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An Interview with Phyllis Silvestri

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee White

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

Recorded interviews, manuscripts, broad copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through grants from the City of Las Vegas and the University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries. The University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries also provided administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they visited their community, they realized it was a special place that encompassed issues of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, disability and generational. Patrick and Deborah wanted the John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an employee of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

The transcripts received numerous editing that included the elimination of fragments, false words and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. These interviews have been catalogued and can be found as non-circulating documents in Special Collections at UNLV Libraries.

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Interview with Physics Professor

January 1, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Clayton White

Recorded interviews, transcripts, bound copies and a website comprising the *Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project* have been made possible through a grant from the City of Las Vegas Centennial Committee. Special Collections in Lied Library, home of the Oral History Research Center, provided a wide variety of administrative services, support and archival expertise. We are so grateful.

This project was the brainchild of Deborah Boehm, Ph.D. and Patrick Jackson who taught at UNLV and resided in the John S. Park Neighborhood. As they walked their community, they realized it was a special place that intersected themes of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gentrification. Patrick and Deborah learned that John S. Park had been listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and that original homeowners, local politicians, members of the gay community, Latino immigrants, artists and gallery owners and an enclave of UNLV staff all lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, they decided that the history of this special place had to be preserved, joined with the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries and wrote a grant that was funded by the Centennial Committee.

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Interview with Phyllis Silvestri

January 11, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee White

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Preface

As a young woman, Phyllis Silvestri made the adventurous decision to move to the United States. She was born in Canada and lived there until her early 20s. Over the next few years, Phyllis and her friend Mona logged many miles, worked and visited several states.

By 1953, Phyllis had met and married Vincent Silvestri, who worked at Bingo Palace, now the Sahara Hotel and Casino. Soon they had their first child and had bought a home on Santa Rosa. A few years later they were building a new home in the John S. Park area. She proudly recalls her husband's attention to details such as including lots of built-in features and a bomb shelter that represents the era.

Phyllis talks fondly of the neighborhood, but also recalls her children not being allowed to play with some of the neighborhood children because they were of Italian ancestry.

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER AT UNLV

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood



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Name of Interviewer: CLAYTEE D. WHITE

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Phyllis M. Silvestri 1/11/10
Signature of Narrator Date

Claytee D. White 1/11/2010
Signature of Interviewer Date

Interview with Phyllis Silvestri

January 11, 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Claytee White

This is Claytee White, and I am in the John S. Park Neighborhood today. It is January 11th, 2010, and I am with Phyllis Silvestri. And we also have in the room with her, Phyllis's daughter, Sharon Bangle.

Phyllis, tell me a little about your childhood and where you grew up.

I was born in Montreal, Canada [ca. 1922], and stayed there till I was in my twenties, so I went to school [there]. [I was] very active in sports: tennis and baseball. [I] just loved sports, and swimming. My activities: I went to a Catholic high school in Montreal, and after that I got a job and worked, but I decided it wasn't enough. I wanted to see the world, so I decided to leave home. Before that, I did go to college at night, so I got my B.A. I took four years and it was a long process but I enjoyed it very much. Then I decided, Now it's time to do something else. So I decided I would leave home and travel and get a job, of course. My family didn't have a lot of money to hand me the money to do that.

So anyway, I had lunch with my close friend Mona one day. She was secretary to the president of the largest pharmaceutical company in Montreal, and I was secretary to the secretary-treasurer [of the same company]. We had lunch and I told her, Well, got my visa, I'm ready to go, and she nearly died. She said, Oh, I'd so love to do that. And I said, Why don't you? So she thought about it and called me the next day and said, I want to go, too. But she'd have to expedite her visa. It took me two or three months. So I knew someone in the United States Consulate and phoned this lady and asked her if she could

expedite Mona's visa, so she did, and Mona got her visa and we left. But the first thing is, I told her, My first stop is Chicago [Illinois]. Oh, she said, I wouldn't go to that city of gangsters. [Laughing] That was our first disagreement. So she went to Winnipeg [Manitoba, Canada] to visit her sister and I came to Chicago and got three jobs there. I worked in a law firm, [for] Indiana Steel, and I forget the other one. So then, we decided we'd meet in St. Louis [Missouri].

So how long were you in Chicago?

About two or three months, maybe three months. And then our next stop was going to be—we'd say, Meet me in St. Louis, meet me at the fair. [Laughing] So we decided we'd meet in St. Louis and I made reservations to stay at the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. So, first of all, we nearly missed each other, but we found each other that evening. And we both got jobs the first day we went looking, because maybe they were desperate for secretaries after the War [World War II], I don't know, but we both got jobs really easy.

And then we thought, Now where is our next stop? So we went from place to place. We went to Kansas City [Missouri], then to the Grand Canyon [in Arizona]. We worked at the Grand Canyon and that was fun. We really enjoyed it.

Sharon: Because you saw the ad for being a Harvey Girl.

