

**An
Oral History
Interview
with
Kerin Scianna
Rodgers**

1998

**Las Vegas Gay Archives
Oral History Project Interview
with
Kerin Scianna Rodgers**

**conducted by
Dennis McBride
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This is Dennis McBride and I'm sitting with Kerin Rodgers in her living room in Las Vegas and we're going to talk about a few things I have listed and a few things I don't know that she's going to enlighten me about.

The first thing I want to know is when you did you come to Las Vegas?

1966. August 17. It was hot!

You remember the exact date!

Oh, yes! We drove across the desert from Los Angeles, my daughter, my cat, Mocha, and myself. And I thought the car was overheating [at] about Barstow and I kept getting out to see what was wrong because even outside the car was heating up the air. But it didn't register hot. Well, anyhow.

I couldn't believe ... I thought there was something wrong. But anyhow, I came in off the old Las Vegas highway and driving down I keep looking for the Broadway

Department Store.¹ And I had cut over some place or other, at Tropicana, I guess to Paradise, and I'm still looking and thinking, "Why would my company put a department store in the middle of nowhere? Who in the world's gonna go to it? Nobody's ever gonna come out here in the middle of the desert to go to a department store." I mean, I was just appalled. And of course it was just a bare frame building. It was in the process of being built and I was here to train the people.

Is that what brought you up here, then?

What people? Who am I gonna get [to work there]? Down the other end of the desert was Sears and Roebuck and that was built and in between was empty.

That was the Boulevard Mall.

Yes. To be.

Did they send you up here to live or just to get the store up and running?

They sent me to get the store up and running. They put me up—and my daughter, Leslie, and my cat, Mocha—at the La Concha [Motel].² Which still stands. And it was kind of a snazzy little small motel at the time. That and the El Morocco next door. I don't know which one had the beauty salon with what's-his-name, Mario. He's still around. *Marion!* Tony Marion and his brother, Mario!³ They're still big shots with the Italian-American Club and they're in everything. Anyhow, they had the beauty salon. And then the fellow that had the beef house with the best prime rib in Las Vegas. The Copper Cart.

Jack Denison?

That's right. So there I was staying there and next door was the wonderful Riviera [Hotel] with Shecky Greene appearing nightly. And so I lived there. Found a lovely maid that took care of the cat during the day—we could do things like that then.

What was it that you did for Broadway?

Well, I came up as their training director. I'd been training director for several Broadway stores at the time. And also which included being their fashion coordinator, so before we hired Colleen Schroeder—and there were two before her—I was doing it as well as the training. So I got to do the opening fashion shows. We did one at the Tropicana with Sam Butera playing. A fundraiser for St. Anne's [Catholic] School. We did some wonderful fashion shows. I had some fun.

So anyhow I came up here as training director. I had already owned a dress shop and done some interior design in California. Actually, in California I had more of a career than I've had here.

How long had you been in California before you came here?

I guess about eight years, but, I mean, they were young, *busy* years. I did lots there.

Were you familiar with Las Vegas before?

Never had been here before. Yeah. But I'd heard a lot about it. I worked as head of the Social and Cultural Department for LA County Parks and Recreation, Theatre Arts Division, so I produced and directed plays. Shakespeare Festival Players.

Your background was in the arts, then?

Always in the arts, yeah. Design arts, theatre, set design, radio. But I was in radio when I was eight years old.

Eight?

Um, hm. In Boston.

As what?

[sings] *Cream of Wheat is so good to eat ... ! The Little Bear Club.*

Were you the star or just part of it?

Part of it.

What kind of opportunities did you find in Las Vegas when you first got here to express this arts background that you'd worked so hard at in Los Angeles?

None! I applied at the City of Las Vegas and [Clark] County to conduct children's theatre [for] free. Free or paid something, you know, like after work or Saturdays or something like that. I applied and they said, well, I'd have to take the test. They wouldn't just take my services like later the Community College did and that kind of thing. But, no, they had to do all this stuff. Anyhow, they gave me a test that was like how many square feet on a basketball court and how many ping pong balls to play the game and how do you repair racquets for the tennis courts. Basketball, ping pong, tennis, swimming—all these stupid questions! They weren't stupid if you were in an athletic department, but I'm *not*. I was social/cultural which they didn't know. They didn't have a department called Social/Cultural. And then I said, "Well, how about Theatre Arts? They called me a Theatre Arts Specialist in Los Angeles." No, they didn't have that. And I said, "Well, I just want to . . . I've got about 50 children's plays here, some of which I have written or people I've worked with have written. Including Shakespeare. I have a children's version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that would be just adorable to do." And I think I had a children's *As You Like It*, I'm not sure. *Little children*.

Anyway, long story short, I took the test, I flunked it, they didn't want me. And that was the end of my endeavors because I was busy with the Broadway, I was busy with Focus. Just about then I got so involved with Focus Youth Services for runaway and troubled children in the [19]60s and '70s. I already had a friendship with Flora Dungan—Humanities Building [at UNLV] now.⁴ Eileen Brookman, still see her all the time. And Edith Katz and Leola Armstrong. All of whom I'd met in the legislature in '61 when I was doing some other stuff in Nevada [but] living in Los Angeles. And so I knew them when I got here. Matter of fact, my first day in town The night the Broadway had its grand opening was also the same night that Leola Armstrong had her big party for Grant Sawyer running for governor. It was October something. The election was to be in November a few days later. And everybody I still know and love were there. Everybody was there. Everybody that's still important but they're old now, was there.

Anyhow, so that's how I got to Las Vegas. And that's how I had instant acceptance in the political community.

Juice?

Well, we didn't call it that and I worked my fingers to the bone, so I'm not sure if it was juice in terms of I didn't run around getting comps and going to shows and that kind of thing. In that respect it wasn't [juice]. I was involved with Focus. I got very involved with Focus's program working there on a daily basis, in other words, doing group things with the kids and stuff like that.

Is Focus an acronym?

No. *Focus*. It was like focusing on the problems of the young people. In the '60s and '70s the problems of the young people—run-away, throw-away kids, kids with no alternatives. Matter of fact we called them Throw-Away Kids With No Alternatives. That was one of our grants. There weren't many grants around. There were no terms like *grantsmanship* and so forth. But there was some grant money for kids. So it was a youth hostel, actually.

Was that a problem in Las Vegas to the degree it is today? Has it always been?

Today the problems are so different. There's no need for a Focus. There's need for other things. Our kids were messed up with marijuana and stuff but mainly it's because they had no place to go. They were living on the streets. Hippie-ish style and so forth. Some of 'em had homes and families here but they were out of control kids and so forth. But these were kids that were really searching for something *positive*. Not kids that were searching to hold up the Valley Bank.

What was it that Focus provided them?

Focus was modeled after Synanon.⁵ And the founder ... Well, Flora Dungan was probably the founder, but the founder, Ray ben David, was a Synanon person. And he married Flora Dungan and they started the program and they started with games. Synanon did games and Focus started with games in Flora Dungan's living room. And people like Herman Van Betten. I could name people all over town—

Darlene and [John] Unrue. They came once in awhile. Ron Jack—he's left town now. Who was on the board? Well, my today best friend Steve Evans, Judge Evans over at the State—he doesn't go by Judge, but anyhow, he's administrative law judge for the state—he was one of our kid counselors. I still see him. And Leola Armstrong and Bryn [Armstrong]. Bryn was on the board. Edith Katz was very, very involved. Moreso not working with the kids, so much, as helping find the money and helping find the house that we opened.

Was it a halfway house?

No, nobody lived there. Well, we did have kids live there sometimes. We did. The runaways lived there short term until we could arrange to get 'em either back home or somewhere [else]. We knew more than the authorities did At that time, most kids that ran away, and perhaps today, too, *should* have. Running away from incest, running away from worse situations than they found down on the street. Now, there will be people that differ with me, but I'm telling you frequently when young people run away that's the *right* decision. They made a better decision than whoever was at home.

Was Focus founded while you were here or was it going before you got here?

I think the games in Flora's living room were going when I got here. But, of course, I'd been involved with Synanon in Los Angeles. That's how I met all these people.

What, then, did you do specifically for Focus?

Everything from looking for a house with Edith [Katz] and getting the Petersens to fund it to running games with the kids. There is no game director. Participating in games [is] a free for all. It's group therapy without a leader.

What sort of games?

That's what a game *is*—group therapy without a leader. It's usually attack therapy. It's attack therapy.

What does that mean?

[*moves closer*] "Where the hell have you been? You're late every single time. Look at yourself! Do you realize that you're never on time, ever? That you have no sense of responsibility, ever?" And it's overdone. To the point where I'm being very polite. But overdone and usually about subjects way deeper than whether or not you're late or something. And you have to defend yourself.

How successful were you in turning kids around?

Very. Better than anything I've ever seen before or since. I believe in the Focus concept of opening people's eyes with the truth. Then it's followed immediately by love. In those days loving and hugging and the circle of love [*gestures an embrace*] and all that. Yeah, you don't drop somebody in the toilet and then leave them there. You pull them up and help them in the right direction. Help them to see themselves.

