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# An Interview with Mary Jo Sheehan

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

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Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic sources (housed separately) accompany the collection as slides or black and white photographs.

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

Claytee D. White, Project Director  
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## Preface

Mary Jo Sheehan shares detailed memories of her family's early history, her father's search for work in mines in Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, and her education through high school. She recalls with clarity the family's move to Henderson in 1945, her first job at Nellis Air Force Base, and their home in Victory Village.

Mary Jo recalls bowling at the Emerald Casino, joining a sorority, and dining at the Frontier Hotel as part of her social life. She also remembers where she and her husband met in 1963. They were married at a friend's house first and later recommitted in a ceremony at St. Peter's Catholic Church.

In recounting her career, Mary Jo talks of working at Nellis Air Force Base, then RFC War Assets Administration, the Colorado River Commission, and Basic Management Incorporated. Most recently she has done volunteer work for St. Rose Hospital and the Clark County Museum.

Mary Jo shares many memories from her long history in Henderson, Nevada. These include events such as the PEPCON explosion in 1988 and the renovation of downtown Henderson beginning in the 90s; people like Hal Smith, Pat McCarran, and Selma Bartlett; and places such as the Swanky Club, the Emerald Casino, and the Black Mountain Golf Course. The fascinating end result is an overview of all the growth and changes in Henderson since the late forties.



**This is Claytee White. I'm with Mary Jo Sheehan. It is July 14th, 2009. And we're in her home in Henderson.**

**So how you doing today, Mary Jo?**

Oh, I'm doing fine. Thank you.

**Great. So first we're just going to start by talking about your early life. Tell me where you grew up, what that was like, what your parents did for a living.**

I was born in McAlester, Oklahoma. My dad was a coalminer. He went into the coalmines when he was 13 years old, as they used to do. We lived there until I was three and then the mine closed. We went to Colorado and Dad worked in a coalmine there. My brother developed rheumatic fever because he had -- well, in those days it was his tonsils, you know, that had caused it -- so they said we had to go to a warm, dry climate. We moved to Arizona where my dad worked in coalmines, silver mines, whatever. And then most of those closed. So we went to Carlsbad, New Mexico for a year where he worked in a potash mine.

And then we came back to Arizona. By that time they had opened up this mine with lead and zinc because they were getting ready for the war and they needed all that kind of stuff. And it was low-grade, so it had closed for a long time. But when they needed a lot of that stuff, then they had reopened it. This was in Chloride, Arizona. It's between here and Kingman. We lived in Kingman first and then we moved to Chloride. And then we went to New Mexico and then back to Chloride. So then that's where we lived.

Dad was in a really bad cave-in -- he'd been in two or three -- so he kind of just figured, you know, his time was up in the mines. He got a job at the Kingman Army Airfield doing packing and crating, so we moved back into Kingman. That air base closed down, so we moved to Henderson, Nevada. The plant down here was no longer processing magnesium. They had stockpiled enough of that. They were making shell casings for the army and navy. And he went to work down there. He had worked I think three or four -- maybe not even a week -- and the war ended and they just shut down everything. Like they turned off a switch, you know.

**So that was 1945 that you came here?**

Uh-huh, 1945.

**What was it like living in a mining town?**



Well, you know, it was just out in the country. And we kids just kind of ran around in the desert, and perfectly safe, you know. You wouldn't dare let your kids go climb the mountain then like -- I had a little girl that would take off and climb way up on the mountain, you know. And we were very poor. But so was everybody else. So, you know, people look at me and I talk about this and say, well, you know, we did not have hot water. We did not have indoor plumbing. And they say, oh, my God, how could you live like that?

**I grew up the same way.**

And I said, well, you know, I guess I had a lot of love because I was a happy little kid.

**Yes. So what was the school like?**

My school?

**Uh-huh.**

Well, in Chloride -- I started in Kingman first grade. Then we moved out to Chloride and we had a two-room school. And then they added another room. So we had this great big three-room school then. So that was like first through eighth. So we had -- what did we have? That would be I guess first and second and third, fourth and fifth, and then sixth, seventh and eighth is the way they probably did it. The teachers were very strict and you learned. And if you didn't do it correctly, you did it again. It had a lot going for it.

And then, of course, when I got in high school I had to take the bus into Kingman. And there, again, you know, it was a very strict school and there was a lot of respect for the teachers, which I hear you don't get anymore. But then if you didn't show respect to the teachers and got in trouble, you were in trouble when you got home. I know you've heard this a bazillion times, but it was true. There was discipline when I was a child.

**Right. So how many children were in the family?**

I have a sister who's still living here in Henderson. She's 92. And her granddaughter is now with her. She's living with her. And then I had a brother. He was four years older. He was a Los Angeles motorcycle policeman. He was chasing a speeder and somebody cut in front of him. So at the age of 37 he died. So that was kind of -- I said that's why my hair is gray.

**Yes. But your hair is beautiful.**

Well, thank you.