Phyllis: Oh, that's right, being a Harvey Girl. Now, what do they do? We didn't know what they did. We didn't know about waitress work. [Laughing] So we went to be interviewed by Miss Toyce—I still remember her name—the director of all this, and she said, Now, how much experience [do you have]? And I said, Well, not very much

(meaning zero), and she said, Well, I want you to forget everything you know about waitress work. [I thought], Oh, that's wonderful. [Laughter]

Because you didn't know anything.

So it was easy to forget. So they trained us, and for two days you're trained; you follow someone that's experienced. And they also let us see all the tours at the Canyon. They took us on the tours for two days. So we were the best guests they had. We loved it. And then they had dancers at night. It was a very exciting place to work, and we learned very formal service: tablecloths and table napkins. It was all very formal. I'd never been in a kitchen before, and I didn't do any cooking at home, so this was an experience.

From there, we decided we'd take off. We were heading west to Los Angeles [California]. It took us two years to get to Los Angeles. We didn't go that fast. We went from Grand Canyon down to Phoenix [Arizona], and we worked in Phoenix, and now we had experience as waitresses. We knew how to do it. We were so happy. We knew what a kitchen looked like. [Laughter] You know, it's marvelous how waitresses can get jobs, and you learn very quickly when you have to. We'd take notes, and at night before we went to bed, we would exchange notes with each other. We'd put it all down in shorthand and then exchange notes and here's what you do and here's where you place the spoon and everything.

Oh, we did go down to Mexico City. That's right, we took off for six weeks to see Mexico and Acapulco and all these places. We had enough money from the tips to go on further, so we had a wonderful time in Acapulco. Oh, it was fabulous. We went on a bus. We were prime residents of buses.

Then we came back. We went back to our homes. Both of us were from Montreal. But then we came back to the States and we worked in New York City, and then from there we went down to Florida. We got wonderful jobs. We worked at Palm Beach at the Everglades Club. You had to be a millionaire to belong to it. They never gave anybody a check. I don't know how they did it, on their machines.

Did you meet a rich husband?

No, I didn't, darn it. [Laughter] At each place we did have boyfriends. We were doing all right. [Laughter] Down in Florida I met who-do-you-call-it? I forget his name.

Then we went to Havana, Cuba, and that was great. You see, they used to buy drugs from the pharmaceutical company [that we worked for in Montreal].

So we're still in the Forties?

We are.

So what was Cuba like at that time?

It was wonderful. There was music on every street. Fidel Castro was not in power at all.

That's right, Castro wasn't there until 1959.

No, not at all. Yeah. So Havana was music everywhere. And of course we had a connection, because they bought their drugs out of this firm in Montreal, so Dr. Fabres was dying to meet Mona because she was the president's secretary, and they knew each other because he made trips to Montreal, to arrange all these finances. And so, they took us to lunch and everywhere. We were just very, very lucky. And of course we both got boyfriends there. [Laughter] Mine was a good-looking guy. He was like, what was that actor's name? (I can't remember. It will come to me eventually.) And they took us out to lunch, and so did Dr. Fabres. The lunch at these places was fabulous. You have a private

little dining room. I don't know what he did. He just tapped somewhere on his bell and the waitress came. Everything was very secluded and lovely. A private club, I guess.

Sharon: You had left your car, though.

Phyllis: I parked my car in Miami [Florida]. I went down to the airport, and parked it, just parked it at the airport, and said to a fellow there, I'll pay you a dollar a day if you'll watch my car. We were only going [to Havana] for seven days, so seven dollars to park the car, right at the airport. I mean there was no parking like this [today]. This is out in the like desert. It's just out in the open.

Sharon: You had all your stuff in the car.

Phyllis: Oh yeah, all our stuff. [Laughter] We never gave it a thought. And I had a convertible. Oh yes, while I was in Palm Beach, I bought a Cadillac convertible, not brand-new but it was like brand-new because the owner had bought it during the war and never drove it. So it was a lovely car.

So now you and your girlfriend stopped taking the bus and started driving?

Yes, now we start driving. We drove down to Key West, you know, in Florida, and we just had our little, not bikini bathing suits, little tops and bottoms, and we had to stop at the something and this guy said, Well, look at these two girls, just driving down to Key West. [Laughter] Why are you going there and whatnot? We said, We have Canadian passports but we don't have U.S. passports. So after meeting Dr. Fabres, Somebody-somebody arranged it for us to get a visa into Cuba, and so we went there and parked our car at the airport, came back, the car was still there, all the luggage was there, and [the car] being a convertible I'm amazed. Today it wouldn't be there. But in those days it was. Everything was still there. We have changed, unfortunately.

Unfortunately, yes. So tell me what Los Angeles was like when you finally got there.

Our first trip to L.A.: I can't remember. Isn't that terrible?

Sharon: I don't know if you ever made it to Los Angeles. You didn't stay and work there. You just visited, I think.

Phyllis: No, we stayed there.

Sharon: Yeah. Because then you went to Hawaii.

Phyllis: Not from there, right away. We went to Lake Tahoe [Nevada]. We worked in Lake Tahoe for the summer. I had a Triple-A book and we'd look at the most expensive places [laughter] then we'd write to them, and they'd hire us, you know. So we were very fortunate.