Was Focus an organization particular to Las Vegas or was it a national program?

Oh, no. It was particular to [Las Vegas]. But Synanon became somewhat national and other programs Chuck Dietrich was the founder of *all* such programs. There are people in AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] who will differ because AA was already started and he had been with AA. AA is a totally different program and it's wonderful for those people who need it and go to it and so forth. But the concept of Synanon and then Focus was based on a different concept. Harder. Deeper. Most of those other programs you talk about yourself and you spill your own things, but nobody can attack you for lying about it. This It was our *duty* to attack them. Call them a liar even if they weren't and see how you do, how you hold up. Strong. It developed strong, strong To this day, many of us A youngster came into town not long ago to visit Steve [Evans] and Steve said, "Kerin lives up on the hill."

"Oh! I gotta go see her!"

You know. And I was one of the old ladies. Great kinship. Of course, many organizations develop great kinship. Strength of character. But mostly guidance in showing people a way to live their lives without the crutches. And self-esteem, I

suppose. And there's all kinds of ways. I wouldn't put down anybody else's way, but that was the Focus way and it was very successful.

How long did Focus last?

Well, until the era of that kind of problems was over. So I would say the '60s through the '70s. Now, the board even existed into the '80s. Matter of fact, Reneé Diamond and Myrna Williams still There's still a board and they're still on it. Edith Katz dropped off, Earl White, Zack Taylor died. Mahlon Brown. We all dropped off. But they've still got hundreds of thousands of dollars of Focus money that they won't give up to some organization.

Is it just sitting in a bank?

Yeah. And up to this day I don't know why Myrna Williams is not willing to part with that money unless she's waiting to grandstand it.

Is it still called Focus?

Well, the board is but there's no organization. There's no house. It's just money in an account that needs to be given to someone.

You were also deeply involved in the politics of southern Nevada. You'd worked on Jimmy Carter's campaign and Mike O'Callaghan's campaign.

Oh, yeah. Well, that was much later.

Flora [Dungan] and Leola [Armstrong] forced me into politics.

How?

Well, first of all I met them in politics because I was lobbying for Synanon in the [Nevada] legislature in '61 when I met them all. And I ran a successful lobby for a young person so they were relatively impressed. I was in the newspapers up there, *Gazette*, or whatever it was, several times. So they already perceived [my political talents] and they knew I had been in radio and television in Boston and Seattle. So they knew a little bit about me and I owned a dress shop, I ran theatre. So they

knew I was a get-something-done kind of person. What did Queen Anne say? "The lady who fixes things and makes things happen." So, I suppose that's what they thought, that I was somebody who fixes things and makes things happen. Amongst others. There were others, too.

At any rate. So in the '70s my political activities were lobbying and going to city hall and all that for Focus. And then Flora ran for the [University] Board of Regents. And I was her campaign manager. Well, I took it seriously. She kind of made me that title. She really meant campaign *flunky*. However, I took it seriously, got her elected. I talked to her and I said, "We're gonna do this campaign on our bicycles."

"No, don't be silly."

I said, "For the University Board of Regents, the Candidate On a Bicycle? *Fabulous!*" I said sure it wouldn't work for the assembly or the other things—she had already served in the assembly and so forth. But for the Board of Regents in a town where you can ride a bicycle to the university? [*smiles, laughs*] Regent On a Bike—and did very well.

And it was during the time that she was on the Board [of Regents] that she was diagnosed with cancer. And I was with her through that as were many. When she went down to California to stay in a nearby hotel to the Century City Medical Center which at the time was the only nuclear medicine that was being done nearby, I went down and I lived with her down there during [her treatments]. She'd say some funny things. We'd be driving to her treatments and she'd say, "Boy, what an interesting experience this cancer is. Just the most *interesting*. Look at all the equipment, so fascinating—*but who needs it!?*" [*laughs*]

And then, of course, Flora passed away and her term wasn't up and I ran for the unexpired term. I beat five men in the primary: Cantor Cohen, Larry Luna Oh, a gumshoe, I forget his name.

What was your platform?

Well, it was really Flora's platform, except I had a couple of ideas of my own. I wanted a law library. And I wanted a 24-hour school that was a 24-hour school in a 24-hour town. Now, in those days we claimed to be a 24-hour town and sort of were. We're not anymore, let's face it. You can't go out for steak and lobster and go dancing and leave the house at midnight anymore. But we did. We *did*. Leaving at midnight was a typical time to go out on the town. We'd have dinner, go dancing,

da-da, get home at four in the morning. This was true. And I felt that those rooms [at UNLV] We paid the heat, we paid the rent, we paid the water—have some late-night classes for the working people. I don't mean six o'clock at night. I mean classes that start at nine and get over at eleven-thirty or so. And, see, we didn't have fear of walking around campus. People weren't getting raped and mugged all over the place. The crimes were different crimes. They were hippie crimes. They were marijuana crimes, but not speed and acid crimes. People weren't killing each other. We still kept our doors open or we forgot to lock them. Right up through about 1980.

Were you involved still with the Boulevard [Department Store] all through all this time?

All through that time, no. I left the Broadway in 1972 and went to Larwin Homes which is Tiburon and Montara Estates and I was the designer for them. I designed the interiors. First I did the models and the interiors. Anyhow, I did that. Made good money and I was married at the time to Paolo Scianna. He showed no interest in my activities and no more needs to be said on that. But I was married when I bought this house [1500 S. Seventh Street].

[*laughs*] I had a big check coming from Larwin, a \$9,000 commission check. It was late, it was late, it was late. Now, I owned an apartment house that I had already when I married Paolo down in Huntridge, one of those triplexes.

Was Paolo a second marriage for you?

Yes.

When was it then, that you first became involved in opening [Gipsy]?⁶

I never *became* involved in it! I didn't know it existed!

What is the story about it?

Well, OK. Moving right along, let me just move fast here. [*ponders*] The house. Larwin.

OK, well then. So I had this \$9,000 check and the deposit on this house was \$10,000. This house wasn't for sale but I wanted it and we found it on our bicycles. One thing Paolo and I and Flora did together, we rode our bicycles all over this neighborhood all the time. I just sold my Schwinn bicycle, same bike, at a garage sale last week for \$40. I loved that bike but now with my back and all, I figured well But anyhow, the house. Larwin. Flora had died by now. Board of Regents was over. By now I'm president of the Clark County Democratic Women's Club. And then Harriet Trudell wanted to leave [the] governor's office—this was '76 or so [1979-81]—to go to work for Harry Reid and she told [the] governor to hire me. Well, that was OK with him. But they sent Chris Schaller.⁷ You don't know the name, but I'm telling you Chris Schaller worked for Grant Sawyer. He worked for every governor back before Grant Sawyer as their press. He was the brains behind all the governors. Chris Schaller. A very famous name in inside circles. But he drank and he smoked and he had bad habits. But he was *brilliant* and they kind of kept him quiet. Just stay there and be brilliant. Well, anyhow, he came in to do the final interview with me for the governor's office. I picked him up in my then new Volvo and I put Mozart in the tape recorder, you know, put one of my Mozart tapes in and I'm waitin' outside [the airport]. And he comes out—he told me not to go to the gate—'course, it was called McCarran then and it was just one fell swoop across here. I knew it was him right away [because] he *looked* like a governor's aide. Gets in the car and we're driving down to the state building which became my office and he said, "You know why I'm here?" [*mimics a loud, gruff voice*]

And I said. "Well, yes, I know I'm being considered for the administrative assistant job in the governor's office."

"*Knock off the crap!*" he says to me. Now, he knows I'm a friend of Harriet's and probably figures I don't get ruffled that easily, but I'm from *Boston*, so I *do*. So, "Knock off the crap! You got the job. I just want to know how much of a pain in the neck you're gonna be."

I said, "Well, probably some."

He said, "Well, I guess anybody that plays Mozart in a Volvo can't be all bad. When do ya start?"

That was it! From Harriet to governor, from governor, Chris, from a Volvo ride to the office. By the time we got to the office it was *my* office.

What was your title?

Special Assistant to the governor.

That sounds like ...

It's an appointed job instead of hired, so that's why you're special. Because if they call you administrative assistant, of which there really isn't, then it's a state job and you have to kind of answer to the state before the governor. You serve at the pleasure of the governor. Which wasn't always a pleasure, but Wonderful stories. I could go on and on and on! If Gayle Wiener were here—she was my secretary and she's still my dear friend—if she were here right now Oh, even better! A few weeks ago Harriet Trudell was in town and Myram Borders came over and the three of us sat on the back porch—I served a nice breakfast, one of my gorgeous breakfasts—and the three of us sat there from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon telling stories to each other and reminding each other of stories. Of course, we had to keep jumping in because we all knew the same stories. But still, you all have your different perspective[s] on a story. Plus Myram and I were keeping Harriet up to date with some things going on with the [Las Vegas city] council and Steve Wynn and Yvonne [Atkinson] Gates and Myrna Williams and the people who aren't who they *used* to be We know what we mean.

