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1997

**An
Oral History Interview
with
Ralph Vandersnick**

1997

#39776776

Photographs

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank Ralph Vandersnick for his patience in helping me complete this interview and for his hospitality in allowing me to visit his home and borrow photographs for the transcript. Talking with Ralph and socializing with him at events around town was a pleasure. I appreciate his candor and because of his generosity our record of the Las Vegas gay community is a little safer and a lot richer.

* * * *

conducted by
Dennis McInnis
October 18, 1997

This is Dennis McInnis and I am interviewing Ralph Vandersnick today, Saturday, October 18, 1997. We are at his home at 3125 Calle de El Centro in the Spanish Oaks subdivision in Las Vegas. Ralph owns Sam's Place, the longest-running gay bar in Las Vegas and whether he'll agree or not, he's among the most respected members of our community.

One thing that Sam's Place is known for is that it is the [Las Vegas] Bugle is Ralph's 50th birthday from now tonight is Sam's Place. Really I am it is know really where were you born?

March 16, 1927.

Places, huh?

Las Vegas Gay Archives

Oral History Project Interview

with

Ralph Vandersnick

conducted by
Dennis McBride
October 18, 1997

This is Dennis McBride and I'm interviewing Ralph Vandersnick today, Saturday, October 18, 1997. We're at his home at 3305 Calle de El Cortez in the Spanish Oaks subdivision in Las Vegas. Ralph owns Snick's Place, the longest-operating gay bar in Las Vegas and whether he'd agree or not, he's one of the most respected members of our community.

One thing that Rob [Schlegel]¹ always makes a joke of in the [Las Vegas] Bugle is Ralph's 39th birthday from year to year to year. Well, today I want to know really when were you born?

March 16, 1927.

Pisces, huh?

Pisces, yeah. So I am 70 years old and I am damn proud of it! What can I say? And I'll use my hands, too, as you'll notice [*motions as he speaks, laughs*].

Tell me where it was you were born.

I was born [in] Annawan, Illinois. That's a small town in the southern part of Illinois, about 150 miles from Chicago. [I was born] in a little farm house. I've even got the picture of the house I was raised in. In the country. My dad was a farmer and my mother died when I was 5 years old. You want all this information?

Yeah!

I have three other brothers. My younger brother was only 5 months old when my mother died. I was 5 years old. And my older brother, David, he was 6 years old. Then the other brother is from another marriage. He's 12 years younger than I am. Yeah. [My father's] second wife.

What are your brother's names?

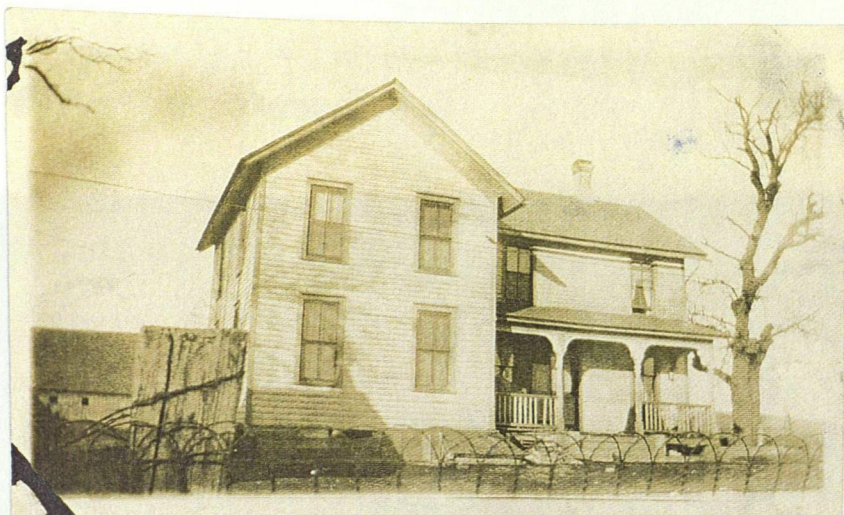
Well, there's David, the oldest one. And then there's Duane, he's the second to the youngest one, then Lyle. He's the one that's livin' in Arizona. He'd be the half brother. His dad and my dad are the same dad. But he's livin' in Arizona, happily married. He's been married 8 times. I haven't talked to him lately.

He must really like [getting married]!

[*laughs*] I think he's a little bit funny, too, I don't know. [*laughs*] What can I say?

Growing up on a farm in a small town in Illinois—what kind of childhood did you have? Would you say in retrospect it was a happy childhood?

Well, as I said, my mother died when I was 5 years old and there was three of us and my aunt [my mother's] sister, Mary [Rumler], she took care of us all our

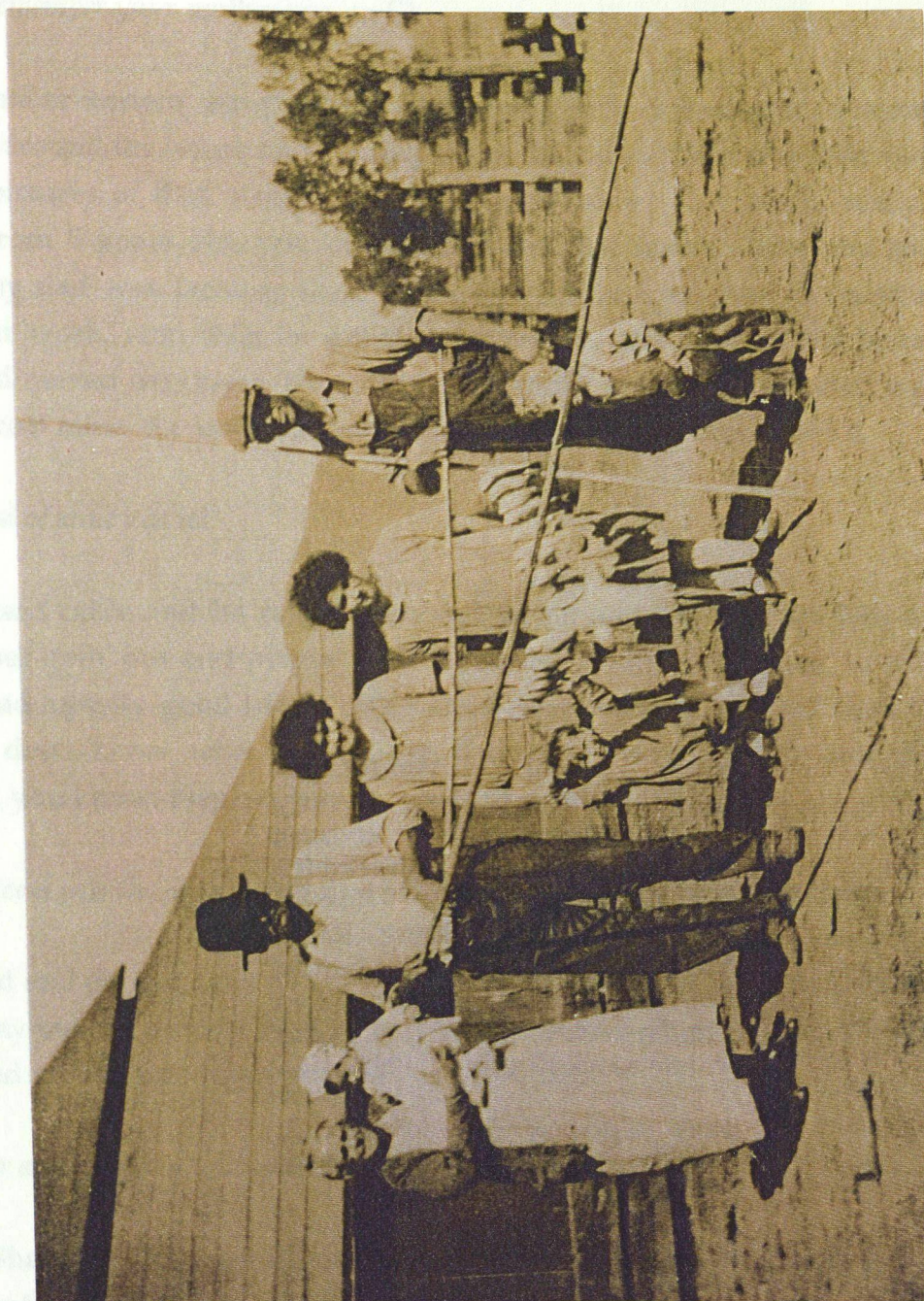


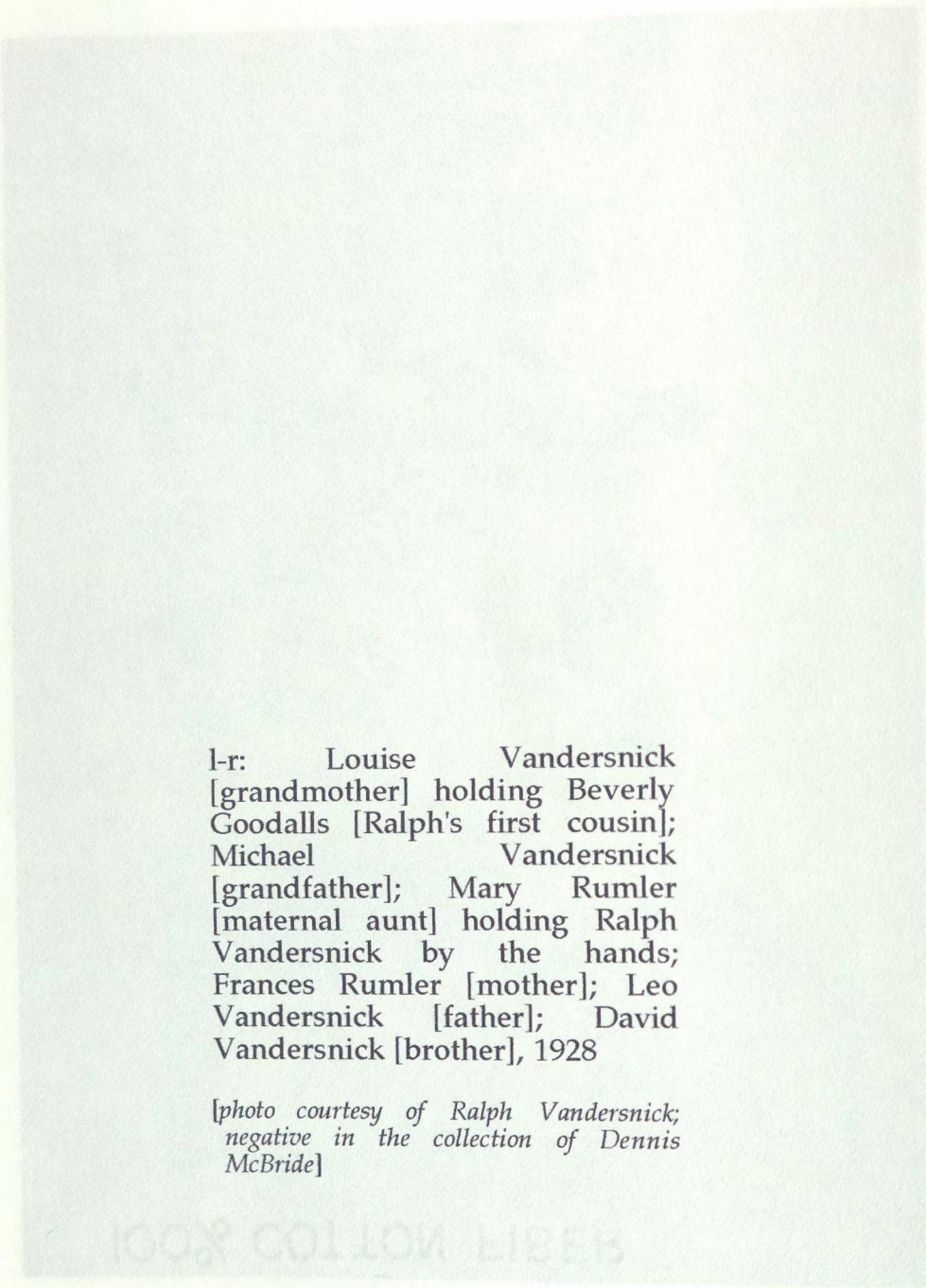
*Top: The house where Ralph Vandersnick was
born in Annawan, Illinois on March 16, 1927.*

Bottom: Ralph Vandersnick, 1928.