**So what are your parents' names?**

My father was Martin Parker. And my mother was Ethel Edna Johnson Parker.

**And did your mother ever work outside the home?**

No. Nope. She was just there, you know.

**What kinds of things did she do in a mining town? Did you have a garden or anything like that, farm animals?**

No, because we didn't have enough water. Now, in Oklahoma they always had a garden. And up in Colorado they had a garden. But Chloride had limited water. We had a little church there. Of course, she was always active in that and the Sunday school and anything with school, you know, anything we needed at school. Why? Because in a little school like that you don't have all these big organizations. You just have parents.

**That's right. So what happened in 1945 when the whole town closed down and you guys were just getting to Henderson? What did your father do?**

He went to work out at what was then Las Vegas Army Airfield, which is Nellis now. I had finished my junior year in high school. And I said, well, I'm not going to go over there and go to a different high school. So I took my last few credits by correspondence from Phoenix and I went to work at the air base at the age of 17. And it was really funny because I had been working there for about a month I guess and somebody from personnel called and they said, you know, you're really not supposed to be working here. And I said, well, why? What's wrong? Well, you're not 18. I said, well, nobody asked me. So then I had to have written permission from my mother to work out there. So, of course, the guys in the office thought that was really funny.

**So tell me what kind of work you did.**

I did steno kind of work, secretarial. And I had taken bookkeeping and shorthand and typing in high school. So that's what I did all my 20 years of working here, there and yon.

**Where did the family live in Henderson?**

When we first came here we lived in Victory Village.

**Tell me about Victory Village. What did it look like? Can you remember enough to describe it?**

Well, it was concrete buildings. I was going to look and see if I had any old pictures. On the one



side of Lake Mead -- you know where Lake Mead is --

**Oh, yes.**

-- going down towards Lake Las Vegas? There was Victory Village. And it had a big administration building. And it seemed to me like it had a little store in it at one time. And on the other side was Carver Park. You've heard the story of Carver Park I'm sure.

**Yes.**

That was in the days where we didn't mix, you know, which always seemed so strange to me. You know, I still can't believe there will ever be peace in the world until people get over that.

That's right. That's right. And it looks sometimes as if we're moving toward that and then sometimes not.

And then we got a little town site house up in the old town site area of Henderson.

**Describe those houses to me.**

Oh, well, of course, coming from Victory Village where you didn't have a yard or any space, it just seemed wonderful. It was a little two-bedroom house. I think they have 900 square feet in them. It had a bathroom.

**That's right. Indoor plumbing. That's right. Was there anything unusual about the doors?**

The front door you mean?

**Uh-huh.**

It had little square panes of glass in it.

**Were the hinges on the outside or the inside? Do you remember?**

It opened in.

**Oh, it did open in?**

Yeah. I'm almost sure, yeah.

**Okay. In the beginning a lot of them opened out because they were so small.**

Oh. No. I'm pretty sure it opened in.

**So now, you were the baby in the family. So no one had to go to school once you came to Henderson. Everybody else was already out of high school.**

Right.

**So did your sister and brother move here with the family?**



My sister and her husband had moved here about a year before we moved over here. He had been in the army and had hurt his legs and he got a medical discharge. So they had come over here. He had gone to work.

Of course, my brother was in the army. He was a paratrooper. So then he -- let's see. The war ended in December of '45 I think because I remember we waited Christmas until he got home. And then he took a job down at the plant. He said, you know, this is not what I want to do the rest of my life. He went down and applied to be a policeman. So he was a policeman in Las Vegas before he moved to Los Angeles. He met this girl -- well, he was married first, then divorced. And then he met the girl. She was from L.A., so that's why they moved back to California. And then he was a policeman down there.

**Tell me what life was like for a person probably 17, 18 -- 17 years of age when you first came. What was life like for you when it came to entertainment, your social life?**

Well, they had a bowling alley. You may have heard of that. It was down -- what is it? -- Emerald, I think they call it Emerald Casino. Have you ever driven down there?

**Yes. Downtown Water Street, yes.**

Yeah. There was a bowling alley there. Then I joined this group called Beta Sigma Phi, which was a social sorority, not like a college sorority. And we had meetings and dinners and parties. Then, of course, there was the El Rancho, and we'd go stand out by the pool and sometimes be able to sneak a look at the shows in there.

**You mean the El Rancho on the Strip?**

Yes.

**Okay, good.**

And the Last Frontier.

**Okay, good. So did you have your own car?**

My parents and I shared one for quite awhile. I can't remember what year I got one. Anyway, I got a car all my very own.

**So tell me what the El Rancho was like for young girls your age.**

Well, you couldn't go in because you're supposed to be 21 to go into a bar. So we'd just kind of go out there and walk around the grounds and kind of go in the lobby and look around.



**But couldn't you go to a show?**

Yeah, I think we could, but we didn't have the money.