And then I always have [Ralph] Denton stories because I'm close with a *different* circle. Jim Shetakis is my close friend and his attorney is Ralph Denton. But Ralph Denton was my attorney forever, too. So we always feel comfortable in shooting the breeze so to speak. And *nobody* shoots the breeze quite like Ralph Denton. There is no story teller better than Ralph, at least, politically. A lot of 'em are good, but he's good. He's *good*! And that voice. Not afraid to kind of ruffle a few feathers but not a mean bone in his body, none of it mean. But certainly not sugar-coated. Doesn't sugar-coat anything. I'm told I tend to, but if so, it's just who I am. I don't set out to do so. I don't know. I just got read the riot act last night: "Who do you think you are? Mother Superior?" I said, "Well, it's just the way I feel." I guess it goes like this. If you decide to help somebody then you're not supposed to complain about it. Well, that isn't the way it really is. You do decide to help 'em and you do it, but you wanna complain. Just because you're doing it and just because you think you should be doing it doesn't mean you enjoy doing it.

The governor that you were hired by was O'Callaghan?

Um, hm.

Did you just work for O'Callaghan or did you make the switch over to [Governor Robert List]?

Oh, no, never switched.

Now, however, while I was in that office I was appointed to the Kennedy Center of the Performing Arts.

Appointed as what?

A White House Commissioner by the President of the United States. There were only three White House Commissioners from the state of Nevada serving in any capacity. Mahlon Brown was appointed by President Carter to serve as Federal Attorney. Ruby Duncan was appointed as a commissioner representative to Russia for some special kind of White House ambassadorial kind of thing. Not ambassador, but Anyhow. But hers was a commission. And I was appointed as a commissioner for the performing arts.

What did your job as a commissioner involve?

Well, it was on the Kennedy Center so my meetings and everything I did were at the Kennedy Center.

You had to fly back there [to Washington D. C.]?

Well, of course! And people like Roger Stevens was chairman of the board. Eunice Shriver was involved. Paul Simon—not this Paul Simon [the singer] but *this* Paul Simon [*gestures wearing a bow tie*]. Wonderful, wonderful [*man*]. Really had his finger on the pulse of the people in the arts. Then there was a kid, I forget his name, from Idaho. He was another one from the western states. And he and I and some of the others got together and we decided we were gonna be rebels on this committee because at that time the Kennedy Center was just for people in Washington. Now, here's a national theatre. It's our *only* national theatre. People

think the Ford Theatre is the national theatre. It was a state theatre at one time back in Lincoln's day, but the Kennedy Center's the national theatre. And my speech with the help of four or five other rebels that helped me off the ground was that the Kennedy Center is viewed by Americans as a marvelous place for rich Washingtonians to go to the theatre. Period. And I said, you know, until we bring the Kennedy Center to the communities with the black theatre, with the college festival theatre, with the handicapped theatre—which we sent our young [Brian] Strom there to do the handicapped presentation. Anyhow, we got it on and through our efforts—I didn't *start* the efforts but I participated in the activity that through our efforts we were able to bring the Kennedy Center to the states rather than expect you to go to the Kennedy Center when you're in Washington. You know, I suppose at one time in the history of this country every American was expected at some time or another to go to Washington and visit. And we *did*, those of us in the East. You know, part of a school trip when I was a child in Boston was to go to Washington and see the White House. But that doesn't happen with the people west of Chicago. Doesn't happen. Or south of St. Louis. Or Cleveland, you know. I'm not sure those kind of field trips are happening at *all*. From *New Jersey*, I don't know, because of all the problems with insurance and everything now. You can't take a kid across the street without somebody getting sued. Or without somebody getting accused of sexual harassment You know. Who wants to do *anything* with kids? Not me. I wouldn't take a group of kids on a trip of *any* kind. I'd figure my life was over. But we used to not have those kinds of problems. Anyhow.

So the Kennedy Center was an enormously interesting project.

And all this time I had my show on Channel 5.

What show was that?

The People Speak. Through all of this I had my show. And through all of this I had my interior design firm.⁸ From the day I left Larwin I started with Carl Thomas⁹ decorating the Bingo Palace¹⁰ and then the Aladdin gift stores and in the Meadows Mall when they built that and private homes of Senator [Bill] Hernstadt, Carl Thomas.

Bill Hernstadt owned Channel 5.

Yeah.

So I had my government things, my interior design things, my political things—which are different than my government things—and my television stuff.

Is that overextending a little bit?

It wasn't at the time. I did them all.

Oh! And all that time nationally I was the chairman of the delegate selection rules for the state of Nevada Democratic Party. And that's when Terry Sanford, Barbara McCloskey and all these important people were doing this thing called *The Common Thread* which was a way of getting all the delegate selection rules for all the states to be uniform. And the way we select our president and our delegates and all that to conventions, more or less uniform even though the laws and rules in each state were different. So our job was to take our existing laws and all that and write delegate selection rules. For instance—I won't go into detail, [it's] very complicated to the point that even today people call me how to run a precinct meeting from Washington and places. Grant [Sawyer] used to call me [and ask], "Now what do you do, how do you divide up this ... ?"

I said, "Well, this is it. You elect three people from the small counties, three people from Reno, and three people from Las Vegas and then after the primary vote for the president gets in the top vote-getters from each area are the ones that will represent" You know. And I had a formula. I won't go into detail, there's no reason to. It was kind of complicated, but it worked. And I remember that Democratic convention, there were about 500 people, we were in Elko, and I was explaining the delegate [selection process] And everybody was sure everybody else was out to screw them out of getting to be delegate and I said, "Look. Please listen and trust me." And they *did!* Of course, that's before *trust me* became such a

It has different connotations now.

[laughs] Yeah!

At any rate, so [I] did the delegate selection rules [in] '76. '78 the Kennedy Center. '79, ran the [Jimmy] Carter campaign for the state of Nevada. Oh, before that in '79 [I] ran the fundraiser for the United States Olympic Committee for the Olympics that never happened because Carter canceled the Olympics in Russia.

Every garage sale I throw away posters that say *Olympics 1980 Russia*. Moscow. It may be collector's items but I don't care. They're gone. You can't keep everything from everything. So early '79 was the Olympics Committee and then later was the Carter campaign. *And* I was packed up and ready to move to Washington D. C. with Carter. I had no idea anybody in their right mind would ever vote for Ronald Reagan.¹¹

I still don't believe it.

Me, *too!*

So, anyhow, Carter didn't win. We *did* do a hell of a job. We brought the rate from 17% projection to 37% of the vote in the state of Nevada due to a wonderful campaign we had for Carter. We did a good job but not good enough and Carter lost and that was a sad thing for the country and *still* is.

But couple of days after that, I'm down in the dumps, after I sobered up. Went with Zack [Taylor] and Frank [Shreck] and so forth that night up to Reno for dinner on the private plane, but I was smashed by the time I got there. Champagne. Just depression, you know, and so forth. So I came home and who's at my front door like two days later—still November, so it's not December yet, it's still November something—but Marge Jacques.¹²

Now, had you known her before?

Well, I didn't know that I did but I had. Marge Jacques' mother was Flora Dungan's seamstress. And Edith Katz's seamstress. And some of the ladies around. She did nice sewing. They lived over here on Thirteenth and Bonanza. Or maybe Fourteenth. But over there in those small, not pretentious houses. They were from Quebec, Ontario, something like this, the Jacques family. And they had this daughter, Marge, who was there once in awhile when I'd go over. Well, she knew all about me. I didn't really know I knew her. She acted like she knew me—but she had a *mission*.

A mission?

God, did she have a mission! I was her old best friend and I fell for it. I'm down in the dumps and all. "Kerin! God, you've meant so much to the community!" Oh, God, she was good. *Good!* She was good.

Anyhow, she had this bar called the Village Station.¹³ Now, she had already closed The Black Magic had already become the Le Café¹⁴ and had already been closed. And now she's at the Village Station and George Adamian owns the property and Marge ran the Village Station. She owned nothing but she called herself the owner for George because George was from California and so he couldn't be an on-site owner/manager. Technical problems.

Well, she did that Halloween party [with] Sammy Davis, all these people. But the newspaper stories read, like, "Fairies Flitting," "Nude Nymphs Flit Through the Parking Lot," and everything. Well, anyhow, the media hit it hard that they had all these I say *gay* but that's not the words they used. All these faggots running around half nude smoking marijuana, *luring* youngsters. I mean, just horrible exaggeration. Now, we're talking about Halloween and people in costume, dressed outrageously and then they [the media] took pictures. But they showed it a few days later, the party at the Village Station. It was *Halloween!* And most of those costumes that looked nude were designed by guys like Michael Darrin and I'll say Bob Mackie, but maybe not. But *maybe*.

Or that type.

Yeah! Award-winning things that maybe looked nude but they were maybe just skin [color].

So the media went after the Village Station.

Oh, it was just horrible. And so Marge came and told me about all this and then introduced me to George Adamian who owned the property. I was young and skinny [and he] had kind of a crush on me. Took me out to dinner, flew me down to Los Angeles, went to the top of the You know, Escoffier, you know. Well, partly it was he wanted me to take this club off his hands.