Because you had that training, so you could do secretarial work, waitress work.

Yeah, or anything like that. So, we were lucky. We couldn't cook a darn thing, either of us. [Laughter]

That's OK. [Laughter] So, before we get to Las Vegas, tell me about your parents, what kind of work they did.

My dad was a court stenographer, a court reporter, and he transcribed evidence. They didn't have stenotypes, which they have now and a machine does it, but they had to do it by hand. So he came from Ireland. He had lost most of his jobs because he couldn't get up out of bed on time. Court started at ten o'clock in Montreal, so he got a job as a court reporter. And he must have worked hard to get to learn to do that. So every night they transcribed. From 6:30 to eleven, Dad dictated to my mother and my mother typed all these depositions. And then they had to be signed and bound a certain way. If this attorney wanted a copy and this attorney wanted a copy and that one, you charged extra

per page. Now of course I understand it's much more expensive than it was [in] those days. [Laughter] It was sixty cents a page and thirty cents a page for a copy. I'm sure it's different today.

Anyway, Daddy and his brothers and two sisters, they all came to Canada but they didn't come together, any of them. And one sister came to the United States, so she married a man down in Pennsylvania, I think it was. I'm not sure. And Sarah lived in New York, the other sister, and at childbirth, her mother died, so her poor father, who worked for the constabulary (he was really a policeman, I think), they finally brought him over, the father. They paid for his fare to come over. But it was quite a move, you know. That was tremendous for those guys. But they had to get jobs. They came over in steerage, so it means the lowest [deck] on a ship that you could come on, and then you got a job. The first thing you do is look for a job. And there were clubs of certain men that were foreigners that helped each other. As soon as another one came, he would plead his case and they'd say, Now you all have to help. So they would, and they'd find him a job, and Daddy went to study at night, and studied till he learned shorthand real well.

My mother's name was Alice Hale Saunders and her father was principal of a Catholic high [school] in Montreal. All the big Catholic men in Montreal went to that school. It was prestigious to go there. And he [my grandfather] had his M.A. when [for] most people [it was] very rare to have an M.A.

And women could not go there?

No, only men. My brother went to Loyola [High School]; only boys could go there.

Yeah, the society was based on men. But of course, men were to provide the sustenance

for people to live, and women stayed at home and brought up the children and changed the diapers and all that stuff. Wonderful stuff. [Laughter]

So Phyllis, how did you finally get to Las Vegas? What brought you here?

Well, eventually I went to [Honolulu] Hawaii. I gave up the waitress work and became secretary to the manager of this travel agent, right on the Royal Hawaiian [Hotel] grounds. I just went to Hawaii on a ship, didn't have a job, and the next day I got all dressed, ironed my clothes, you know, and walked down the street, and went past the Royal Hawaiian. In those days everything in Hawaii was low, just two stories high or three at the most. There were none of these high-rises. And I said, Travel service. I wonder what they do. Oh, I'll go in and ask. So I went in and I asked who was the manager and they told me and I told him I was looking for a job. Well, he thought I was a lady that wanted to travel, go to the other islands. So I thanked him, gave him my phone number, and went home; I got a little apartment the first day. (The little apartment was right in Waikiki.) And as soon as I got there, he phoned me [and] he said, I thought you were a visitor. He said, If you're interested, please come back and see me right now. So I did. So I went over there to see him, and he hired me right away, as his secretary. I was lucky because there were five other employees. Some were very good on tours, you know. We planned tours. One tour I was involved in was an around-the-world tour, and they [visitors] came and they just stayed two days in Honolulu, but those two days were busy, busy days.

I went to the employment office before I got the job [at the travel agency], as soon as I landed, and the [woman at the] unemployment insurance [office] or whatever it's called, she said, Oh, my dear, there's no jobs here. You'd better take the next ship back to

the mainland. I said, Well, thank you very much. I waited an hour to be interviewed by her, and that was the result. I thought, Well, to heck with that. So I just got up and went and got dressed as nice as I could and went around looking, and found that job [at the travel agency] the first day. I hate when people tell you there are no jobs.

But your skills were so exemplary at that time.

Well, I was lucky. They needed secretaries badly. I stayed there [in Hawaii] a year. It's a nice place to enjoy. But I found that it was too lackadaisical—I mean a sort of a dream world. People ate at seven o'clock at night. [Laughter] And see, I wanted movement. I had a boyfriend over there. Duke Heatherly was his name, and he was a bandleader. Those [military] bases were still there then, so he played at the Officers' Club, and I would go and listen to the band and we'd have a few drinks, you know, and I was lucky, because Duke was great. At five o'clock at my office, he was there with his car.

[Laughter]

Isn't that great? You keep saying you were lucky but this is not just luck. You were just in the right places at the right time and you had the right experience. You were ready for this.

But I didn't know I was prepared except I knew I wanted to leave home. There's nothing wrong with my home. I wanted to get out of that environment and see the world. That was my ambition.

And you did it well.

Well, I still say, lots of luck, but still moving, getting moving. And it worked out. And eventually I came back. I stayed [in Hawaii] a year. I still have my bag in Hawaii. I'm sure Duke has thrown everything out.