**I see.**

And then later on I remember going to the Frontier. This was part of being in Beta Sigma Phi. We would have these formal dinners and dress up and go out there and go to a show and dinner. And that was exciting. When the other hotels started building -- oh, even when Bill and I were first married in 1964, when you went out to a show, you dressed, not a long dress particularly, you know, but a dressy cocktail kind of dress and gloves. And it still just sleazes me to go out to these beautiful hotels now and see the way some of these people dress.

**Oh, yes. How did you meet Bill?**

I was having lunch one day with this woman. He was working -- you know all his history. And he had opened an office out here. This woman was working for him and I had worked with her at one time. And we were having lunch down at the old Swanky Club, which is long gone.

**What is the Swanky Club?**

It was a restaurant with the greatest fried chicken in the world. Oh, I guess it was down there about where -- what is the name of that place now? -- anyway, that casino that's down there on Boulder Highway just kind of at the end of Water Street down there.

**Oh, Fiesta?**

No, not Fiesta. It's the other way.

**At the end of which street?**

Water Street on Boulder Highway.

**Okay. So downtown.**

It's not downtown. It's on Boulder Highway. Anyway, that's about where the Swanky Club was. And it was just a restaurant. So Bill happened to be down there and she introduced us. When she got back to the office they were talking and he said, well, I wonder if she'd go out with me? She said, well, why don't you give her a call? So we started going together. And that was 1963, I guess, because we were married in February of '64.

**Okay, great. That's wonderful.**

**Your mother was very active in the church when you lived in Arizona. What about**



**the church here in Henderson?**

Yes, she was active in -- they called it the Community Church. It's where the Senior Center is now. Have you ever been there?

**Never been there.**

But it's off of Water Street. Oh, you know where the Rainbow Club and that street that runs into the Rainbow Club?

**Yes.**

Then the Senior Center is just over to the right from that.

**Okay, good. I think I know where it is.**

And she was always active in that and the little ladies' association that they had. She had been raised Methodist in Oklahoma and in Kingman they had a Methodist Church. That's what Mom was.

**One of the things that they have here in Henderson that intrigues me is a farmer's market.**

**When did that start?**

I don't remember. I rarely go there.

**But tell me about it. What have you heard about it? They're becoming more and more popular now.**

Oh, yeah. Well, one friend of mine goes there every Thursday. She just thinks it's great.

**Where do you get the locally grown goods from?**

I think probably most of those people come in from California because I don't know anywhere around here they raise anything. Now, there's one -- the one time Bill and I went there was a couple there. And they were from out by Tecopa. That's somewhere out toward Death Valley. I've never been there. And I guess there are palm trees out there and they have dates. They brought dates and date bread, the one time we were down there. Now, I don't know if they're always there or not. I don't know. It's okay, but it's not any better than the grocery store. It doesn't really seem any fresher and it's more expensive.

**Wow. It's supposed to be fresher.**

Well, I didn't find it that much. So --

**Several things I want to talk about. First, tell me more about the work that you did and the**



**job and getting back and forth to work and who you worked for at the --**

Down at BMI?

**Well, was it still called BMI?**

Well, they called the whole complex BMI. And you know it was Basic Magnesium Incorporated. They brought in these different ones like Reconstruction Finance Corporation when I first went to work down there. I worked out at the air base a year and then I came to work out here. The RFC was doing this big audit. They had War Assets Administration. They were selling pieces of equipment and all kinds of stuff like that and trying to interest private companies to come in here. So then after a period of time I worked for RFC and I worked for War Assets Administration.

Then the Colorado River Commission of the State of Nevada bought the whole complex and I worked for them as an executive secretary for years. And then --

**What kind of work did the Colorado River Commission -- how did it -- so it ran the complex?**

Right. The fire department, the water. They had their own fire department down there at that time.

**Wow. So how big of a place are we talking about?**

Oh, boy, I don't know. And then there were five companies. There was Titanium, Kerr-McGee -- well, it was Western Petrochemical Company at first. And U.S. Lime. I can't think of the other couple. I was going to write all this down so I'd have it for you.

**Okay. But no problem.**

So then they formed this corporation called Basic Management Incorporated. And then they ran the fire department and the water and the sewage and everything, plus the water treatment plant. Then the city took over the water treatment plant. They also had some kind of contract with the city for the fire department. They did away with the fire department because that gets very complex and very expensive.

During that period when Colorado River Commission was operating, there were a thousand houses, these little town site houses that you see. They sold those to the John W. Galbraith Company and Galbraith came in and actually sold them to the individual people because BMI didn't want to be in the housing business.



**Did your family buy one at that point? This was, what, about 19 --**

Oh, I'm trying to think when that would have been.

**Were you married or still single?**

The 1950s because I was working down there. I bought it in my name.

**Oh, okay. So you purchased the house.**

Yeah.

**Okay, good. How much did you have to pay for it?**

Oh, what was it? Nine hundred dollars I think, something like that.

**Oh, wow.**

I think the two bedrooms were 900 and then the three bedrooms were 1500. Isn't that unbelievable?