How did he mean take it?

Buy it. Take it. He couldn't get licensed, period. We don't license off-premises people. It's a privilege investigation, *da-da-da-da-da*. And he couldn't pretend he was gonna live here, he didn't have a house here, he's got a family, you know. He owned 27 Texaco stations and all th[e]se flower shops. Why he bought this—he wanted a little club in Las Vegas, 'cause, like, millionaires get like that. Good lookin', nice guy, actually. Armenian. He was very intelligent but not a wheeler dealer. Maybe a wheeler dealer in business but not in Las Vegas terms. Not in Las Vegas terms. Different kind of wheeler dealer. *They* wanted to think of him as some kind of a hood. He wasn't. He was just a millionaire business man that knew good investments and *da-da-da*, and thought this would be a fun thing.

Well, then, meanwhile, downtown wasn't going to give Marge a license. They blamed her. As a matter of fact contingent on *my* license, some of the things she still doesn't know. Because when we parted She still doesn't know today. Contingent on giving me my license—and what I went through to get that place open was *hell!* And *because* of the opening of it the Garage¹⁵ and all those other places got to stay open, too. It was down to I shouldn't be the one talking about this because it sounds self-serving. It was down to "Are there gonna be bars for the gay and entertain[ment] crowd in Las Vegas or are there not?" And *that* was my fight. It wasn't a fight just to get Gipsy open. It was a fight for the gay community. And I didn't ever call it the gay community because at the time I called it the show business community because that really was what I was talking about. It wasn't just gay people. It was people that worked in the casinos and in the shows that got off at two in the morning [who] wanted to go out and have fun. They have given their art, their talent, their costumes, their dancing, their singing, or their cocktail serving to the community, for our tourists all week and all night. And now what we're saying in essence is Everybody else that gets off at 5 and 6 gets to go out for a drink, go gambling, go to a show. But the people [who] are providing that entertainment for us, there's no place for them to go.

What was the problem with the county?

It's not just the county. [It's] the county, the city, and the state. There's a state law that says—and it's still on the books—that no business shall solicit the business of anybody who is homosexual, prostitute, hoodlum We called it the 4 Hs, even though, not spelled right. Homosexual, hooker, hoodlum There was another H.¹⁶

Was the county getting ready to close these other places?

They *had* closed it [Village Station]. It was closed!

There were other places still open, though. Were they going to close them?

They were closing the Garage and the Village Station was closed. And [David] Canter Mostly they wanted to get rid of all of them. Period. They wanted to push that law to the wall. I called people like Harry Claiborne. I had some good people helping me. Zack Taylor, bless his heart. Other people that were helping me. I'd run a respectable business. I didn't want to just cater only to homosexuals, which I didn't. But any people that wanted to come and have fun and dance. But the thing is I didn't want to *discourage*. In other words, I wanted to keep it a place where the gay crowd could dance with each other if they wanted to. Which you couldn't [do] at the Brewery. So I had to be honest about it. Yeah. In other words, it's not only for gay people but it's not for people who are going to *object* to the gay people. Making it, let's say, 75%. But it was never more than 75% actually. There were showgirls. I mean, some nights Howard Cannon and Zack Taylor would come in to see me, or Bill Hernstadt and his wife. All kinds of people came in there. And the celebrities galore! They didn't care if it was gay, straight. In those days—and you still hear people say, "Oh, if I really wanted to go out dancing I'd go to a gay disco." And people say that even in other states because the music was always better, the people were always more fun. People didn't stand around saying, "What's your name what sign are you do you want to dance?" You know, it's "Hey, Baby! *Come on!*" And *five* of us'd dance together. "*It's Raining Men* and *Hallelujah!*" So they were fun! Good sound system. Good fun. Good clean fun!

OK. Let's back up just a bit. Marge came to the door with this proposition for you.

Yeah. She wanted me to just get the license for her.

For her.

Yeah.

In your name?

Well, no, not yet. For *her*. She wanted me to use my political pull and pull things for *her*. Well, that was not gonna happen. Period. The end, end, *end!* The same chance of getting O. J. Simpson to be president of the Mormon Church. OK?

So. And they didn't want *those* people, anyhow. The city. But, what with all that was on the books and everything, everybody was still a little careful about discrimination. Not like we are now where politically correct has gotten so awful I *hate* it! I want to go back to discriminaton! [*laughs*] But, at any rate.

However, *those people* included Liberace, Waylon Flowers. Whadda ya say? These people that were guests at the Village Station. Well, anyhow. We got the Gipsy papers drawn up and it took many months of hearings and investigations and my house being ransacked by the Privileged Investigation Bureau. A terrible thing.

What do you mean ransacked? What were they looking for?

Burglarized. Ransacked.

You're sure it was them?

Absolutely, 100% positive. They took nothing. What kind of burglar'd break in and tear your house apart and not take anything but take all your switchplates off and all your vents off?

What were they looking for?

Evidence that I was some kind of front for Carl Thomas. 'Cause I did all his design work. Well, that's what I'm pretty sure I think. But any rate I did go to my attorney Frank Schreck at the time and [*said*], "Ohh! They broke into my house they took me to the bank, they ransacked my safety deposit box." *Da-da-da-da*. I was *scared*.

He said, "If you're wrong about that break-in you better just say nothing. And if you're *right* you better *just say nothing!*"

"Oh," says I. So we erased that and I got my license.

Oh, and one more thing happened. [Two men] with PIB [Privileged Investigation Bureau] had called me. Now, I had an old I've always had trouble with answering machines. I never want to buy one so I always take everybody's old trash because I just can't stand the idea of spending money on shit! And I had the kind that you couldn't tell was recording and recorded your whole conversation. They were discs. If it went on for two hours It was a dictaphone. All those dictaphone jokes? [laughs] Well, I had the dictaphone. So a black guy from PIB called me that morning—his voice was black. And he wanted me to meet him at the Gipsy that afternoon with \$10,000. *Da-da-da-da*.

"Meet me there at two o'clock in the afternoon."

So I said, "Well, I'll get a check."

"No, it can't be a check."

So, at any rate, I ran up to Zack Taylor at the bank and I had him issue me a \$10,000 cashier's check. I figured, well, anybody'd take a cashier's check. They said cash, but I figured So, put it in a paper bag just like they said. And then I called Frank [Schreck] and I said, "Well, you better come with me. It's raining. I don't want to be all alone in the Gipsy with these two guys from Metro. Who knows if they're good guys or bad guys. Maybe they're gonna burglarize me." I didn't want to tell him the truth. I knew I was being hit for a bribe 'cause he [Schreck] wouldn't have wanted to be there. Eveybody would run from me.

So now the guys come in and I said, "Oh, I have the \$10,000 you asked me for."

"We didn't ask you for [\$10,000]."

I said, "Oh, yeah, the one that's on my tape recorder. You know."

"No, no. We asked if you could prove you *had* \$10,000 as back-up for ordering."

I said, "No, no. Remember? You said I had to bring it to you and it had to be cash. I figured a cashier's check is all right. It's from Zack Taylor. So when I told him what you guys wanted and who wanted it he said, 'No problem.' He issued it to me right away."

Well, they didn't take the \$10,000. To this day I'm not sure if Frank [Schreck] thinks I made it all up. But I don't care. I wasn't gonna then continue to play the tape and make a thing. I wanted my license. I didn't want to nail the cops. I wanted my *license*! Now I'm into it, see? Months are going on. November, December [1980], January, February, March, April [1981]. Now we're into this whole thing every day of my life for six months. So now I'm in it. I'm *it*! I'm not *in* it, I *am* it! And the sign being decided [upon] and David Lopresti and Bob Sutton making the sign with all those light bulbs and getting to know Jerry [Guerin] from

Gelo's¹⁷ and schmoozing everyone, being delightful. *Da-da-da-da-da* and working myself into the role of Madame Gipsy. So we finally got the license and we got open.

Do you remember when you opened?

Yeah. April Fool's [Day].

'81?

'80. No Oh, yeah, I had it for three years so it was April '81. Had to have been. 'Cause was the election in '80?

Yeah.

The election was in '80. Then it was April 1981.

How did you decide on the name Gipsy?

Well, the funny thing is I'd been called Gipsy myself. And I did Gipsy fortune telling. I don't do that anymore, I'm *against* it. And then the Gipsy dancers. Gipsy, and then Gipsy's. A little bit of both. The straight Gipsy and the gypsy Gipsies. It was kind of a combination of whatever you wanted it to mean. It could mean whatever you wanted.

Did you have to go before the boards in a formal situation?

All the time!

And what kind of questions did they ask you?

Oh, God! Everything from financing and backing and my experience to what kind of clientele. Lot of 'em They asked everybody. And off-site improvements! Oh, God! \$48,000 worth of off-site improvements they hit me with right after they hit me with my license.

What kind of off-site improvements?

Street lights, gutters, sidewalks, curbs, paved parking. None of that area Nobody else had that. Jerry [at Gelo's next door] didn't. The Jungle Club¹⁸ didn't. Nobody else had paved parking lots with curbs and gutters and drainage and fire hydrants and street lights. \$48,000. Now, I will say those same things right now probably would cost a half a million.