But in any event, from L.A. I phoned Mona. She was working at the El Rancho Vegas [Hotel and Casino]. There were only three hotels when we came here [to Las Vegas]: El Rancho, Flamingo [Hotel and Casino], and [Last] Frontier [Hotel and Casino]. **Right, and that was on the Strip [Las Vegas Boulevard], and then downtown they had the old hotels.**

Yes. And so I phoned Mona from L.A. and I said, I'm on my way to Montreal. I said, Why don't you come with me? She said, I think I will. I'll get a leave of absence. And so we both went to our homes and got together there and saw our parents. Both our mothers were widows.

I came back to Las Vegas with Mona. She already had her job, at the El Rancho, so I had to go and look for a job, and it took me a good week to find a job, and it was at the old Club Bingo which is now the Sahara [Hotel and Casino]. And that's where I met my future husband. I didn't know it. But what happened, I didn't have any [transportation]; I had already sold my Cadillac car in L.A. Now we [Mona and I] got a little apartment on Fourth Street. And I met Vince.

How I met him: I had this job. First of all, I worked day shift, then I was transferred to one [o'clock] in the morning, but the buses stopped at twelve [o'clock] here, so I had no way to get home or keep this job, so I told the bartender and he said, Oh, that's no trouble. Hey, Vince, over there, this young lady has no transportation after one o'clock. Can you drive her home? He said, OK. So that's how I met him.

Then he asked me to go out, and I said, Oh, I can't. I already have a date. And it was true, you know. So then he said, We have Tuesday off again, next week, and I said, I have a date already. [Laughter] So the third Tuesday, I went up to him, being very fancy

with my little cocktail tray, and I said, I don't have a date on Tuesday night. [And he said,] Oh, I never ask anybody three times. [Laughter] So he wouldn't ask me. So I went back to my work, just paying no attention, and he came back a little while later and said, How about going out Tuesday? [Laughter] He was cute. So, next thing you know, we got married and had four children.

So from the apartment on Fourth Street, where did you move to then?

Vince and I lived in that apartment for a little while, and then we bought a house on Santa Rosa [Drive]. And the houses were nothing like they are today; this was twelve thousand dollars. And he could just walk to work. So that was very handy. It was a nice home. We eventually had a pool put in.

So which year was this that you got married?

January of 1953, I believe, and then the first child was born in December of that year.

And you have four children. OK. Did you continue to work after you got married?

No. No, I was too busy. To me that [being a homemaker] was a big job. [Laughter]

When did you learn to cook?

[Laughter] That's a great question. I never liked cooking; that was not my forte, so I just did it. You had to do it, you know, but it was plain cooking. Very healthy. I love vegetables, so a hamburger or whatever, pork chops or lamb chops. I cook simply. And so they all survived and they all looked very healthy. [Laughter]

Yes, they do. So when did you and Vince decide to buy a house here in this area?

Well, we got another child, after the two children, and his [Vince's] dad came from Pennsylvania and stayed with us. It was a two-bedroom home and we did fill in the carport and made it a three-bedroom home. Even [with] that, we were very crowded. So,

we decided, especially Vince—he was good—he'd buy a lot. This was a vacant lot here and that [indicating direction] was a vacant lot, too. This area wasn't fully developed yet. And we went to St. Anne's [Catholic] Church downtown. We had a church downtown.

OK, because I'm thinking about St. Anne's on Maryland Parkway.

That's where we go. But before St. Anne's even existed, the church was downtown on Second Street. I think it was called St. Joan of Arc [Catholic Church]. Vince worked at the Sahara. As soon as it transferred [from the Club Bingo] we had got married, and he came up to Montreal and saw the relatives and everything. And then [after we got married], he decided we would build another house. This was a vacant lot. Of course, we did all kinds of tricks trying to get it cheaper, but I think we paid forty-two hundred [dollars] for the lot.

Do you remember who financed the house?

I guess the First National Bank, which is now Wells Fargo, but in those days it was First National.

And how much did you pay for it?

I think it was forty-nine thousand [dollars]. I'm not positive. It's in that range. Forty-nine thousand. It's amazing how times have changed because at one time I had it up for sale at four hundred thousand [dollars]. Of course I didn't get it; things went down again. They didn't go down that much.

So, for forty-nine thousand dollars, describe the house to me that you purchased.

Well, it's a five-bedroom home, with a family room and a living room.

And a huge living room.

Well, very handy. And has three bathrooms, and a storage room, and it has a bomb shelter, too, so we have six beds in there, in that bomb shelter. In 1960 we moved in, and that was the scare time that we were really worried about being attacked [by the Soviet Union]. Bomb shelters were the thing.

This is interesting. So, the house that I'm looking at now has not been remodeled; it was like this when you purchased it? Wow, this is beautiful.

The only thing is the garage was put in.

Sharon: Right, right, and Mom repainted.

Oh yes, but I'm talking about the size and the openness and all of this. It's a beautiful home.

