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# An Interview with Houghton Peterson

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *All That Jazz* Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
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## Preface

Houghton “Hoot” Peterson played trombone in his high school band in northern Minnesota where he grew up. That same instrument would lead him to be a member of the highly regarded Air Force jazz band called *Airmen of Note* after enlistment. Then during a short tour at Nellis Air Force base, Hoot decided that the Las Vegas entertainment scene might have career opportunities for him.

He moved to Las Vegas in 1962, an era of celebrity performers and tourists who enjoyed the crowds and nightlife. Hoot’s point of view was as a musician in the band, most often a Strip relief band. But he also has tales of famous musicians and late night jam sessions.

Hoot’s career spanned 20 years. Eventually the Las Vegas scene for live musicians began to change. When times got tough for Hoot, he worked as a carpenter and at a music store. In this interview he discusses his fascinating past and offers advice for today’s musicians.



ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

*All That Jazz* Oral History Project



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Houghton Peterson

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Claytee D. White 5/20/2010  
Signature of Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**This is Claytee White. It is May 20th, 2010. I am in the home of Mr. Peterson, who is going to now give you his correct pronunciation and spelling of his first name.**

My first name is Houghton, H-O-U-G-H-T-O-N. It's kind of a strange name. So I was kind of happy when I got the nickname Hoot.

**And Hoot, is H-O-O-T?**

Right.

**Now, how did you get that name?**

Houghton got shortened to Hoot when I was a kid. Then when I moved to Las Vegas, one of the first things that happened was my roommate, who I was in the Air Force with, said hi, Hoot. So it was Hoot from then on.

**Tell me about your childhood: where did you grow up and what that was like.**

I grew up in northern Minnesota, a town called Virginia, which is in the center of the Mesabi Iron Range—where they got most of the iron for steel back then and I guess that still get quite a bit. It's called taconite now because it's not as strong as iron ore. It's one-third iron where iron ore was two-thirds iron. They have to crush it and do a lot of that stuff before they can make steel out of it. I just saw a TV show. They did all the cities of the country, or all the states of country, on an educational channel. They did Minnesota the other day and I just happened to catch it. So it was kind of neat. They showed our iron mines.

**Great. So wasn't it cold?**

Yes, real cold. I lived 80 miles from the coldest spot in the country, which is International Falls, Minnesota. We were not much warmer than that.

**So how cold would it get?**

Oh, 40-below zero once or twice every year. In fact, I just heard a couple of years ago it had gotten down to 50-below zero. Not much activity in that climate.

**So what do kids do? You play outside doing what in that weather?**

Well, sledding and other outdoor activities. But not even very many kids go out when it's near 20-below zero or colder than that. It's pretty much stay-at-home weather, inside naturally.

**So tell me about your family.**

Well, my dad worked for the city. He worked for the electric power company and he was in



charge of checking all the meters in the houses, kept track of (power) that people used. My mom didn't work when I was a kid. Before I was a born she was a piano teacher. She didn't play much after me. I don't know why.

**Did she teach you piano?**

A little bit, yes. It was kind of weird because I started learning piano at about age seven or so. I used to like to carve wood. I was carving something and I cut my tendon in my finger and I had a splint on my finger. So that was the end of my piano career. Then I took up trombone because I always thought that was the greatest instrument of all time. My uncle played trombone and my dad played baritone horn. So I was kind of just in that ilk, you know.

**Okay. So did you play in bands in school?**

Sure.

**Tell me about that.**

I played in high school bands. Then I went to junior college in my hometown, where we had a band. And I played in a dance band. I played gigs (on) weekends. It was a cute band. It was kids, you know. All good players, though.

**Great. So how did you leave there?**

Well, I went to the University of Michigan in my junior year. That's how I left town. I haven't been back much since.

**And Michigan is almost as cold. You can tell I don't like cold weather.**

Oh. Well, no, it's not nearly as bad as Minnesota was. It was still pretty cold, though.

**So after college what happened?**

A friend of mine and I decided to look into the military bands in Washington. So we both took a trip to Washington. He made the Marine band and I made the Air Force dance band, the *Airmen of Note*, a jazz band, the Air Force jazz band. So that's where it all started.

**I've never heard of the air force jazz band.**

The *Airmen of Note*, it's pretty popular. It's a really good band, one of the best in the world. They're becoming more notable now. But it was really good then, too.

**So how long were you in the Air Force?**

Four years, just one hitch.

**And did you travel while you were there?**

Oh, yes. We went all over the world. I went to Europe—that was one of my first trips, a six-week trip to Europe. I had to leave college early because when I was in junior college all of my credits didn't transfer. So I still needed four credits to get a degree. So I had to ask the dean if I could leave early and get my credits transferred back to Michigan to get my degree. One of my selling points was the trip to Europe. I thought, you know, he's going to go for that. Well, he did.

We went all the way from Norway to Turkey doing one-nighters and concerts. I think the band is more popular in Europe than it is in this country. It's a worldwide band. There's Air Force bases all over the world.

**So were you playing at Air Force bases or were you playing --**

On that trip we played all kinds of concerts. We did civilian concerts, but most of the playing in this country was Air Force bases. We would take trips almost every week. And we'd play one night at the officers' club, one night at NCO club and one night at the service club.

So we got to play for all the branches, all the ranks of the Air Force.

**But not all the branches of service, just within the Air Force?**

Pretty much, yes.

**So you left the military at some point. Tell me what year is this now?**

Sixty-two.