Do you feel they were demanding this of you because it was a gay club?

It wasn't a *feeling*, it was an absolute fact. There was no feeling about it. I was told that by many in no uncertain terms. "We don't want people like you around here." And then, by that time I didn't dis-associate *my* you—you was all of us. *You* to me meant anybody that came [to the Gipsy]: gay, straight. *You* was *my* people. 'Course, I didn't know that later I would be undermined by Marge and that the undoing of the Gipsy would be at the hands of Marge. Who could've thought that?

Where did Marge then figure into all this when you got your license?

She put up the money for the first booze order and stuff like that, for which within a month she got paid back. Honest is honest. Maybe two months. She got paid back every cent first. Before anybody got paid anything Marge did. But still, because of that, and because I allowed her to call herself one of the owners because she had the gay following—which she did. But it was a big mistake. You never give anybody a title they don't deserve because it will come back to bite you in the ass. Period. The end. I mean, she thought it was *hers*.

Was she essentially, though, an employee of yours?

She was an employee, yes.

How much did you put into the Gipsy?

We both put in ten [\$10,000]—she got paid back right away, I didn't. Then another forty [\$40,000] from miscellaneous that got paid back, that rotated right away. [*slaps her hands*]

What does that mean, rotated right away?

That was like borrowed and paid back immediately so that it never appeared [as] anything. It just kept it running.

Borrowed from individuals or from institutions?

No, no. No institutions at all were involved. It was on a lick and a promise! [laughs] But because of [Marge] paying [for] the bar [liquor] didn't make her an owner or even an investor. It made her a loaner. But I treated her in every way as if it were hers or we were equal. And we were in terms of the work done and all kinds of things. But the problem was she wanted it for herself and wanted me out of there. And I had already made a solemn promise to the city and the county that she never would [be an owner].

And why were they so [against her]?

Because they felt she burnt down two of her clubs.¹⁹

That she did it herself?

Yes. There was the thing about [not wanting] the gay thing. Then there was the definite, *other* thing against Marge Jacques.

It was a personal thing?

Yeah. And I wasn't against her, but I knew that they had other things on her.

She came with baggage then?

Yeah, big baggage. And they didn't want her running a club [because] they knew that she would be slipshod. Other things. They had charges against her about putting [cheap] booze in bottles from higher-grade booze—which I can tell you she tried to do and probably did behind my [back]. Yeah, the baggage was correct. But also I made a *promise*—and I *live* here—that I would be there every

night except for my nights off and I would not turn over the management or operation entirely to Marge Jacques. She could work there as an employee. And that was contingent on my license. Why would I foul that up? I felt by then that I had an obligation. By now I'm in it and I have an obligation to keep the bar open for the gay community.

Now, don't forget, I had already served on the gay task force for the Democratic Party. I was already known to be a supporter of people's rights. And probably more than a supporter because of my own friends. Of course, I didn't see gay people in the same light as I later did. I do have to say that. I have to admit I was shocked, too. I was used to Larry Luna, Peter Bugle, Don Schmidt, the designer. All my design colleagues—fabulous, wonderful people, charming and intelligent. I wasn't ready for people that were shooting up dope [and] having a blowjob in the men's room. But I'm sure those things happen in all kinds of bars, not just mine. But, I mean, I wasn't ready for some of the stuff. And when I did leave Some of the grossness that goes on in bars, during that time especially, I *hated*. Not that I didn't do my share of everything myself, too. You know, I always had at least one drink too many I'm not a heavy drinker so for me two or three drinks is a lot. And by the third year I was having two or three drinks a night, which was just horrible.

At the hearing for your license, did you have people come to speak in your behalf, in your favor?

Oh, yeah.

Who?

Well, Lloyd Katz. Frank [Schreck]. Earl White just sat there. Sometimes they just sat there. Suzanne Buhner. The auditorium was packed but I'm not sure which ones were all speakers. By then we were into the new city hall. The county commission meetings were held on the first floor in the city hall. It had just opened.

Do you feel that perhaps part of the reason you got your license was because of the people you knew, the connections you had?

Yeah, I do. And partly because of how I lived my life. There was no shred that would have said that I would break the law intentionally or be anything but be upright and reputable. And I would continue to be reputable.

And they tried to find dirt on you.

Um, hm. Every way but upside down, yeah.

What kind of ambiance did you want to create at the Gipsy?

Well, I hadn't even gotten that far. First of all, as it turned out, certainly not the ambiance that got created. Don't forget, I was an interior designer and I didn't have the money to do what I wanted, but I had money to do part of it. Cleaning it up was first. I couldn't afford new carpet. I got all the kids that used to work [there]—Mark Boulevard, Michael Savoia. Those are the two I remained friends with [but] they're both dead now. David Lopresti, but he's in California. We, on our hands and knees, dug up bubble gum and gum and stuff out of the carpet. We cleaned the carpet thread by thread on our hands and knees. And then steam cleaned it. The same with the booths. Immaculate.

Now, Marge had painted all the mirrors all the way around with black paint to do this black light psychedelic stuff. Well, you just don't paint mirrors. It wasn't gorgeous but I had to do the best I could with it as a decorator. And after cleaning the rugs the second thing I did was make sure those mirrors were spotless and beautiful and cleaned every week. And then I put sconces and lighting between the booths. See, it had been a restaurant, remember? It was Via Veneto. It was owned by Robert Goulet and Don Rickles. And I had big paintings of both of 'em in my office that I loaned to this gal, Bonnie, that used to own Déjà Vu dress shop and I'm still looking for her to get my paintings back!

Anyhow, so, we cleaned. Then I had the booths pulled out and upholstered with this suede, imitation suede, brown, tan stuff. And the dance floor we cleaned and sanded down, and the stage. So we cleaned it up, but it *definitely* was not the decor that I visualized with high-tech this [and that]. I had just gotten back from Italy, from Milano, from some of the magnificent discos in Milano. And in Copenhagen, Madame Arthur's, gay club, I'd been there, with all these fabulous laser spots and stuff. Well, we did the best we could.

Now, Marge had the disco equipment and it turned out it wasn't really hers. It was Kahara Pavé's. And the stage stuff and so forth. You're gonna interview Kahara and she'll tell you her end of all this stuff with Marge. Stuff I didn't know about that was going on.

Anyhow, so we got open with a bang. And the first party Now, some of these were my ideas that were a little different. I said, well, instead of doing something like the [Village Station] party that got [Marge] in trouble, Halloween with the costumes. I said, "Nobody can put us down if we have costumes from the *existing* shows."

"Well, we can't do that."

But I had this idea. *Jubilee* was about to re-open. It was *Hallelujah Hollywood* and now it's re-opening [as] *Jubilee*, right? And I said, "Why don't we have a party with all of the show kids from all of the other shows celebrating *Jubilee*? We'll have a *Jubilee Jubilation*." And I cut out styrofoam You know, when I say, I [I mean all of us]. The decorator comes in now, different than Marge's thing. I had stars cut out and glittered with the name of every single performer, backstage attendant, and everything from *Jubilee* hanging all over the ceiling. And then Zack Taylor brought his Airstream travel home for out back for a dressing room and we got the *Lido [de Paris]* and the other managers of the other shows in the other hotels to allow their costumes to come out, to come to the Gipsy. It would never happen again, but anyhow, it happened. And it was a *turnabout*. The girls wore the boys' costumes and the boys wore the girls' costumes and did the same numbers they did every night. It was a turnabout. It was just wonderful!

Was this the opening party?

It was the first big party. It wasn't our opening party but it was the first big party. '81. Sometime in '81. It was fabulous. We did a lot of shows that were at two o'clock in the morning. They were always packed. Michael Darrin's especially. *Always* packed. *Hot Ginger and Dynamite*. Suzanne Buhner's show. *Steppin' Out*. Anyhow, we did shows that were great. Some of the hottest shows I've *still* seen. Some of the greatest dancing I've *still* seen.

You mentioned earlier the celebrities that would come down. Who?

Well, Rip Taylor and Debbie [Reynolds]. He drank Pepsi-Cola and Ripple. It wasn't unusual for Liberace to come in. He always called first. And that twerpy kid that later sued him.²⁰

Scott Thorson.

Oh, God! I hated him.

What would he call first for?

Table. To make sure there was a table. These people always had somebody call first, the big stars, Cher, and so forth. Because they can't just have to walk through the crowd, elbow people and try to stand around for a table. It's not nice for them or for anyone. We don't want to see 'em that way, either. Anymore than we want to see the president make an ass out of himself. People want to see their celebrities and their stars in some kind of proper decorum. Not outrageously overdone. They don't need to be carried in on a solid gold pillow, but they also don't want to see them trampled and pushed around.

What was Marge's job?

Manager.

And what did that entail?

Everything. I knew nothing about ordering booze and all that. Or running the bartenders. 'Course, little did I know. I'm sure that part of the stealing that was going on was encouraged by management.

What kind of stealing?

Money, at the bar.

Did that happen right away?