*[photos courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negatives in the collection
of Dennis McBride]*







l-r: Louise Vandersnick
[grandmother] holding Beverly
Goodalls [Ralph's first cousin];
Michael Vandersnick
[grandfather]; Mary Rumler
[maternal aunt] holding Ralph
Vandersnick by the hands;
Frances Rumler [mother]; Leo
Vandersnick [father]; David
Vandersnick [brother], 1928

*[photo courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick;
negative in the collection of Dennis
McBride]*

lives. If it hadn't been for her I don't know what would have happened to us. We probably would have been in foster homes.

Do you remember your mother very well?

I remember certain things, but I was really only 5 years old. I remember running around the house and playing out in the yard. [I] had this little wagon—I have pictures of that. [laughs] But I don't remember that much, really. You know, from 5 years old, you don't remember that much. After [my mother] died—my dad was farming then, and after she died, he was in construction, carpenter work. And then he did that for awhile, and we sold the house, the farm and moved into town. He quit [construction], and then he started working [in] the coal mine, the underground coal mine. Strip mine, they called it.

What kind of farm was it?

He raised cattle and he raised corn and wheat and oats and we had cows. I remember goin' out and playin' with the cows' tits [laughs], trying to milk the cow. I had a pretty good life. It could have been better. If it hadn't been for my aunt, I don't know *what*. 'Cause my dad was always runnin' around with women, you know. Neglectful.

How success was the farm itself? We're talking about just before the Depression.

He did real good. I can't remember what year we moved into town. I was born in '27, my mother died in '32, so it had to have been right after that. We sold the farm and moved into town probably in '33 or '34.

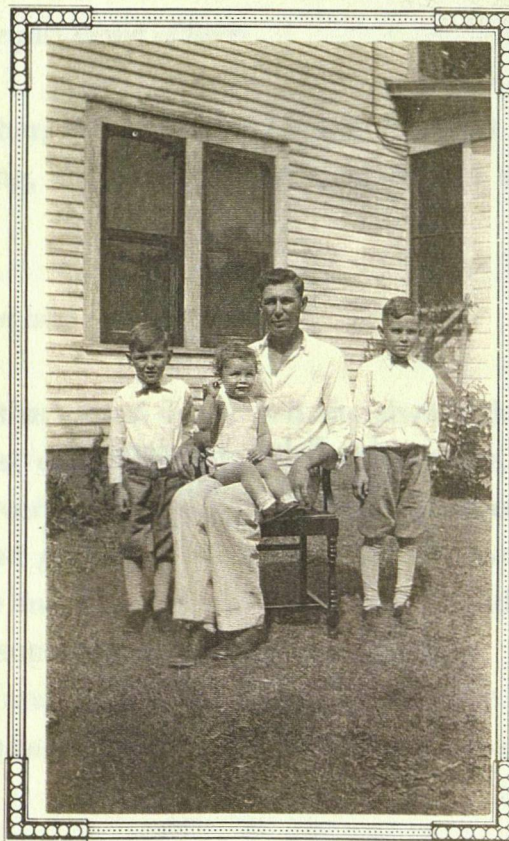
Did your aunt move in with you?

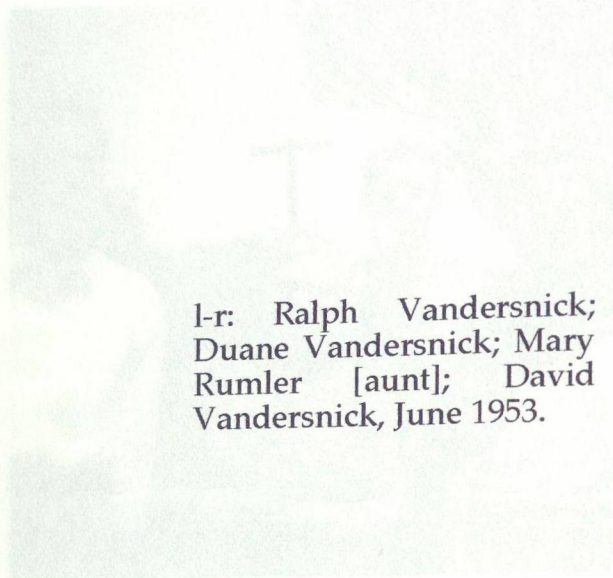
Yes. She lived with us all the time. My younger brother, [who] is 5 years younger than I am, she raised him all his life, yeah.

She was never married herself?

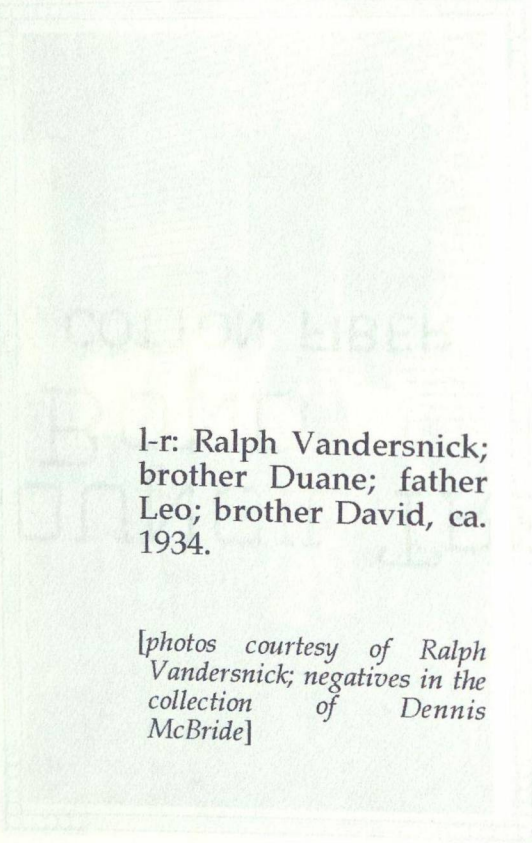


June 1953





l-r: Ralph Vandersnick;
Duane Vandersnick; Mary
Rumler [aunt]; David
Vandersnick, June 1953.



l-r: Ralph Vandersnick;
brother Duane; father
Leo; brother David, ca.
1934.

*[photos courtesy of Ralph
Vandersnick; negatives in the
collection of Dennis
McBride]*

She never got married, huh-uh. We moved into town and [Dad] worked on the strip mine.

Which town was this?

This was Atkinson, Illinois, five miles from the town where I was born. We moved into this big house in town and Dad was workin' at the strip mine. He worked at the strip mine for years.

As a miner?

As a miner, yeah. His second marriage was [19]38. He had to marry her. She was only 16 and he knocked her up. Ethel Burgess. This is where the other [brother] come in, Lyle. So we moved into this big house, another big house in town and she was just a bitch. She used to hit [Dad] and throw dishes and pots and pans at 'im, and Dad would just stand there and not do anything or say anything because you're not supposed to hit a *woman*, you know.

Was that his attitude or was he just afraid of her?

No, he wasn't afraid of her, but he knew he shouldn't hit her because she would have *done* something, she would have sued or did somethin'! So we stayed there.

How did she treat you children who weren't hers?

Horrible! My younger brother raised ducks and she always threatened she was gonna kill the ducks and eat 'em! Yeah. That was a feud there, you know. Then one morning I remember very clearly—[my parents'] bedroom was the other side over there, and Dad had gone to work because he was workin' nights—we were in the other room, me and [Duane] was in one bed, David was in the other bed, and we was makin' some kind of noise or somethin', not that loud or anything. And she came in and she just beat the shit out of my little brother. She went in the closet and got a cane and whacked him over the ass with it.

Then things just started gettin 'worse. She didn't like any of our relatives or any of our friends or anything, you know. What a *bitch*! Ooooh! I'll never forget it.

What was your mother's name?

Frances. Frances Rumler, before she got married. She was a beautiful woman. I just wish and would have prayed she hadn't died and we could've got our lives on. The old *man* got along real good with [Ethel Burgess], I don't know.

You'd started school, then, by the time that your dad had married a second time. Where did you go to school?

St. Anthony's in Atkinson, St. Anthony's Catholic school.

You were a Catholic!

Yeah! And [the school's] still sittin' there! My mother graduated from there and my aunt [Mary] that took care of us graduated from there. The old building is still sittin' there. Every year I go home I wave at it. I go by and say, "Hi!" Then the church is right across the street, St. Anthony's Catholic church. That's where I was baptized and confirmed.

What was it like going to Catholic school as a child? What did they teach you?

They were very strict. Very strict. They got away with a lot more than they get away with now. They could crack your hands with a ruler [*smacks his knuckles*], crack your knuckles, you know, and hit ya on the head and all this crap and nobody'd say anything about it. Now, you can't *touch* kids in school.

Did that happen to you?

Yeah! I got cracked on the knuckles many times with rulers. And then you'd have to write a sentence sayin', "I will not do *this* anymore." Somethin' like that 500 times on paper, you know, or stand in the corner with your back [turned to

the class] for an hour or so. And all that crap. Or they wouldn't let you go to the toilet for five or six hours. Different things like that. They were very strict.

And it was nuns?

Nuns. St. Benedict nuns. They were from the St. Benedict order.

The teaching order.

Teaching order, yeah.

How did you get along with the nuns?

I got along pretty good with 'em. I mean, I didn't *hate* 'em or anything, but they were very strict. Everything was on the up-and-up. Not like schools are nowadays. Oh, my God! The teachers can't even hardly look cross-eyed at kids anymore. It's terrible, yeah.

Was this was just grammar school you went to at St. Anthony's?

Yeah. Eight grades. And then I graduated from there and went to high school—they had the big high school in town. I went three years there and the war [World War II] broke out and I got drafted out of my class and I had to go to war when I was 17.

Before we get to the war, tell me some about the friendships you made while you were in school here in the late 30s and before you went to war. Did you have a circle of friends that you ran around with?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Who were they?

Fish. We used to call 'im Fish all the time. Fish [Gerald] Cowells was his name [laughs]. He hates that now. Everytime I see 'im [he says], "Don't you call me that! Don't you call me that!" [laughs] And Albert DePauw was a friend of mine.

And I had a lot of girls, you know, that I hung around with. Joyce Gritman and Betty DeBeare and Bev Welvert and Frances Vandevoorde and Donna Verbeckmoes, and oh, different. Cliquish. And I still got all kinds of pictures of all my classes and everything.