**1962 you're leaving. Oh, wow, good time to get out.**

I guess so. Any time was a good time. I didn't like the service. It was a great job. I loved the job. We played all over the country and got to travel and everything. But I didn't like the feeling of the service because I felt like I was in a worldwide jail. I mean you can't quit; they've got you, you know. You're obligated totally. And I just didn't like that feeling. I was not meant for military I guess. Not my thing. But I can't complain about the job. It was a great job.

**What a great start. So where did you move after the military?**

Here.

**Why to Las Vegas?**

Well, we got to travel all over. And we did a couple of concerts at Nellis and I got to see the town. I saw all the action that was going on here. There was all kinds of music and gigs. I

thought this would be a perfect place because you didn't have to leave town. You didn't have to go on the road or anything. You can make your living right here. And I did for many years, for 14 years I guess.

**Great. So what did Las Vegas look like in 1962?**

Oh, it was small. Really nice town, though. I think the mob controlled everything at that time. So there was very little crime. It was a really safe place, much nicer than now.

**Most people that I interview about Las Vegas and early Las Vegas tell me that they liked it when the mob ran the town.**

Uh-huh. It was very peaceful. Nothing bad happened. You'd end up in the desert somewhere if you did something bad I guess.

**But do you think the mob could run this now at this level of our economy?**

I don't think so. It's too big now. There's too much action and too many people making the money. Back then I think they made theirs off the top. I mean they took their profit from the top and then everything else they could give away for all they cared. They already got theirs.

**So who were some of your early influences in music? Probably your mother I know.**

And my dad also and my uncle. And then when I left town -- I mean when I was a junior in college. So after that I don't know if I had very many influences when I went to Michigan. I don't know. Of course, Tommy Dorsey was always one of my favorites.

**Tell me about the first paid engagement you had, the first gig. What was that like?**

Oh, probably a dance in Minnesota, northern Minnesota. We didn't play anything fancy. We played for the VA or veterans club, whatever that is. We played every week there for a while. Just every Saturday night.

**So were you playing the same thing every Saturday night?**

Pretty much. We had a library of tunes. We played mostly the same stuff. There wasn't much improvising back then. We didn't know enough to play jazz.

**So coming to Las Vegas -- oh, I love that lamp—where did that come from?**

A friend bought it for me. It was a birthday gift.

*They got it in a catalog or something.*

**Oh, fantastic. And by the way, in the room also is his wife, Fran Peterson, F-R-A-N. And**

she purchased the lamp. And the reason that it caught my attention is because the lamp is a trombone.

**Okay. So tell me how did you get introduced to music on the Strip? What was your first job here?**

I was in the Stardust lounge with the DeCastro Sisters. I played in the lounge for, oh, I don't know, several months. Then one of the people from the show band heard the band and I got hired into the Stardust show band, the Lido show.

**Oh, okay. So how did you find out about that first, the DeCastro Sisters?**

I just was staying in an apartment on the Strip and got around playing at the union. I was kind of asked to play in the band at the Stardust lounge.

**How did the union work at that time? Did you have to be in Las Vegas for a certain amount of time before they would send you out on jobs?**

Yeah, I think so. But it didn't seem to affect me because at that time we really needed musicians. There was a shortage in a way because there were so many jobs. I was never bothered by any of that stuff. I kind of went to work as soon as I got a job. The union doesn't find you jobs, though. It's not like the carpenters union. I belong to the carpenters, too. You find your own jobs in the musicians union, which is okay. It keeps the band good. They can't just take any schlock guy that can pass a test, you know, put them on a job.

**And it means you have to be paid union scale.**

Right.

**Are you still a member of the union?**

Yes, I am. But there's no more work. So I don't know why I'm still a member. I guess because I'm collecting a pension I guess and I wanted to be sort of faithful. But there's not much activity anymore in the union. It's just kind of almost defunct.

**But now that we have shows coming back like, ooh, some shows beginning now to have some live bands again, do you find that there are more jobs now?**

No. Not for me. I'm kind of old now. Nobody knows about me anymore much. I mean the old guys know I'm here, but the new jobs are mostly for new musicians.

**Okay, when you said that you had an apartment on the Strip, where was that located?**

Right by the Desert Inn, right behind the Desert Inn sort of. There was an apartment complex there. There was lots of show people lived there, musicians and show people. So it was perfect spot to get started.

**Tell me about the Lido, how you got that position and what that was like.**

Well, I think some of the band members of the Lido came to hear the lounge show one night. They probably just needed a trombone player and there I was. So they kind of recruited me. It was a good job, a little boring because you play the same thing every night. But it was good music and a good band. And then after that I got asked by the Desert Inn to play in that band and I took that job. I was only at the Lido probably six or eight months. And the Desert Inn was like a more desirable job because we had stars that we could play for and the shows changed a lot.

**Who were some of the stars that you played for?**

Oh, I wrote a bunch of them down. I thought of them.

**Good.**

You want to see the list? It's not that big.

**You just may tell me so that we may hear it on the tape.**

Jimmy Durante, Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughan. I can't read my writing. Jack Jones.

**Who were some of your favorites?**

Juliet Prowse was really kind of my favorite because she was such a nice lady and she had great music and I just liked her.

**Give me an idea of -- does the band get to interact other than playing for that person?**

Not much.

**Did some of them give parties for the band?**

Yes, almost everybody gave us a party on closing night. You know, it was just drinks and snacks mostly. They all appreciated us and they treated us well. They should because we were good.

**Yes. How did musicians qualify to play in those bands?**

They just have to know you. They don't take anybody off the street.

**Did you have to be able to read the music?**

Oh, sure.

**And if somebody played by ear, could they get jobs at that time?**

Not that kind of job. You really had to be a very versatile musician and read music well because you played the rehearsal and then that night you'd open. So you had to know what you were doing right away. You couldn't take it home and practice it or anything.