Oh, good. Our other house on Santa Rosa was all individual, separate rooms. I said to Vince, All I want is space.

Yes, and this is it.

Sharon: My dad designed it. He said, There's not one inch of wasted space. So he planned it all out and went to a draftsman to have it drawn up.

Phyllis: We went to an architect first and the price the guy wanted, Vince said, No way. So then he went to a draftsman, but Vince gave [him] the ideas, like there's a lot of built-ins. I can't describe it all. See, there's a built-in bar there [and] a built-in for my card table. I like to play bridge, and the card tables and chairs are all there. The TV is built in. And even a place for the scale for me to weigh myself is built in. All the little things. He had closets built all down the hallway, on each side, so it gave you a lot of space. And Vince was very good at planning this.

Oh, this is great. Now, does this house compare with the other houses going up in the neighborhood at the same time?

I would say it's a little above. I may be wrong. I don't mean to be. A little above what's [here]. Like that house [indicating direction] has been in many more years before this house was built. He was a senator here. He's still living there. I'm talking about the corner house [where the Petersons live].

So who were some of the neighbors that you remember in the Sixties when you moved in?

The Petersons. They're still living there. And they have a large house, too. And they're high in the [local] Mormon church.

I certain knew the McCuistions well. She was an interior designer. (You didn't call her an interior decorator; [she was] a designer.) And then across the street was Darrell Tanner, and he became a legislator. They had five children. They were wonderful. I just had her [Mrs. Tanner] here the other day for lunch, but she doesn't live here anymore. They've all gone, except [the] Petersons. He's still there.

This house [indicating direction] was [occupied by] what was their name?

Sharon: I think the Shaws built it. The Morgans then moved in. They didn't have kids, so I didn't interact with them.

Phyllis: Oh, that's true; they divorced. What did the Shaws do, do you know? I don't know what he did.

Sharon: I don't remember. Then the Zahns [moved in].

Phyllis: Oh, the Zahns. She's a Von Tobel. So, that way, corner-wise. Our fences joined. I don't know what's happened. I think she's dead and the husband, I don't know what's happened, or he's dead and it's the other way around.

So is there anyone else? The lady you had to lunch the other day [Mrs. Tanner], would she be a good person for us to include in this John S. Park project?

She would've been, but she lives up in Utah. She'd be great.

Sharon: Yes, she would be because it was a real strong Mormon neighborhood and they [the Tanner family] lived across the street, and then they lived just down at Eighth [Street] and Franklin [Avenue].

Phyllis: Oh, they built a beautiful house at Eighth.

Sharon: And they were very involved in the Mormon church. And even though we weren't Mormon, my brothers went to Boy Scouts with the kids, you know.

Oh yes, the Mormons that we've interviewed said that all the children participated in the activities at their church.

Yes, yes. It's ironic, though, the church is leveled.

Phyllis: We don't know what's wrong. Nobody knows.

Well, structurally it was not sound any longer, so they had to [demolish it].

You mean the city ordered it to be [demolished]?

No, the Church decided that it would take too much money to bring it back up to code.

Oh my gosh, is that what happened? Everybody is amazed. We don't know what's happened.

Yes, yes, and I talked to some of the people and they were just devastated to see it go.

So tell me about the social life here in this community. You're a young married couple. What was the social life like in John S. Park? What did you refer to this area as at that time?

It had another name. It was not Huntridge. We're right close to Huntridge but it was Alta-something. It's on the deeds.

So socially, what was it like?

Oh, socially. Well, first of all, most of us belonged to our churches and we went to the church organizations, you know, Altar Society and all these things. But I played bridge, and I like bridge, and I also decided to study parliamentary law. We used to meet at the Sahara Hotel in those days. It was much swankier than it is now. But we still meet at the university [University of Nevada, Las Vegas, UNLV], and we meet at the [Clark County] library on Flamingo [Road]. So it's still great, you know.

So tell me what the Parliamentary Club is.

It's a study of parliamentary procedure to help people make group decisions, democratically. So first, you have to take a test to even join, and then you take a test to become registered, and now to become professionally registered. You study more and more.

So now, is this using the Robert's Rules of Order?

Yes, right. Of course it's international now. It's grown so much. People that want to become parliamentarians sit beside the president at a meeting and advise the presiding officer. [They] don't interrupt a meeting, just advise, quietly. It's very helpful, I mean I

think it is because most presidents are grateful, and you get paid, too. So it's an income. So I've been registered since '68.

And you actually used it to help some different organizations?

Oh yes, oh yes, it worked. I even went to England one time. They took me to England, that group. And then I went to Australia and worked as a parliamentarian. So it's an interesting profession if you're ever looking for not a steady job, you know, an interesting job. It's very rewarding personally because you feel they've accomplished something. They could do it in one day or three days and get things done. Otherwise they just blabber and talk, and often nothing gets done. So it's helpful. And everybody gets an equal chance to talk, not just the blabbermouth. [Laughter]

They asked me to be parliamentarian of the [Clark County] school board; so for three or four years, I was parliamentarian on the school board. And one gal who was on the board (she was an oddball), she said, We don't need a parliamentarian. We know how to do this. So she made a motion that they were not going to hire a parliamentarian anymore. So she's gone and I'm gone. [Laughter] It was OK, you know. Parliamentary jobs are sporadic, and many are just temporary. But as I say, one group thought it was nice. They even took me to England.

