picture again. I don't remember what I did with it. But I wouldn't be surprised if I had not torn it in pieces. I wish I could get rid of the memory, but I can't. It's everlasting.

My high school was miserable. I did not like anything about it. I didn't like my life at that time. So when I finished high school, what was I going to do? What could I do?

**Get as far away from there as possible.**

Yes. Yes. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to run so far. But where? So at that time I felt -- I remember the time my mother and sister and I, the three of us, got together to decide what am I going to do now I've finished high school?

**And you were only 16.**

Yes, I was 16 when I finished. So there were three choices at that time in the Heart of Dixie. One was the most popular, and really the one that all young girls were supposed to do, was to get married and have lots of children. I was still so immature and would be for a long time. I had not been around a boy yet. So we three knew that that was not the thing. Okay.

So the other two choices were to go to college and maybe become an old maid schoolteacher. My teachers were all old maids. The best were old maid teachers. So that didn't appeal to me. But that wasn't the reason. The reason was there was absolutely no money for college. There was no money for anything at all.

The third choice was to go to nursing school at the Macon Hospital like my sister had done. But times had changed since she entered. Of course, there were no more cadet nurses.

She had actually been on a little bit of a government income while she was in nursing school. Every two weeks she received a check for maybe \$12 or something. And that was enough to buy the items that she needed, little personal items. But that was over. The war was over.

So my choice had to be to go to the Macon Hospital School of Nursing because for three years they fed you and you slept in a dormitory and you were actually a slave to the hospital. There were no aides at that time. Student nurses cleaned the springs under the patients' beds with a pan of soap and water after they were discharged. We crawled under the bed. We cleaned the walls. We cleaned the windows in the room when a patient was discharged. There was no hired help. The only hired help was an orderly and he worked just for the men. So it was work beyond anything I could ever have imagined. But I belonged. I was a part of that nursing class. Most of my classmates had come from small farms. They were used to hard work. And I had not done that kind of hard work. But they were stronger and bigger and older.

But anyway, I got along and I was surviving all right. I didn't find it hard. There were six of us in the class of '54 that were from Macon. I had known these people in high school because they were in my level, my category, and there they were in nursing school. And they were so nice, so wonderful. The most wonderful two ladies I could ever know were in my nursing school class and had been my classmates in high school. They had been adopted when they were very young by a Methodist organization. That's why they had to go to nursing school, too, because there was nothing else and no way of making any money and supporting ourselves.

**Did they have the ballerina skirts?**

I don't remember. They were probably dressed more appropriately because I did later learn that they had been given the things that they needed by the Methodist Church. And they were older than I was. So they probably did.

But we got along fine in nursing school. For the first time in a long time, many years, I felt like I belonged with a group. So wherever my classmates were complaining about living in the dorm, oh, I could not complain because we actually had a little, small bed, a little bigger than a cot. The room was clean and we had a closet—I had not had a closet before. So

I just thought this is really nice. It really was. We had to walk all the way down the hall to the bathroom, but we had a shower, and I had never had that before. I had taken sponge baths in tubs, you know. So I loved it. I loved not the hard work, but I loved the dormitory life. I belonged for the first time. And that was wonderful.

It was so wonderful. So I had my experiences for the next three years. I made very good grades in nursing school.

**I know it was a lot of hard work, but tell me what the classes were like.**

Well, at that time, and this is about 1948 or '49—the first six months the classes were learning bedside care, learning how to bathe patients, learning how to turn them, to ambulate them, learning how to give treatments to them like enemas, douches, catheterizations, and learning how to clean the room when the patient was discharged, basically just doing a lot of scrubbing and cleaning. And when we did a treatment on a patient, we had to prepare for that specific treatment.

So we had to go to a room called the utility room. And we had a big something like an autoclave where if we wanted to -- like to give an enema, if we wanted to give a treatment like that, we had to boil the equipment. We had to boil the rubber tubing. We had to pick it out off the shelf and clean it. Even though it might have been cleaned, we had to re-clean. Things were very big on cleaning because we didn't have the sanitizers. Luckily there was nothing in the news of the hospital about anybody dying or getting an infection or anything like today with all the modern gloves and all like that. We cleaned with our bare hands. We learned how to clean the proper way. So we had to clean any equipment that we used in that utility room.

And later on when I moved up the ladder in nursing school and started giving injections, I learned that we had to boil the needle and the syringe. And we were given a great big serving spoon like one would have in their home. They would have a big serving spoon. And we held that spoon over a little Bunsen burner that we had lit like a candle almost. So we had a little fire. We held that spoon with water in it and the needle in there that we were going to use for the injection and we boiled it for a certain amount of time. And then we took the sterile tongs out that were soaking in a chemical solution to make the tongs -- we called

them forceps. So then we would use the forceps to put the needle on the end of the syringe that we had already boiled. So we had to prepare all of the equipment that we used.

So, you know, I didn't mind doing any of that. I just didn't mind it. The only problem I had was the same as all the other student nurses had. There was so much more work to be done than time to do it. We would work overtime. We were on duty from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. But during that time we had to break from working on the ward to go to the dormitory and attend classes. Classes were taught by graduate nurses. They were teachers and they liked teaching and they knew the material. So, you know, I had really no problem with the classes.

It was very difficult to get up at 5:30, cross the street to the hospital, and stand in line in the cafeteria for breakfast. As beginning nurses, first-year nurses, you had to always stay at the back of the line because nursing school at that time was operated very much like the military. If an older student came in the cafeteria, she could get in front of a lesser-ranking student. And our uniforms told our rank. Yes. And then doctors, of course, would come in and step in front of us. Sometimes we would wait -- out of our 30-minute period we would wait 25 minutes before we got up there. And then you talk about 'grab and run'. That's what we did because you were not going to be late getting back on the ward. You were not going to be late going to class because it didn't happen.

In fact, we could not get off duty sometimes at 7:00 p.m. because the relief had not come. You could not walk off of a floor, being the only nurse there, and leave 40 patients there without somebody. So we would sometimes be there until eight o'clock because the relief that was coming was coming from somewhere that she might not have been relieved. So it was a chain.

But what was so bad about that was not the fact that I had been going since 5:30 that morning and working on the floor and in classes with very little time to eat, but the rule in the dormitory was you must be in the dorm at seven o'clock. The door will be locked. So if I got off duty later than seven o'clock, I was in serious trouble and got a demerit every time because sometimes I would go to the dorm and it would be eight o'clock because I had just been relieved and I was given a demerit.

It was a difficult time and it was a time where the lower your ranking was the harder your life was. But then I learned later that being a senior nurse it was easier in some ways, but also the responsibility was tremendous. As a senior nurse I had a lot of night duty and I was the only nurse on the floor. A lot of patients die at night. They die about five o'clock in the morning. That was always difficult. The supervisor would make routine rounds and tell you what you should do or should not have been doing. Then after the routine round you knew that during the night she might make a surprise visit back. She really wasn't a person that was very helpful. She was mainly just doing her job, which was making sure that we were there doing our jobs.

Of course, it was so long ago then patients stayed in the hospital a long time after surgery. We did not ambulate them for days and days. So then when we did get them up in a wheelchair it could have been close to two weeks depending on the illness and the age of the person. My back broke every day. I felt like it did because I weighed around 92 pounds. Rolling up a patient's bed was such a difficult thing for me, and every time I did it, it just took so much strength out of my arm to roll that crank. Nothing was electric but the light that hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room and a few things in the utility room. Everything else worked off of just muscle. And I did not have much muscle at all. So it was hard physically. Many of my classmates, having come from bigger families and being older than I was and straight off the farms in Georgia where they had done heavy work, they didn't have this problem. But I survived it. I survived it and had very few close calls.

One time when I was a senior I had my night duty experience in the operating room. Well, we did not have anesthesiologists at that time. We had nurse anesthetists. They graduated from nursing school and decided to go into anesthesia. Maybe they had several months or even possibly as much as a year at some school -- probably out of state -- where they had learned anesthesia. And so they worked as nurse anesthetists. When I had my night duty in the operating room, the work of a night duty nurse is to set up the tables for all the cases for the next day and label them. Of course, everything has to be sterile. So I scrubbed my arms for maybe eight minutes up to my elbow. I am gloved -- I mean I have a mask on. I have my turban on my head and I am prepared in a scrub gown. Then what I do is I look at

the list posted to see what cases they were having in the separate rooms. And so all night I worked just setting up all the tables. And then I'd go to another room. I learned I may not finish before the 7:00 a.m. shift starts. I may not get through. So what I had to do was just set up maybe for three cases in all the different rooms. They don't tell you a lot of things. But you just figure it out in doing it. And that helped. I was real glad I figured that out. Of course, we pass these things on down to our other classmates. But it was not my job to get the nurse anesthetists. My job was to just set up the tables. But, of course, if there was an operation, then I had to scrub for it. I was the only one. I had to scrub on that case.

So the night supervisor one night came up to me while I was sterile and setting tables and told me that she had been notified that a doctor was coming in to do an appendectomy on a ten-year-old boy so that he wouldn't have a ruptured appendix. We had to do it then. I said all right. So I started preparing for that and then the doctor came in. The orderly rolled the stretcher in with the ten-year-old boy who was moaning and wailing and carrying on. No nurse anesthetist ever appeared and at some point before the doctor finished scrubbing, he told me that I don't think that we are going to have any more assistance; I think it's just going to be the two of us, so you don't have to continue in your scrub outfit.

I was scared to death. I didn't know what I was going to do. So he told me take everything off. I wasn't going to need it. He said go in and strap the patient. So I did that since I broke scrub at that point. And I stood there waiting on his orders. We know that the doctor has the final word. You do not question anything the doctor tells you to do. You just do it, right or wrong. The doctor told me that there was no time to wait on anybody to come and give the anesthesia. He said you're going to sit down there at the patient's head and I'm going to tell you what to do. I've never been so afraid. I did not want to kill this ten-year-old boy. And I knew the chance was so great that I might. I had no idea what to do.

About the only thing we had for anesthesia was ether. I knew by working there that we had shelves with cans of ether. He told me to get a mask, and I knew what he meant because I had scrubbed on so many cases. He meant the type mask you put over a patient, not the type that we wore. So I got one of those. He said go ahead, open the can of ether; let's get started here.

So he had finished scrubbing at that point. The boy was strapped on the table and screaming and hollering due to the pain he was having and probably a good bit of fear, too. I was just so afraid. I was even too afraid to tell the doctor that I had never done that before. Well, he knew I had never done it before. Anyway, every now and then he said open it. I couldn't get it open. I just wasn't strong enough to open that can. And he had already scrubbed. I said very weak and very -- I'm sure my voice was just trembling. I said, I can't get it open. He said, well, keep on until you do. I finally got it open. I saw that metal clip at the top and all I wanted to do was to be able to put it in my mouth and maybe I could open it that way because my hands and fingers could not pull that metal flap up on that. I finally got it open, but I did not get it open far. He said go ahead and saturate the mask.