And you know how you are when you're in eighth grade. That's probably when I was 13, 14. Then, on to high school. Most of these ones I was acquainted with went to the same school, you know, the girls and boys. There was 32 in my class. And it was *amazing*. We had three sets of twins and five Ralphs in my class out of 32 people! Can you believe that? Five Ralphs and Ralph is not a common name. Three of us got drafted. Gordie [Gordon] Taber and myself and Ozzie [Roy] Hamer. The three of us got drafted, and when we come back we never did receive our high school diplomas. They wouldn't give it to us. No.

Why?

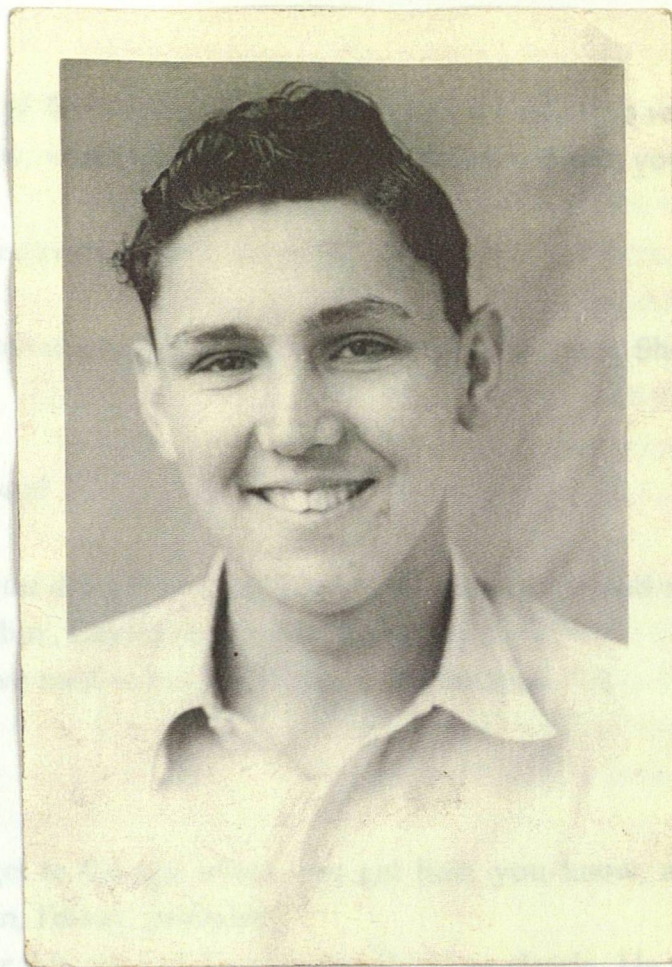
I don't know. They said we just didn't complete [the work]. But I heard that in other, different states and towns and stuff [that] if you served in the war during your schooling years they would automatically give you the diploma. But they just refused to do it [for us]. We had a superintendent that was a *real asshole*. Mr. Allison was his name. We asked 'im many times [for our diploma] and he said no.

You were drafted, then, right in the last year of the war, next to last year, '44?

Yeah. I went in the early part of '45. I never seen any action, but when I went in I was in Camp Roberts, California. And during my basic training the war ended, I think the fourth or fifth month I was in, the war ended. I remember I was on furlough back home and I had to go back at Christmas time, go back and celebrate Christmas back at my base. I couldn't do it with my relatives, and that kind of pissed me off, you know [laughs].

And then I was in the service for, like, three years, then I came out and I got a job at John Deere Harvester.

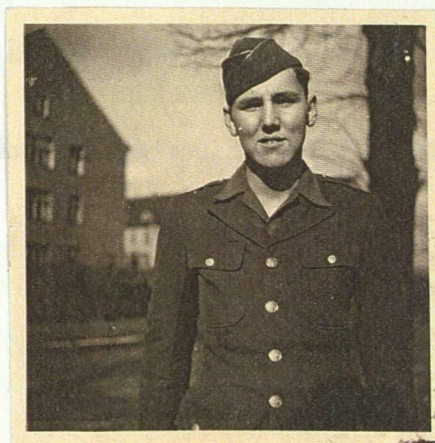
When you say came out, which way do you mean that?



Top: Ralph Vandersnick, about 14 years old, 1941.

Bottom: Ralph Vandersnick in the army in Frankfurt, Germany, 1946.

[photos courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negatives in the collection of Dennis McBride]



[laughs] Oh! came out of the service. I really didn't know I was gay when I was in the service. You know, when you're young you monkey around, young kids.

Tell me about some of those experiences.

Fish Cowells. My brother caught us jackin' off a couple of times. Should I say that? [laughs]

What did [your brother] say?

He said, "What are you *doing*?" [laughs] We wiped our hands [and said], "Oh, nothin', David! Oh, nothin', David!" It was real funny!

Then this other kid, we used to jack off in the car all the time.

How old were you then?

Oh, just when you get to the age when you get hair, you know, and you're horny. Fourteen, fifteen, I'd say, probably.

And then I remember this one kid, I remember [him] so clearly. He was about two years younger than me and he had a thing on 'im like *that* [measures about seven inches] and he tried to put that up my ass and I screamed and yelled! [laughs] I hope I can have a copy of this! [laughs]

Absolutely!

And a couple of other times. Different people in town. You know, you go out, play around [with] people, feel around. But I didn't really know.

You couldn't really put a name to it at that time?

No. Huh-uh. I didn't really know I was gay until I went to California when I was 24 years old!

After the service.

Yeah. I didn't know what gay life was. I didn't know what a gay bar was until I got this job at Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica, California. This one kid [Stan Novak] was workin' close to me, and he says, "I want to take you out to a bar." I got acquainted with 'im. I didn't know what his story was or anything. He says, "I want to take you out to a bar tonight." I went there, you know, and I saw all these men in there and I thought what the hell is goin' on? I'd been in a bar before [where] there's been a lot of men, but there was no women at all in [there] at all, you know. He started introducing to me to people, you know, and [he said], "This is a gay bar, Ralph. You know what that is?"

I says, "No. I have no idea."

So then he introduced me to the guy that owned it and [Stan] *worked* for 'im at this gay bar. [My friend's] name was Stan. And the owner of the bar was Bob Gallagher. And I got to know Bob real well. Then I think the second or third night I met this guy, his name was Raul Tellez. I'll never forget [him] as long as I live. He was a little Mexican guy. And I fell in love with that little fucker, ooooh! Ooooh! And we carried on for over a year.

And this was when?

This was '53, I would say. Then we kind of broke off, and he says, "I love you, but I'm not really *in* love with you." And that kind of ended that. That was my first big romance and I cried like a big fuckin' baby. I thought, "Oh, God!"

You were 26 or so?

Yeah.

And then this guy that took me to the bar and introduced me to the owner [Stan], he got hepatitis and he got sick, then Bob [Gallagher], the owner, asked me if I wanted to work there, so I ended up workin' there for five years.

In addition to your job [at Douglas Aircraft]?

Yeah. I did this for five years. I worked at Douglas Aircraft in the morning from seven till three-thirty, then I went home and cleaned up and took a little nap, and I worked at this bar from six till ten o'clock every night. Sometimes I would work more hours, you know. I did that for five, six years. Only had

Monday nights off. And then in the meantime I met different friends, you know. I really got into the swing of the gay bars and everything, you know. I started going to all the other bars in town.

Let's back up just a little bit. When you were in the service did you have any gay experiences?

Not a one. As I look back now, I can see I had plenty of chances, but I didn't even know I was gay then. But I knew I didn't like women. I knew that, you know, I liked men better than women.

How did you come to that conclusion?

Well, I used to go with women and everything, but it didn't *do* anything for me, you know. My brother would fix me up with dates and stuff and, I don't know, I just didn't feel comfortable going out with women. After this other scene in the service, then I just flew right into [my gay life]. All this time I was missing that.

Did you understand why you weren't interested in women the way your brother and the other guys were?

Not really. I just never thought about it. I knew I liked a big *thing* hangin' down instead of a hole! [laughs and claps his hands]

A hole in the front, anyway.

A hole in the front, yeah! [laughs] I'd take [girls] to the shows and kiss 'em goodnight, and that would be it. I have done it, but I just didn't *like* to do it. It's just, to me, it [was] just an old hole down there. That, and smell so bad you couldn't stand to be around 'em, you know. Now, I used to take women out to shows and to ball games and different things, you know, take 'em home at night, kiss 'em goodnight, and, "See ya later, Sweetie." But when it got down to the real jobbie of doin', you know ... I was kind of pressured a few times. They wanted to get screwed, but I said no. And in a small town doin' that gets around. But nothin' was ever really said about me bein' gay all that time, you know.

So you had no sense of it being wrong?

Uh, uh.

It was just not an issue?

Yeah.

Well, when you got out of the service and moved to California, where was the first place you lived?

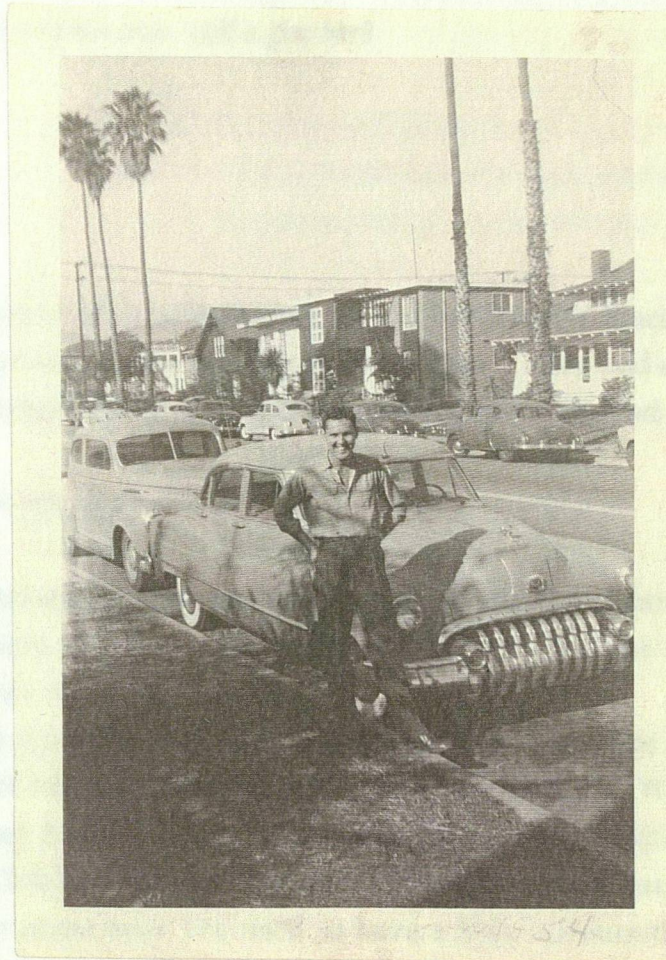
848 Fourth Street in Santa Monica, California. I'll never forget it. I went out there with a friend of mine. I still don't know his story. We jut hung around together all the time, took out girls. We never took out guys or anything. But we used to go out and get drunk and go to parties and all this shit. I was workin' at John Deere then, back in Illinois. We said, "Well, let's go to California." We packed all our stuff in this 1950 Buick I bought, brand-new Buick. I paid \$3000 for the damned thing in 1950. The year before that we drove to New York, went on a little tour from New York and visited relatives in Ohio and whatever, you know. And the next year we said, "Well, let's go to California." Our intention was as soon as we got out there to get a job and stay out there. But we didn't tell anybody [that]. So the first day we got out there—Santa Monica, California we hit—we went to Lockheed Aircraft and they weren't hiring. Then the second day we went to Douglas Aircraft and they hired us!

What did they hire you to do?