**Oh, isn't that wonderful.**

Some people are still living in them I'm sure that bought them probably.

**That's right. Wow. Amazing. So you were a homeowner before you got married.**

**Tell me about the day -- I want to talk about your wedding also. What kind of weddings did young women have in 1964 here in Henderson?**

Of course, a lot of them -- I was married once before in 1958 and we just went to a JP and got married. But, of course, a lot of people -- there was always the Catholic Church over on Boulder Highway and there was the Community Church. So a lot of people had big weddings in those.

Now, when Bill and I were going to get married, we wanted to get married in the Catholic Church. But it was a bit of a problem since I had been married and divorced. So we were actually married in a house right around the corner here where a dear friend lived. And we were just going to get married with a JP. And she said, oh, no, you aren't; you're at least going to get married in a house with some of your friends. And so that's what we did in 1964. And then -- oh, Dana was -- how old was she? She must have been about a year and a half, something like that. We finally got it cleared to get married in the church. So then we just had us and a couple of other people and then just had a little reception.

**Now, is that St. Peters?**

Uh-huh.



**Okay, good. Was St. Peters ever politically active here in Henderson?**

Oh, yes.

**Tell me about the political activity out of that church.**

Well, the first priest over there -- well, he was just Father Moran and then he became monsignor, a real character from Ireland. He was always involved in some political thing or over. And he was always coming down to BMI. Well, can't you donate this to me? Can't you donate that to me? And he did very well with donations.

Then we went through a series of priests. Then we had Father Caesar Caviglia. And Father Caviglia was always very active politically, in a good way I think.

**How much do you know about any of that activity? Any memories of any of the things that he did or was involved in?**

Well, he worked very hard to get the convention center. He worked on that. And he was always trying to get things done for seniors. That's about all I know that he actually did.

**What did the convention center mean to the Catholic Church?**

I don't think it meant anything. I just think Father Caviglia was interested in getting things done for the city and improving the city. He just was one of those hyperactive people.

**What was the population makeup in Henderson as you were starting out here as a high school senior at about 17 years of age? How did you see the community change when it came to race and race relations?**

You know, that's hard to say because I never had those kinds of feelings. I have to tell you a funny story. When I was about 15, there were no black people in Kingman, no black people in Chloride. And my mom and I had gone back to Atoka, Oklahoma to visit my grandma, her mother. I was going to go down to Texas to visit these cousins and give Mom a little more time with Grandma. So she took me down to the bus station to catch the bus down to Texas. And I was sitting on this bench and I noticed some of these people kind of looking at me. And I was blond, kind of redheaded color. I got up to go get a drink of water. There was a fountain that said white and a fountain that said colored. And I thought, wow, they have colored water. I really did. I was that dumb. I was that dumb. So I bent over to get a drink of water. And then I started back to where I had been sitting and it said coloreds only. And then I kind of looked around and I saw



these white people sitting on one side and these colored, as they called them then, sitting where I had been sitting. And I thought, well, I guess I shouldn't be sitting over there. But, see, I had never been exposed to anything like that. And my mother just always said -- you know, we had a lot of Mexican people in Arizona. But they were my friends. I just didn't grow up with that kind of feeling.

**Right. And evidently, your parents weren't that way either.**

No. And they were from Oklahoma. Dad was born in Texas. My mom was born in Missouri. But they just didn't have those kinds of feelings. So I didn't grow up with it. But it was a gradual thing here, very gradual I think as far as mixing. And you've heard all the stories about Las Vegas.

**Oh, yeah. Tell me about the explosion.**

Oh, that was bad.

**Tell me about that day.**

Well, my brother-in-law had died the day before, so my sister's in-laws were coming up from Phoenix. In fact, they were here. So I was going to have them up for lunch. I was actually over at the grocery store across on Boulder Highway. All of a sudden there was this huge boom. Then the glass started breaking, the big glass windows at the front. So this man that was beside me -- we were back in the deli area -- he said, well, a goddamn truck must have run into this building. And I said, well, I think it was more than a truck. And this one woman that was standing next to me just started screaming, you know, one of those kinds. And I said, well, come on out; I'll help you get out of here; I don't know what's happened, but let's get out of here. And then they announced just leave your cars where they are; just try to get out of the building because nobody knew what was happening. So I came on home. The one dining room window was broken. Of course, the first thing I did --

**Now, which year is this?**

1988, May of 1988.

**So you found that one window had been broken.**

That was all. So then I ran down to check on my sister. And she was okay. She didn't have any broken -- well, her nephew was here. And he was standing outside smoking and he had the door



open. And I think maybe that's why nothing broke at her house because then this air could just kind of go through.

**Right.**

The phones were still working for a little while. And Dana called and she said, oh, mom, Mike, which was my brother's son down in California, asked have you talked to your mom? And she said no. And he said, well, they've had a big explosion out there. And both he and Dana were getting ready to fly up for my brother-in-law's funeral but not on the same plane. And he said, well, let's see what we can do. Let's see if we can get there and try and stay in touch.