Well, I was into it and I was so concerned about following his orders there was no problem with hearing them because he was shouting loud and clear. So I saturated the mask. He said, well, what are you going to do with it? Put it over his nose. I put it over the nose, and I thought, you know, I may die too. If he dies I may die too. But I really have no choice. I'm into this. There's nobody else coming up here. I'm just going to have to do whatever he tells me. That'll be the best thing to do. So the next hour I don't think any private in the army has ever been yelled at as much I was yelled at. Give him some more. No, no, let up. Let up a bit. Hold off. It was just one yell after another.

What I'm doing is holding the mask with my left hand. And I'm dripping the ether on that mask. And he sees if the body is hard or if it's very flexible, totally relaxed and so forth. And he directs me. I don't even look at anything but the mask. I drop ether or I let up. And I wait on his command. I'll never forget that night. I will never forget it.

**But the boy lived.**

The boy lived. The boy lived. And I will -- I just have -- I just thought about how many other people die because at least we did save the boy's life. The doctor did what he had to do and I did what I had to do. It kept the boy from dying. And I'm very grateful for that. But I don't ever want to do that again because I just felt too uncomfortable not knowing. Maybe when he said let up maybe it was already too late. Who knows? I didn't know because the doctor never did anything but just yell the commands.



So the next week I tried to find out from my classmates that were working on the floors about that boy. And I think I found out. I'm not sure. I never knew his name or anything. All I could say was a boy about ten years old that had an appendectomy. I never heard anything bad. And I don't know if I would have heard anything bad. But that's one of my lasting memories.

When it came time for me to graduate from nursing school, I was happy. I was not in love with nursing. It was too hard and too much responsibility. But I was glad I was finishing.

**And you were good.**

I wanted to make a living for myself and to help my mother. And so I got my certificate. That worked out fine.

**So you're around 19 years of age and you're an RN.**

Yes, and I became an RN.

**So were you proud?**

I was. But I was more exhausted and tired. I mean, I was glad I had gotten through to the end, but it had not only worn me down and I was not only just so tired. It was a tiredness that two weeks of vacation or sleep would not—it would take a long time to sort of move into another pattern.

My mother had moved to Miami then. I had lived in Florida, you know, before in my childhood. I wanted to go down there and get a job and try to help my mother financially so that she could live a little more comfortably even though she was still very happy with all the rough life that she had and the meager earnings that she was able to make. She was still a happy woman and enjoyed walking and looking at people and everything, just happy.

So I went down there and I found out -- I applied for a nursing position at the hospital. When they started doing their paperwork on me, I found out that I had graduated from nursing school a year early and was not eligible to be licensed in Georgia as a nurse.

**What do you mean?**

You had to be 20 years old. Now, I had gained enough wisdom, if you will, to think I was 16 when I went in and they knew that. Why had they not added the three years of nursing school and come out with 19 and tell me then? I'd come back in a year. They had allowed me to go

through nursing school and to take the state board exam and pass it for what, working in a dime store or something? When I tried to go to the hospital in Miami to work, I was told I could not work because I was one year too young.

So I was down there two weeks with my mother. I got back on the bus, went back to the only place that would hire me. The only place in the world where I could function as a nurse was the Macon Hospital. Okay. I was a graduate nurse. That's what they called me, a graduate nurse. That gave me a little easier job than being a student nurse. It gave me also a lot of night shift because they knew I wasn't going to leave because it was the only place that I could work. And I had to work. So I had endless night duty, which I did not like. That was my working shift.

**But did you take classes also, graduate classes?**

No. Nothing.

**Okay. So all work.**

It was just I had to put in my time. I had to work a year. I worked as a graduate nurse, not an RN. And so, you know, that wasn't really a bother to me because --

**So how did it differ from when you were a senior, the third year?**

It differed in the fact that I wore a white uniform and a cap.

**So you could get in the cafeteria line?**

Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, I had no problem with time to eat, you know. Oh, yes. No problem there. Absolutely. And then more respect from the doctors. They talked differently to someone in a white uniform, you know -- just the routine things like that. I didn't have to do as much scrubbing and all. And I probably had more responsibility than I did as a senior in school.

**Tell me about race relations in Macon.**

Well, in nursing school we learned to do most of our early procedures in an area of the hospital that was called colored women's ward. They did not have any private rooms. They had beds lined up. They had a big area there and the beds lined up on both sides. The big sign over the door said colored women's ward. I spent a lot of time there because that's where we learned to do our procedures on these people. And it was after we learned to them well that we then worked on the wards and did the same procedures on the white patients. We

were not only instructed, but we were told very emphatically you are never supposed to go near the colored men's ward. You're not supposed to even look down that hall. That was where you stayed away from.

We did not have any black doctors. There might have been some in New York, but I'm sure that there were none in Georgia.

When I had been in my senior year, besides having the experience with night duty, I also had to spend three months in Milledgeville, Georgia affiliating for my psychiatric experience because Macon did not have a place. And when I got to Milledgeville for three months of psych experience, I met many student nurses from all the other nursing schools in Georgia, from Savannah, from Atlanta and from Augusta. We worked together in the hospital. Of my entire three years of nursing school that three months in Milledgeville, Georgia was the best. It was the very best. I have liked psychiatry so much since then because of the three months I had.

When I first rode into Milledgeville with my classmate's father who drove us in with all of our personal belongings, we drove around the campus of the Milledgeville State Hospital and it was like a huge town. We drove the dirt roads. There were huge buildings all over the place. I thought how could there be so many people in a psychiatric hospital that is this big? I was told that it's because psychiatric patients from all over Georgia and all over surrounding states were brought to this hospital for care. I never knew that.

So our teachers were eight psychiatrists. They were excellent. Of course, they were all white men. We would go as a group into an auditorium. And we didn't have all eight at one time, of course. We would have two or three. They would sit on something like a stage in front of us. These were the best classes I ever had because they were so well educated. They were doctors who had specialized in psychiatry. I learned more about psychiatry than I learned about all the other courses I took in nursing school. It was just -- it was absolutely fantastic.

**So you were talking about the school with psychiatry and how well educated those professors were.**

Yes. Yes. Needless to say, when I took the Georgia state board for nursing, I made my



1949 high school graduation and then off to  
Macon Hospital School of Nursing.





1957 St. Mary's School of Nursing

highest grades in psychiatry. I was in the high 90s because that program was so wonderful. I would have loved to have gone into psychiatric nursing, but I knew I couldn't because at that time they did not have medicines for psychiatric, mentally ill patients. They did different types of treatment. People who had lost their minds were so severe sometimes they acted like animals. They were strong and you could not talk with them. And you had to be a very strong person. And I was simply too small to protect myself.

But I really liked it and I know it was because of the teachers. When they were teaching—and like I had said, they sat on this stage—we, the students, sat in front and could take notes and listen, and they would sometimes bring out some of their patients. It was just perfect because we could see what they were trying to teach us. We saw the behavior of the people. Whatever subject they were talking about, they would bring those patients. We had psychodrama. I also worked in what we call EST, electric shock treatment. That was what they used. They used shock treatment for so many. I set up the tables, strapped the people down. I put the restraints on the patients and everything. And I pressed the button as a student because that was what we did there. So, you know, the first time or two that frightened me, but then I got used to it. Another thing we did was we would put the patients into insulin therapy. We would sort of change the chemistry in their body by giving them heavy doses of insulin.

### **Injected?**

Yes. And then we would sit there and observe what they did at different periods of the time that they kept the medicine in there.

The other types of nursing that I did in psychiatry were we had to do physical care. We usually had two nurses, two student nurses to a patient. That was very important to me because I was small and not real strong. So they matched us in duos. We had to bathe the patients. They had a shower there. So the nurses would put on an old ragged dress that they furnished because we had to stand under the shower with them. We got wet too because we had to physically bathe them. And one of us tried to hold them and keep the person from moving and trying to get out of where she was because you can't say anything to them that they understand. So the other one would bathe the person. And then you would dry the

person and put them outside the curtain. And then there would be a student nurse there to receive them and put the clothes on them. It was total care to many of the patients because they had no operating mentality at all. They did not know where they were or who they were.

**And shock therapy, did it help?**

Yes, I believe it did, not that I could personally know, except we were told that and they kept doing it. I never understood psychodrama because the psychiatrist would try to get the patients to act out certain scenes. But I did not benefit from that experience very much.

I don't recall having night duty in psychiatry, but I do recall very vividly having three-to-eleven duty. Here again, there were two student nurses on the ward. They told us when you are checking the cells—just like in prison the patients were in small cells. They had a window on the door. All of the doors to all the different cells on both sides of the hall were locked all the time. And you had a window, a little glass. When we were going to give medicine or something, the very first thing we were supposed to do was look in that little glass and see the patient, see if she's awake or asleep or what, and then maybe get somebody else if you decide to go ahead and give the medicine.

But I remember working with a student who was affiliating from another school of nursing other than mine. We had a three-to-eleven duty together. They told us don't ever get in a hurry to get off duty and work separately; both of you go to every room together on one side and then you do the other side. So the other student did want to hurry. She had reason enough to get off early. She said, you take that side of the hall and I'll take this side of the hall. I knew at the time we were not supposed to do this. I said, okay, I'll take this side. I did okay.

The reason we're supposed to look in the cell before we unlock the door, if we unlock the door, we don't have to, but we have to see that the patient is sleeping or we have to see that the patient is breathing and is all right. And another thing is you have to locate the patient, even though it's a tiny little cell. You have to see where the patient is.

And so what happened in this other student's haste she unlocked the door. The patient was standing right behind the door. So when the door was pushed open, the patient was behind the door. When she stepped in the room, the patient reached around—they can be

very strong, you know. They reached around and grabbed her, threw her on the floor and beat her to death. Beat her to death. I did not know it. I did not even know it until the next day when they called me in. I didn't see her anywhere and I thought, well, she was in a hurry; I guess she's gone. I got off duty. I went.

And the next day I heard about it. And it was so difficult. It was so sad. I could just image how horrible the death was. Here again, if you do what you're supposed to do -- and never has it been more important I think in my life than for somebody to do. And now, of course, I do realize I should have said no. We should have argued about it, you know. But we didn't. So I do have these experiences. Even though it's been a long, long time that will always be with me.

After I did get my opportunity to practice and work as a nurse after one year at that same school of nursing, working in that same hospital because I was too young. All my life I had been too young for everything.