**Who were some of the other people that you played with in some of these bands like at the Desert Inn?**

You mean the band members? Boy, it's a long time ago. I don't know if we had anybody famous in the band. There's still some people in town here that were in a band. But I don't think you'd know them.

**Do you know Ken Hanlon?**

Yeah, I do. He wasn't any person I played with. I played with him at the trombone concerts. We have that annual trombone concert.

**The 76 Trombones? What is it, 76?**

Seventy-six Plus Four. I think the four was a rhythm section. I don't know if we had 76. We had close to it, though. I think one year we had over 80 trombonists.

**There are a lot of people on that stage. So do you interact in other ways with UNLV?**

Not much anymore.

Do I interact with UNLV anymore?

*Fran: We go to concerts there.*

Oh, yeah. That's about it. Yeah. They don't hire many musicians anymore.

*Fran: You do more with CSN(College of Southern Nevada).*

**So what kinds of things do you do with CSN?**

Played in the band. They had a jazz band for like one of the courses they offered a jazz course I guess and they needed more people. So they built the band up with local pros. That's no longer offered. That course is no longer. I guess they didn't get enough people to fill up their chairs.

*Fran: Well, they had several sections.*

Oh, yeah.

*Fran: And they just didn't do that section you were doing.*

Yeah, maybe so.

**So who put that together for CSN?**

I don't know who. Bobby Scan was the leader, but I don't think he put it together. He just was the top of the class.

*Fran: He was the teacher.*

**Okay. So which was your favorite venue playing here? Was it the Desert Inn or some other? And why?**

Well, the Desert Inn was one of my favorites because it varied a lot. We had everything from one-month shows to like shows that would last over a year. Hello America and some of those shows were long like the Lido show almost.

**Tell me more about Hello America.**

It's been so long I barely remember. But it was an entertaining show. It had a lot of audience, you know.

**Tell me some of the stories about some of the bandleaders and about some of the things that would happen on stage.**

I don't know. I don't have anything bad to say about any of the bandleaders.

**No, no, no.**

Some of them knew more than others. I mean one of the guys had been a violinist. All he did was sort of wave his arms to the music and didn't know much about conducting or that kind of ilk. But he got the job. And I think it was because he gambled a lot and wasn't very good at it. So the hotel probably kept him on just to make the money.

**I didn't mean any negative stories. I just want funny stories or stories that you remember that were memorable.**

Oh, jeez.

**Now, was Antonio Morelli one of the bandleaders during your era?**

Yes.

**And he was known for an unusual personality but being very, very good to the band members.**

Apparently, yes. We always got together and had a drink after work. One of the guys from the Sands band would come and tip a few with us. They had nothing bad to say about Morelli. I guess he was kind of a strange person.

*Fran: So you never worked for him?*

No. He was at the Sands and I never worked at the Sands.

**What other places did you work other than the Desert Inn?**

Well, the Stardust. But then I got a job shortly with a relief band, which was Lou Alias relief band. They would play the off night on the Strip. So that was interesting. One night you'd come in and read the show. It was kind of nerve-racking. But it was nice. It was fun.

**So how many different shows would a relief band play for?**

Oh, about four or five a week.

**And would it be the same rotation every week?**

Pretty much unless a show changed. Some of the shows were the same year after year. But some of them changed every month.

**Tell me about the relationship among musicians here in the city, what that family was like.**

It was very friendly. There was very little conflict or arguments or competition, actually, at that level of quality of musicians. Everybody had to be pretty good. So we weren't really competing for jobs. We already had it. If somebody wanted it, they had to earn it more than anything else.

**People have told me that the camaraderie with show people is different from anything else; that there is no color, not a lot of competition just as you said. But it was like a family. And they've told me stories about how they helped each other through the years and those kinds of things. Do you have any of those memories?**

Well, I remember all the stars were very nice people. I have no complaints about any of them. Some of them probably had bad reputations, but not from us. We thought they were great. They treated us well. But we treated them well too, so. And they were friendly, not overly friendly. I think Juliet Prowse was one of the friendliest. I sat with her between shows a couple of times and talked. She was just a nice lady. She was born in India to South African parents. I didn't realize that until she told me. She didn't sound like a foreigner or anything.

**I didn't know that either.**

**Did you do things together after performances?**

Only drink. Every night. The Desert Inn had a little liquor store on the side there and musicians would gather there after work. We would get kind of worried thinking that, you know, there's all



these guys standing out there drinking. But the person who worked at the store was friendly and he liked us all. He liked to have us there because with all those guys standing in the front, nobody's going to rob the place. So he was happy we were there.

**What about community activities that the band members would do together?**

Not much of that.

**No Christmas programs? No anything special for the city?**

No. We were too busy. We were working six nights a week. And the seventh night we didn't really want to play much because we were tired.

*Fran: You would do trombone caroling and stuff at Christmastime.*

Oh, yeah. Sometimes we'd go caroling.

**Tell me about that.**

It wasn't much to tell. It was just guys getting together and going to people's houses and playing Christmas carols.

**See, you don't think it's anything to tell, but that is so interesting that people from the Strip who make their business doing this would get together to go caroling. That's fantastic. And that's something that we don't even have in our records.**

Well, it didn't seem any big deal. Just a couple of nights we'd go tramping around at people's houses and playing.

**So who would organize something like this and how did you decide to go where you went?**

We went mostly to people we knew. I don't even know who organized it. We all had a play in it I guess.

**And you would just walk to these areas or everybody would get into cars? How was that arranged?**

We'd get into cars and travel from one house to the next.

**And play outside the house?**

Uh-huh. Yes.