Shipping clerk. And I was there seven years. That's when I met Stan Novak. He got sick and I worked at the gay bar until 1957.

What was the name of that gay bar?

Hap's. It's still there, but it's not called Hap's anymore. It's right in Santa Monica Canyon. Right on the coast highway there. You've heard of the Friendship Bar in Santa Monica?



Ralph Vandersnick in Santa Monica with his
1950 Buick "cruising car," January 1954.

*[photo courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negative in the
collection of Dennis McBride]*

Well, it's the same way as with this one [Snick's Place] out here. You kind of Yeah.

Yeah. Easy for a bit, you know, maybe a month or so, and just kind of feel out the customers. There's always gay people going into straight bars, anyway. Then

It's about two doors from there. The Friendship is still there.

Is Hap's, or whatever it's called now, still a gay bar?

Yeah. And if they want to come back, OK, and if they don't want to come back,

that's all right, too. Most of 'em come back. I still have straight people come into

What did it look like? I came up here that I've been walking on for 21 years.

It was just a little beer bar. About the size of my bar [Snick's Place]. And they just served beer. They didn't have any liquor or anything. They had a juke box in there. And they had a hole in the wall and they served Mexican food next door.

It had a little restaurant attached?

Yeah. And Jack Cartwright was the waiter, and we used to shove the beer through the hole there. [laughs] And he would pay us for the beer. I just remember so many fun times I had in LA.

Then I quit Douglas Aircraft in '57 and I bought this bar called the Studio Club right across the street from the Twentieth Century Fox studio in West LA. The old studio, before they built in that Century City thing. I quit Hap's, too. I ran this bar [the Studio Club] for about eight years. It was just a beer bar, too. All the movie people used to come over. We used to have a little restaurant in the back and [the stars'd] come over for hamburgers for lunch everyday. And I waited on many of the movie stars.

I know, yeah.

Was the restaurant gay? [shows me autographed picture of Joan Crawford]

No, it wasn't gay. Anybody could come in and get a sandwich or whatever they wanted, you know. When I bought the bar it was straight, but I turned it gay right away. I think. Maybe 25. Look how young she looks there.

How do you take a straight bar and turn it into a gay one?

Well, it's the same way as with this one [Snick's Place] out here. You kind of take it easy for a bit, you know, maybe a month or so, and just kind of feel out the customers. There's always gay people goin' into straight bars, anyway. Then you just tell [the customers], "We're gonna turn the bar gay."

You tell the straight customers?

Yeah. And if they want to come back, OK, and if they don't want to come back, that's all right, too. Most of 'em come back. I still have straight people come into my bar at Snick's Place up here that I've been waitin' on for 21 years.

Tell me some more about the Studio Club.

I was there eight years. We had a lot of stars come into the bar.

Like who?

Montgomery Clift² and Marlon Brando³. I'll have to show you this. [Ralph leaves the room and returns with a stack of photographs.]

You have a picture here of Jayne Mansfield.⁴

Um, hm. That sat in my bar for four or five years before she got killed. If you look close you can see kind of beer stains on the picture.

She looks kind of nasty.

I know, yeah.

And look at this one! [hands an autographed picture of Joan Crawford]

Joan Crawford!

That was '54, I think. Maybe '55. Look how young she looks there.

Was she a dyke?

Yeah, well, she played around. She was known to play around with Bette Davis and other different ones, yeah.

Did she ever bring girlfriends in with her that you knew of?

Yeah. She brought a couple in, uh, huh. And she brought the one she was married to, Franchot Tone. She brought him in a couple of times.⁵

My friend Roy [Mazza] used to be a dress designer at the studio. He used to dress all the stars. Boy, he could tell ya some stories, you wouldn't believe it. The big dicks they have and all that shit! Oh, God! [laughs] Unbelievable.

Frank Sinatra [came into the Studio Club]. Ernest Borgnine. And the one who plays in all those old pictures with Jack Lemmon.

Jack Lemmon and ... Walter Matthau.

Walter Matthau! What a beautiful man he is. He used to come into my bar, and then when I worked at California Electronics later on when I got out of the bar business, he used to come into my place, too. He came in and bought batteries for me all the time. That's another story, too. I met a lot of nice movie star people in there, too.

*You mentioned Ernie Kovacs.*⁶

The night he got killed was right in front of my bar, about half a block away. He ran into a big telephone pole. We heard the crash in the bar and everybody ran out.

Did you know it was Kovacs?

No. We didn't know it was him till later, you know. He was comin' from Dean Martin's party and it was kind of like a parade of different celebrities were goin' to another party or somethin', they said, and he was drunk and he ran right into that post. He was killed instantly. Then some people came to the bar and said that it was Ernie Kovacs. It was '61, maybe?

Can you describe to me what the Studio Club looked like outside and inside?

Just about like Snick's, really. It was a little old bar, you know. It had a nice sign up. I got some pictures someplace but I don't know where. It was just a beer bar. I just loved that place. We had more damned fun in there. I remember at the end there when they were tearing down the old [Twentieth Century Fox] studio on Santa Monica Boulevard—they were puttin' up Century City—we used to get all those construction workers in there, all these butch ones with big dicks hangin'. Ooooh, God, the fuckin' queens went out of their fuckin' minds, you know. It was *too much!* [laughs] And we had a couple of fights. You know how it is when you get some butch construction workers together, you know. [laughs]

And there was a little bar down the street. I can't remember what it was called. I used to go down there all the time, too. It wasn't really gay, but it was mixed. I'd send some of my customers down there and they sent some of their customers up to me, you know. And we used to carry on and carry on and, oh, God, we had more damned fun. As far as I know *that* bar is still open. But the Studio Club is a big high-rise building now. It's about a 21-story building.

I interviewed a lady from southern California who got the lesbian softball teams going in the '60s.⁷ She ran several bars down there. She described to me that [gay] people weren't allowed to dance close together. Do you remember that?

Oh, yeah. The vice squad were terrible. When I [worked at] Hap's and [later when] I had the Studio Club, [the vice squad] used to come in and harass all the time.

How did they harass?

They'd come in and they would come to the bartender—I knew most of 'em—and they would say, "Now, don't tell the gay kids that we're in here." A lot of the bars would have a little light in the back and the minute the vice would come in, they'd turn that light on so that would tell you, "Behave yourself. The vice are in here."

Did the vice know about the light?

Oh, they found out in a hurry. Oh, yeah, they found out in a hurry. And the vice told me three or four different times when I was working back of the bar. They said, "If you tell any of the customers that we're vice we can get you for interfering with an arrest."

Was there a front room and a back room [in the bar] or just a light in the back of the room?

Clear at the back of the bar. We had it in some corner. Not real conspicuous. It would be a kind of a dim light, you know, either amber or red or kind of bluish and it would just kind of flash on and off. That would tell [customers] that the vice was in the bar.

That would be awful, I think, to have to be so careful and watch that light.

And I remember one night when I was workin', the vice came in and they took a very good friend of mine. He went with 'em. I don't think at the time he knew they were vice. He went with 'em and they took him up to Mulholland Drive—that's where all the lovers make love and all that crap—they took 'im up there and they got 'im to suck their dick and then they pushed 'im off a cliff.

Did it kill 'im?

No, he lived, but he was in serious condition for awhile.

And it was vice squad cops that did that?

Um, hm. And another time—I happened to be workin' this night—they came in and they took this one kid outside and just beat the livin' shit out of 'im. They didn't have a trial or anything. They wouldn't let anybody say anything about it. They just kept hush-hush. I took up a collection and [the vice squad] gave me hell about *that*. The kid was really beat up. His face was all scarred and cut. It was really terrible. He happened to be a real good customer. He wasn't a real close friend of mine, but a real good customer. The bar got together and had a little party and took up a collection for 'im. We had a jar back there [for donations]. Then, you couldn't do anything, you know. You could have buffets, but you had

to have a little bucket sayin' that this was a buffet but [customers] had to contribute to somethin'. To a welfare outfit or somethin'. You still have to do that out here if you have a buffet.

But you actually used the money to help this boy?

Yeah. We took almost \$5000 in. And [the vice squad] just raised hell. "You can't do that, Ralph." I says, "Well, why can't I? You beat this poor kid up and he didn't have a chance. He wasn't doin' anything."

Did you ever have to pay vice squad off to leave you alone?

No. They never asked me, either. But I know some bars did. [Bar owners] took 'em out to dinner, you know, and paid a certain amount of money and everything. But I was never asked to pay 'em off or anything. I think they wanted me to offer it, you know, to keep 'em from buggin' the bar, but I just never did.

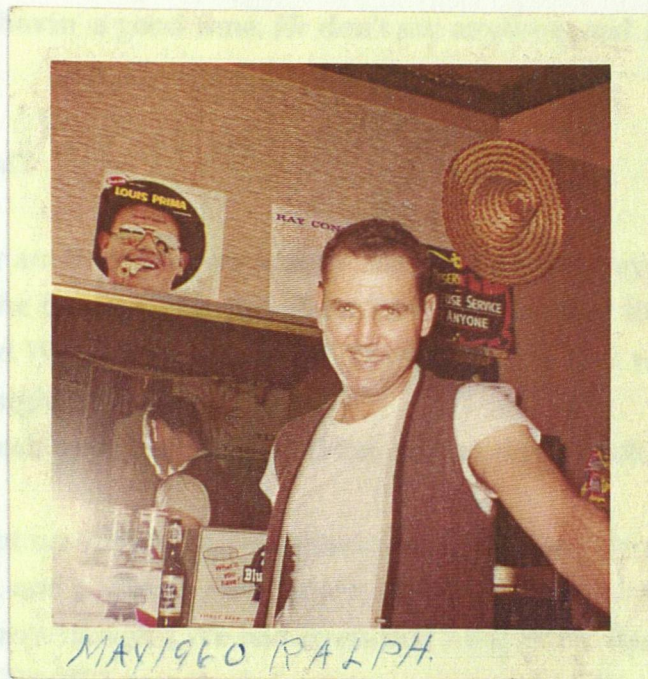
Did you have dancing in the bars, in Hap's and in the Studio Club?

Well, we let 'em dance a little bit. We weren't supposed to. But everytime we would see somebody strange walk in, I'd tell [the customers] to cut it off. It was way in the back by the pool table, you know, where they were dancin' and carryin' on.

And I remember another time, it was on my day off. I was sittin' in the bar gettin' half smashed with a couple of friends of mine and these two sonovabitchin' vice squad officers—Joe Gunn. I'll never forget that name as long as I live. Little Italian fucker. Oh, he was the *meanest*. Good-lookin', he had a dick on 'im like that [*measures about nine inches*] and he would show it all the time. He'd go in the restroom and pull that goddamned thing out. Anyhow, gettin' back to it. They asked me to go for a ride with 'em, the two vice squad officers. And I just jumped up and I said, "You think I'm crazy? You think I'm gonna get in that car and go for a ride with you guys? Hell, no! I'm gonna stay here and get drunk!"

And they said, "We'll be back and watch you."

They never came back. They were just kind of threatenin' me.



Ralph Vandersnick in his West Los Angeles bar, the Studio Club, May 1960.

[photo courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negative in the collection of Dennis McBride]

Do you think that these vice squad officers were on duty at that time, or were they gay and coming in and using this opportunity to beat people up?

I don't know, really. And another good customer that I had, a good-lookin' kid, he was *trickin'* with one of these vice officers all the time! And I told 'im, I says, "Jack, this is a vice squad officer and you're goin' to bed with this man all the time? What in the hell is *wrong* with you?"