I had the most experience. I felt like God has just given me the biggest gift. I was finally an RN, a real RN. I could get out of the South. I wanted to get out of the South so badly.

**Did you think the other part of the country would be different?**

I was so adventuresome I wanted to find out. But I had spent some of my happy childhood in Houston where we had moved and my mother's brother had lived there. I had the fondest memories of Houston because I was with my daddy a lot. He would take me to the drive-in and all that sort of stuff.

And I had my first airplane ride with my daddy. When we lived in Houston, he did not tell my mother where we were going. He and I got in the car. He asked me if I wanted to go for a ride. And, of course, I said yes. So he took me to the airport. He met one of his friends there who could operate a Piper Cub. And he said you want to fly? I said yes. I was just a little girl. So we got in this little Piper Cub. I thought it was just fun. I did not know how dangerous it was. But my father was just laughing and telling his friend the pilot do some flips with us, you know, do this or do that, take a nosedive. It was like being on a roller coaster. All I could think of was how much fun this was. My father was always doing fun



things with me.

But I remembered Houston as being a wonderful place. That was my destination. So when I left the south I thought, you know -- especially that city of Macon -- I had seven years from 13 to 20; those are the years that I missed out on. I missed out on having a normal life those years. So when I left I got on the train. I packed everything I owned in two blue suitcases. I had already through the snail mail gotten my job in Houston because you didn't dare just go. Where would I sleep? I didn't have money or anything. So I got the job. And I probably had enough money maybe to buy some food for a week or so. I don't know. So anyway --

**So we are talking about leaving Macon, Georgia, going to Houston. And you were telling me about getting on the train.**

Yes. I do remember the trains and I do love the trains. And to this day when I hear the train whistle blowing it takes me back. It really does. The trains were just wonderful. So when I was finally able to get a job outside of Macon, I wanted to go to Houston so badly. I had had happy times as a child in Houston. So my mother and I went to the train station. I was standing on the train looking out the window at my mother in the distance there and she was looking at the window for my wave. It looked to me like she was shedding some tears because, you know, I was sure that she probably did. But my problem was this: I was so happy, I was so thrilled. I kept trying to keep from laughing my head off at the window because I didn't want to do that to my mother. But it was one of the happy moments of my life. I did not tell my mother, but I was never going to live in the South again.

**Now, you didn't consider Houston the South?**

No, I didn't. Other people do, but I didn't. That was sort of southern, but it was nothing -- Texas has its own culture.

**That's right. Now, how did you get your job?**

Oh, okay. In Houston?

Yes.

Well, before I moved to Houston, I had gotten a job through what we call now the snail mail, of course. And I worked at Hermann Hospital, which was a great big hospital in a medical

area where there were doctors' offices and other hospitals. And Hermann was the biggest hospital.

**So we're talking about a medical complex?**

Uh-huh, a medical complex. That's exactly right. As a graduate nurse I subscribed to the monthly magazine, the American Journal of Nursing. So that's how I knew about Hermann Hospital because they were advertising for a nurse.

I had liked working in labor and delivery because the patients weren't really sick and you didn't have them for months and months. And the work was not too heavy physically for me because the people could pretty much function on their own. And it was usually a happy time. It was only occasionally that it was a very sad time.

So when I got to Hermann I had already gotten my room in the nurses' dormitory. I was back in after four years of living in a dormitory because where else? I mean I had to have a room. And I didn't know where I would eat or anything. I had no transportation. So I got the room.

I found that working at Hermann Hospital was not for me, but I stayed on, I don't know, maybe six weeks because I did get the job there in labor and delivery. But it was so different. At the Macon Hospital I had had, oh, maybe three, four or even sometimes six patients who were all in the labor room. And I just went from one to the other. Time -- the shift -- just went so fast. But they were in there. And the nurses assigned to labor and delivery would go around and examine all of them and time their contractions and so forth and do a rectal exam. Student nurses were not allowed to do a vaginal exam. So we didn't have the advantage of being allowed to do a vaginal. In doing a rectal exam you were not quite as adequate as you were knowing what was going on as far as the baby's passing downward, but you could tell enough when you coordinated the dilatation with the contractions and how the woman tells you she's feeling.

So I worked there. But at the hospital in Houston, at Hermann Hospital, you're not assigned to a labor room where you have several patients. You are assigned one patient. Well, I was young and I had been so active and so busy to just stand around in a room with one patient that may deliver tomorrow sometime. I was bored. I was absolutely bored. And I

just did not enjoy it.

So I moved like I mentioned previously in the dormitory there. And there were some other graduate nurses in there. And I remember talking with one of them. We were talking about things that, you know, young ladies talk about. I had told her, I said, you know, I'm almost 21 years old and I have really got to start living a young person's life very fast because I'm losing years here. I had missed seven years of my teenage life. She said, oh, I know. She said because if you're not married by the time you're 25, there's no hope; you won't be. The only thing that's out there is somebody that's been married before because they will wonder what's wrong with you. I thought oh. I knew that I had lost those years -- never having a date was so abnormal -- so that I was going to have to really move fast, you know, and I was very much aware of that.

But one thing was for sure -- I wanted to leave Hermann Hospital because I was bored. So I did make plans. And I moved to another hospital in that complex. And that was Methodist Hospital. I was not in labor delivery there. I was on a medical surgery floor. I did not care for that hospital either, but I liked it better than Hermann. So at least I told myself I'm making progress. But it was just I was just used to this mad action. You know, the shift goes by fast and you're constantly busy and things are happening.

The only real thing I remember about working at Methodist Hospital was that one of the patients -- but certainly not my patient -- was Hedy Lamar, a movie star, and some people will remember that. But I did see her. I did walk down the hall when her door was open and I did glance from the hallway in and see her. To me that was kind of exciting.

But I talked with people and somebody mentioned to me that after the hard four years I had had in nursing, the hard work and all, and being ready to start meeting some young people and especially to meeting some boys, yes, that I might want to work at a place called the Southwest Blood Bank because you work days. You don't have night shifts and you don't have evenings. So working days would free up my evenings and my weekends. So I thought that sounded wonderful. I had never had a job like that, Monday through Friday and off in the evenings.

So not working in a hospital in the complex I couldn't live in a dormitory. And, of

course, I did not make enough money and didn't have anything at all to move into an apartment. So I read the Houston Chronicle. And I saw there that they were advertising a boarding house. Well, back in those days we were almost a crime-free world. And a boarding house was a legitimate business and very nice. I always thought of a boarding house as having older people living in it, but not so. This one said something in the ad about young people. So I thought, well, I'm going to take a look and see. It has to be on the bus line and it has to serve breakfast because breakfast was important to me.

So it worked out beautifully. I remember going to the place. On one corner it had the main boarding house. And that's where the meals were given on the bottom floor. And then on the top floor you had the rooms. And this was a coed place. I was so surprised coming from where I had come from I had not thought about it being, you know, coed. That seemed kind of strange to me. But anyway, a smaller building across the street also had two stories that was part of boarding house. And people that lived across the street naturally had to walk over. You did not get lunch, but you got breakfast and dinner because most people were young working people and they were out somewhere for lunch. So you paid one price. That was for your monthly room rate and for your breakfast and dinner. And that was not including the weekends. That sounded fine to me. That sounded just fine.

**How much money were you earning at Hermann Hospital and then at Methodist?**

Do you know I have no idea? I don't remember those figures at all because all I wanted was enough money to get by on. I didn't have dreams of buying a car. It was too out of sight. Or even buying nice clothes, it was just not even in my thoughts anywhere.

So they told me the room that they had for me. And I said, oh, fine. And they said you'll share the bathroom. I said okay. My world had been women. And I naturally thought that you would share the bathroom with other women. But this was a coed boarding house and so you shared the bathroom with men. Well, that's okay. It had a lock on the door and men don't stay in the bathroom as long as women do. So that would work out fine. Well, the room that had not rented and was available for me was very, very small. There were two single beds in there. And there was a small chest of drawers. I don't remember a place to hang clothes. I don't remember a closet, but it could have had a small closet.

So I paid the dues and went in the room. I walked in there with my two suitcases. There was a nice lady in there. She was sitting up propped up on one bed. And we spoke to each other. I told her who I was. I said, you know, I am from Georgia and I'm 21 years old and I'm a nurse. And she said, oh, really, a nurse? I said yes. You know, I expected her to tell me more about herself, but she was sort of quiet. She really didn't. Anyway, she was nice and friendly and she did tell me things about the boarding house there. I noticed that all the time she's typing sitting at a card table, folding card table, and she's typing all the time. So in the days that followed as I'm meeting other people they said she's probably writing a book because she's very quiet. She was an older person and so forth. So I found her to be very, very pleasant, very nice as a roommate.

One of the first rules that I was given about living in a boarding house was you cannot date any of the men in the boarding house because they did not think that was appropriate. But the boarding house had 22 people. It had a lot of men. I don't remember the ratio, but it was probably pretty much even women and men. And I found through this roommate that they had a system there that was kind of fun. Since the boarding house did not give us meals on the weekend, what the members of the boarding house -- what everybody did -- was we jumped in our cars. Of course, I went with my roommate. But we jumped in our cars and we would drive down to Galveston. We could go for one day if we wanted to. You know, I think it was -- I've forgotten -- not a long drive from Houston to Galveston. But we could go down there and go on the beach, swim and everything and eat our lunch together and dinner together. So we did that. We went as a big group of people. And we knew each other and we were just a great, great group.

But even though I had been told that we do not date, there was one young man that asked me for a date the first night I moved in the boarding house. I wasn't about to pass that up. There was no way. There was no way I was going to pass that up. I mean after all I'm 21. Oh, maybe my life is truly beginning to change. That was an opportunity. So I had a date. I broke the rule, but I had a date. He was very nice. He came from McAllen, Texas, which is down on the Texas-Mexican border. I think we went somewhere to eat or we may have gone to a movie or something too. But that was very nice. And the next day not too

many people were talking about it.

I liked my job because I worked from I think nine to four or nine to five and had an hour for lunch. So it was a relaxing job. What I did as a nurse in the blood bank was people came in all day long off the street and donated blood. And they were paid five dollars for it. It didn't matter what type they had, they were paid five dollars. And these were probably a lot of street people. But that's fine. Their blood was fine. Made no difference who you were. Your blood was fine. So I enjoyed working with not a patient but a person, a donor who was not ill and could sort of be fun and upbeat, you know. So all day long one after another I put a tourniquet on and drew the blood and so forth and wished them well and gave them five dollars. That was just a lot of fun and I loved the hours.