Probably a little. But it got outrageous.

How did it get outrageous?

We could count heads and drinks and know that You know. It was off. Some of it always goes on, they say. And then, probably, even a couple of the young people I really really was very fond of probably did, too, because a lot of people by then were into drug problems. Not drug problems that kept them from work. Different than today. Not drug problems that had 'em out robbing banks and murdering people. People that used drugs to kind of stay up. And then they used 'em to party with after work. And many of our employees used drugs. Not that I didn't try everything myself. And everybody in those days did try [something].

We did inhale.

We did inhale, yeah.

At the beginning of your relationship with Marge, what kind of personal relationship did you have with her outside the business relationship?

We were both friendly. She was going with Suzanne [Buhner] at the time. I liked Suzanne a lot. I appreciated her as a talent and so forth. And Marge and I did some traveling together to get some things going for the Gipsy. We went to LA looking for the Gipsy sign which we found which she knew where it was. There had been an old club in Los Angeles called Gipsy and she knew on their roof they had a sign. We carried it back across the desert! In my station wagon, my Volvo, tied on top. It was bigger than this [*measures as far as her arms can reach*]. This story is so funny! She and I got along at the time and this is funny. I wonder if she laughs about this sometimes, what we went through to get this gorgeous sign for a hundred and fifty bucks that was worth \$3,000. Trying to get it strapped down on the Volvo on the roof. And I had ski clamps on the roof. So anyhow. [*laughs*] A big wind comes up in Barstow and the car starts shaking and we see pieces of the sign flying out to the desert! [*laughs*] Thing shattered into pieces and flew all over. It was glass. It was before plexiglass and we had it packed and padded and all that, but I mean it was like we were bombed. So that was the first sign.

It never made it to Vegas, then ?

No, it was in shards!

It may still be out there.

Yeah.

Anyhow, another time A friend of mine was just visiting—Betty Stansbury from Los Angeles last weekend. She said, "Whatever happened to that lady that did the bar with you?" And I had forgot that when we'd go down to Los Angeles to do business with George Adamian or to visit, like Studio One and stuff like that to pass out our cards and say, "Come to Las Vegas." We'd stay with my friend Betty Stansbury, who was also an interior designer that I'd gone to Italy with a couple of times. So she was just asking about Marge. I don't anymore. For a long time my friend Elda and I Even when [Marge] opened the new Le Café once a week I heard somebody who was sitting around bad rapping me. I thought, *Why?* Everytime there was a horrible thing happen, Kerin Rodgers must be behind it. The funny thing is nobody had ever thought me to be evil, unkind, or mean before, and I'm sure since. So it really hurt me that [Marge] would garner a little following of people that think I would You know, if they got busted by the cops, that I was behind things. That's not my style. Just not my style, never has been. I don't worry about if anybody *thinks* it is, because it *isn't*. But that was harmful and hurtful and brought tears to my eyes many times, that once it was over it was over and why couldn't she just leave it alone and open her new business, *da-da-da-da-da*. But anyhow.

Did George Adamian still own the property?

Um, hm.

And you were a partner with him?

He *still* owns the property.

He still owns it today?

No, I *leased* the property from him. That's why I say *different money*. I leased it for so much but I didn't pay him off for a long time. So when you asked about it, it was \$40,000 for the down payment but I took a long time to pay off that forty. In other words, there was money that was spent that looked like it was spent right away, but actually wasn't. It couldn't be done now. You can't do it that way anymore.

Where did the Gipsy rate in the gay community in terms of bars, relative to

I think it was *the*... .

The *place*?

Oh, yeah. Not relative to *just* the gay community it was *the* disco in Las Vegas. It's what everybody talked about. And around the world. I'm not saying it because of myself because I'm not the only one responsible for that. Yeah. When I'd go to Copenhagen to Madame Arthur's, Lester Wilson was there when I was there in Copenhagen. He was *Black Satin* choreographer. He won some Emmy Awards. Here he was in Copenhagen talking about the Gipsy. I mean. I go to Italy, there they are talking about the Gipsy in Las Vegas. And we had people come from all over the world. And there wasn't anybody in show business that didn't know about the Gipsy and hadn't been there at least once. Nobody. Gay, straight, old, young. Black, white, Chinese, or circus character.

It sounds like at least on one level the Gipsy was very, very successful.

High camp and fun. Minimum of problems. Some drug abuse going on, but minimum problems. A couple of times Oh, one young lady that had won Miss Teenage Gay or something like that got run over by a car probably drinking too much over on Tropicana walking home. A couple of things that make your heart just sink. Couple of fights in the parking lot. I'll never forget. You talk about the boat people, wherever they came from. Some women had been murdered out by Maxine's.²¹ And this one night—my daughter was with me that night—we drove up to Gipsy and we saw some guy lingering over on the side kind of in where the fireplace used to be when it was a restaurant. Cut in and out. Jutting. There was a little cubby hole you could hide in out on the side and I just happened to see him.

to see him. He was lingering and it made me nervous. And then he kind of got around back and I drove around, and now he goes over behind Gelo's. And I called the police. I didn't do that very often. We didn't want the police there very often, but this was real suspicious. And they came and they cornered him and so forth and called Immigration. He had hidden on his body a shiv long enough to completely kill you. Which is how these women had been killed out near Maxine's. And he had that on him. And they wouldn't pick him up. He was in [the United States] on asylum. So they wouldn't do anything. They just ran him off the property.

This is interesting about the police, the different kind of policemen you can run into in your life.

I said, "What am I gonna to do? He'll come back, then, as soon as you guys are gone."

[The cop] said, "Well, I know what I would do if it were *my* place. I'd take him out in the desert and he'd never be seen [again]." Yeah.

"Are you recommending we murder him because he might murder someone?"

He said, "What's wrong with that?" Like it's OK.

Well, of course, I then, and now, and even to this moment do not believe that murder is an answer to murder. Even in the state. Even in the death penalty. I am dead against the death penalty. I've been asked, "You mean you don't think [Timothy] McVeigh deserves"22

I say, "Of course he deserves it. But only God can administer it." I mean I've never lost that much of my knowledge of the hereafter. Sure there are plenty of people that deserve all kinds of things, but we're not allowed to be the ones [to do it]. Life imprisonment we're allowed to do and *should*.

But at any rate there's no way I was gonna [kill that guy]. God, I was afraid that Marge or somebody would hear it and actually do it because some of the people I was associated with didn't feel the way I do.

And there were a few fights in the parking lot that got pretty rugged. But on the all and all I could have my mother or your mother in the Gipsy.

Was the place a financial success in the first couple of years?

Yeah, yeah it was. Especially for everybody except *me*. Know what I mean? [laughs] I'm sure. Lots of money went through the Gipsy. Lots of money.

Was the Gipsy then, at least in the first couple of years, the kind of place that you had a vision to own?

I never had a vision to own a club in the *first* place! What are you talking about? Never! I just rose to the occasion. Once I rose to the occasion I had ideas and I implemented them. *The Great American Strip-Off* was one of my ideas.

What's The Great American Strip-Off?

Well, I needed to raise that \$48,000 for the off-site improvements and I had a friend in Los Angeles who made movies for the Playboy Network. And one of the things he was doing was called The Great American Strip-Off and they'd been to Miami and New York to Studio 54, *da-da-da*, where they have amateur strippers that strip down but they still cover *one, two, and three* [gestures]. In a man's case, *one*. But anyhow. Male and female. But they can't be professional dancers. Just people. Fun kind of thing. So I asked 'im if Paul Abayda would do it at the Gipsy.

"Too small, I can't get enough people, we can't get our equipment in."

Well, I begged him and pleaded and I needed to make that extra money and I wanted to do it while the Broadcasters' Convention was in town and would do fliers at the Broadcasters' Convention. Well, anyhow, we did *The Great American Strip-Off*. *But ...* . I had all these kids lined up to do their routines and the last day or so all the camera crews were in, this was a movie for the Playboy Network. It was all done pretty quick. I had guaranteed 24 strippers, whatever it was. Now they're dropping off: "I'm not gonna do it." *Da-da-da*. I didn't know Marge was going around saying Kerin was full of shit. See, she knew I might lose the club if I couldn't pull this off. I don't want to say what she knew. That's what I *think* she knew. I don't want to be slanderous here. But in any event, it's not slanderous. It's factual to say she told people not to do it. So now I'm digging up my own personal friends and begging people to do this—including my daughter and myself. Yes.

You rose to that occasion!

We *had* to do it! We had to do it and I was still short one and I said, "What the hell? I'll do it myself." And I did my routine. I was the last one, too. *I Will Survive*. Gloria Gaynor. Brought down the house, actually. Big hat, velvet coat to the floor. But, at any rate, so we raised about \$26,000 that night.

That's quite a lot for an event like that.

Yeah. We charged at the doors.

Oh, and then somebody called—I wonder *who*—called the fire department on us, the fire marshal to close us down in the middle of the show.

Why?

Too many people in there, standing around. There were too many people but they were gonna leave once the show was over anyhow. The fire marshal came so I walked out there with a case of Stolichnaya and said, "Welcome to the Gipsy! How about a drink? Why don'tcha have it at home?" I mean it's not really my style but you do what you have to do.