So who did you play bridge with?

Well, you know Helen Cannon, I've played bridge with her for years. Mary Shaw. I don't know if you know her. And Bobbie Kellogg. We always had eight. Then we dwindled down finally to four and now we just have four that meet two times a month, every second and fourth Tuesday. Oh, Anne [sounds like Poke-ris]. You might know Bea Reed.

Her husband owned a bar here. Bonnie Davis. You know, as the years go by, you don't see these people anymore. I still see the one group.

That's wonderful. So now, did any of those ladies live in this neighborhood?

Anne, I'd say. She lived on Seventeenth [Street] and Oakey [Boulevard]. That's about the only one I know of in this neighborhood. Isn't that funny? We were spread out. I don't know how we all met. Well, we all belonged to ITC. Not all belonged to that, but some of us did. And we got together. I don't know we all got together.

Oh, that's good. What is ITC?

International Training and Communication. It used to be Toastmistresses. They had to change their name when they opened it to men. The competition was too great.

[Laughter]

I joined a sorority, Beta Sigma Phi. You might have heard of that.

OK, so tell me about the sorority. Was that part of the community activities?

Not in this area. I mean it was all over town. No community activities right here.

OK. So what did you and your husband do for social activities. Anything connected to John S. Park?

Well, I used to play tennis over at [the] Tanners'. They had a tennis court. No, Vince was very individual, and worked at the Sahara, and I never knew what happened in there. He never told me.

OK, so did you ever go to the Sahara to see any of the entertainment?

Oh yes, yes. I remember Guy [Silvestri], my oldest boy, and Sharon coming to dinner there, and you know how they have those little seats, and I said, Guy, you got to tell the lady what you want. He said, I'm so nervous. [Laughter] He couldn't speak. It was such

an awe-inspiring [event]. In those days, the shows were great, and much more intimate, because the dining rooms were smaller. We were given a booth because Vince worked there, so consequently we were given one of the prize seats.

Who were some of the stars that you would see at the Sahara?

Well, do you remember Lawrence Melchior? He was a great singer. He was the opener. He opened the Sahara. And then, oh gosh, there were so many. What was that lady that was so funny? She was quite a singer. She'd have the men all like this on the stage, you know, in a semicircle, and they had like capes and then in shorts, you know, so she'd go through and say, Mmmmm. [Laughter] And the crowd would just laugh, you know. We'd all enjoy it. Think of all the other stars. There were so many in those days. There were individual stars more than these pageants that are there nowadays. We didn't have as big a stage. I don't know if you knew Milton Prell. He was the president [of the Sahara]. And Frank [A.] Schivo was his [vice-president and] right-hand man.

So, were people in this area politically active at the time?

Yes, like [County Commissioner] Chris Guinchigliani was. In those days she was not [in the] position she's in today. In fact, I think she was a teacher. And Mr. Ted McCuiston, he was the Nevada [state] senator. These people next door, they were very prominent. They were powerful [politically]. They did divorce. [This must be the Morgans mentioned earlier.] And then of course [the] Zahns lived cattycorner to me, and behind me was somebody important, I mean prominent, I'd say, in politics. And of course Darrell [Tanner], who lived across the street, became a legislator here in Nevada. Oh, at the corner house, cattycorner that way [indicating direction], they were very prominent.

The Mormon Church [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or LDS] was very powerful in this community. Tell me about the activities of the Church and how the Church influenced the area.

Well, you see, we were Catholic, so we weren't involved very much, except that our children played with their children. How they affected the area: I think they were just nice.

Your children went to activities at the [local] Mormon church.

Oh yes, and they allowed them to play. Now the Petersons two doors down, on the corner, they're very prominent. Mrs. Peterson would not let her children play with Catholic children. So she would tell my children, if they were all playing together, you know, Now, everybody go home, except hers and some Mormon children. She'd tell all the rest to go home. And the kids didn't even know the difference, you know. They didn't know what was the reason. Mine would come home and say, We were told to go home, Mom. [Laughing]

So what would you consider some of the historic events here in the area? Anything that you can think of that was special to this area, that you would consider historic?

I'm sure there are things and I can't put my finger on them.

Did you hear about the John S. Park part of this community becoming part of the National Register of Historic Places?

I'm sure of that. I don't think so. All of my four children went to kindergarten at John S. Park [Elementary School], but then went to St. Anne's [Catholic School] following that. You're the first one that I've met that knows what happened to the Mormon church there. We're shocked.

What are some of the changes that you've noticed in the community over the years?

A tremendous amount of people have changed, and we don't know them. And they move. A lot of people come in and move, come in and move. So this lady across the street has been there quite a while. She's a cocktail waitress, I think. But that's where the Tanners lived and others that we were close friends [with]. This lady, I went over there to say hello to her one day. No interest at all.

So people have forgotten how to be neighborly.