So I really felt very happy. I was making some money, not enough to really buy anything, but enough for some little trivial things that I needed. I felt comfortable in my job. And heaven knows 21 other people living in the boarding house -- at breakfast I would go across the street.

There was one man there who was from Europe and had a very heavy accent. He was always dressed in a black suit, a white tie, a black bow and had jewelry on his fingers. I tried to talk with him one time and he told me that he was a hairstylist. And I thought, oh, great, great. Well, it did not take very long before I was always sitting next to him at breakfast. And he told me that he would be very happy if I would go over to breakfast, oh, maybe 45 minutes early and he would do my hair. I thought that is the grandest thing I could ever imagine. And I know -- I found out, too, that he owned a salon in the richest section of Houston. So that was just fabulous.

I don't think I paid him anything, but when Christmas came he asked a favor of me, which I was ever so happy to oblige him. He asked if I would go with him to select some gifts for people in Europe that he wanted to send them to because he wasn't real knowledgeable about -- of course, I wasn't either, but he didn't know that. But anyway, we picked out some things. He seemed to be happy with that and I enjoyed being with him. So frequently I did get my hair done free and it looked so stylish. I remember thinking how could I ever clunk this cap up on my head because he had done such a fabulous hairstyle?

The boarding house was just fun. I had the answer for some of my adventurous desires. I always wanted to seek out people and do things for fun. I really felt like life is beginning. Life is beginning for me. And I just love this place.

So I was reading the American Journal of Nursing. I was looking at the ads in the back. And there was an ad for a nurse wanted in Colorado at a Girl Scout camp outside of Denver for the summer, for three months in the summer. And here is this adventure-hungry person. So I got out a pen and paper and mailed a letter to them, applied for the job. And I got the job. They wrote back and told me yes.

And these Girl Scouts were from metropolitan Denver. They were from very wealthy parents. They lived a good life. They were probably some of them in private schools. There were 88 campers at any one time, and every two weeks we got a different 88 in. So I was very busy admitting them and then waving goodbye to the others.

We were at 10,000 feet. Now, I was this little girl from Georgia and Florida that was not very worldly at all. And 10,000 feet to me had no meaning unless it was depth. I did not know that 10,000 feet up high was cold because in the South there's no way that June, July and August were not dripping hot. And for somebody to try to convince me that it was going to be cold at 10,000 feet...

I learned that this roommate lady I had that was always reading and typing was a very smart person. And I also learned that she was from the West. She was from California. So she explained to me how I better really think seriously about this job because I'm not used to cold weather. And you're out in the woods and high up on a mountain. And it might not be my cup of tea. And I said but I've already applied and been accepted. And she said, well, you need to shop for some warm clothes. Well, I didn't really have any appropriate clothes at all. So somewhere there in the city -- I learned later she had friends somewhere there in the city. She had a lot of western clothes for events, celebrating the West and that sort of thing. She said you're welcome to use these. I said, well, thank you, but I could never fit in those clothes; there's a lot of difference in our size. And she said, well, we can take them to a tailor or somewhere and get them altered. I said but then they wouldn't fit you. She said doesn't matter, doesn't matter at all; I'll probably never wear them again. So I had all these very nice

western clothes that had been retailored for me. And she paid for the tailoring for me.

This lady was just doing things. She was spending money like I had never heard of or seen. And there were times when the boarding house would go out. And she would offer to pay for a dinner for everybody at our table. All of this was shocking me so much.

And she thought I was just absolutely the most uninformed person she had ever been around in her life. I did not have enough sense to come in out of the rain in the real world because my life had been so sheltered. It had been so far from the real world. We didn't have a radio until World War II ended. And then my mother went out and bought two, two radios—in a one-room apartment. But I did not know very much at all.

I was so excited about having a bank account. I had a bank account and they gave me a checkbook. I was so happy. So every time I wanted to spend any amount of money, 50 cents or anything, I wrote a check for it. My roommate said, you know that's not the way to do. Just write a check maybe every week and then you'll have that cash and then you spend it. I was concerned about having cash in the boarding house, not because of the people there or anything but because of my background. I had not been in nice areas, nice living areas. And we had to be very careful about our personal belongings. And she said no. She showed me how to write the check. I had never written a check before. I had never seen a check before. I had only heard about it.

So I was getting an education a hundred percent different from every bit of education I had had. But it was worldly and I needed it desperately. And another thing she told me was, since we share this little bathroom right here with men in the boarding house, I don't think you should hang your underwear in there anymore. I thought, oh, my goodness, I guess I shouldn't. I had been hanging my panties and bra after I rinsed them out in that bathroom. But here I am so naïve, so unworldly. And I am 21 years old. I had never been exposed to the world. I had never lived life before. So she introduced me to life because she really knew it. She was very, very smart.

**So did you ever find out who she was or where she got all the money?**

Not where she got all the money, but I found out who she was. She had worked in California in Los Angeles. And she had spent a lot of her childhood in a boarding school in Los



Angeles. But she was really from Las Vegas, Nevada. I told her when she told me that, I said, I've never heard of that, but I've heard of Reno. The reason I had heard of Reno was because on the buildings -- riding the bus in the South from one town to another -- on the barns, the old wooden barns, there would be a big sign on almost all of those old buildings that said Reno or bust. And I found out that was in same state. I also heard that people went to Reno to get divorces and you could get married very fast in Reno. But I had not heard of Las Vegas. But anyway, she didn't go into it anymore.

You know, I knew that I was getting prepared to go spend three months in Denver. And she said, I will be going to Reno and if you like I can drive you and you won't have to fly to Denver. I said, really? I said you mean -- she drove a big Cadillac. I said really? I could see the West. And she had been telling me over these weeks -- she had been telling me about the West. She didn't know the South and I didn't know the West, and this was the opportunity of a lifetime. I just thought my world is just getting bigger and definitely more wonderful all the time. So she could coordinate. She made a few phone calls and she could coordinate her schedule of going to Reno with when I had to start work in Colorado. So we packed and moved out, put everything in this great big, current-year, beautiful Cadillac.

And the other boarders had always kind of made remarks, some of them to me, about your roommate certainly drives a nice car. She must be very rich, you know. And she was kind of a mysterious person. We didn't know why or what. And my uncle's wife said, oh, well, darling, she's writing a book. So she typed all day. So that's what I thought she was probably doing. But she never really talked about what she was doing or a family or anything.

So we drove away from Houston and headed west. It was interesting. She was a fast driver, but I wasn't afraid. I was too young to be afraid. We were just having a grand time. She had all the money. I had none. But that was okay. And I thought I don't know, but anything like that I've never heard of this happening to somebody.

We went to Los Angeles. I had heard all my life about Hollywood. Every time I would go to a movie on Saturday it was all this Hollywood stuff. So I said, you know, I don't care what else we do, I must see Hollywood. And I had this dream about Hollywood like it

would be the most gorgeous heavenly place in the world. So we were driving along an ordinary street there and she says, well, that's Hollywood. And I looked out the window and saw poor people. I saw a dirty street. I could not stop crying. I just cried and cried and cried. I had this dream like the movie industry wanted me to have that it's a paradise like nothing else. But she knew that it was a town. It was a section of L.A. And I'll never forget how shocked I was and how disappointed I was because with that being Hollywood, I mean my hopes of ever seeing a movie again, I just thought no, this can't be. And she said this is Hollywood Boulevard. Read the sign over there. I wanted to and the tears were just flowing down my face. It was just the worst disappointment anybody could ever have. It reminded me how some kids are when they find out who Santa Claus is. It was that same sort of letdown, you know.

So we moved on. We went through Las Vegas. She pointed out a lot of places and so forth. It was a little, tiny town. She said her mother lived here. And I think I met -- it seems like on that first trip I think I met her mother, Aunt Martha.

And so we went on to Colorado. She did what she had to do. And then we went on to Colorado. I checked in at a certain place in Denver. They told me that there would be the next shuttle van going to the camp. It was a two-hour drive, not all because of distance but because of the high mountains. So we went there and she dropped me off there. So that was that.

I found that job very interesting. I liked it. I did not have a lot to do. There were 22 counselors there and they were all college girls from these very expensive colleges back east. They talked about Shakespeare at dinnertime and all of this stuff and their travels around the world. These college students were enjoying the mountains and Denver and everything. I had never been around anybody like that. We were the same age, but I was just not anything like them at all. But we ate at the table together there. And we got to be friends, but not really the kind of friends where you will correspond with later on or something, but friends for the summer. And that was fine. That was good.

So, of course, I didn't have to wear a uniform or anything. But I had certain duties over and beyond when someone would get sick. I just had to make sure that the children ate

an adequate diet and so forth.

I lived in a big tent. It was big enough for two cots. I didn't live in the building. I lived in a tent. I didn't know that I was going to be living in a tent at 10,000 feet. But there was snow. When we arrived there was snow on the ground. It was not totally covered, but this is what I had been told but could not believe. Could not believe. I mean I had the clothes because this friend had seen to it that I had the clothes. And she talked me into buying different shoes and things like that. So I was okay there. But I had a tent mate for the three months.

### **How did they heat the tent?**

We were not heated. We were not heated. No, no, no. We stayed bundled up. I stayed bundled up because it's the coldest I've ever been in my life. But my tent mate was from North Dakota and she walked around there in shorts. And they were short shorts. I thought that they were too short. And sometimes she would have just a top on with straps and sometimes she would have on a more tailored shirt, but always the shorts.

My tent mate was the dietician and not too long after we had been tent mates she told me that she had not really finished her course in college in nutrition, but I was not to let anybody know that, of course. But she was an excellent dietician. We had two cooks. My tent mate did not cook. She was just planning the meals and writing down the approximate amount of food to buy and so forth. So after I had been there at the camp for a while, I realized that, you know, I think the children are hungry; I don't think they're getting enough to eat. And I kind of felt the same way myself, although I was not playing and hiking like they were. I thought I could eat more too. So I mentioned this to my tent mate and she immediately made the adjustment and everybody was happy again.

So every two weeks we got a different 88 little girls in. I enjoyed them immensely. They were gone with their counselors, the college kids, and doing fun things all the time, which I didn't have to worry about. The only thing I had to be concerned about was if there was an accident or if one of the students maybe complained about their throat being sore or their ears hurting or something like that. And three times during the summer we had to make an emergency trip from the camp into Denver General Hospital emergency room due to an

accident.