He says, "Well, we're havin' a good time. *He* don't say anything and *I* don't say anything."

And he was never arrested?

And never arrested or anything! It was weird. That was all the way up [to the time] that I got rid of the Studio Club. '63. Then I bought another little bar on Pico Boulevard, Pico and Westwood. I named it *There*. T-H-E-R-E. A whole mess of us got together one night.

"What are we gonna call your bar, Ralph? What are we gonna call your bar, Ralph?"

And this one queen got up—Ziggy, a very good friend of mine. He used to go with Montgomery Clift, and he was a sweetheart. He says, "Let's call it *There*." I says, "OK, we'll call it *There*." [laughs] We had flyers and a big grand opening, and it was, "We're goin' to *There*!" I was there for two years and I had to go home. My dad died of cancer and I had to go home. I put people [in charge] that I thought I could trust, people that were workin' for me back of the bar. I came back to town and the vice squad just ruined that bar. They had five arrests in the restrooms and they gave me, like, two to three months to get rid of the bar. *Moral arrests*, they were called. [Vice officers] would go into the toilets, play with their thing and get it hard, let it hang over. Then these little nellie⁸ queens would go in and take a look at it, you know, put their hand down there and right away, arrested.

Entrapped.

Entrapment. That's what it was. I still got the [legal] paperwork someplace here. I had to sell the bar. I lost my ass on it. I sold it to some straight guy. When

your bar is closed from entrapment like that, gay bar, anybody's taking a chance buying it. He bought it and he turned it straight and he did pretty good for awhile, then he lost it, too.

Tell me about going to court over these arrests. What did they ask you and what did you say?

I just said that I was out of town. And they said, "You knew you're runnin' a gay bar?" And I said, "Yeah, I knew it was a gay bar." At that time, when I had the Studio Club, they put a certain [note] on the back of my license. If you owned a gay bar and you were known as a gay bar owner, they wouldn't let you have the bar unless they put this little sayin' on the back of [the license] that if any immoral conduct [was] displayed in your bar, your customers are caught doing nasty things or whatever, you know, we could close you. So that's how they got me.

But they didn't say that same thing on the back of a license for a straight bar?

No.

But later, out here [in Las Vegas] I've never had a bit of trouble with Snick's Place being gay. Nobody's ever asked me. I've been downtown to city hall to pay my liquor license and my gaming license and everything, and nothing's ever been said. I'm sure they know what it is. And I don't think there's ever been vice in that bar that I know of.

In the meantime, I couldn't find any work. This was '63. I was out of work about, oh, shit, eight, nine months. I had to sell my furniture. I was broke, I was completely broke. I had to get rid of my car, had to sell my furniture. I was just roamin' the streets. I had an apartment to sleep in, I mean, I never slept on park benches or anything. But if it hadn't been for these two straight women that I know, I don't know what I would have done. One worked in a restaurant and I would go in and eat and she'd just charge me for coffee. I'd get a big meal, a steak, and she'd just write up the bill for coffee. If it hadn't been for her, I don't know what I would have done. Then—maybe I shouldn't say this—she used to shoplift all the time. I remember sometimes we'd go out She used to wear these big muumuus and big coats in the winter time. I remember one time we came home with *four fifths* of vodka! We had to do somethin', you know. She

had two kids she had to keep, too, you know. Oh, she would shoplift steaks. Just anything. Clothes. Anything. This one time I was with her and I had something in my pocket that I took and they caught us. They took us upstairs to a room. In the meantime, when the cops weren't lookin', I got in my pocket—I forget what I put in there, something real cheap, razor blades or somethin'—and I threw it under the desk and they never got me. But they got her. They hauled her ass away. She had meat in her purse and a bottle of vodka, and oh, God! She went to jail and I got a lawyer for her and she got fucked up. Oh, what a mess that was.

Anyhow, I was out of work for, like, almost a year.

And you were alone? You had no lover?

I had a lover, but he left me, too, because I didn't have any money, you know. His name was Bill Freed. I met him when I had the There bar. I met him at a New Year's Eve party at a friend of mine's and he come home with me. He worked for me at the bar and we were together, like, oh, six, eight months, then I flew back home [to Atkinson, Illinois]. Then he gets on the phone and says, "I want to come back and be with ya." So I had this little Chevy Corvair and he drove the damned thing back there! It was almost a brand-new car. I think I only had like not even a thousand miles on it. And when he come back [there] the transmission went out. So I had to send 'im money to get the transmission fixed, you know, and he made it back there and he stayed with me at my older brother and his wife—she's dead, now—for about five, six days.

Did your family know you were gay by this time?

They had to, but they didn't say anything.

And they didn't ask?

They didn't ask, no. But I'm sure they got the message. We slept together. "There's your room, Ralph," my brother would say, you know. So we slept together and fucked and sucked and all that, you know. Nothing was ever said, you know. Then later on my brother did ask me whatever happened to Bill. Because he kind of liked 'im. He was an easy-goin' guy. Shit, we had a party one night. Oh, God! It was in the winter months, my aunts were there, and all my



Ralph Vandersnick in his Los Angeles bar, There, ca. 1964.

[photo courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negative in the collection of Dennis McBride]

relatives and [Bill] was in the back room doin' something, and the music was playin', some kind of jittery music or somethin' was playin'. And he come out with a bikini on! And my relatives! Oh, my God! "What is goin' *on* here?" They were just screamin' and yellin'! I said, "Bill, go put some fuckin' clothes on! What's wrong with you?" He was the type that didn't give a shit, you know. He had a nice body on 'im. He just didn't give a shit what people thought. I never will forget that. I think a couple days later we took off and come back [to Los Angeles]. That's when I walked into my bar and the police were there and everything and they said, "You know, you're gonna lose your bar." All these moral arrests and I had to go to court and all that crap.

So your lover just cut and ran?

Yeah.

Did it break your heart?

Yeah, I kind of liked 'im. I knew he was monkeyin' around with other guys, too. Yeah.

Was he the same age as you or younger?

About the same age. Maybe two or three years younger. He was kind of a gigolo. [laughs]

So then I moved to this little apartment. This one kid helped me out. I roamed the streets. I worked in a pet shop—oh, I *hated* that. And I took care of this Oh, let me tell you *this* one! I took care of this old man. He was 89 years old. He owned potato farms and he was fuckin' filthy rich! He wouldn't let me stay there. I had to stay at my place. But I had to go over [to his place] every morning at seven o'clock. If he wasn't awake I had to wake 'im up at seven o'clock. Give 'im a rub down, make his breakfast for 'im and go to the post office to get his mail and do his shoppin'. Then cook his dinner for 'im, then I had to go home at night. I lasted about two weeks. He was so fuckin' tight. He let me drive his Cadillac—he had a beautiful Cadillac—but I always had to write down the mileage. And if there was any money left And Blue Chip stamps! Remember the Blue Chip stamps?⁹ I had to get them all the time and give *them* to 'im. And

one time I was a dime short from what I was supposed to get back and didn't give to 'im. And he just blew his fuckin' top. Then the next mornin' he called me, says, "Where are you, Ralph?"

I says, "I'm home. *I quit!* Send me my check. I can't *stand* you. You're an asshole!" [laughs]

And then I met this one guy—I forget where I met 'im, I think it was an ad in the paper or some damned thing—and he collected steel from different locations and everything, you know? Heavy job.

Scrap steel?

Yeah, yeah. And I lasted, maybe, five, six days on that. And I thought, "Wow! What am I doing?" And I was a waiter at a restaurant for about five, six days, just to keep me goin', you know, and I didn't like *that*. Then I finally got up one morning and I says, "Goddamn it! I'm gonna put a suit on and go out and goddamn it, *get a job!*" And I lived in an area where there was a lot of industrial places. I had this cheap little apartment. I think I was payin' \$65 [a month] for it. This girl was livin' with me. She was a dyke, you know. She slept on the couch and I slept on a pull-down bed. She was broke, too. I've been through a lot of shit, believe me!

So this morning I got up, I put a suit on, got dressed up and everything and I just went and banged on every door and walked into every office and finally, the last place I went to was called California Electronic Supply. And this real young, pretty girl interviewed me. Her dad owned the place, and I says, "I'm desperate for a job." She said, "Well, fill out this application. You look like an honest man." And everything. I filled it out and she took it to her dad and the [personnel office] or something, they looked it over and came and talked to me a little bit and about ten minutes later they came back and said, "You're hired. Come in in the morning at eight o'clock." And I was never so fuckin' happy in my *life!* I went home, got up the next mornin'. I was working in the shipping and receiving department, California Electronic Supply. It was only about a block and a half from where I [lived]. 'Course, I didn't have a car anyway, so I just walked over, you know, and then I'd walk home for lunch time. This was '63. I worked there till '74. And that's where I met a lot of the movie stars, too. There was a lot of gay people worked there. I think there was 36 or 37 employees workin' there and there was eleven of us gay. We used to come flyin' around there! The boss'd

come out, stick his head out the door, you know, up on his little balcony there and say, "How ya doin', Sweeties?"

"Oh, we're doin' fine!"

We used to take some of the customers clear in the back where they had kind of enclosed areas and grab their dicks. Oh, Jesus! I was very happy. I was there about eleven, twelve years. I met a lot of nice people at California Electronic. Jerry Lewis. I'll never forget—Jerry Lewis used to come in all the time. And smelled like a French orgy. He parked his big Mercedes right out in front of the place, you know, come swishin' in the door and you could just tell the minute he come down that aisle [*sniffs*], "Oh, there's Jerry Lewis! There's Jerry Lewis!" everybody would say. I used to wait on 'im a lot. And I took checks from 'im all the time. We could take checks from the different customers if we thought they were good. We never had to make good for 'em if *they* didn't make good for 'em. And this one check [of Lewis's] bounced—I still have a carbon copy of that check. \$254. The boss in the office told me, "The next time Jerry Lewis comes in bring 'im up to me because we got a bad check here." So the next time he came in, I says, "Jerry, guess what?"

He says, "What, Ralph?" He kind of yelled at me.

I says, "You got a bounced check up in the office."

Oh! He just screamed. "It's impossible! It can't be!" *Blah blah blah*. He just about went out of his fuckin' mind.

I said, "Well, come with me." So I took him up to the office, introduced him to the girl in Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, whatever it was, you know. And, oh! he just blew his top.

He says, "Well, I'll have a check in the mail tomorrow."

A lot of stars I waited on. Lockhart, June Lockhart. Remember her? She used to come in and buy batteries from me all the time. She was a *bitch*! "Oh, test 'em for me, will ya, Ralph? I don't know if they're good or not." And I had to sit there and test those goddamned batteries for her. Oh, I used to get so *goddamned* mad at her! [*laughs*]

"Test 'em for me."

And I said, "But they just come in, they're brand new. I just got 'em off the shelf."

"I still want 'em tested."

Her. And there was another woman used to come in, too: Shelley Winters. What a bitch she was. She was gay, she played around, but she was a bitch, too.

She was very hard to wait on. And Bob Crane from *Hogan's Heroes*. He was a sweetheart to wait on. I waited on him many times. And Keith Andes. He used to own a lot of boats out in Santa Monica. He was a big, tall blond. He used to come in all the time. Burt Lancaster was very nice to wait on. My favorite, though, was Walter Matthau. Oh, he was so sweet. "Hi, Ralph, how ya doin'?"

I says, "I'm doing fine, Walter. How're you?"