Yes, yes. These are new people that moved in there [indicating direction] and I brought them over some fruit, peaches or pears, and that's the only time I've ever met them. They've never said hello, goodbye, or whatever. And I think they're Mexican. I'm not sure. They're Spanish of some type. So I never hear them. And the next one used to be the Marksons. He was one of the heads at the El Rancho Vegas. He was the head accountant. They always kept their house just beautiful. Well now, different people have moved in and out, you know, so I don't know who lives there. Somebody does, but I don't know. And then the Petersons are still there. So we're the two old-timers.

The corner house was Esther Page and her husband. He was head of a casino downtown on Fremont Street. And then next door was Dr. Sanner. I happened to know him because I went to him as my dentist. I knew several of the people down on Seventh Street, but it's hard to recall.

Yes. Now Sixth Street was known to have larger houses.

At that time, especially after Oakey, there were some beautiful homes. Our doctor [Claire Woodbury] lived there on Sixth Street, an old-time doctor here, and he was on the school board, too.

That's great. I've heard you say quite a bit now that this person worked in the casino industry, so there was a very strong relationship with this community.

Oh, there was. Definitely. The Schivos lived right over there on Beverly Way. There were a lot of people in the casino business. Well, it was easy because they could walk to most of the hotels. It was perfect.

So was this the only place to live?

No, the other place was Rancho Circle. That was considered the ultimate. But these people had no other place to live but Sixth Street, you know, and Seventh, but Sixth had some beautiful homes.

So, would you consider this area to have been middle class or upper class?

A part of each. It was a mixture. One thing [that] is good about Las Vegas [is] it's very democratic, you know, they're not snobbish. So [Jerome D. (Jerry)] Mack lived right over here on Sixth Street. I used to play tennis with the wife [Mrs. Mack]. They were well-known, and they built a beautiful house. I don't know if you've passed it. More custom-built homes on Sixth Street. Not right here but right past Oakey. Then they're all individual.

And there were some parts of the area where they were sort of like, not cookie-cutter homes but they were designed by one builder?

There were some tract homes. From Seventh on, a little area will be that tract, some builder came along, and then another tract, another tract. So from Seventh to Maryland Parkway, they stopped the individual homes. Sixth Street became very important for the well-to-do. And this was a vacant lot. Our family had grown, so we had to accommodate [it].

I think it was a great idea. What are your children's names?

The first one is Guy. And Sharon. And then Vincent. And Jimmy [James P.] is an attorney here. And he has five children.

It seems that a lot of the children of the first settlers became very well known. Like out of here you have [former Governor and U.S. Senator] Richard Bryan. You have [County Commissioner] Bruce Woodbury. And I could go on and on and name many, many more but those names, I don't have to worry about privacy. What was so unique about this community that you had so many people coming out of here with such a great work ethic? What happened?

I think the parents were ambitious and willing to pay the price. I mean, none of my children became anything to do with casinos. The first one [Guy] has his doctorate in physics, and he graduated from Princeton. So the kids did well. They all went to college and they did well. They were not the waiters or the waitresses or anything; they did well. So I think the parents were the drive. [They] said, You've got to get an education, and after high school you go on to college.

Did all of your children go to college?

Yes, all, except Sharon didn't finish because she got married.

OK, but she went, though.

Oh yes, yes, she had a scholarship all through Loyola Marymount.

Do you think the changes in the community make the community better, or not so good?

It was better up till about the last two years and now this area is going down. I go to church every Sunday with Margaret McGhie and she's lived at her house on Ninth Street for umpteen-hundred years.

Margaret McGhie lives right in the [historic] John S. Park Neighborhood.

Yes, she does.

And her neighborhood has that National Registry designation.

They are now. That's right.

And they find that the neighborhood has improved since that.

Oh, recently. I don't find that. I may be all wet. It's the caliber of people that are living in the neighborhood are, how do I say it, I don't mean to be poor, but were lucky to get a house, say, for five hundred dollars, which the house was worth fifteen thousand [dollars]. Well, I'm only looking at the people and don't know them, but I'm looking at their cars and them, and [they] just seem not to be the old caliber. Maybe I'm too critical; I don't know.

But you find that the neighborhood is not kept up as well?

Oh, definitely not kept as well. Everybody had lovely lawns, with flowers. So no, no, it's not kept half as well. In fact, they move in and then forget the front lawn. Of course it's been encouraged by our society to forget it.

Do you have a neighborhood association that covers this part of the community?

We used to, and I don't know what's happened to it. We never meet or anything.

Occasionally, once a year or so, we will meet over at the church over here, but it's not active, for sure. I went to a meeting last year.

Do you think that would help?

Oh yes, I do. And I think it would help that you would get to know your neighbors, you know. It's just peculiar how it has become indifferent. I mean, everybody does their own thing and that's it. So I don't see it. I think this particular section has gone down. People have died, you know, lots of us are older now. I'm eighty-seven.

Wow! Oh, I had no idea. I really did not have any idea.

Well, it's just that it's amazing how your years go on, and you still keep on living.