They said, "You got more than 250 people in there?"

I said, "Probably not. I don't know. I didn't count."

He said, "Well, we're gonna be back."

I said, "I think you should. Why don'tcha come back about two?" 'Course, we'd be empty by then. By two our regular crowd [would be there]. This was early, this was a *straight* thing, more or less. *The Great American Strip-Off*.

I was already having serious problems by then.

Was there one particular incident that really was the start of the decline of your relationship with Marge or was it an ongoing thing?

No. Just ongoing. Just the more my eyes got opened the more I realized my eyes were open.

What did you see with your eyes open?

Well, theft. And management [style] that I didn't approve of and tactics that I don't approve of like the booze thing. And [Marge] drank heavily. 'Course, I got so I drank a few, too. But, I mean, she was a heavy drinker and obnoxious over at Gelo's after we closed till the wee hours talking about me or the business and the way she wanted me to do the books and, you know, I had my own accountant. Just things. I'm not used to slipshod this and "We can pocket *that*, nobody has to know

about *this*." I don't like things that way and that's the only way she knew how to operate.

Why was she going after you?

She wanted the club for herself. She wanted me out and she thought she could pick up the license herself. But, see, it wouldn't have happened. If she sat here today and would believe me, I would say, "It doesn't matter. I saved my neck and everybody else's and yours, too!" In the end I *still* saved her neck. She would have lost everything. But I don't want to get into it anymore. It doesn't matter. It matters not except when I bring it up it gets my adrenaline going again. She wouldn't have had it. She would have lost all her stuff and been closed down. This way at least I got a buyer, paid everybody off and everybody went away with a little money.

At what point did you decide to get out of it?

Oh Well, before *The Great American Strip-Off*. So, maybe I don't know.

Who did you find to buy it?

We found Chuck Melfi, but I think we found him through Frank Schreck, my attorney. Or something like that, I'm not sure.

Do you remember when that was?

Um, hm.'83.

Were you disappointed about your experience with the Gipsy?

Still not. It was a *fabulous* experience. There are people like Marge every place. She's not a *baaaaaaad* person. She operates differently than I do. You know. And a lot of people operate differently. That's probably why I've always kind of been in business for myself. Even in my design business people say, "Gee, you only paid \$30 for that and you can get \$3,000." And I say, "But I won't. I'll get \$45 and I'll pass it [on]." If I find a fabulous bargain then my client gets a fabulous bargain.

And I get my 10% and I'm happy. That's the way I do it. It works for me. It works for me.

Do you remember what you sold the Gipsy for?

Well, mostly bills. So it was under a hundred thousand.

What happened then with you and Marge at that point?

I never saw her again.

Do you have any idea how she came to be involved in opening the new Disco Le Café?

No, I know almost nothing. But Kahara Pavé knows.

Were you ever again involved in the bar business in Las Vegas?

Never. Never. Never had set out to be in the first place and still aren't. But I wouldn't give up the [Gipsy] experience for anything.

Looking back on it now what do you feel that your contribution was to the gay community in owning Gipsy?

Well, inadvertently, and again, nothing I set out to do but just kind of rising to the occasion kind of thing, is I *do* feel because of my efforts—I probably couldn't have said this a few years ago [because] I still wasn't sure, but now I'm pretty darned sure—and because others in the non-gay areas have kind of come up and told me, "Gee, you're the woman" Because of my efforts I think that we were able to upgrade and legitimize the idea of the gay bar. Not that others weren't there—Backdoor and 1610²³

The Red Barn,²⁴ Maxine's.

Yeah, they were there but they were like sleazy places even for the gay community. I'm not trying to insult anybody. But they were like sneaking-around-

ashamed-to-be-a-[gay]-person kind of places. By legitimizing the whole idea of a club for the showbiz crowd that was high class for the time—not magnificently beautiful like Olympic Gardens²⁵ is today or something like that. Liberace couldn't go to the Backdoor! Or wouldn't. Anyhow, I did that and I fought the good fight and I won. And I had the good answers with the help of some people who told me what the answers were to the commissioners. For instance, "Are you going to encourage homosexuals to attend your place of business?"

And I would say, "I'm not sure. What do you want me to do? Card everybody?"

How do you know? "Who do you sleep with?" I mean [grimaces] If you think you can go by the way people look, ho, ho, *ho!* Sure there are people whose behavior is that which you might say, "*Aha!*" But OK, then, tell me about Robin Williams. Then, if *that's* the case then he should be the number one gay guy in town.

At any rate. So I feel I made a major contribution to the fact that perfectly lovely people may be gay and perfectly lovely people that may or not be gay like to go to a wild, fun place to dance and have a party. And partying is good. It is not a bad thing. If it gets into too much drinking, too much drugging, too much All of these things, too much of is not good. But show me the person that doesn't know how to go out and have good fun and kick up their heels, flirt a little bit, and I'll show you a person who also probably doesn't run a very good business, has no imagination and is dull and boring and probably doesn't even have a good heart 'cause it kind of takes a good-hearted person to be outgoing and fun-loving and want to share and "*Y-M-C-A!*" kind of thing. So I think I brought a little bit of Kerin Philosophy to the Las Vegas scene. That one doesn't have to be a depraved individual to be a person full of the spirit of good fun and good joy.

And I think that's mostly what existed at Gipsy. I've already talked about the down side and people with very bad behavior. And people with very bad behavior, outdoors and indoors, come in every size and every sexual orientation and they're always gonna be around. I never expected to see them with my own eyes, but now I know that, too, huh?

In the years that you owned it and after you'd been granted your license, did the Metro vice squad ever come around trying to find trouble?

Sure. Every once in awhile.

How?

One of the things is the Mad Mothers Against Whoever the Mad Mothers are. [Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)] Somebody, and we assumed it was somebody from down the street [at a rival club] but later I think it was my own people trying to undo me, not sure. But anyhow somebody would send in these kids from the university with what looked like good ID. And then somebody would call MADD mothers and then their particular vice cop, the people they did business with, would come in and bust us. They'd get these kids and the kids wouldn't have any ID. ... The first time I thought it was very strange. The second time I knew it was a set-up and I got fined each time. And the third time I would have lost my license.

What prevented that?

It didn't have time to happen yet. I was already aware I was being undermined in many directions and I was already working my way out of it.

—λ—

Do you remember Le Bistro and Le Café and Camille [Auber/Castro/Goudable]?²⁶

That was before the Garage when Camille and Marge were in business in the same location. The Bistro was Camille's and the disco part, Le Café, was Marge's.

Do you rememebr the Bistro? The decor, the ambiance?

Yeah. It was a room. It was a room with tables and chairs. Like a living room, kind of dowdy, nothing special at all.

Not too impressive?

No, not at all! Tables and chairs. But nice food.

Popular place?

Well, to some. Although I went there with Tammy and Tod, who live over on 10th Street, way before I knew any of this [about Marge Jacques]. This would have been '68, '69. We had dinner and I remember we had a medley of vegetables that was nice and probably a Chicken Vesuvio or something. In other words, it was nice and kind of camp. By today's standards you wouldn't go there at all. It would be White Cross Drugstore by today's standards, but it was kind of cute. And then I had been to the Black Magic several times and I think I went to the Le Café a couple of times.

Do you remember much about Camille?

A little, yeah. She was a French lady. And she knew how to find herself some big shots in her own way that were kind of behind her. I always thought she maybe dealt more than alcohol and dancing, if you know what I mean. I'm not gonna say what I mean, but maybe the word *dealt* helps.

Evidently she came over here in the first place involved in the shows on the Strip before she opened the Bistro.

Yeah, she was. Was it the Tropicana she came over [for]?

Barcelona. She wasn't French. She was from Spain, from Barcelona. Yeah, Barcelona.

Was she with Marge at the time

As lovers, you mean?

Yeah.

I don't believe they ever were.

They were just business partners?

I'm sure. I'm almost positive of that. Early on Marge used to tell me all kinds of things 'cause, like you, I always liked to listen to the stories. I never heard any, any inference to that effect. However, what's funny is Peggy Trayham—does that name ring a bell? Should. Peggy Trayham, who is now Suzanne Buhner's lover, and Marge had been together prior. So a double switch went on there someplace over the years.

All in the family.

But no. It wasn't Camille. I mean, I'd say for sure, but then, who knows?