"Give me my usual." He'd always come in and buy batteries from me and some wire for his TV, you know. Such a nice, polite man. "Thank you, Ralph, thank you."

And I'd take checks from these guys, take 'em up to the office and get duplicate copies made so if anybody said I didn't know [these stars] I would prove to 'em that I *did*, you know. [laughs] Many stars. Oh, Peter Lawford. I always used to see him down at the beach all the time, too. Kirk Douglas.

How come all these stars came to that particular shop?

It was one of the best ones in town. There was about seven or eight big electronic places in LA at the time. This was the most well-known. There was Federal Electronics about three blocks from it, and they would go over there and they'd always come [back] to our place and say, "Oh, they don't have anything, Ralph, you got it here?" And I'd fly over to the back and get it for 'em. I waited on the counter, you know. It was fun. I really enjoyed this place.

How long were you at California Electronics?

Twelve years, yeah.

When did you quit?

I was sittin' home one night and my brother called me on the phone. I was still workin' at California Electronics. He says, "Ralph, there's a little bar" In my little home town of Atkinson they had four bars back there. And he says, "There's a bar for sale here. You can get it very reasonable. Why don't you come back and run it?"

I said, "Oh, Duane" After living [in California] and going through all the crap I went through—24 years I was there—I says, "I don't think I'm interested."

And I started thinking about it. Went out and had a couple of drinks, you know, and I thought, "What the hell?" I was happy with my job at California Electronics, but the population of LA and the confusion and the Mexicans movin' in and everything, I thought, "Why *not*? Try it, Ralph!" So a couple of days later I called my brother back and I says, "Is that bar still for sale?"

He says, "Yes." He says, "Send me thousand dollars. I'll put it down on the bar."

And this bar that he was talkin' about At the same time there was another bar that my uncle owned, later on my stepbrother owned. I had a couple of cousins and uncles and aunts—oh, everybody owned it. And that was for sale, too. So I thought to myself I would sooner have *that* one than the other because [the second] one was getting closed because there was drugs in the bar. The guy that owned it was [named] DeFrieze, and the mayor of the town closed 'im because there was too many drugs goin' out of the bar. So [Duane] mentioned it to him, he says, "Well, my brother would like to buy this bar."

So I sent 'im a thousand dollars back. Then about a month or so later I went back and I bought the whole damned building for \$17,000. I lived upstairs. I had a two-bedroom apartment upstairs and I had the bar on the first floor, then I had another bar in the basement. And I run that bar for two years. I sponsored a baseball team. I got pictures of it in there.

This wasn't a gay bar, though.

No! Strictly straight! It was straighter than Oh, God!

Do you remember what year this was?

'74 and '75. When I come out here [to Las Vegas] September 23, 1976. That's when I opened up the bar out here [Snick's Place]. I was [in Atkinson] two years.

Did you have a lover while you were back there?

No.

All alone still?

I played around with some of the little farm boys. I would close the bar every night. Well, not every night. My brother worked for me a couple nights. But I'd always go down and take the money and close up, you know, 'cause I just lived upstairs. There would be some people hangin' 'round, gettin' drunk and stuff, you know. And I'd say, "Well, after I get off work why don't ya just come upstairs and see my apartment, Sweetie!" [laughs] I had a few tricks. Not that many, you know. And I had to be pretty careful 'cause my brother used to have a milk route and he used to go through town about five or six o'clock in the morning! If he saw anybody come out of my house, out of the bar ... ! [laughs] And I tricked with a couple of colored guys. Good-lookin' guys, you know. This one was a bartender in Kewanee [Illinois], and he would come over quite a bit, you know, and he'd stay with me at night. And I almost got caught! I started to let 'im out the door and here comes Vandersnick Dairy Products going by. I said [to my trick], "Come here! Get in here!" [laughs] [My brother] never did say anything. I don't know if he saw him or not! [laughs]

Two years and I thought, "I just can't do this anymore."

What made you change your mind about being back in Illinois? Why couldn't you take it anymore?

The winter, you know. The winters back there are terrible. After living in California for 24 years. The winters were terrible. There was two or three feet of snow on the ground and half the time the people'd come to the bar and we'd have to get out and push [their cars] to get 'em goin'. Farmers would drag in shit and snow [on the floor]. I mean I had a good time and everything. And if it hadn't been for my brother and my nephew [Larry Vandersnick]—the one who's a judge, now He was goin' to law school at the time and he was workin' part-time for me. That kind of saved me, too. I would go up to Chicago and he took me to all the gay bars in Chicago.

Your nephew?

My nephew. He's a judge now.

Is he gay?



Top: Snick's Place in Atkinson, Illinois, ca. 1974-75.

Bottom: Snick's Place, ca. 1976-77.

[photos courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negatives in the collection of Dennis McBride]



No. Well, he's played around, but he's married and got two little boys now. But I used to go up and see him. He'd take me to all the gay bars. In fact, he wrote a big thesis about gay life in Chicago. You should see 'im. He's just a sweetheart. He's really helped me out a lot. He worked at the bar for me. And I'd go up to Chicago all the time and he'd take me out. He just loved to go to the gay bars. "Come on, Uncle Ralph! There's a new gay bar opened up. You gotta go see it!" Oh, Jesus! It was a scene. But if it hadn't been for him, and my cousin, which was a girl. She was straight, but she knew I was gay and she would take me to gay bars, too. She says, "Ralph, we got one thing in common. You like to suck dick just like I do!" *[laughs]* I remember when she first told me that! She says, "You didn't know I knew you were gay, did ya?"

I says, "No!"

She says, "Well, I knew it all the time, Ralph! You didn't fool me, Sweetie!" And she comes out here and sees me all the time. She's a sweetheart. *[laughs]*

You don't drive?

I can't. I got three DUIs. Took my license away. That happened This is goin' into the fourth year.

OK. You decided to leave [Illinois]. Did you decide to come to Las Vegas in particular?

No. When I was [living] in LA I came [to Las Vegas] a couple of times and I kind of looked around for bars. I didn't find anything I wanted. I come with a friend of mine. And I always had in my mind I wanted to open up a gay bar in Las Vegas.

Why did you have that in your mind?

I don't know. I just love Las Vegas. When I was livin' in LA we used to come to Las Vegas on the weekends a lot. I liked the lounge shows and I liked the people and everything. We used to go to the Red Barn.¹⁰ Maxine's.¹¹ Those were about the only two I think I went to before I [moved] here.

One night we were sittin' at the dinner table havin' drinks or somethin'. And I says [to my brother], "David, will you go to Vegas with me? I want to buy a bar in Vegas."

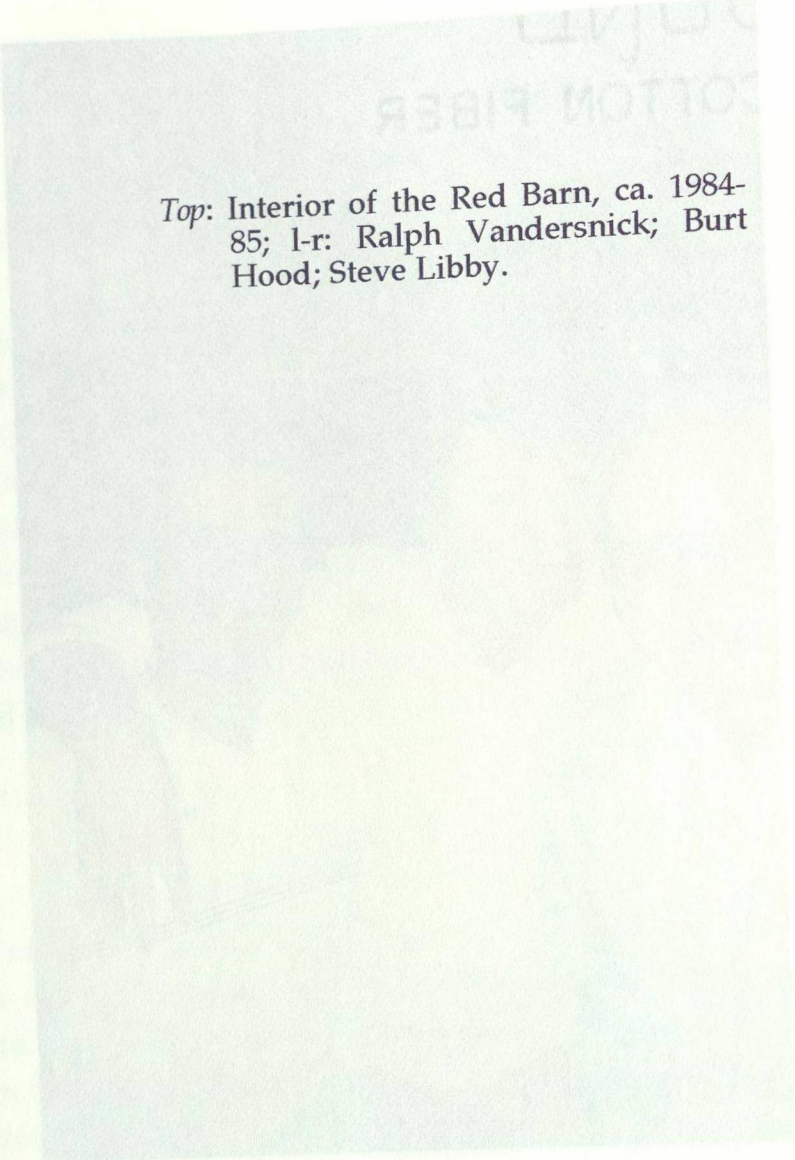
So he says, "Why, I've got a couple of weeks vacation comin'. Whenever you want to go."

So when was it we [came]? ... The last of May we got on the plane and come out here. I met this guy Wolfgang Glossner was his name. He was a real estate broker. Just the sweetest man you ever laid eyes on. I don't know if he was gay or not. I think he was, but it never really came out. He took me to Maxine's. [laughs]. He says, "Here's a bar for ya, Ralph." [laughs] I looked at it. It was a big bar, and I met Maxine and I said, "Well, I'll think about it." [Glossner] had about seven or eight other ones lined up, too, you know. Toots¹² on Las Vegas Boulevard which is tore down now. Across from the Foley Building. In that area. I looked at that and that was a hustler bar. I went in with my brother and he says, "No, you don't want this, Ralph."