So your daughter [Sharon Bangle] is getting ready to move in with you.

Oh, she is. They moved in three months ago. As you can see, all the junk everywhere, the patio is loaded, the storage room is loaded.

So how do you feel now about not living alone?

I appreciate it. I like it. And she's very helpful to me. But it's a shock to see that this is no longer on the table. It's something that she plunks down there, you know. It's a little education. You have to be educated to enjoy it. I don't mean educated going to school; I mean get used to.

Yes, oh yes, I know what you mean.

After fifty years, what does this neighborhood mean to you?

It always meant convenience: schools, bus service, hotels, entertainment. However, it does not encourage friendship with each other. You know, we don't know each other.

And there are new people always moving in and changing things and not doing the lawn and not watering. Before that, everybody kept it very lovely. Everybody had a lawn. So it has gone down.

What are your greatest wishes for this community?

Well, I wish that we had a neighborhood association that encouraged people to fix up their front yard, and their house. And I've thought of typing up a little note and putting it in everybody's mailbox, saying, I love to have you here, but would you mind sprucing up [your property]. I'll come and help you spruce it up and make it look nice, appealing. I don't care what the inside of their house looks like, because that's [what] they're living with, but I would love to encourage people [to fix up their houses and lawns]. And I don't know if it'll do any good. And I'm always thinking of this in my mind [but] not doing it.

So do think now that, you know, Sharon is here and she's younger, you think that she could get involved?

Oh, I do. I do. She's had so many things for her to overcome. They had a beautiful home, and it must be hard for both of them to go down a lot without income.

Yes, but they're very, very fortunate, to be able to live in a place like this.

Oh, well, that's nice of you to say that.

Yes, yes. I really appreciate this. I appreciate all of your input. Is there anything else that you would like to add about the neighborhood?

First of all, we still have a lovely park for the children to go swimming. There were tennis courts there; I think they're all down now but it used to have four tennis courts, all free. You could go over and play tennis.

The convenience of St. Anne's and [Bishop] Gorman [High School]: well, Gorman now is taken over by the school board, so it's not Gorman anymore; Gorman is way out west. But the schools. And then there's John C. Fremont [Middle School] right here, so there's junior high, and there's John S. Park [Elementary School]. So there's a lot of schools. And there's five churches on Saint Louis [Avenue]. But they want to put a

high-rise there, seventy-three stories, on Saint Louis and Sixth. And on top of that, this latest one now, everybody's got another idea. He wants to put up something that they dive down.

Oh. The Stratosphere [Hotel and Casino].

Well, not by the Stratosphere. It's something else that makes tremendous noise all the time, and they wrote a letter saying, Would you object? So I told them I couldn't get to the meeting but I objected. He said he was marking it all down, how many people objected to this thing. Of course this has been going on over a year. They have these marvelous ideas, what they're going to do with that property.

So by getting involved behind things like the high-rise and that new thrill ride, do you think the neighborhood will come together behind that and then maybe do some other things, like clean up and you get to know your neighbors?

No, I don't. I don't think so. I wish it was true. I wish it were true, because this used to be a residential neighborhood. The high-rise is over at Las Vegas Boulevard and Saint Louis. You go right to it at Saint Louis. But see, in a way he took away from the residential part. But it [the neighborhood] is very involved with schools, it has parks to play baseball, and it has a lot of nice things for a family, and all kinds of schools, and swimming pools. There's a swimming pool right there at Saint Louis. I don't know how much you pay to go but the kids can go on and [use it]. So, they had a lot of wonderful things, and churches galore, and we need churches, I think. So it had a lot to offer, but I don't know if the kind of people that are moving in are interested in that at all. I have no idea. Do you interview newcomers?

I'm interviewing newcomers and old-timers and people who used to live here and moved away to other parts of the city. So we're getting a look at everybody. So we appreciate all of your memories. Because something can be done. You know, the neighborhood may just become more active.

Sometimes they are, you know, sometimes you recover, or you reinstitute that neighborhood feeling, and we have not had that. We have not got together. It's too bad.

Well, I really appreciate all of this information.

Oh, it's a pleasure.

I was so involved in what you were saying. This is wonderful. This is really wonderful.

Well, I have no regrets about moving to Las Vegas.

Great. Great. So did you continue to travel over the years?

[I] went to Europe a couple of times, but, you know, not as frequently, needless to say.

With four children I had to be sure to have a babysitter here. On one trip, my mother came from Canada and she stayed here, where I could be gone three weeks. But I've been back to Hawaii a couple of times. [I have] not traveled as much.

Who taught you how to budget your money so well when you were a young girl traveling around and working? Who taught you that?

Well, my mother was a teller in the bank, and then my first job was working at the bank. I was hired as a stenographer, but I took over as the ledger-keeper. You know, I lived through the [Great] Depression where you were conservative. I guess you'd say "tight." Because even my children laugh, you know, I'll say, No, that's still good. Are you going to throw that out? No. [Laughter] So I have stuff from the beginning of the ages.

That is wonderful. I just really appreciate this.

Oh, it was nice meeting you.

Thank you so much.

Very nice.

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