**So you were just like carolers.**

Yes, we were instrumental carolers.

**So would the whole neighborhood come out into the yards?**

No. The doors were all closed because it was wintertime. So we were on our own.

**But, see, I think that's so interesting. So thank you for that memory.**

**Any stories about the union and how the union operated at that time? We've interviewed the current president of the union.—So, how did the union work at that time? Anything that you remember?**

You know, I kind of stayed away from that. The reason I even belonged to the union is because it was the musicians union. But they didn't do much for me and I didn't do much for them. I mean I was not against them or anything. I just wasn't particularly interested.

*Fran: At that time did they have the hall yet, the big hall over there on Tropicana? It was a great big property over there.*

That happened when I was here, oh, maybe five or ten years. There used to be a musicians union on Fremont Street. About 15th and Fremont was the union back then -- or 13th and Fremont I guess. And then they sold that building and built the one on Tropicana.

**Now, the one on Tropicana had enough space so that guys could actually come in with their horns and practice?**

Yes. We had jam sessions late at night sometimes till three or four in the morning.

**So what were those like?**

Oh, they were fun. You know, everybody came. It was like a social event, too.

*Fran: It had a bar in there.*

Yes, a bar.

*And the celebrities would come too.*

Sometimes, yeah.

**Tell me more.**

Well, they just wanted to hear the bands. Not too many came, but once in a while somebody would come.

**So once in a while when someone would come would they perform with the band?**

Yes.

**See, you don't think this is interesting.**

Well, musicians really don't like singers much.

**Oh, really?**

And that's because they take away from us. Everybody pays attention to the singers and forgets the band.

**Oh, so that's the way you see it.**

Kind of, yes. That's true. Nobody notices the band after the singer gets up there.

*Fran: But you need to qualify that, though. When you were making a living, that's what you did.*

**Yeah. But I understand that. And here's why I understand it. When I go to a concert and the band plays and plays and plays, I'm ready now for a singer.**

Yeah.

**But I want some variety. I love to hear the bands play also, but I love the variety. When I hear -- and I have the CD in my car right now -- the big band with Freeman, his wife was Carolyn Freeman.**

I don't know who that would be.

**Stan Freeman. I love that band. The album I have only has two songs where there is a singer. So it breaks it up enough for me to really appreciate the band. And the singer is just wonderful. Sometimes she's just sort of scatting in the back. But I understand what you're saying.**

Yes. I don't dislike singers. It just would be more fun without them sometimes only because we don't like to share the headline.

**Yes. Did you do jam sessions at other places here in the city?**

Well, see, I'm not really what you'd call a jazz player. I play in the sections and I'm a good section player. I play bass trombone in the first place and bass trombone is not really a jazz instrument.

**Okay. I see.**

*Fran: The answer is yes.*

**And I'm going to ask the next question anyway. I have interviewed a lot of entertainers who told me about jam sessions that would take place sometimes over on the Westside in some of those tiny clubs.**

No. I wasn't involved. That's more for the real down-home jazz players. And I was never in that ilk very much.

**Were you aware of those clubs?**

Oh, yes.

**What did you hear about them?**

Oh, nothing negative.

**And I don't want negative.**

*Fran: Did you ever go, Hoot?*

Very seldom. I don't know why. But we had everything we needed in the Strip. So there was really no need unless you were a jazz player to go over there.

**Okay. You didn't come until 1962. In the late 50s, really mid 50s, 1955, the first integrated place opened here. It was the Moulin Rouge. Did you ever go over there for any reason?**

Yeah, once a while, not very often. Like I said everything we needed was on the Strip and we were busy enough there. I don't have anything against it.

**Okay, by 1962 the city was integrated. Integration happened here in 1960. Did you play with any of the black musicians?**

There were very few that played on the Strip or anything. I played with Ella Fitzgerald at the Flamingo. There was a really good jazz band at the Silver Slipper. So she would come to the Silver Slipper after work sometimes and hang out. That was really nice. I liked her a lot.

**And see, it's not even that well known that Ella Fitzgerald played here. And we have a long, long list of names. I don't think I've seen her name on that list.**

She was at the Flamingo... It was the one I remember.

*Fran: Did you play her band, Hoot?*

Yes, I played the show that she was in.

That's another thing. The Silver Slipper was a really nice club. Drinks were half price for locals. So we'd go there after work a lot because they had a really good band, jazz band in there. So we'd go listen to that a lot.

**Did they have a lot of dancing?**

No.

**So locals didn't go out to dinner and dance at these places?**

Oh, it was all late at night. When the stuff happened it was maybe one or two in the morning.







ELLA FITZGERALD



Bob Graham

Dean

Doug

John Paul DeLoach

76 (John), very thanks.  
Hope all good, and  
love for you, Tom,  
and the secret.





My Baby  
is my Love  
~~My Baby~~  
My Baby

To Foot  
Love  
Mulla Beale



**Do you enjoy going to the Strip now to see performances?**

I do, but it's just such a hassle of getting there. Driving is murder. It's very expensive now. Back then it was really cheap, practically free.

**What do you think is the major change you've seen especially in entertainment between 1962 and now?**

Well, I think the hotels have become corporations. Before the mob ran them and they just kind of ran themselves. Now everybody has to show a profit. So prices are high and competition is real high. I guess not for me, but I mean for the people involved.

**One of the things that we used to have here were the lounge shows.**

That's what I first started, the Stardust lounge. That was a really interesting thing because the stage would revolve. So like every 45 minutes or whenever the show was over, the stage would revolve and a new act would come on just instantly. No warm-ups or anything. The thing would go around and you were on.