I remember one young girl had some kind of an accident. It might have been falling from a tree. It was falling from some distance. And when I examined her, I thought are we going to be able to make it? Because we would go in this shuttle van down these winding roads where you really don't have much speed and it's going to be at night and every bit of two hours. But I told the head of the camp that we had to go because she was dizzy and she had fallen and hit her head and also I believe had broken her arm. So she agreed. So I sat in that shuttle van going in with her in my lap just praying that we would get there before it was too late. I was really concerned about her. So we did get there. The camp had called her parents to meet us at the hospital. That has got to be the most frightening thing for parents you could imagine. So they were there, of course, when we arrived in the emergency room. She did recover with no problem and everything was all right. I was glad that I had taken her in. I really didn't hesitate about taking her in. But there were others where you're at that point where, you know, you really don't know whether you should make that long trip in to Denver or not and frighten the parents. You just don't know.

So I found that here I was very young in my nursing career and had only worked as a student nurse until my little bit of labor and delivery and my job at the blood bank. I really had to make some decisions. I did not like pediatrics. I could not stand pediatrics when I was in nursing school. And these were children. And so their diseases and their things that they had I really hadn't loved that. I had studied it just enough to pass it knowing I would never work in pediatrics.

But anyway, we all survived that summer. And I have fond memories of enjoying the counselors (and) at night I could go into the main building where it was warm; and also where we had the food, where we ate. Sometimes—I guess it was a radio they had there. It must have been a radio. It couldn't have been television—but anyway, we did get to listen to some music. So that was fun.

**So what did you do when you left Colorado after that summer? Did you go back to Houston?**

I went back to Houston. From Colorado I had written my roommate, her name's Helen. I had

written letters and she had written. I still didn't know what her life was about. But I did go back to Houston and she went back to Houston, too. I think she was living in an apartment. It seems like she was when I went back. So I linked up with her somewhere. I must have stayed over at her apartment there.

We went out on the tennis court one time. Neither one of us had ever played tennis, but we thought it would be nice to learn. Well, little did we know that tennis is not as easy as it looks and you have to -- really. It was kind of fun exercising and I felt energetic after having spent that time in Colorado.

She said, well, what are you going to do now? I said, well, I guess I'm going to keep working because, you know, there's not really anything else I can do. I don't know what type of nursing I'll try to get. But what I have always wanted to, but I knew I never could, and that was to go to college. She said, why do you want to go to college? And I said, well, if my dream ever could come true, I would like to go to college so that I could learn to be a teacher. Then she said, well, can't you do part-time work in nursing and study to be a teacher? I said, yes, but it would take an awfully long time to go through working part time and then I would have to study and everything.

I remember she was surprised at why anybody wanted to be a teacher. But I told her that, you know, I talked a lot about it when I was in Colorado because I had these 22 counselors. I did like all of them very much and some of them were going into education. And I actually picked up some terminology, some college terminology from that three months in Colorado.

And she said, well, you're certainly a very dedicated person and the kind of person that does try to plan and stay with your plan. So if you would like to go to college, I will lend you the money. I said I can't, I can't do that because I could never pay the money back. And she said, oh, of course you could when you started working. I said it would take years and years and years to pay money back for going to college. So anyway, she said that's all right, that's all right. And this was the lady that drove the Cadillac and everything, you know, wore big rings and everything. I tell you my life has been interesting.

So she said where would you like to go to college? And I thought, well, you know, I

want it to be in Texas because I love Texas and we'll find out where the university is in Texas. So we found out. We probably asked a bunch of people. She didn't know anything at all about college. She had never been to college. And so we found out it was in Austin. It's supposed to be in central Texas on beautiful hilly country and all.

So I went over there and looked around. I have forgotten how. I must have ridden the bus or something from Houston. I went over there and I came back and said yes, it's a big school and I would like to go there. So she said okay. She said, I'll tell you what we could do. She said if you don't want to borrow the full amount, she said I can do the work -- I can do whatever I do in one place as well as another. She said we can go over there to Austin. I know it's a beautiful town and I've never lived in a small town that's beautiful. She said, I've never lived around trees. I could not imagine that because I had not ever been away from trees. Even in Colorado it was trees, trees, trees. And she said I don't have to stay here. I could go there. We could rent a small apartment.

I couldn't image saying anything else because this was a dream I never even thought could have ever come to fruition. So we moved into a little apartment there. I went over to this huge university to register. I had the disappointment of a lifetime. I went over there. There were beau coups people, just mobs of people everywhere. I didn't know what to do or how to begin. And I didn't understand what the labels on the different desks were about. People seemed to know where they were going and what they were doing. I knew nothing and I just felt like this is not going to work. And I'm just very unhappy because this hope had just -- I thought, you know, I can't handle this really. I don't even know how you register. I don't know what you say and don't say or anything.

So I went to a pay phone and I called Helen and told her how very terrible this was. I said I don't know anything about this. I don't know what I should do or shouldn't do, but I'm really afraid. I'm terribly afraid and I don't want to make the wrong decision and then not be able to handle it. She said okay, I'll drive over there.

So she drove over there and she walked me through registration. I could not believe she went from one desk -- from one table and told the people what I needed and what I didn't need and what I wanted and what I didn't want. So I got registered at the University of Texas.

Early visits to Las Vegas with a friend and mentor caught her heart. From her scrapbook of 1953 and 1954, photos of the Frontier Hotel, Sahara Hotel and Casino and at the Sand's monument sign.





Donna graduated from University of Texas.



With her husband as he graduated from medical school.



She paid the fee and I made a note of how much because there was one thing I was going to do somehow and that was pay every nickel back. And she knew that. She felt that.

So we went back to the apartment. I still didn't know what she was all about. I felt like she's good for what she says. But I could get involved and halfway through school and then realize I can't go through this for any reason. It's very difficult.

So I started out. The classes were enormous. The courses were very difficult. I did my very best. I wanted to take courses that, of course, would be education oriented. I had to take English. I think that was a requirement. Another requirement was biology. I had no foundation for any kind of science at all. Nursing in my day did not involve science. It was taking care of sick people, turning them over, putting a hot pad on them somewhere or changing a bandage. There was no science in my nursing background, nothing at all like today. And I had never been in the eighth grade. And I had never had junior high school science. So I knew nothing about science. But this course required me to have science, biology.

So I gave it a try. And I did all right in the other courses, in American history because I had had that at Miller High School and English because English had always sort of come easy for me. And one of my elementary grades, probably sixth or seventh in south Georgia I had an old maid English teacher who was just wonderful. I liked the subject. So it stayed with me. And I'm still using that today. I use those same things the seventh grade teacher taught me. But I didn't know what I was going to do about biology. And it was the course that almost did me in. It was ever so close. I probably made Bs or maybe Cs in the other courses.

I was not able to work part time because I went to class and I studied all the time. And that bothered me. That was a lot of a problem because I wanted to get started meeting expenses, sharing expenses. Even though I was not pressured to, it was all right, I wasn't happy about that.

I was not happy at the University of Texas. And the biology class throughout that fall semester gave three exams. I did not get an F. I think I got a C on beginning, the first part of biology. And then I got I think two Ds or D minuses. They gave D minuses then. I studied it

more than any other subject, but the words were difficult. I knew nothing. My roommate knew nothing at all about those words. She had never been around anything. But she did know to go to a library and get a dictionary. So I gave it everything I had, but it was such a long period between exams having just three exams over the semester. But I crammed. I studied. I cried. I did everything. And they gave me a passing grade of a D, which was a conditional passing. I thought if I just never have to take biology again. So I got through that. I went on through the University of Texas.

So let's see. I lived somewhere else. I think she went on back -- we stayed in touch.

**Did she stay in Austin the entire time?**

No. No. And so when I needed money I would write her and she would send a check because she wanted me to get through. She said she had never known anybody that had such a desire to improve themselves and not coming from a background of scholarly people it was a rare thing. My friends told me maybe she's going to write a book about you and I said I hope not.

I did meet nice people along the way. My last year I had to be in Galveston. And Galveston was the place that the boarding house had gone to on weekends. We had had fun down there when I was living in Houston. So I told Helen, I said, my senior year has to be in Galveston. I have to live on campus in a dormitory. I will have meals in the hospital. And also there was some kind of a program they had where I believe if you work so many years, probably one or two, that they would give you some kind of a payment. It was kind of like a student loan. So I told her about that. And we kept in touch all the way through.

So here I am in Galveston living in a nurses dorm again remembering what that friend had told me when I moved in the nurses dorm at Hermann Hospital that if age 25 comes and you're not married-- And I had not had time or thought. I did not date those guys on the campus. They were younger than I was. I had no interest. I was more mature having gone through all that nursing and everything. It had matured me but not educated me at all.

So Galveston was not the fun place that it had been at one time in my life, but it was okay. I believe there were seven of us who were in Galveston for the same purpose, to get a degree in nursing education. I roomed with one of them. She was very nice. There was only

one other person beside myself who liked to eat three meals a day. We didn't eat a lot, but I didn't want to eat peanut butter and jelly every day. I wanted to eat food. So we were talking and somebody said, well, you might want to -- there's a fraternity house here because the University of Texas medical school is there, too. See, they had this big teaching hospital, John Sealy Hospital in Galveston. The University of Texas med school was there and I had to get my senior year experience by teaching students at John Sealy Hospital. So that was kind of like an internship year for me down there.

I didn't need Helen anymore because I was doing all right and she didn't know anything about nursing. She had actually helped me so much with the difficult part of my education because she was just a smart person. She was just smart and so willing to help.

There was this other lady, Monica. Monica probably weighed about the same thing I weighed or less. When you're not a very big person you have to eat more frequently. So Monica wanted to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner, the same as I did. I said, Monica, let's go see if we can find that fraternity -- everything was close together down there -- and see if we could eat there.

So we went over there. Monica was from Indiana and she was in a new world down there in south Texas. So we bravely walked in there. There was a great big fat black lady, just as jolly as she could be. She had on a white uniform all the way down. What y'all looking for? This is a fraternity house. It's all men in here. Scared us to death. We said, well, you know, we wanted to see if we could eat dinner there. She says yeah, yeah, you can eat dinner here, just pay the money. And we found out how much that was. It wasn't much at all.

So Monica and I bravely went over there the first night to eat dinner. And here were all these young men, young medical students, some of them in their freshman year in medical school. They'd gone through college and here they were in med school. Oh, my gosh. Well, we sat down at this table. It was a table that we always sat at after that. And across the table from us the guys started talking to us, you know. So we learned that the medical students don't go out on dates during the week. They can't. The requirement is so severe they don't have any time to even sleep. It's all day long in classes and then studying every hour in the

evening, just took 30 minutes for dinner and then to your room and study.

My courses were not that difficult and they were nurse-centered courses. So I was okay with those subjects. And Monica did well too. We learned that the men there went out, especially the freshman guys went out only one night a week and that was on Saturday night. One of the boys across the table asked me to go out with him and one asked Monica to go out with him. So we dated that first Saturday night there. We were still uncomfortable. But, yet, we knew we were going to stay with this eating in the fraternity because they were basically nice people. And they were so geared towards their studies and everything they weren't really teasing or bothering us in any way.