Well, she called right away. And I said, well, Dana, we'll be there to meet the plane, somehow or other. They aren't letting too much traffic go as far as I know. So anyway, she and Mike both got on different planes and got up here. They weren't going to let anybody go. So I think we went down to the police station and told them that my brother-in-law had died and that my sister just really needed to get in there to finish the arrangements. And they said, well, just go and if the police stop you just tell them this is why you're out on the highway. So we did and then got back home. It was just awful, but not nearly as bad as it could have been. So somehow or another we got into the airport and picked up Dana.

These people who owned the company, the Gibsons -- and it was called -- what was the name of their company? -- Pacific Engineering. And you know where it was down there on Gibson Road? Oh, shoot, I need a map to tell you. I'm not good with directions, but it was right down there where you cross the railroad track. If you're going on Gibson Road towards where all those auto places are now, it was over to the left. And for the longest time it just kind of looked like a volcano because it was just all black over there.

So people said, you know, that they were careless and they didn't know how to run a business. But I had known the Gibson family for years and they were wonderful people. They had about five of their family working down there. And I said, you know, they weren't careless. They weren't down there to see their family killed for heaven's sake. And they're good people. So I said don't tell me that they were just being careless. It was just one of those things that happened. And I don't know enough about it yet to this day.

**Yeah, because some people said it was something with the gas line coming from the gas**



**company or something like that.**

They had thorough investigations about that. And, of course, the gas company proved it was not. So I don't think we'll actually know, Claytee. What they were working with was a very -- well, they use it in rockets. So you know it's very explosive. If it gets wet -- there were a lot of little explosions when it would get wet.

So then when that happened was they said, well, they wouldn't rebuild. And they actually built a plant up in Cedar City. Of course, a lot of the Gibsons are still around. And I remember the first time I saw -- we call him Ted. He was Fred D. Gibson, III, I think. And he was in charge of the plant down there. And we saw him at some chamber thing or something. I went up and gave him a hug and he said, you know, that is so nice because some people aren't even speaking to me. And I said, now, how stupid can you be? I mean he needed all the support he could get, not people turning away from him. But it was really bad for that family. Of course, Jim Gibson, who was our senator for so many years, and then young Jim who's been our mayor --

**Is that the same family?**

Uh-huh.

**Okay. So evidently the people here have forgiven them.**

And they talk about the Gibsons being Mormon. But, see, Jim Senior married a Mormon woman. So he converted. And the rest of the family were I think Presbyterians. It's not an old Mormon family.

**Now, tell me about politics in the area. I know that you've been here for a long time now.**

**Were you involved in any way in the political situation here in Henderson?**

Oh, kind of off sides.

**Oh, good. So tell me about that.**

You know, I was always a registered Democrat. And Bill's a Republican. And I just kind of go both ways.

**Yes. Whoever is the best candidate.**

But I worked for a man named Julian Moore. He was the manager of BMI for years and then he got involved with Frontier Fidelity, a company in Las Vegas. And he went in there and left BMI actually. But he was always very politically involved as a Democrat. We had a senator for years



and years and years, Pat McCarran. And he would be in and out of the office. Then Alan Bible, who was our attorney general for years, when we were doing all this transfer of property from the Colorado River Commission to Basic Management Incorporated, Alan Bible as the attorney general would be in and out. We would spend hours typing. That's when you typed documents with like ten copies.

**Ooh. So that means you had to be accurate. How many words can you type a minute?**

Oh golly, I don't remember. I was pretty fast at that time.

**Tell me about Pat McCarran.**

Oh, he was the typical politician. He would come in -- and you know he had this white hair. And you always thought of him as a great big man because when you would look and see him in pictures he would look like this. But he really wasn't all that tall. And he'd come in and say, oh, and how are you today? How is your family? Well, he had never met my family in his life. But he was such a politician. He was just great. And he did a lot for Nevada and, of course, a lot for Pat McCarran, too, I'm sure.

**Yes, he did do a lot for Nevada.**

But then he did a great job. And then Alan Bible ran for senate. And he lost the first time he ran, but then he won. I worked a little bit on his campaign, not a lot. And it's always interesting about politics because I just don't like politics. I have to be very honest. I said I got my eyes opened at a very young age. There was this one man up in Reno and he would call and say, well, I have put so much money into this campaign. What in the hell's going on in Las Vegas and Henderson that we aren't getting the results that I expected? So, you know, it's just all about money and power. And I really don't like politics to be quite honest with you. I just figure by the time they get there they have sold their soul to the devil.

**You know who surprised me -- and this is not history; this is just recent history -- I think John Ensign surprised me more than anybody else.**

Oh, me too. I met him a couple of times and he seemed so sincere. I know this can happen to anyone. Morally I don't condemn him.

**Yes. I just have such compassion for those families.**

You know, people are weak. But I just feel like he's such a hypocrite because of that promise



thing and all this religion stuff. You know, it's one thing to slip and slide, but then come out and be honest about it. You know, don't start paying off people. No. I'm very disappointed in him.