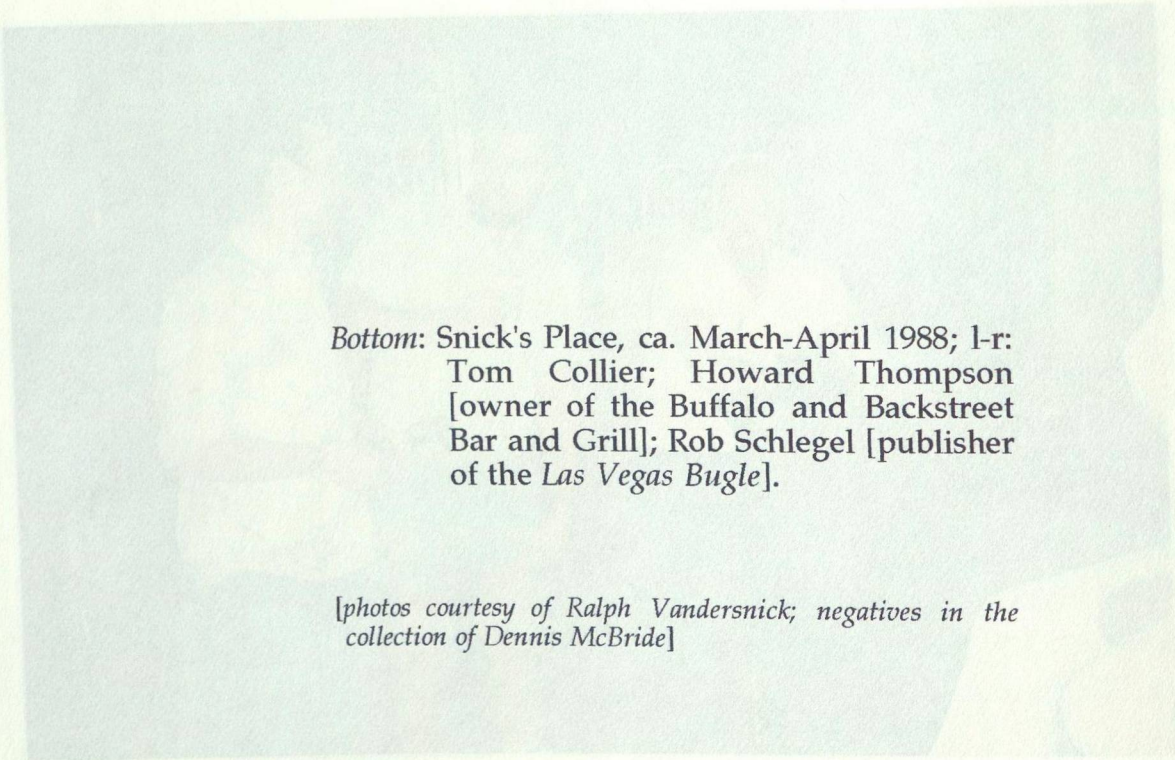
Was it a gay bar?

No. Straight bar. And then we went to one out here on Flamingo. I can't remember the name of that. It was too big. And then we went to It's a straight bar now, Howard [Thompson] tried to get it a couple of times. It's on Maryland Parkway—it's a big bar—right off Maryland Parkway [and Charleston Boulevard] close to the Backdoor [Lounge]. They have a nice parking lot there and it would have been a real nice bar. And I looked at [another] one on Las Vegas Boulevard. It's called Dona Marie's now. It had that big statue in front of it. Big nude statue.¹³ Then I looked at one right on the corner of Sahara and Las Vegas Boulevard. 'Course, Holy Cow! now is in there. Then another one out here on Charleston. Then [Glossner] took me to where [Snick's Place] is now, then another one around the corner—which used to be a gay bar, too. You know Judy Nelson? She owns the Eagle and the other bar next to it. Tropical Island. She owned that bar [around the corner from Snick's].¹⁴ But she didn't own it when I was buyin'. Two guys did, and I didn't like that too well. My brother said, "Well of all the ones we looked at I like this the one best." It was called the Mug 'n' Jug. [laughs] So I told my broker, "This is the one I want." This is going into about the second week [of May 1976], I guess, and my brother had to get back to work. So [Glossner] put 'im on the airplane and I stayed on another week to sign all my paperwork. You got to pay investigation fees for a gaming license and for a liquor license. And the paperwork you got to fill out is unbelievable. This was the end of May and the end of September is when they





Top: Interior of the Red Barn, ca. 1984-85; l-r: Ralph Vandersnick; Burt Hood; Steve Libby.



Bottom: Snick's Place, ca. March-April 1988; l-r: Tom Collier; Howard Thompson [owner of the Buffalo and Backstreet Bar and Grill]; Rob Schlegel [publisher of the *Las Vegas Bugle*].

[photos courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negatives in the collection of Dennis McBride]

finally wrote and told me my bar had cleared all right, I could come out and open up. I sold my bar back in Atkinson to my younger brother [Duane] and I stayed with my older brother in the Quad Cities for about a month and a half until this cleared. Then I came back [to Las Vegas] and opened up the bar. I stayed [at a motel] across the street and there was a fire in the fuckin' air conditioning the first night I got in town!

You stayed across the street?

Where that motel was. There were three motels [across the street from Snick's]. They're all gone now. I stayed in the end one. I can't remember the name of it, but they had a fire and we had to get out of there.

So the next day we went to another little apartment on Casino Center [Boulevard] called the Esquire. I stayed there about a week, and then I moved to an apartment on Las Palmas, a two-story building on Sahara. And then I got into my bar and ran the bar. I met this one guy, John Mikels. You know John Mikels? He was my first gay bartender. He was comin' in the bar when I first bought it. And Tommy Nabors—he lives right around the corner from me. He's my age now and he was in the bar. And another guy by the name of Tommy Collier was comin' into the bar. Them three I knew. That was about the only three I really knew when I first came into town.

And they were all gay?

They were all gay and they were goin' in this bar all the time. And the women that was workin' for the owner—her name was Wanda—I kept her because I didn't know what was goin' on. You know when you [buy] a bar you gotta put somebody back there. You can't fill the hours yourself. So I worked a shift myself and I still hung onto her. She was goin' through, like, a quart and a half of [Seagram's] VO a day. On *my* expense. Besides all the tokes [tips] she was takin'. Half of 'em should have went in the fuckin' cash register. I hope *this* gets out in the public! [laughs] Finally, about the second or third month when I started catchin' on ... And she was givin' customers credit and cashin' checks and half of 'em would bounce. When I first come into town I didn't know anybody. And [Wanda would say], "Oh, yeah, he's good, Ralph." Shit, she had four and five

hundred dollar tabs [for some customers], you know. And this other [customer] was cashin' checks, and I says, "Wanda, are these guys good?"

"Oh, yeah, I've known 'em for a long time. They're very good, they're very good."

I talked to Jerry and his wife that owned the place—they're both dead now—and they said that [Wanda] had been workin' for them for *four years* and doin' all this shit. They just couldn't find anybody else that they could *kind of* trust and depend on, they said. And here she had been workin' for them for four years and I couldn't even put up with her for a fuckin' *month* the way she was carryin' on! A quart and a half of VO a day. I don't know how she did it. She worked at several bars after she left my place. I don't put a bad word in for anybody. When I hire somebody nobody tells me if they're good or bad, so if somebody leaves me and they call and say, "Did this guy work for ya? How is he?" And I say, "He's all right." You know? What am I gonna say? I'm not gonna say he's a goddamned robber or a crook or whatever. He's robbin' me blind.

It was a mess. A *real* mess. And I met this other guy by the name of Ed Judge. He used to come in all the time, and he was gay, too. He helped me out. Was workin' part-time for me. He was a bus driver. Then he told me about Wanda. I said I already knew about Wanda, but I had to hang onto her, you know. And then I told her, I says, "Wanda, I have to let you go." I told her I'm turnin' the bar gay and I want all men in here workin'. And she cried like a big fuckin' baby!

"Oh, what's the matter, Ralph? Aren't I doin' a good job? I just *love* this place." She wasn't gay herself but she knew all the gay people and she had a lot of gay friends and everything. She was married to a postman.

I said, "I'm sorry."

So I hired this other guy and he didn't work out, either. Then I hired another woman. Oh! this was somethin' else. She had big tits and what a *gorgeous* woman! She wore tight things, you know, and her tits would half hang out. Oh, I was gettin' all kinds of customers in the bar—but the fuckin' bitch couldn't count money! Oh, she was so stupid it was unbelievable! I think she lasted two or three weeks and I had to let her go. I thought, "This is the end of the women's scene, Ralph. No more women!" [*laughs*] So then after that I hired men. I bet I went through Since I've been there I bet I've been through a *hundred* bartenders. At least.

Glenn LaDuke was my bar manager in '89 or '90, I think it was. I just happened to go by the bar one day. I had a doctor's appointment or dentist or somethin',

and I went by the bar and I saw the police out there and the ambulance and paramedics and I thought, "What the hell's goin' on here?" I walked inside and there [Glenn] was layin' back of the bar and they were shovin' on his chest trying to revive 'im. And they put 'im on a gurney and just lifted 'im over the bar and took 'im out. I could tell right there he was dead. He was all blue and they had his shirt off. He was just mixin' drinks and fell right over, hit his head on the back bar and there he laid. He was gone.

I'd like to talk about what gay life was like in Las Vegas during that time when you first came.

The only two bars I really went to when I was comin' into town from LA was the Red Barn and Maxine's. That was the only two. I met Bert [Hood] the bartender [at the Red Barn]. Everybody said he was the owner, but he only owned a certain percent. But he said he owned the bar. And there was a guy by the name of Harold that did own it, and I think Bert owned 25% of it or some damned thing, but he was the one that was really runnin' it. Bert Hood.

And then I met Maxine [Perron]. I used to go in there all the time. She wasn't goin' with Marlene [Smith] then. [Maxine's] had three real lovers, each one for years, and I can't think what [the first one's] name was [Mary Mitchell] And then I met some of the girls in there, and that's the only two [bars] I ever really did go to.

This is when you were coming up from LA?

Yeah, before I got the [bar] back in Atkinson. Early '70s.

Describe Maxine's bar in those days.

Oh, it was a dirt road then. It wasn't even a cement road. It was like an old barn. In the men's restroom they had this big trough and every morning the bartender would go in before he'd go to work and put all ice in there to kind of knock out that smell. The old guy that worked for her for years just died about two years ago. Sweet old man. Jimmy! I don't know his last name, but he worked for her for years. He was workin' days and every morning he'd go in and Maxine would yell at 'im, "Jimmy, did ya put ice in the trough, Sweetie?" I

remember goin' out there all the time when Jimmy was workin'. He was the sweetest old man. He was real tall and skinny. He died, maybe a year and a half ago.

Was Maxine's always only dyke bar, or just principally a dyke bar?

She had the Air Force people go in all the time.¹⁵

Men and women?

Yeah. I remember the first time I went there there was about five or six guys from the Air Force sittin' in there. They were kind of lookin' around cruisin', you know. I don't know if they were really gay or what, but they were sure lookin' around tryin' to find somebody, you know. [laughs] [Maxine] was a very good friend of Ralph Lamb's.¹⁶

Did Ralph Lamb ever harass the bar owners in Las Vegas? Send the vice squad in?

I never did hear anything about that out here. I've never heard. The only bar in town that I heard that had vice in it was the Gipsy. It wasn't the Gipsy then.¹⁷ When Chuck Melfi had it. And as far as the Red Barn, I never heard of any vice goin' into the Red Barn or anything.

How long was the Red Barn a gay bar?

Hmmm. Shit. '63 or '64, I think.

It was gay that long ago?

I think so, yeah. When I come into town with Geno, a friend of mine from LA that I used to work with at California Electronics—we used to drive up to [Las Vegas] in his little Volkswagen ... I'd say '65, '66, maybe a little bit before that. I remember when I went out there one time—remember when *Playgirl* magazine first come out?¹⁸ He [Bert] had all those nude pictures hangin' up all over his bar. The police made 'im take 'em down.

Why?

He had 'em hangin' up all over the bar, just all over. The police made 'im take 'em down. I remember this, but I don't remember the year.

I have the first issue. 1973. Yeah. The first issue came out in '73.

I remember that. I used to go out there, and [see that] and finally [the police] said, "Guess what?" And Bert had to take 'em down.

But it was a fun bar. I used to enjoy myself goin' there. It was dark—you could hardly see yourself when you went in there. And they had a lot of drag shows. Did you ever meet Big John?

No.

John Huckaba He worked for me for about five years. She was a big drag queen.

Still around?