It so happened that the person that I had that first date with was Sam's roommate. I met Sam in the dining hall later that night. Sam and I started dating just on Saturday night. It was the only night. I did meet some of the older gentlemen there who were maybe in their junior year and their routine was not as rigid as the freshmen students was. So what I would do was sometimes go out for ten o'clock coffee with them because they would be studying, but they had time, you know, to take a break at ten o'clock. We would go out to some of the coffeehouses there and chat and drink and everything. I didn't tell Sam that because he and I were dating. He and I were dating pretty much every Saturday night. We went as a group. Here again, this group dating. It reminded me of the boarding house, but it was great. It was a good system. You enjoyed everybody else.

So Monica married that man that invited her out. I married the roommate of the one who invited me out that first night. She got married in Indiana and I got married in Houston. I loved Texas. To me Texas was so different than Dixie. It was very different.

**Did you get married before 25?**

I was 24. I was 24. Isn't that something? I should have told you that. Had you sitting over there in suspense like that.

**That's wonderful.**

Oh, my gosh. Yes. Since I really didn't belong to a church. Living in Houston I had gone to a Baptist Church because it was Billy Graham that had turned me on. When I was working there and living in the boarding house I did go to a Baptist Church. It was a very nice little

Baptist Church. I had also dated a beautiful baritone singer, young man there at the church. Yeah, that was very nice. But when he found out I lived in a boarding house that was the end of him. I never heard from him again. I hadn't told him the first few dates that I lived in a boarding house. But, you know, he was from an upper class family and that sort of thing and women didn't live in -- but the boarding house was great. It was like a dorm really.

**But that's not the image we have.**

Right, exactly. And years later I did read in the Houston paper where he had married the daughter of the Houston Philharmonic Symphony. And he should because of his singing voice and because of the person he was. He should have.

**Wow. So what did you and Sam do after you got married?**

Well, we spent our honeymoon in Colorado because I had the beautiful fond memories of Colorado. And he and a lot of Texans go to Colorado on vacation. They love Colorado.

**So in a hotel or a tent?**

(Laughter.) Would you believe it was at a dude ranch?...We spent our honeymoon at this wonderful dude ranch. We were there a week. We flew from Houston. We were going to Colorado Springs because the ranch was out of town from Colorado Springs. And before we got to Colorado Springs, the plane started landing at a small -- looked like a small town there. And everybody onboard was wondering why is the plane landing? We're supposed to land in Colorado Springs. And we looked out the window as the plane was rolling down the runway and there was a little sign that said Pueblo, Colorado. So that was for certain we were not in Colorado Springs. And we learned that he was having some kind of trouble. The pilot had to land due to some kind of trouble. He would not be flying the plane any farther, would not be flying it to Colorado Springs.

All the passengers got off and we kind of thought, well, what should we do? Should we kind of group together and rent cars and so forth and go where we're going? So that's kind of what we did. Got into Colorado Springs and then got -- I think a shuttle bus took us out to the dude ranch, which was a lot of fun being outside and everything. And this was June. It was the month of June.

**It's not 10,000 feet, is it?**

Right. No, it isn't. No, it isn't. But it's beautiful country. It's beautiful country.

**Oh, wonderful. What happened with Helen?**

Oh, Helen lives right here in Las Vegas.

**Today?**

Uh-huh, today. Helen is up in years. I have been in touch with Helen all of my life, all of my adult life.

**Oh, that's wonderful.**

Yes. She was just a wonderful friend. She's always been a businesswoman. She has owned property here. In fact, with Sam and me living in Louisiana in our adult life in New Orleans, she suggested to us that we might want to buy property out here. And so she handled the property for us. Of course, we paid.

And I paid her back. I thought I may lose everything, but I'm not going to lose this piece of paper. Had the exact amount. And she had said don't worry about it. I said of course I'm going to worry about it.

Helen had probably had interests in gambling or she had had an aunt, an Aunt Martha had had real estate. I think Aunt Martha was in real estate. It is because of Helen that we are retiring in the most fabulous city in the world. I would have never dreamed of retiring in Las Vegas, Nevada, if it had not been for her. She lived her childhood in L.A. and here. She's definitely a westerner.

I wrote Helen and told her that Sam and I were getting married and I didn't know beans about what to do. My mother wasn't able to help me even planning or anything. We just didn't have that kind of a life. So Helen said, well, I'll go to the library. She always did everything in the educational way, you know. So she went to the library and wrote back and told me all these things that I would have to have and so forth. Helen flew over to Houston for the wedding and I think she stayed around a little bit longer and probably did other business, whatever. But anyway, I just think once I did get out of Dixie my life has been fantastic.

**Yeah. I bet you Helen likes the Internet and Google, doesn't she?**

Do you know what? I told her about that... Helen is 11 years older than I am. And Helen is

of the idea that 'I can learn it myself.' She has always been so independent. Helen did not finish high school, but she's brilliant and totally self-taught. She has also had great office jobs where her tremendous typing skills were appreciated. And so when I told her about the Internet and so forth, that I was going to take classes and she might be interested in that too, she gave it one lesson and she said no. I think that Helen felt like it's not anything that she needed. And she knew how to type. And because we were typing, you know, I think she got the idea where this is -- I really have better typing skills than the people in this class and didn't really realize that it was the beginning of a whole world. Now she doesn't have any interest. She's never from that day had any interest in that.

But she taught me so many things. She taught me how you can find out anything you want -- just go to a public library...I had never even thought about doing such a thing. And now, of course, I use the Internet and would love to use the UNLV library more. But she taught me so much about the world and life and maturity and planning. And she has advised us so much in the years we've been married. She has advised us on not only real estate but just putting money in the different investment places. She is extremely knowledgeable of that. And she probably had some excellent results with her money being invested. We talk every now and again. We try to get together sometime around her birthday and sometimes -- mine is in November. So we're always busy...

**So I want to hear about how you decided to move to New Orleans.**

Oh, okay. Our adult life.

**Uh-huh, a little bit about that and then coming to Las Vegas.**

Okay. All right. Let me get another cup of coffee here for the final chapter.

**This is wonderful.**

Oh, well, you're so darn kind and pleasant to be around. I don't want you to go away. I want you to be another Helen.

**Well, I can always come back to --**

Oh, this is wonderful. Would you really?

**Well, see, in a couple of weeks --**

Oh, good.

**-- this will be transcribed and I will bring it back to you. I'll drop it off and I'll have you read it. You'll be able to make minor changes. And then you're going to call me and I'll come back out. And then you're going to show -- I want some photographs to go into this.**

Now, that's a big thing. I'm not big on pictures. I do have some old boxes. But I am just not a camera buff.

**You'll find a few. And I would love to have a photograph of Helen if she wouldn't mind having that photograph in your transcript.**

Which photograph? The one I showed you?

**The one you just showed me.**

Oh, I don't know if she would. I would have to have a copy made.

**Oh, yes. I can bring my scanner out and scan it.**

My scanner's in the garage because I never learned how to use it because somebody gave it to me. And the reason they gave it to me is because it wasn't any good and they didn't know how to use it. So I'm going to try to donate it somewhere. You mean you scan pictures?

**Uh-huh. I'll bring my portable scanner.**

Oh, my gosh. I would like to see it operate because I might buy a scanner sometime. But I haven't known enough -- I haven't slowed down enough to even think about a scanner.

**See, the one thing about Las Vegas is we have researchers and historians from all over the country and all over the world who are very interested in the history of Las Vegas.**

Oh, I would think so because this city has history. Oh, does it ever have history.

**Yes. Like none other.**

Oh, my gosh. Well, you know, I think at one time didn't we talk about that I was going to talk about nursing at Southern Nevada Memorial?

**That's correct.**

Yeah. Over the years Sam had a lot of medical meetings here.

**So I want you to say that over near --**

Oh, you mean right now?



**Uh-huh. When you get ready to tell me about Sam's meetings here, I would like to have that on the tape.**

Well, there's not a second sentence. It's just Sam had -- (Laughter.) I mean I had a real estate career because of Helen. This lady talked real estate so much. I came to a period of teaching nursing after about 12 years that I was tired of being inside in a building all day long and I wanted to be outside. And Helen said, well, if you want to be outside think about real estate.

**So after moving from New Orleans --**

I was in real estate in New Orleans.

**In New Orleans. Okay. So you taught for about 11 or 12 years?**

I did.

**And where did you teach in New Orleans?**

At Charity Hospital.

**Is that a Catholic hospital?**

The nursing school was Catholic. It's a Charity Hospital.

Sam was born in north Louisiana. His parents were from north Louisiana. So he grew up in Dallas, but he lived his first I believe it was three years in north Louisiana and then he moved to Dallas. So he's far more of a Texan than, you know, Louisianan. But when he was looking for a residency in ophthalmology his father, thinking Louisiana, his father said, well, what about Ochsner in New Orleans? And Sam said, well, I'll look into it. So he did look into it. He did go on and pursue that. He did his three-year eye residency at Ochsner, and then we decided to stay there. We had adjusted to the culture. It was rough at first in many, many, many ways. But we stayed 25 years of our adult life in New Orleans.

**But it's unlike Macon and unlike Houston.**

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It's a city that grows on you because if it doesn't grow on you, you might not like it. You have such a unique culture. I do not believe that any city in the U.S. has a culture that is -- may be different, of course, but is as unique as the culture there.

I'm not familiar really with New York. I've been there a couple of times and I do take classes with a lot of retirees from New York. I enjoy them because they have a sense of laughter and fun. A lot of them are Jewish. So, you know, they challenge one another and it

sounds ferocious like it's going to be a fight, but it isn't. It's just the greatest thing. I just love this place.

After the residency Sam decided to stay on there at Ochsner and just be one of the doctors there. So he did work there until his retirement.

But in 1978 there was a change occurring in the medical world. It was about that time that I knew that I had to make a decision because what was happening was medicine and nursing was about to employ high technology like we have today. I knew nothing about that. And I asked myself do I really want to learn that or do I want to do something else? And as much as I loved teaching nursing -- I love the interaction with the students because the teaching was my first love, not the nursing, of course. I just had to go the long way to get to teaching. So I thought about it. I had had Helen's influence on what a lucrative career you could have in real estate. And she had been a broker out here and had owned so many properties here and had the experience of reselling those and so forth. So I thought I don't think I want to learn all of this technology. It's not really my thing. So I think I'll leave the field of nursing.