**I really thought he could be the next Republican president in this country.**

Oh, yeah. He's good looking. And I remember Hal and Tina Smith down the street. Hal was a state senator for years and years and years. And we were very dear friends. They had a little get-together for Ensign when he first ran and I was talking to him for a little while, just the two of us. I said, you know, I guess I'm not much for politics. I said why do you really want to get involved in this? You have a successful business and a nice family. Well, he says, I really just want -- I feel maybe I can do some good. And he did. He just seemed so sincere. But I don't know. They get a little power and I think they just think they can do anything and get away with it.

**Yeah. That's unfortunate.**

**When you first moved here Henderson was really not that old. Henderson was a World War II city. Tell me about some of the changes you've seen in Henderson from 1945 -- the city was brand-new -- to today. What are some of the major changes that you see?**

Well, we lost our little downtown.

**But now, isn't it coming back?**

They're trying. Oh, even when Bill and I got married, we still had a little grocery store down there. We had a drugstore. We had two little dress shops. I mean it was the kind of "walk down there and get anything you need" little town. And I miss that. I think it's too bad that we lost that. And, of course, we're not casino people. So I don't go down there for that.

We try to support anything that goes in. When the art gallery first opened, we went to that. And when that woman -- oh, shoot, she was the wife of the man that was in charge of Lake Las Vegas at that time. I can't remember her name now. But every time there would be a new artist she'd have a little open house. And that was fun. I like to see that sort of thing happening. But it's just like most little towns. And I don't know. Maybe they'll get it going. The city keeps hoping they will.

Bill had an office down at 26 Water Street and we owned the building next door. Well,



there were little shops in there. But the city said, oh, no, we're going to develop this. And they just went in with a big skip loader and mowed down all those buildings. Well, to me those little shops were better than a bunch of empty land down there. But some of these people, they thought everything was going to happen that fast. Well, it's not. And maybe eventually it will, hopefully. **Yes, I hope it does. I hope it comes back.**

**So what other changes have you seen here in Henderson when you think about those years? What about the golf course itself, this golf course?**

Well, we celebrated 50 years last year for this golf course believe it or not.

**So it's as old as the city almost.**

1957 I guess. Fifty-eight. I think it was '58 that they celebrated the 50 years of this golf course.

**How did you feel about the area now that's called the Green Valley section of Henderson?**

**How did you feel about that development?**

I've never had this thing about it that some people do. Of course, our daughter lives out there. I think they've done a wonderful job on that. We go out there for dinner quite often. I go shop at Talbot's and those kinds of places. I like those small shops better than -- now, I do of course go to the Galleria. But I like those little shops.

**Me too.**

And I think Greenspun was -- I can remember him coming into meetings at the Colorado River Commission and he had these ideas. Of course, that's when he was in all that trouble because he ran those guns to Israel or wherever the heck it was. He had quite a time there for a while. But he just had so much foresight to be able to see that he might be able to do this kind of thing. And I commend his family for carrying it on.

**Oh, yes. They've just put a building on UNLV's campus almost single-handedly.**

When we used to just have two golf courses -- well, three, Municipal Golf Course and Black Mountain and Desert Inn -- she belonged to Desert Inn. We would have these little tournaments and she would always come and play. I never knew her on a one-to-one basis, but if you happened to be in her foursome, she was just a delightful woman.

**Wow. That's great.**

When everything was so small you met people that you'd never meet now. I mean I wouldn't



because we aren't on that social status.

**Tell me about some of the neighbors that you've had over the years. Anybody memorable?**

Well, of course, Hal Smith. He was like I say in the senate for so many years. And we had several doctors that lived up here and were just really nice people.

**What about back from 1945?**

I'm trying to think of anybody that went on and on. That's so long ago.

**Do you remember Lubertha Johnson? She worked at Carver Park at one time. She could have been gone by the time you got here. Do you remember that name?**

No, I don't remember that name.

**Tell me about Lake Las Vegas. That's probably the most recent part of Henderson. That's one of the communities in the area that's having financial problems right now. How did you feel about that development?**

Oh, I've always just loved it down there. I said if I were a millionaire that's where I'd live.

**Yes.**

Every time I go down there for dinner I think, oh, it's just so pretty down here and it's so quiet. And I just think -- I think it'll come back. I'm like that article that was in the paper Sunday. I think there's so much money down there that eventually they'll turn it around. Now, Dana was down there the Fourth of July. She and several of her girlfriends went down there and it was a mob scene.

**Oh, great.**

Yeah. They had a lot of people down there that night.

**Well, I'm very glad.**

And they had little stands set up with fast food. They had little things set up for the kids. She and the girls went down there and had dinner and watched the fireworks. So she was glad to see there were that many people down there.

**Me too, because I want that community to survive. I just love going down there when they have that little arts show. Well, it's more than just a show. They have arts and crafts and everything and you just walk through. I just love that.**

Yeah. I love it down there. Do you go to that restaurant at Loews? Have you ever been there?