*Fran: I remember that. They used to have three acts revolving. The lounge—didn't it go around the clock almost?*

Well, I don't know when they stopped. But we'd stop about 1:30 or two in the morning. But they were still going on after that.

*Fran: And even in the afternoon.*

It was kind of nice. They had two stages, one in the front and one in the back. And the whole thing would turn around and there you were.

**What was the audience like?**

Oh, probably the same as they are now. I don't know.

**Were they pretty big audiences in the lounges?**

Yes. I don't know if the seats were all taken very many times, but there was quite a good crowd. People could come and sit and listen to music all night long for practically nothing. So I guess it was good.

**Oh, that's great. How long did you play here?**

I guess almost 20 years.

**Wow. So tell me about some of the other places that you played. You told me about the**

**Desert Inn, the Stardust and the Flamingo.**

Yeah. Then when I was in a relief band, I played in other places too, the Dunes and the Sahara.

**Did you have a favorite location?**

No. At that time it didn't really matter because the traffic wasn't bad enough that you had to wrestle it to get to work. It was pretty easy. And the places were all just places. We just played our music and it didn't matter where it was or what the conditions were very much unless it was negative conditions. But they were very seldom negative.

**Did the entertainment director make a difference?**

I suppose, but not to us. I mean it made a difference to the hotel and the artist maybe, but it didn't matter to us because we just played whoever came. We weren't given a choice much, you know. That wasn't our job at all.

**So tell me about those times that you played with no singer in front of you. In those lounge shows did you play without a singer?**

Not very often, no. We always had a star of some kind. In fact, I was trying to think of some of the people. We had one act that was a four-piece male vocal group. And I can't remember their name. The DeCastro Sisters were four girls. That was my first job. So I remember them. But they weren't particularly famous, but they were good. I don't know. I'm not much help I guess.

**What do you consider the impact of those lounge shows on overall entertainment in Las Vegas?**

I think they were kind of important. I mean people liked them. It was entertainment that was relaxed and inexpensive. I mean they didn't soak you for drinks. You could either have them or not. Nobody pressured you.

**What was your life like outside of the hotels, outside of the entertainment?**

I rode a bike a lot. That was my hobby sort of.

*Fran: You had a family.*

Oh, that too.

**Tell me about your family.**

Well, I had three kids. Only one left. Oh, I don't know. We had a nice house.

**What kinds of things did families do in Las Vegas for entertainment?**

Movies I suppose. We went for picnics and all that, but I worked six nights a week. So it was kind of hard to arrange any kind of big deal for entertainment.

**Did you ever go to places like Lake Mead or --**

We'd go up in the mountains, Mount Charleston and stuff. Yeah, we went all over.

**How has that changed for you?**

I don't go anywhere now particularly. I mean we do. We used to go out every night. Of course, I was working every night. But in the daytime we'd try to go places too.

**I asked you earlier what you thought the major changes were. At one time there was a strike. After that strike, canned music came in.**

I was sort of out of the music at that time. I'm a carpenter also. So I was working in that area.

*Fran: That was even after we were married, so.*

**Okay. Earlier you talked about the carpenters union. Tell me about that union.**

I moved to California for about a year because the Desert Inn closed for remodeling. So I was temporarily out of a job. And I thought, well, I'll just go to L.A. and see what happens. Not much happened. The only thing happened, I got to work for Harry James for a year, but that was not anything. You know, it was nice just to say I did it. It was good. And the band was good. But I didn't like the conditions. We made very little money. It was tough, traveled all the time.

**You made very little money with Harry James?**

Uh-huh. Not very many musicians made good money then. I mean I made a lot more here when I was working here than I did with him on the road.

**So you didn't have the same union scale?**

I don't think so. It was in L.A., union.

*Fran: I'm going to interject here. They might have made scale, but the thing is they had to pay their own expenses on the road.*

Yeah, we had to buy our own meals, pay our own hotel and everything.

*Fran: Child support and have a home that he lived in when he wasn't on the road.*

You could very rarely send enough money home to pay the rent because you had your own living expenses to pay. I guess they didn't figure you had a family or anything.

**So you see my mouth hanging open. So for a musician to have to pay their own expenses is**

**just foreign to me. I never expected to hear that.**

Well, it was not easy. The band was good, but that was the only thing that was good.

*Fran: Basically for a single guy it probably would have been fine. But in his situation it was -- you worked another job, though, didn't you? Didn't you work at the music store?*

Yes, I worked in a music store when we weren't on the road. I learned to be a musical instrument repairman, which was kind of nice.

**So did you learn to play other instruments other than the trombone?**

Nope. Never wanted to. I mean some people can play four or five and do it well, but I never cared enough to play any others. One was enough for me.

*Fran: You can play tuba, horns.*

Oh, yeah. But that's related.

*Fran: The bass horns. He plays a lot of different stuff.*

**What are the related instruments that you consider related that I probably wouldn't. What are the related instruments? So it's easy to transition from one to the other?**

Well, it's hard for a brass player because the mouthpieces are so varied in size. I tried to play trumpet a few times and it just didn't work because they're playing high and we're playing low and it's a different set of muscles. So you're kind of stuck. I never even wanted to play any other instrument. So I'd stick with the lower brass instruments, which include the tuba and baritone horn. Trombone is the only one you can make any money with. I mean they don't hire tuba players very much and baritone horn players are only in a concert band. So trombone's it.

**Do you feel now from what you hear and what you read in the newspapers, do you see band coming back to Las Vegas, live music?**

Not like they were.

**Do you think that they will ever come?**

I don't know. People keep saying, they'll be back, but I don't know. I just don't know. I'm not too optimistic about it.