So I did. And I went into real estate in New Orleans. I had a ten-year career in real estate. I worked for Stan Weber, Stan Weber Real Estate. And I can truthfully say today that everything I really needed to know I learned in real estate because real estate is not about houses or buildings. Real estate is about people. It's about people. And it's about people who are about to make one of the most important decisions of their life. And it is about people to whom all sorts of terrible things may have happened and they're having to sell their home and they don't know what they're going to do or where they're going to live. Real estate is totally people.

I went to real estate school in the summertime. I finished the semester in May. I went to school for six weeks. And the real estate school was nothing but learning the laws of Louisiana. That's all I studied. And then I took the real estate exam and it was nothing at all that you do out in the field. You're totally on your own when you're out with future hopeful clients. You're just on your own. You know the laws of Louisiana. And they are different. The terminology is different. Helen speaks one language of real estate and I speak another.

And she dies laughing at me speaking Louisianan. She makes funny jokes about that because her language uses the word escrow and things like that. That is not a part of -- that word does not fit anywhere in Louisiana real estate conversation. I had never heard of that. Again, I'm still learning.

So Louisiana is a charity state. We've been gone 20 years and I've never been back since we left, but they have state welfare there. In other words, when I was working in nursing I did not have Social Security from the federal government. I had it from Louisiana. And then when I turned in my badge, you might say, they paid me a lump sum of money. There is no monthly payment that I would get. They paid me a sum of money.

But so many things are different in the state of Louisiana. And the language with a lot of things, there are schools of law in New Orleans. And when a person graduates they have learned Louisiana law. And if they want to go to some other state, they have got to learn that because Louisiana law is different. Therefore, Louisiana real estate law is different, so what I learned would not really -- it would help me, but it would be different words and so forth. When we close a deal, a transaction, we call it going to an active sale. That's the language that we use. And here what do they do? They close the deed. They use words here like escrow and trust, trust deed and things like that. Like I say Helen managed all of our real estate. I was not involved in it. But when I would hear these words spoken, I knew that I would have to say, well, what exactly is that? because our language is very different.

**So even while you were in real estate in Louisiana you had already started investing in Las Vegas?**

Yes. Through Helen. She managed everything. And then we went into some investments here with Helen where she would have a certain percentage of it and we would have another. And she managed it. And we knew that we were in very good hands, very good hands.

**Yes. She already had a great track record with you.**

Oh, right. Yes. So, you know, we have been very blessed. We really have. I can't tell you the things that she has been so helpful in. She was also instrumental when we bought this house almost 20 years ago. I don't think she was active then at all, but she did a lot of research in the area and told us what's going to develop and so forth.

**Were you planning to move here when you purchased this house?**

Yes. We purchased this house to move into.

**Why did you decide to leave Louisiana?**

When Sam was ready to retire, he felt that he would take an early retirement. And an interesting thing happened. When Sam was in medical school -- he graduated in 1960 from medical school. There was something known as if you go -- I don't know if it's for all the military services or if it was just for the Navy. But Sam preferred the Navy. And if you do -- I don't remember exactly what it was. But he had gone in the Navy and he had done a Navy internship after medical school. He did it one-year --

**After you got married?**

Yes. He went in the Navy. They had a program where if you go in the Navy and give them X number of years, in return they will do certain things for you. And so he chose that program. And I'm trying to think of the name of that program, but not having any luck. But he chose that.

So after he finished medical school in Galveston, we moved to Virginia because that's where the Navy said you can do your internship. We were at Norfolk and they had the most fabulous new, beautiful Navy hospital. So he was so lucky. He got to do his internship in that beautiful new Navy hospital...

Well, he worked on a ship the second year there. The first year was the internship at the new Navy hospital. And then the second year he was on a ship, the Shenandoah, that was stationed there. That was in port there in Norfolk. We, like many other intern families, lived in Portsmouth. So he drove back and forth between Norfolk and Portsmouth. You know, we liked the experience there. I liked him being in the Navy because you have so many instant friends. When you go to a new base, you just have instant friends there. Your life is all Navy and I liked that. But Sam did two years there, the first year being the internship and the second year stationed on the Shenandoah. It was in port almost all the time.

After that he had two more years because getting this senior program meant he had to give back so many years. We spent the next two years in Jacksonville, Florida where he worked for the Navy down there, so it was after that that we moved to New Orleans. Yes. So



As a young mother with her two sons.



New Orleans 1982



New Orleans home office.



Newsom Family portrait in 1970s.



1990



Working with English as Second Language student and friend, Brian Yu in 2001.

Danny with her husband and grandson, Spencer



With sons Steve (Left) and Mike (Right).



Donna with her husband and grandson, Spencer.



I think it was 1964 that we went to New Orleans. That was when I started teaching.

And so when we got ready to leave and Sam retired -- like I say we had been out here to Las Vegas many times to medical conventions. And there are only two cities in the country that I wanted to go to when he would have a medical convention. One was San Francisco and the other was Las Vegas because it was always such great fun coming to this city and I love San Francisco, as everybody does, you know. So those were the only two cities. And I was able to come here when I was in real estate. But when he would go to other places like Chicago and those places, I didn't want to go because I was in real estate and real estate is 24/7. If the phone rings you're there to talk to them because it may be some other time zone they're calling from, you know. So when I came here and when I would go to San Francisco, I had another agent who handled my business while I was gone. But I had a very successful real estate career. I made much more money in real estate than I ever made in teaching nursing.

**Of course.**

Of course, yes. Of course. But I loved real estate. I really did. I loved being with people. Everything I really ever needed to know I learned it right there in real estate because everything in the world can happen to you.

One of the first things that our office manager told us was don't spend it until you have it. And you know when you think about that, that's important. Don't be so darn sure you're going to get it because at the last hour things can go wrong and it can turn completely upside down. So I have always said that to myself; don't spend it until you have it. And you don't have it until you have it. You've got to hold it in your hand before it's yours. So that's just one of the many simple things I learned in real estate. We did have a young man who came into our office who thought, you know, this is so wonderful I'm going to be so rich so fast. And I just wanted to say to him slow down and think about this. Of course, he didn't last long because you work hard at it, but you don't measure the time. You just don't measure it.

Our manager was wonderful. And she used to say if you walk -- when your business is down, it goes down and then it'll come back up. But when your business goes down, try not to be down yourself. And don't ever walk in the office if you're not feeling upbeat. Do not

ever step foot in the office. Just stay at home until you're feeling very upbeat because you cannot walk in the office and associate with the other agents and maybe some of their clients and not be upbeat about the business. And when somebody says, hi, how are you doing? Busy, busy as I can be; that's your reply. Maybe you haven't sold a house in three months. Busy, very busy. There's a certain language that goes with it. I wish I could think of more.

**Oh, that is great.**

Uh-huh. You're always busy. And they interpret that as, wow, selling houses, yeah. But it could be working on problems, you know.

**So what made you decide -- well, you had such a connection with Las Vegas. So you decided to retire here at this time Sam was going to retire?**

Yes, Sam was going to retire. When we left New Orleans a strange thing happened. I came home one day and got the mail. This is in New Orleans at our home there. And it was from my -- I believe it was the Air Force that was not aware that Sam was approaching senior-hood. They thought he was probably out of high school. It was a big crazy mix-up. But we read the letter anyway. It was trying to get him to join the Air Force. I said something to Sam like, oh, gosh. I was just kind of being silly. This might be something we might want to do. I still had this adventure, you know, before I tossed this piece of paper. This might be something. He walked on through the kitchen where I was and went on upstairs. And as he was leaving the kitchen he said, well, if I were going to do something like that I certainly wouldn't do it in the Air Force, I'd do it in the Navy. Well, I let those words stay in my head for a little while. You know, I had always liked Navy life as a Navy wife. And so I thought, um. He didn't say, well, I've had that; that's over. He said if I were going to do something like that I'd do it in the Navy, not in the Air Force.

So in the next few days I said, you know, we really don't know where we're going to go or what we're going to do. And I think that if you jumped back in the Navy after all these years, you know, if you jumped back in for just two years, we could go to some exciting place. I'm always looking for new adventures. He's not. But I can drag him to some of them. And so he said like where? I said like San Diego. He said, well, I'd rather go to Washington State than San Diego. I said, oh, I don't know if I could take that bad weather, all that rain up

there. And I said San Diego is beautiful.

I said why don't we go across the river -- New Orleans -- let's go across the river to the Eighth Naval Reserve over there and just talk to them. I couldn't believe he said okay. I couldn't believe it. He made an appointment and we went over there. And Sam jumped back in the Navy. That's why we went to San Diego. And, again, he lucked out having this gorgeous brand-new Balboa Naval Hospital to work in. So both hospitals on both coasts were just gorgeous, new and everything. So he stayed in two years.

**What did you do in San Diego?**

Had the time of my life. I did fun things. I went out on adventures. I took some of the bus trips for seniors. I was a brand-new senior. I took some of the bus trips down to Baja, you know. I just enjoyed the city. And then, too, the Navy is a great social place. You have a lot of nighttime parties and functions and everything. And you rotate different homes where you go to. And I met all these wonderful people in the Navy.

And I wished that Sam had stayed in the Navy because of the excitement of the adventure and all. Sam liked his career in the Navy. But the reason he didn't want to stay in was because as you stay in you keep getting promoted in rank. And the higher you go in rank the more administrative your job becomes. Sam does not want that kind of a job.

**I understand.**

He enjoys seeing patients and talking medicine and so forth, but he does not want to sit at a desk.

**I understand.**

Yes. So that's why he got out. So then from San Diego we had to decide where are we going? So we went back to Oregon on a time-share, central Oregon. The town was Bend. And we could not believe it. It had grown so much. We were thinking at one time that we might want to retire there. Our friend Helen, who is so smart, said you might want to go to the library and read about some of the laws of Oregon before you move to that state. I had never in my life thought about going to the library and reading the laws of the state before you moved. But that's the way her mind works. So we did that. And we didn't like it.

**Give me an example of something you didn't like.**

Well, one example that I thought was utterly ridiculous was the law that you have to have a bag in the front seat of your car for garbage. You can have a plastic bag and hook it onto the handle of your glove compartment or you can anchor it some way for your trash. They didn't want you to throw it out the window. So you have to have it -- that's the law.

**That's why it's always so beautiful. That's the law.**

That was the law.

**Wow. I understand.**

That's the only one I can think of right now. But I thought that there were several laws that were a little bit kind of gooney, kooky.