**Is it Italian?**

No. It's actually sort of Asian. Well, the reason we went there is that when we're in La Jolla, we always love Japengo at the Hyatt. Dana and I used to always go to the Nordstrom preseason sale and we'd stay at the Hyatt in La Jolla. And there's a restaurant there called Japengo. So they originally opened that with the Hyatt down here. It had a different menu, a whole different feel, actually. But now it's called Marsa's. We went down there I think in May. It was about half full. They have all kinds of sushi. And I'm not a sushi fan.

**Me either.**

If I'm with Dana, why, she likes it. So I always have a little bit. But they have some wonderful seafood dishes and that kind of thing.

**That's my thing.**

And it overlooks the lake. It's a lovely -- really a pretty restaurant.

**So now, is that over by the hotel?**

It's in the hotel. It's in the Loews hotel.

**I see. Okay.**

Now, that place called Como's, I think it closed. I liked that. And then there's another one down on the corner. What the heck is it called? We've been there a couple of times. And it's still open I think.

**Yeah. I love it too. I really like that area.****So are there any other things about Henderson that you'd like to share?**

Oh, golly. Well, I think the fact that it survived is amazing because it was supposed to be demolished when the war ended. I'm sure you've heard all that. The fact that these -- because so many of the houses were empty at one point. These companies came in and gradually hired more people, so then they built the houses down behind the hospital. And that's where I lived when I was first married -- down on Lowery Street. And it was a nice area then. Everybody kept their house up and it was just real nice. Then they built some where my sister lives down in National Street just off Major, and those failed immediately. Henderson has had its ups and downs. Until they get rid of some of those really bad-looking houses down there I don't think the downtown city will evolve into a much better area. I think it still needs a lot of cleaning up. The city bought so



many of those houses right around city hall, tore those down and have built these other buildings.

**So the city had owned some of that property?**

Yeah.

**Okay. Did you do any volunteer work here?**

I used to volunteer down at the hospital. Then when the nuns ran the hospital, I was on something they called the advisory board.

**Now, we're talking about St. Rose?**

Yes. It really wasn't a decision-making board. They had a board of trustees that made any real business decisions. But it was just a great interaction. The board consisted of several people in the community. The chief of staff at the hospital would always be there and two or three of the nuns. It was just a really nice thing to be asked to be on. It was very much a compliment because when they asked me I said, well, I'm not in business; I don't work anymore. But they just felt I could contribute something.

**Wonderful. Who recommended you?**

Well, probably this Betty Lou Anderson, who had worked down there for years and years and years. And through her I had gotten to know several of the nuns. There were some wonderful women down there that were nuns. And, of course, Selma Bartlett, you know who she is and she was on it. She's an old, old friend. And then I was very active in the museum deal for years.

**Tell me about that.**

Well, it's the museum -- have you ever been up here to the Clark County Museum on Boulder Highway?

**Boulder Highway? Yes.**

Yeah. I was president of that for a couple of years. And then I think I just got tired. They got a couple of women in there -- and we'd make money and we'd spend it. To me that was what it was all about. And then we got a couple of women in there. And everybody has their own way of thinking. They were hard-working women, so it's not a slam on them. And I'd say, well, you know, Mark is needing money for this; let's just give it to him. Well, we might need that for something else. And I'd say, well, go out and earn some more. But that wasn't their attitude. And I said, well, my thinking is just different. So I just dropped out. But now they have this Mark --



**Hall-Patton.**

Yeah. And he is such a character.

**Yeah, he is.**

But he has a lot of enthusiasm. And I think he's good for it.

**And he knows the museum business. He knows the history.**

And Mark whatever his name was -- I always stuttered over his name -- he was a hard-working man, but he didn't have the same "get out and go" personality that this guy has.

**So there was another person named Mark before this Mark? Oh, really?**

Ryzdyski or one of those kinds of names.

**Okay, good. I'm not familiar with that person.**

And Mark did the airport -- all this stuff at the airport. And I was glad when the other Mark resigned that they gave him this museum. I think he's kind of earned it. So I think he'll be good for it.

**Yes. This is wonderful. If you take a minute and think of any other aspects of Henderson that you'd like to highlight, I'd be happy.**

Well, I think I've kind of talked myself out. I can't think of anything else. Our daughter was born at St. Rose and went to Basic High School. Then she went to Pepperdine and thought she wanted to stay in California. After about a year down there she called and said, Mom, I'm sick of this town; can I come home?

**What was her major?**

Public relations and communication. And she just thought she was going to go out to some big ad company and get this wonderful job and everybody was going to say, oh, Dana, we're so delighted that you've graduated and you're here. And she couldn't get a job. So she's worked her way up. She came back home. She worked for a radio station for a little while. Then she worked for the Arthritis Foundation and the Cancer Society. Then she knew somebody that had gone to work for APL, Associated Pathology Laboratories -- they have since been bought out by Quest Diagnostics -- and she's in marketing. That's what she does and does a very good job. And she likes it. Like she said some days it would be kind of nice not to have to do it.