**Do you currently play in any gigs that are kind of permanent?**

Well, I play in four bands a week, but they're in a studio in this guy's backyard. So if you know where it is, you could hear it. But it's hidden by the airport in his backyard. It's a nice studio, but

it's not really for audiences. We'd like to have some once in a while, but nobody knows about it.

**Tell me how that happened and what you do.**

Well, I play Tuesday through Thursday. Every night we have different music to play. It's good sight-reading practice. It's good to keep our chops up. I don't know for what because there's no more money to be made. So it's just for fun.

**Okay and this is a place that's open to the public? People who are interested in the music could just go and listen?**

Oh, yes, they could. But it's kind of hard to find because it's not a very populated street and it's way in his backyard. So you'd really have to know. Somebody would have to show you where it was.

**Wow. Okay. Las Vegas has always been the type of place where if you've got the juice you could get a job or all kinds of things like that. What does that term mean for you?**

Not much to me because I never had any. I didn't know any of the people who were in charge or anything like that. I just played my horn. If I got a job, fine. Pretty much I always worked. But I didn't have to know anybody, just other musicians.

**Were you able to also help newer guys find jobs here?**

I guess just inadvertently. But I don't think I ever found one for anybody because we weren't involved with that. We were just kind of doing our own thing. I wouldn't have minded, but never had the opportunity I guess.

**Okay. Which time frame do you think was best for music here in Las Vegas?**

Well, it was great when I first got here in the 60s. I don't know when it went downhill. I guess it stayed active for ten or 15 years at least. When I went to California I was gone for a year, year and a half and came back and everything was different. The bandleaders were different and the players were pretty different. Everything had sort of changed.

**In what way were the players different?**

Just different faces.

**Oh, I see. Where had the others gone, the ones who were your contemporaries? What happened?**

Maybe they just stopped playing or just lost a job or something. I think jobs were harder to find

when I got back. There were not as many and the competition had started.

**Earlier you started to tell me about the carpenters union. First tell me how you got involved in carpentry.**

Well, I was in California and wasn't playing anything. So I was always pretty handy with my hands. I got a job with this guy in carpentry work. We were putting a roof on a building. I just got the job. One thing kind of led to another. I joined the union in California.

This was in the late 1970s or early 80s.

**And so when you came back here you continued in the carpenters union?**

Yes, it was a good opening. I was involved in California. It kind of opened the door for me to do that. Some of my jobs were iffy because I was really a beginning carpenter and a lot of things I didn't know. I had to learn on the job. On-the-job training I guess you'd call it. And I managed to do it all right. I started working in the hotels then. I worked at the Four Queens downtown and the Hilton was my biggest job here. I worked there for quite a few years, 15 years I guess. It wasn't really a carpenter -- it was like a repair job mostly. We would cut the walls open for the plumbers and the electricians. And then we'd patch the holes after they were done. So it wasn't any creative job. The Four Queens was more creative because we built the casino, furniture and slot machine tables and all that kind of stuff. But the Hilton hired all that stuff out, so we were just maintenance.

**When it comes to the camaraderie among musicians and among carpenters, what's the difference?**

Oh, I don't know. We're all pretty friendly. I mean I had good friends in carpentry as well as music. I don't know. I'm a pretty friendly guy I guess. So I got along well at both jobs.

*Fran: I would think that the relationship of the musicians was probably more.*

It meant more.

*Fran: And kind of more educated group of people.*

Oh, yes. Not everybody can be a musician. Almost anybody can be a carpenter. Musicians, we're kind of selective. You know what I mean? It's not something you're born with. I guess some people are and some people aren't. I'll say that. So that kind of holds you together I suppose, people with your own ability and way of thinking.



**Were most of the musicians who could read music college-trained?**

I would say half and half maybe. A lot of them went into bands when they were just out of high school. So they started playing music early for a living.

**If today's students are going into music at CSN or UNLV, whom do you think some of the people are that they should study?**

Oh, they can tell from the records some of the people they like and respect. That's how most of us learned. We got our taste from music we hear and if we liked it we learned to play it. I didn't recommend going into music now for any kids because there's just not that many jobs unless you want to be a teacher. I have a teaching degree, but I never had to teach. I always felt myself being lucky that I never had to put up with this generation of children.

**So you don't think music the way it was will ever come back?**

No, I don't really. It's too bad. It would be nice if it would because it was a very enjoyable life.

*Fran: Well, we went to see Bernadette Peters the other night and she had a full orchestra.*

Yeah, that's true. Yeah.

*Fran: And it was the kind of music you used to play.*

Yeah. It was very nice.

*Fran: A lot of your contemporaries were in that band.*

Yes, but that's one band. There used to be like 20 bands like that in town -- not 20 maybe. But every hotel had a nice big show band and lounge groups.

**Don't some of the plays now have live music?**

Yes, but not the big bands. They maybe have a quartet or sextet or something.

**Now, I can't remember. I saw "O" and I'm not sure I saw any of the other Cirque performances. Do they have live music?**

*Fran: They're tiny.*

You know, I don't even know.

**Oh. But they're very tiny?**

*Fran: Strings. Real small bands. A lot of it's recorded.*

Not a very big band.

**Okay. That's too bad.**

Maybe their musicians are from Canada too. That could be.

**Because it's Cirque home. Yes, okay.**

**Right now if you had the opportunity what would be your dream job in music?**

Oh. I don't know. The Desert Inn was a pretty dream job. We got to change a lot, a lot of different music and always busy every night, all good entertainers and friendly, you know. It was nice.