End

Notes

1. The Broadway Department Store anchored the south end of the Boulevard Mall at 3634 S. Maryland Parkway. At the time of this interview the Broadway is Macy's.
2. The La Concha Motel stands at 2955 Las Vegas Boulevard South.
3. For information on the Marions see *Beyond the Mafia: Italian Americans and the Development of Las Vegas* by Alan Balboni [Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1996].
4. Flora Dungan [d. October 25, 1973] served two terms in the Nevada State Assembly [1963 and 1967] and was the first woman to serve on the legislature's Judiciary Committee. In addition she was chairman of the Social Welfare Committee and Elections Committee. Dungan was elected to the University of Nevada Board of Regents in November 1972, and UNLV's Humanities Building is named for her.
5. Synanon was founded in California by Charles Dederich in 1958. The organization's original mission was to rescue people from alcohol abuse and help turn their lives around. The group's mission expanded through the 1960s to include saving people from drug abuse. Synanon eventually developed into a cult some people felt was dangerous and exploitive of those it professed to be helping. For more on the history of Synanon and the Games concept to which Kerin Rodgers refers see *Paradise, Incorporated—Synanon: A Personal Account* by David Gerstel [Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982]; *Escape from Utopia: My Ten Years in Synanon* by William Olin [Santa Cruz, CA: Unity Press, 1980]; and *The Tunnel Back: Synanon* by Lewis Yablonsky [New York: Macmillan, 1965].
6. The Gipsy is Las Vegas's premier dance club, located at 4605 Paradise Road. A series of restaurants and nightclubs operated at this address from at least April 7, 1969 when La Scala opened. La Scala became Lucien's/Lucien's Corner by December 1969; the Singer's Rendezvous in 1971-73; and Via Veneto in March 1973. A nightclub known as Disco Fever opened here ca. 1977. It was known as Studio 4 from November 22, 1978 until May 1979 when the name was changed back to Disco Fever. Disco Fever was called the Village Station from August 1, 1980 to November 1981 when it was closed. The Gipsy opened on April 1, 1981 and since then has undergone several changes in ownership and a number of major remodelings, the latest of which was during April and May of 1997. The Gipsy held its grand re-opening on May 16, 1997.
7. Schaller, who served as the information officer of the Nevada Employment Security Department under Grant Sawyer, was previously the city editor for the *Las Vegas Sun*. In 1967, Schaller accepted a position in Washington D. C. with Nevada Senator Alan Bible.

8. For information on Kerin's involvement with interior decoration see "I Like This Idea—Designer Kerin Scianna" in the *Las Vegas SUN Magazine*, September 11, 1977, p. 20.
9. Carl Wesley Thomas came to Las Vegas in 1953 and rose from blackjack dealing in the Stardust Hotel to become one of Nevada's most respected casino executives. He was eventually convicted as part of the Argent Corporation scandal of the late 1970s for skimming profits from the Stardust and Tropicana Hotels. He was sentenced in 1983 to 15 years in prison. Thomas's part in skimming operations is detailed in Nicholas Pileggi's book, *Casino* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995].
10. The Bingo Palace opened in 1976 at 2411 West Sahara and is today known as the Palace Station.
11. See "Nevada Campaign Organizer Has Her Work Cut Out" in the *Las Vegas Sun*, September 28, 1980, p. 21.
12. The Las Vegas Gay Archives conducted an oral history interview with Marge Jacques on May 26 and 28, 1998. Also see note 14.
13. The Village Station opened at 4605 S. Paradise Road on August 1, 1980. For more on the secret police surveillance and raid of the club, see "County Closes Disco" [*Vegas Gay Times*, December 1980, pp. 4-5], and the Las Vegas Gay Archives interview with Marge Jacques.
14. Le Café, one of Las Vegas's most famous gay bars, opened on August 18, 1954 as the Club Black Magic, a popular *straight* nightclub at 4817 Paradise Road. In about November 1968 Camille [Auber] [Castro] Goudable opened a French restaurant in the Club Black Magic and renamed the cocktail lounge the Club de Paris. Both nightspots held their grand opening on January 10, 1969 and were popular hangouts for Las Vegas's gay community, particularly Strip performers. On January 16, 1970 Marge Jacques bought the Club de Paris, changed the name to Le Café, and operated it as a gay bar. Sometime after 1970 and before 1977 Camille moved her Le Bistro restaurant to 4310 Paradise Road as Le Bistro Parisien Bar and Restaurant. Meanwhile, arson fires burned Le Café on August 8, 1978, and again on May 5, 1979. The bar was closed until October 20, 1983 when it re-opened in the old Rebel Steak House restaurant at 2710 East Desert Inn Road as Disco Le Café Bar and Restaurant. The business failed and closed its doors in April 1984.
15. The Le Bistro Parisien Bar and Restaurant at 4310 Paradise Road reopened on April 2, 1977 as the Carousel de Paris gay bar. Between 1977 and about 1988 when it closed, the gay bar at this address was known variously as Prelude [1978-79], the Garage [November 1979], Lipstick [1984], the Body Shop [November 1, 1985], and the Upper Level [September 1988].
16. Sections 8.08.030 (e) and 8.20.570 (e) of the Clark County Liquor and Gaming Code in 1973 read, "Each licensee who permits his licensed premises to be frequented by or to become the meeting place, hangout, or rendezvous for known prostitutes, *homosexuals*, vagrants, known hoodlums, persons described as undesirables or those who are known to engage in the use or distribution of illegal narcotics or in any other illegal occupation or business"

could have his liquor and gaming license revoked. The 1998 code does not include homosexuals or vagrants.

17. Gelo's Lounge [4633 Paradise Road] started life as Kelly's Tavern, a straight cocktail lounge, in 1957. It went through a number of name changes during the next twenty years: the Valley Inn [1959]; the Rubaiyat Cocktail Lounge [1960]; Lido's Lounge [1962]; Gelo's Lido Lounge [about 1963]; Gelo's Lido Lounge and Chinese Restaurant [about 1968-69]. Gelo's may have been a gay bar as early as 1976 when an ad in the *Panorama* newspaper [March 5, 1976, p. 15] notes the drag show *Belles a Ringin'* is being performed there. While an ad in *Action* magazine [October 1981, p. 9] notes Gelo's grand opening on October 23-25, the October 1983 *Nevada Gay Times* Calendar notes a party to celebrate Gelo's 3rd anniversary. Jerry Guerin, the bar's owner, in 1982 bought the Cantonese restaurant next door and expanded the bar. In 1989, Marlon Tenana bought the Gelo's shopping center and renovated it. Gelo's became Angles, and a women's bar built into the back of Angles was known as Lace. Angles and Lace opened in June 1989, was briefly known as Angles-n-Curves, but at the time of this interview is called Angles and Club Lace.
18. The Jungle Club bar and restaurant stood at 610 Naples Drive across the street from Gipsy, and is now known as Free Zone, a popular gay nightspot.
19. Arson fires burned Le Café on August 8, 1978 and again on May 5, 1979.
20. Famed pianist and entertainer Liberace was born as Wladziu [Walter] Valentino Liberace on May 16, 1919. His first Las Vegas performance was on April 21, 1955 at the grand opening of the Riviera Hotel. He became a Las Vegas institution thereafter, and one of its most popular performers. Rumors of his homosexuality were common throughout his public life, the last two years of which were marked by revelations that Liberace was HIV positive. Before his health became public knowledge, *Las Vegas Sun* entertainment columnist Dick Maurice broke the story in a small gossip item, "Wish We Could Name Names" [*Las Vegas Sun*, August 29, 1986, 1E]. Liberace died on February 4, 1987. Scott Thorson and Liberace were lovers from 1977 until 1982. On October 14 that year, Thorson filed a \$113 million palimony suit, but settled in 1984 for just \$95,000. For more on the Liberace/Thorson affair, see *Liberace*, by Ray Mungo [New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995 (*Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians* series)]; and *Behind the Candelabra: My Life with Liberace*, by Scott Thorson, with Alex Thorleifson [New York, NY: Dutton, 1988].
21. Maxine's was opened by Maxine Perron at 5110 East Charleston Boulevard in about 1950 and for many years, as Max and Mary's, was Las Vegas's only gay bar. It was a legendary place, earning mention in the notorious Las Vegas exposé *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris. When Perron sold the place in 1981, the name was changed to Maxie's, which it remained until closed in January 1989. The site now is occupied by Duffy's Tavern II. [See *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris (New York: Pocket Books, July 1974), p. 97.]
22. Timothy McVeigh was convicted of the April 19, 1995 terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

23. The Backdoor Lounge at 1415 East Charleston Boulevard opened in November 1977. 1610 was a small gay bar at 1610 East Charleston Boulevard which evolved from popular restaurants called Cioppino's and Margi's Fiesta Restaurant. 1610 became a gay bar in the late 1970s, and closed about 1983.
24. The Red Barn was one of Las Vegas's most famous gay bars, catering in its later years principally—though not exclusively—to a leather crowd and rough trade. It was built in 1958 at 1317 East Tropicana Avenue as an antique furniture store. In 1964 the Red Barn was leased to a Mr. Davidson who operated it as a restaurant and cocktail lounge which was gay after midnight. On July 1, 1972 Hood and Betty Taylor leased the Red Barn and made it gay *all* the time. Hood closed the bar on March 31, 1988; the building burned on September 11 that year and was demolished shortly after.
25. Olympic Gardens is a "topless cabaret" located at 1531 Las Vegas Boulevard South.
26. For information on Camille Auber see [Las Vegas] *Panorama*, January 10, 1969, p. 3 and November 28, 1969, p. 20, as well as the Las Vegas Gay Archives oral history project interview with Marguerite "Marge" Jacques.

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