**Oh, yeah.**



She works out of her house now. It's a good company. She gets like six weeks' vacation. Where else are you going to do that? Isn't that unbelievable?

Yes.

But she's been there for 12 years, Claytee. She's been there a long time.

**That's great. I think that's wonderful when you get those kinds of perks for your job.**

Yeah, because it's pretty stressful. Trying to keep doctors happy is not the easiest thing in the world.

**Oh, yes. Did Henderson ever have anything that we would consider a civil rights movement?**

What now?

**A civil rights movement.**

I don't ever remember one.

**Any kind of antiwar protests during the Vietnam era?**

No. I think there were some in Las Vegas, but I don't remember them out here.

**Right. Yes. What do you see as the future of Henderson, especially downtown?**

I think that it will gradually improve. I think the buildings -- the city is bringing more activity down there. And even though so much is happening out in Green Valley, I think that because we do have our municipal offices down there that this gradually will make the downtown improve.

It's going to take some doing. I don't know if anybody ever started out with a master plan or not.

It seems like it just kind of grew like Topsy for a while. But I don't know.

**When you look at downtown Las Vegas it's going through the same kind of growing pains.**

Yep.

**And they do have a master plan for it, but it's slow.**

Now, I just said growing like Topsy. And that's just an old-fashion phrase. But is there anything racial about that?

**What is Topsy?**

I don't know. All of a sudden I thought, my goodness, is that something that's out of one of those old books that --

**Is Topsy the person in -- no. I'm thinking of the Little Rascals. Is that from the Little Rascals?**



Maybe so. And they just always say you're growing like Topsy because she's growing so fast. And I thought, oh, my goodness, I would never say anything like that.

**No, I don't think so.**

Good. Good.

**I think it's okay.**

**I have covered the social and the political, so I think we've covered Henderson pretty well. How do you see Henderson in relation to Las Vegas? When someone asks you where you're from and you're back in, let's say, Florida, where do you say that you're from?**

I say I'm from Henderson. And if I get kind of a blank look, I say it's right next to Las Vegas. You know, it used to be for a while there you almost were embarrassed to say you were from Henderson because they referred to it -- in fact, I used to play bridge with a group in Las Vegas. So then, you know, they'd say you drove all the way in by yourself? And I'd say, you know, it's 15 miles for God's sake. I didn't say it quite like that. I was more like a lady. But that's the way I wanted to say it. It was like we were out in the boonies. Well, they used to call it Hooterville sometimes.

**Wow.**

And when Bill first opened an office out here and we'd go to these CPA things, they'd say in Henderson? And I'd just want to smack them. I said that's why Bill could never be in politics because somebody would say that and I'd hit them right in the mouth.

**Yeah. Maybe it was better that he didn't.**

**So right now how do you see Henderson related to Las Vegas?**

Well, I think that they're just going to kind of work off each other, really. I don't think there's the animosity. I don't know that it was ever animosity. I don't know if that's a good word or not. It was just that we felt like people looked down on us because we lived in Henderson, to be perfectly frank.

**I don't think there was animosity. The only animosity that I ever heard was when people would say I'm from Green Valley. And people who were from old Henderson would get a little --**

A lot of resentment.



**Because of that. That's the only resentment I ever heard of.**

Yeah. It really is. And I hope people are getting over that and beyond that. Well, you know, it's just like if you get in any big urban area there's this area and that area. We are going to Rome in November and I was looking at the map of Rome yesterday. Well, there's this area and this area and this area on the map of Rome. You're going to run into that anywhere you go. And there are going to be these older sections.

**That's right. Yes.**

They're just always going to be there because they were there first. And it's just like this one nurse that came to treat Bill's knee. She lives over in Green Valley. And she came here and she said I didn't even know this was here. She said this is just such a nice area to be right on the golf course. I didn't know old Henderson had anything like this.

**And you know what? Half the time people don't know.**

No.

**They just don't know.**

They don't. Our daughter lived here for two or three years after she came home. And all of her friends at that point were single and didn't have houses. So they'd have all their parties out here. And they'd say we didn't know this was out here. They just loved coming out here.

**Oh, yes. You have just a wonderful home.**

So it's funny how things go. And I'm just too old to worry about stuff like that.

**Oh, yes. And I love your attitude. I really do.**

Well, thank you.

**And I thank you so much. This is a wonderful way to look at Henderson. As I told you and Bill earlier Nevada State College is in the process of developing an oral history program.**

**And one of the things I will do -- as you know, I'm training them to become oral historians -- will be to share with them the interviews of the two of you so that they can learn about Henderson. You have to know the history of the city in order to start asking questions about it.**

Oh, I think you're right.

**So I will share yours with them.**



That's fine.

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

Like I said I'm not any big political person or anything.

**You don't have to be.**

But I've been here.

**That's right. That's all it takes. That's all it takes.**