**The last question you've already answered. Would you encourage or discourage kids from going into music today? You've really answered that one.**

Well, it's just because of the conditions, not that the music is bad or anything. Well, I don't like the modern music very well either. I don't like rap or any of that stuff. I'm a jazz person, so.

**Right. Supposedly though, music can redo the brain so that we can think better and deeper and all of that. Do you believe that about music?**

Yes. I had a funny thing happen. It's not funny. I was a bicyclist. So I fell off my bike on my head. Woke up in a hospital and I couldn't read anymore. I had to learn to read all over again. I could still read music, but I couldn't read words. One of my guys I was working with had to get my music in order because I couldn't read the titles of the songs, but I could still read the songs, which is kind of weird. I guess that proves we have two different sides of our brain. One of the sides was shut off and I could use the other side okay still.

**So what was it like learning to read again?**

It was hard. I moved to Los Angeles shortly after that happened. When I was driving on the freeway, by the time I figured out the signs, I was past the exit. It was trying.

**Oh, it had to be.**

I was totally illiterate for several years after being a college grad. It was different.

**Wow. So we've gone over all the questions I have for this project. Any other memories that you'd like to share about the music industry here?**

You know, my memory is not so good maybe from the whack on the head with the bicycle. I really don't remember a lot of stuff and I should.

*Fran: Hoot, who was the guy that always made you laugh when you played him? You said he always cracked the band up every night.*

Milton Berle would get everybody in the band a jug a week, whatever you wanted. You filled out a thing at the beginning of his engagement and every week you'd get a bottle of booze. I think he did it just to keep you laughing because, you know, there's nothing more boring than watching a band sit there. The show gets real boring after you've done it for a week or so and it's not funny anymore.

**So did most guys have a few drinks before?**

Oh, yeah.

*Fran: You said he always would make you laugh every night.*

Yeah, he did. But we were just trying to be friendly.

*Fran: I thought you said he would bring in new material.*

Yes. He was a funny guy. Some of them weren't, though. Some of them it was like listening to a record. It was exactly the same every show every night. I don't even remember who they were. They didn't make a big impression on my brain.

*Fran: What about the Bobby Darin thing that you found out late? I mean like a couple of years ago you found out.*

Oh, yeah. A friend of mine had bought a record of Bobby Darin. It was "Bobby Darin at the Desert Inn" or something like that or in Las Vegas or whatever. And he had this one song. What's the name of the song?

*Fran: "Beyond the Sea."*

Yes. "Beyond the Sea."

**Yes. That's one of his best.**

At the end of the song he'd say, okay, it's you and me, Hoot. And I would play (singing) after the song was over. And they had it on the record.

**Oh, fantastic.**

I've almost forgotten that.

**You're probably owed some royalties or something.**

Oh, maybe.

*Fran: He didn't get paid for it.*

No. We didn't get paid for much of anything. They recorded a show at the Desert Inn. We should

have got some pay for that, but we didn't. We just got our regular salary but never any extra.

**And that wasn't part of the union contract?**

Oh, it probably was. But either nobody knew about it or just nobody told them or something maybe. I don't know.

**Wow. Those are the kinds of stories that I really enjoy hearing about.**

**Any others that you've heard over the years, Fran, that you could kind of remind him of?**

*Fran: I do know one thing about the union that when he first came here the local wasn't involved in the pension. So that the first, what, ten years you played here or more?*

Yeah, probably.

*Fran: None of that went to pension, to the international. So his main time that he played did not count toward his pension.*

Yeah. I got no credit for it.

*Fran: So at the very, very end of his career so to speak, he had to hurry up and get some credits so he would qualify.*

Yeah. I just barely got vested.

**Okay. So it's like Social Security.**

*Fran: Right. But it's probably different now because the laws have changed so much. But back like I said the first ten or 12 years that he played every day, every day, every day, none of that went into pension. So because of that his musicians' pension is really tiny. But we still take it. My carpenters' pension is pretty good. It's a regular union. But the musicians union was a regular union too, but --*

*Fran: There are guys that are making a lot of money, though, that are on pension, musicians.*

Yeah, because they lasted after the thing took place.

**After that change.**

Yes. And then I was pretty much out of music by then. I still worked occasionally but not every night full-time stuff.

**Do you have any regrets?**

No. I regret the fact that there's no more jobs. Other than that, no. I had a very nice life.

**So where are some of the places that you lived in Las Vegas. After the apartments behind the Desert Inn, what other areas did you live?**

Let's see. I lived in a trailer court for a couple of years. It was way north of town by the temple there.

*Fran: Sunrise Mountain.*

Yeah, Sunrise Mountain. Then my first house was near Eastern and Sahara kind of, about a block from that.

*Fran: It was right across from the Jaycee Park there on St. Louis.*

Yeah, East St. Louis. I lived there for quite a few years.

**This city has grown rapidly since 1962.**

I'll say.

**Have you had a chance to see the upper northwest?**

We have friends there. Once in a while we drive up there. It's unreal.

**Yes, it is.**

It's pretty unreal here, too. You can go way south and west. There's new towns there kind of almost.

**Yeah. Amazing.**

Yep.

*Fran: This area right here, when I moved here, well, long after I moved here was just desert.*

**What do you mean after you moved here?**

*Fran: Well, I mean after I moved to town.*

To Las Vegas.

**I see. Yes. Fran, when did you move to Las Vegas?**

*Fran: Seventy-four.*

**Okay. Some people still tell me they remember where the desert started, you know, that last street and that the west was desert.**

*Fran: Hoot, didn't you tell me that -- what street wasn't paved? Was it Sunset that wasn't paved?*

Tropicana wasn't paved.