So like I say we had all kinds of property here. So from San Diego I think we came here and probably had some business that we had to tend to here due to it. I don't remember. But we thought about, well, what about this? We've always loved this place. And Helen said, well, yes, why don't you stay here? I mean it's got this and that and the other. And so we're here. We never dreamed that it would be so wonderful. We remembered the enjoyable times that we had had here staying in the hotel and seeing a show or two and all like that. But, now, living here opened up a world that we did not know. For Sam it has been fantastic golf, and for me it has been lots of things. I probably have had more pleasure come to me from UNLV, the program I'm in there. I wasn't a founding member of that, but I came a couple of years later. So I've been in there almost 15 years.

**Wow. Now, before you tell me about that, you worked at a hospital here at one point.**

Yes. That was when I came out here and I visited Helen. And she was living with Aunt Martha in a house on Bonneville. I know. I enjoyed the shows so much and they were free.

**Oh, so those lounge shows.**

Well, not only the lounge shows. I don't recall if they were free for everybody or if it was because Helen had connections.

**Okay. Some of the dinner shows.**

Oh, yes. All kinds of things like that. I had so much fun here I wanted to spend more time here, but I knew I had to work because I'm really work oriented, too. So I looked into working at -- it was then Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital on Charleston. Well, it's right

where UMC is today. We had not gotten into technology too much at that time.

I went over there to apply for a job in person with the director of nursing and she said, well, what type of nursing, what part of the hospital would you like to work in and where have you had the most experience? I said, well, I've had the most experience in labor and delivery and that's where I'm most comfortable and I enjoy working labor and delivery. She smiled and looked across her desk at me and said, well, we don't have that department here. I said you don't have it? She said no, we don't. I said, well, what would you do if somebody was driving through Las Vegas and maybe the lady went into labor or something? She said, well, they could come to the hospital, but people who are pregnant don't drive through Las Vegas. She explained to me that there are great distances in the state of Nevada and we're down here and people don't just drive through like they do in big cities, you know. So she said it's highly unlikely that that would ever happen. She said we do have a gynecology floor and perhaps you would like to work there. I said yes, that would be fine, and I would like the evening shift if possible. She said, oh, sure, that's fine.

So I started to work there. I remember that the atmosphere was much more relaxed and comfortable than the atmosphere I had had back in the South in nursing. People were more fun loving and still being professional at the same time but just not being so strict about everything. I had been a product of that and I had had to teach that. And so to find just a little more casualness to it, you know, it was nice. It was very nice.

**What were some of the other differences working in a hospital here versus the hospitals you had worked in in the South?**

Well, there was one shocking difference. It was so shocking. Every time I had experience being on a surgical floor, either with students or in my own years of nursing, the incision made on a woman's abdomen for a hysterectomy, removal of the uterus, was a vertical incision, a long vertical incision. I had the shock of my life here when I worked during the summer and at Christmas holidays too at Southern Nevada because I saw for the first time in my life that the doctors did not do a vertical incision. They did a very low transverse incision. Of course, I was all why? Why? I've never heard of any such thing. And I was told by some of the other nurses it's so that their scar won't show because they're showgirls and they can't

have a scar showing. I thought I have seen and heard everything. This is so unbelievable. That comes before the surgical aspect of it and the medical aspect, you know. My goodness. So that's what they did here.

We had a lot of patients with venereal diseases here.

**Why?**

I don't know. Because there were people that were just not protective of themselves, did not take good care of themselves. And sex was everywhere in -- this was a big city.

**Was it because of prostitution?**

It could have been. I don't know. We had an awful lot of cases because I was on the gynecology floor. Probably some of it was other general surgery too. I don't know. It could have been all gynecology. And there were these things.

But another real shocker I had was -- in my nursing life I was familiar with when a tube had to be put in a woman's bladder, extended out from the meatus and connected to another tube. And then the urine drained into a container. The nurses would go in to make rounds on patients and they would examine it. They would look at the color of the urine. They would maybe take notes on it. The amount was very important, and we would also check to see that the tube was not kinked somewhere and that the urine was draining free and easy.

So I expected to see something like the same equipment here. But, again, the same type of shock. Some of the young ladies had urinary catheters in their bladder that drained and they drained into little, tiny plastic bags that were stuck with tape onto their body so that they could not be seen because they might have to still keep their job like dancers or something. I mean how many times can you train a dancer? How fast can you train a dancer or something? I don't know. That's the only thing I could imagine. But I had never heard of that. And I do remember asking, well, that little plastic bag is so small. Oh, but they have others. When that one gets full -- they're still at work -- they go offstage or something and they just attach another one on there. Shocking. Shocking to me.

I have no idea today what's going on. But that's what was going on then. And nowhere I had read or heard of anything. It was just part of this wonderful city that does

things differently, very differently and sometimes it seems to be just a way-out unheard of solution to something. But I do believe that miracles happen every day in this city. They're not afraid to try something here in this city. And they do it on the Strip and they do it other places and they did at the hospital.

It was so crime free. It was so safe. The Mafia ran the city. And that was comforting. I didn't know or understand any of this. But it was so comforting when I got off the evening shift at 11:00. I could walk down Charleston by myself, no fear whatsoever. Nobody in the world would have ever bothered me and I knew it. Sometimes I would make a change at the hospital into street clothes. Sometimes I wouldn't. And I would head to the Strip because I was a night owl. I would head to the Strip and catch the late show. I had met some other friends out here and I would meet them sometimes and have a late dinner or something. It was just the life that I thought this is the most wonderful, exciting life I could ever have imagined. From what I had come from to what I was seeing and living in is just -- it's like nothing else. This city to me is the most unique place in the world. And it's right here in the U.S. A.

The news on the street at that time was we should have brothels; prostitution should be legal because it protects the other women. In other words, they don't have to bother other women because prostitution is legal. So why should they bother other people? So, of course, you're safe. You're totally safe walking in the middle of the night here. And I didn't mind doing it. I felt totally comfortable doing it. You had sort of a code that you lived by here. It was just exciting. It was just 24/7 excitement. The Strip and then downtown was different then, too.

**Tell me about what downtown was like at that time.**

Downtown was so much nicer than it is now. The Golden Nugget was then and is now the very nicest place downtown.

**Wonderful place.**

Yes. But the other hotels down there were very nice, too. And so, you know, Fremont Street -- I have come out here on the train sometime in the summer just for the experience of riding the train, getting on the train and coming all the way out here. The train station was

down at the end of Fremont Street. And that was fun and exciting. And times I would fly out here for a quick weekend or a few days off. I would take a plane late afternoon because flying West the sun never set. You just kept going into the west.

And the pilots of these commercial airplanes would fly over the Grand Canyon and circle around so you could see the Grand Canyon. I never felt like I had to drive down there and see the Grand Canyon. I had seen it from an airplane. It was amazing. And then as we got into Las Vegas it was just getting dark, which meant that the lights on the Strip are just absolutely glowing. And the pilots would circle over the Strip over and over. I remember going up in the cockpit on the commercial airline. Yes, I went in the cockpit. He said, look, look at the lights over here. I said I know it; I think it is absolutely gorgeous.

It was such a different world. It was safe and it was a small world and it was just so fun, just so much fun. I just have these fond, fond memories to live with.

**So now what do you and your husband do for entertainment here in the city?**

Well, we have friends. We're not people that need at this time or at any time really a big social life. I do my thing sort of and he does his. And sometimes we just go out and have dinner or something or sometimes, you know, we do have dinner with his golf friends at different homes. I know most of the wives in his golf group.

During the daytime I am a member of the Salvation Army women's auxiliary. Sometimes there are functions there and I do go to those monthly meetings. Also I do church work, different programs that are spring-off groups from church. Of course, what occupies my time mainly, especially in the summer, is tutoring.

**Yes. And tell me about the UNLV program.**

Okay. The OLLI program that I'm in?

**Yes.**

It's a national program.

**Now, what does it stand for?**

Okay. OLLI, O-L-L-I, stands for Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. And large sums of money were granted by Osher for this purpose. Our program used to be on the main UNLV campus and it was called Excel. And then we moved. We were in the different classrooms



on the main campus and the library is what is now I believe the Boyd School of Law building. And they have built the new library. I was there before that changed. So when they were making changes there and building the new library -- it's a good thing really that we moved to the Paradise campus. You know, Judy Garland played out here all the time. I've seen her endless times. Her daughter -- what is her daughter's name?

**Liza Minnelli?**

Yeah. Liza Minnelli went years to this Paradise campus. You know, her mother was here so much. Yeah, she was in grade school, Liza was at Paradise Elementary School. And old-time Las Vegans know that. A couple of streets or more from the Paradise Elementary School is Swenson. And on Swenson there is sort of a compound that was Liberace's when I was here.

**Where the museum is?**

No. That's on Flamingo I believe. No. Where he lived. He had a compound where he lived because Helen owned property on Swenson there and it was very close. So he had three houses within kind of a corner area there for the staff, the on-site staff that lived there.

So I just find it to be such an exciting city in so many ways. I like the fact that it's a late night city.

**Oh, yes.**

Yeah. New Orleans was an early morning town.

**Oh. Not your kind of place.**

Not my kind of place. Right. Right.

**So tell me a little about OLLI.**

OLLI was the former Excel, only we have more money to grow, more things we can do. We have grown in attendance, in membership from the very beginning. I don't think we've ever dropped back. We're very close to 500 members. And, actually, we are legally allowed to call our satellite membership part of the OLLI program. They do pay their dues. And they just happen to get their classes over satellite in their location. We are close to 600 now because we can now count the satellite places. And we have about 22 courses that are offered every semester. We have the fall and spring semester and we have summer semester.

And the people who conduct these classes are called coordinators. They don't want to

be called teachers. So we call them coordinators. They give us material and insight and information that is priceless. We have two-hour classes, ten to twelve and one to three. Some semesters that includes Friday and some semesters Friday is maybe just a morning class or something and not an afternoon. So it varies per semester. Our coordinators come from every lifestyle. Many of them have been in business. Many have been attorneys. And some have been doctors. And many have been professors in colleges and universities who like the academic lifestyle. And then some have not been especially related to a career but have certain interests, like maybe somebody just loved Shakespeare in college. They loved it so much that they're willing to work hard and gather more reading and information and present a beautiful class. We have one attorney who is here from L.A. and his background was in entertainment law. So that presents a different thing. But all the classes are well attended. Being peer directed is nice. The coordinators in one class are students in other classes.

We pay the cheapest tuition in the country. In some cities OLLI people pay four and \$500. In California it's very expensive. We pay \$55 per semester.

**And you can take as many classes as you like.**

Right. And you can take one or all of them. I was just so wild about OLLI when I first started there that I gave up everything I was doing and I went to OLLI five days a week and took morning and afternoon classes. But then over the many years, the 15 years, other things have come up that I needed to do. I have gotten involved -- about eight years ago I got involved in tutoring. One of the Excel members, Beebe Cohen, from New York was an RN too. So we had a lot in common.