*Fran: Tropicana wasn't paved.*

**Can you imagine? People tell me when we did interviews about UNLV, you know, Maryland Parkway in that area wasn't paved.**

Yes.

*Fran: Tell her the story about Debbie and what you used to do with the tandem bikes because that's important to UNLV history.*

Okay. I belonged to a bike club when I was active in the bicycling thing. So one of our projects was -- those of us who had tandem bikes, you know, bicycle built for two, to ride a blind person. So I was assigned this really cute girl named Debbie. Debbie Anderson I think her last name was. But we rode around a lot and got to be good friends. She was killed in front of UNLV [on Maryland Parkway] several years ago with her seeing-eye dog. That was a shock. But she was a really nice lady.

*Fran: That's when they put all those crosswalks and stuff up was after she was killed.*

**That's right. And now they're thinking about even slowing the traffic more in that area. They're thinking about redoing that whole area before the economy changed, which it's probably still on the drawing boards now, but to make that a really pedestrian friendly area in there where UNLV is located.**

I don't know how they could do that because kids cross the street all the time.

*Fran: They talked about actually diverting all the traffic from Maryland Parkway.*

**I don't know if that would be possible. But I think they're going to do something additional to what they've done.**

I think Debbie's last name was Anderson.

**People still talk about that accident.**

*That was really when they put those first crosswalks up there. I mean there were probably painted things, but that was when there was a big push and a lot of demonstrations.*

**And 30-mile-an-hour signs and the flashing lights and all of that.**

**Well, Hoot, thank you so much.**

My pleasure.

**You told me a couple of things that we didn't know about. And I really appreciate this.**

Well, good.

**Any other comments, Fran? Okay. Thank you.**

**So, Hoot, as soon as I turned the recorder off, you started talking about playing in churches here in town. How did that start?**

Well, I was in a brass group. So we'd play Christmas and Easter music, brass music, Christmas carols and stuff for the church. We went to quite a few churches to do that. Church of Religious Science was one of the ones I played with a lot because they liked the brass music I guess at that time, not anymore. My ex-wife was the organist there. So it was kind of a family affair. The kids went to Sunday school and all that.

**So how did you get the brass quartet together?**

I didn't get it together. Someone else did. They asked me to play in it.

**I see. So what were some of the other churches where you would play?**

Well, we didn't do it steadily like at Religious Science Church.

You said some of the other ones.

*Fran: Always Christmas concerts at the Adventist Church. St. Francis, you sometimes played services there.*

What's that big Christian church?

*Fran: Central Christian. That Episcopal Church over on Maryland Parkway you've played in. University?*

I guess. I don't know the name of it.

*Fran: No. The one that's over like Oakey and Maryland Parkway. I don't know the name of it. But really a lot of places that when they would require instrumental music he gets calls about that. He still does that.*

They were out of a choir director at the Religious Science Church. I have a degree in music education. So I was qualified. So I took the job. I did that for about ten years I guess.

**When was that? Back when?**

*Fran: It was in the 80s you started and did it off and on until 2000.*

Yes, till what's his name came in that's the current.

*Fran: Doug Foglesong [minister].*

Doug. I was out of it by the time Doug came in.

*No, you weren't.*

I did it a little bit when Doug came. But he had a different idea of religious music than I did I guess. I had collected all these music, a whole filing cabinet full of music. And he didn't like any of it. So it was a new way -- what do you call it?

**New thought.**

New thought, yeah, of music.

**How well did you know Pier Marini who played piano at First Church of Religious Science?**

Oh, he was the piano player when I was the choir director. So I knew him pretty well.

**Okay. And so then Jim Hodge, all of you were there at the same time?**

Oh, yeah.

*Fran: Hoot was actually there before Hodge. Pierre's only been there -- I mean I was there before Pierre.*

I'm the oldest member. I mean the longest member.

**Really?**

Yeah.

**Fantastic. Do people know that?**

No.

**Why don't you tell somebody?**

Who cares? They don't care.

**I do. I think that's great.**

I guess I've been there 45 years or something like that. It was the only church I really went to. When I first went to it I thought this is for me. I mean it's a whole different thing. I grew up as a Lutheran and that was fine. But Religious Science was a brain-opener.

**Yes. I feel the same way.**

**So, okay, I'm going to turn the recorder off again. Now, is there anything else?**

As soon as you turn it off, we'll think of something.

**So, Fran, did you go over there to look for something special?**

*Fran: I'm trying to think. The other thing is at church even he did stuff with Buddy Greco and Ruth Brown. Joe Williams was around kind of toward the end of that. Did Pierre ever do*



*anything with Joe?*

No. We never did. I offered, but it never happened.

**Okay. So tell me some of the soloists at church that played with you when you were choir director.**

Well, she mentioned the most famous ones I guess.

**So could you say those names again because I'm not sure that Fran's words are going to pick up for the transcriber? So Ruth Brown.**

Yeah. She didn't do much with us, though.

*Yes, she did. She sang with us.*

Yes.

**And Buddy Greco.**

Yeah.

*Fran: And his wife, Leslie Anders. I can't really think of any more.*

We didn't have too many famous people.

**Okay. People that you remember.**

Well, it was mostly just church members. They were good and everything but not notable.

**Well, I think that we have some great voices in the church.**

Yes.

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*Airmen of Note*, 2  
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Anders, Leslie, 28

**B**  
Bennett, Tony, 6  
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**C**  
CSN(College of Southern Nevada), 7

**D**  
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**H**  
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**J**  
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**M**  
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**P**  
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**S**  
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Seventy-six Plus Four concert, 7  
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union, 5, 11, 16, 19, 23  
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**V**  
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**W**  
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Williams, Joe, 27