Yeah. He's still around. He was workin' at Gipsy. And then Paul [San] Filipo who owns the Gipsy now, when he bought it he fired all the bartenders that were over 35 years old. He wanted young pretty boys workin' in there. John was kind of heavy and a drag queen, so he fired him.

Did John work in the back bar the Gipsy?

Uh, huh. Yeah.

I do remember him. Yes, I do.

He worked for me about five, six years.

Where is he now?

He was answering phone calls. What do you call it when you talk on the phone nasty and dirty?

Phone sex!

Yeah. That's the last time I heard. I haven't seen 'im in quite a while.

I think the last time I saw him was about '84 or '85.

I think he was workin' for me then. Yeah. 'Cause I met Steve in '81 and we were together nine and half years.

Steve who?

Steve Libby. We were together nine and half years, yeah.

Is he still in town?

He's in Florida. We'll get to that later. Where are we now [in your questions]?

Do you remember the 1610 bar?¹⁹

Oh, 1610! Yep. [laughs] That was open when I first came to town. [The owner] was a straight man. His name was Tom. He had it for, like four or five years, I guess. It was a really goin' bar. When I first come to town it was goin' good.

Was it gay then?

Was it gay? It was wild! They had one bar, and then they cut out the wall and they had another bar in the back. And they served food for awhile, and that didn't go over too good. Then they made it a cowboy bar in the back, a Western bar. Half of his bartenders worked for me after [1610] closed.

Do you know when it closed? I have it narrowed down between '81 and '83.

It was probably '82, I would say.

What made it so wild?

Well, the bartenders wore real fancy clothes. They had everything goin' on in the bar. There wasn't a time you couldn't go in there and see somebody gettin' sucked off at the bar or somebody gettin' fucked in the back [bar] or whatever, you know. God, I'm talkin' too much, aren't I?

You mentioned earlier the bartenders at 1610 took advantage of the owner. How did they do that?

They just let everybody do whatever they wanted to in the place. Half the time the money wouldn't go in the cash register.

Did the cops ever come in there?

Not that I know of.

The building's still sittin' there. They sell washing machines and shit in there now. Refrigerators and stuff.

I cross myself when I drive past it.

Oh, do ya? [laughs]

There were two more bars that I ran across that I never heard of and can't find any information about. They were close to where Snick's is ...

Confederacy!²⁰

That's it! That's one of them.

That was open when I first come into town but it didn't last that long. You know why they closed 'em?

No.

Because they had a big sign up on top of the building saying The Newest Gay Bar or The Wildest Gay Bar in town and you're not supposed to advertise as a "gay" bar. That's how they closed it.

Do you know who had that bar?

I never did know, huh-uh. I knew a couple of the bartenders because when I first moved into town I lived right across the alley from it. I went there and then, shit, I think a month later they were closed. I don't know how long it was goin' before I moved into town.

Do you remember what it was like inside?

It was a big place and they had a lot of entertainment. The bartenders were wild. They wore these mad hats, these bandanas on their head. It was wild. It was *very* wild. I remember going in there.

What kind of entertainment was it?

Drag shows and people just dancin' around. I don't think it lasted six, eight months.

Another one called D's at 115 North Fourth Street. About a block north of Fremont Street.²¹

Oh, Jack's! There was one down there called Jack's I used to go to.

I don't know about that one.

Yeah. The bartender used to come to my bar all the time. When I first went there it was straight, then they turned it gay for the guys and it was gay for awhile and they couldn't make it, and then they turned it into a girl's bar and *they* couldn't make it, so then they turned it into a straight bar. Now it's no longer there. [laughs] But that D's, I don't remember that D's. What's the date you have on it?

1976 is the date I have an advertisement from.

Maybe it was called D's before then. I'll bet it was, because that's right in the 100 block on the other side of Fremont, about half a block.

Do you remember Le Café?²²

Oh, God! Yes. [laughs] Marge [Jacques]. Marge and Kerin Scianna. She lives right around the corner from Dominick [Vitale]. Where Dominick bought his new home. Marge ran it—they used to have some good shows there. To me, that was the best gay bar this town's ever had.

In what ways best?

The set-up of the bar and the clientele and the way she ran it and the shows she had. It was, to me, the best bar this town's ever had.

How did she run it that made you think it was the best?

Marge was sorta strict. It had to be her way or no way at all. And everybody liked Marge. She was a very nice lady. I always got along fine with her. She used to come into my bar—I got some pictures of her and Kerin at the bar. You heard that it burned down.

It burned twice. 1978 and 1979.

I remember one [of those times] they caught it right away.

What was the story behind the torching? Did you ever know or did you hear stories?

[laughs] I heard stories.

Let's say you heard stories, rumors. These are rumors.

Everybody in town knows Camille [Goudable].

Camille?

She owned bars in town, too. She owned the Le Bistro and she owned the Prelude.²³

The Carousel [de Paris]? That was the Le Bistro?

Yeah, when I first come into town. Big John [Huckaba] was the drag queen there at that time. And there were rumors that, uh ... Well, [Camille] and Marge were lovers for years. She's French. Camille. You never met her?

No.

Oh, what a *bitch*! She's in France. She's in Paris now. But the rumor was that it was her that [torched Le Café]. I don't know.

A reason why?

Jealousy, I think. 'Cause Marge had somebody else.

Would that have been the first or second fire?

The *big* one. The last one. In '79.

But I loved that bar. That was my favorite bar in town.

How was it laid out?

It was real cute. You walked in [and there was] a circle bar, then you had a dance floor over here and tables sittin' around. A little stage in the back. You never was in there?

Yes, I was. That was the first gay bar I went to.

Didn't ya like it? I thought it was a cute, real nice set-up, a gorgeous little bar. I loved it. I used to go in there a lot. I remember I went to a couple of Christmas parties in there. I went in there quite a bit in the daytime when I first come into

town. I had some good times in there. That, to me, was the best bar this town's ever had and ever will have.

Is Marge still around? Do you know?

She's tending bar in Yellowstone I hear.

It's just been within the last, what, five, six years that we've had what, fourteen, fifteen bars now? For *years* it was only like four and five bars. For a town like this, a growing town? A lot of the show people are gay, you know that. They're closet queens and they don't like to go to the bars. They're afraid they're gonna be seen and everything. But since I've been here, God! I don't know how many bars have opened up and closed. Like in Commercial Center there. You remember Willy's?²⁴

Do you remember Willy's?

Chuck had it and he committed suicide. I don't know what his last name is. Good-lookin' guy. I think he was straight. He committed suicide, and then [Willy's] was sold and then it was called the Jaguar. I don't remember who owned that. But there was this old lady that played the piano all the time. I think she's still around. She used to pound on that piano in the back room. Everybody loved her. Oh, she was a *card*!

Then there was another gay bar right in the center of Commercial Center that opened up [and] only lasted like a year or so. It was a dance bar. I don't remember what it was called. I went there with Willy—this was when I first got in town, this was in '76 or '77. It only lasted a short time.

Then the Reef?²⁵ Remember the Reef? You know Toby, don't you?

Toby? No.

Oh, God! What a queen she is! Well, [the Reef] was a straight bar for years. I used to go in when it was straight, then he got involved with it and somebody sponsored 'im and he ran the Reef. It was right up here on Sahara. You know where the Golden Steer [steak house] is? About a block and a half [from that], on the corner there by Tam [Drive]. It's still a bar now. He had it for maybe less than a year, I think, as a gay bar. And it got too wild and they had to close it.

Did the police close it?

The police did, yeah.

Then there was one out by Nellis [Air Force Base]. That only stayed open a short time.²⁶

And then In Cahoots.²⁷ Remember that one?

That was a little restaurant, wasn't it?

Yeah. Uh, huh. On Eastern [Avenue] and Tropicana [Avenue].

Then the Cave? Remember the Cave?²⁸ And Toons?²⁹

Toons Saloon?

Yeah. Judy [Nelson] had that, that's the Eagle now. And Jester's.³⁰ Remember Jester's? I remember when they first opened up. Me and Dominick and about five of us queens got drunk one afternoon. We went in there and there were some straight people in there and we just carried on and screamed and yelled. "This is a gay bar now, Sweetie! If you're not gay, get the fuck outta here!" Oh, they practically had to throw me out, I was so loud. And this queen—what the hell's her name. She does all the dirty videos. He's a blond guy. Oh, he's done 30 or 40 [videos]. He used to be the bartender there [at] Jester's.

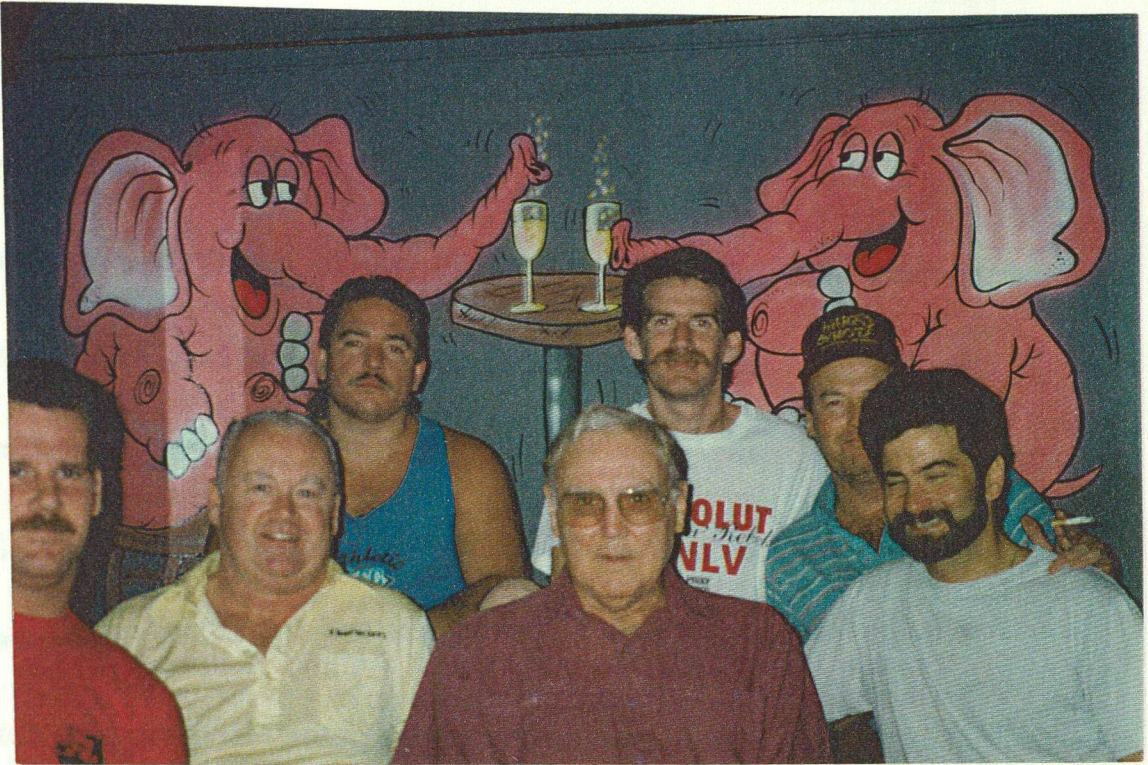
And Farmer John. Remember Farmer John? He opened one out here. The Hawk or somethin'. That didn't last very long, either. Clear out over here on Spring Mountain and that area. He worked at the Buffalo³¹ for awhile, and he worked for me for awhile, too. Farmer John they called 'im. He had a big dong on 'im like that [*motions about eight inches; laughs*].

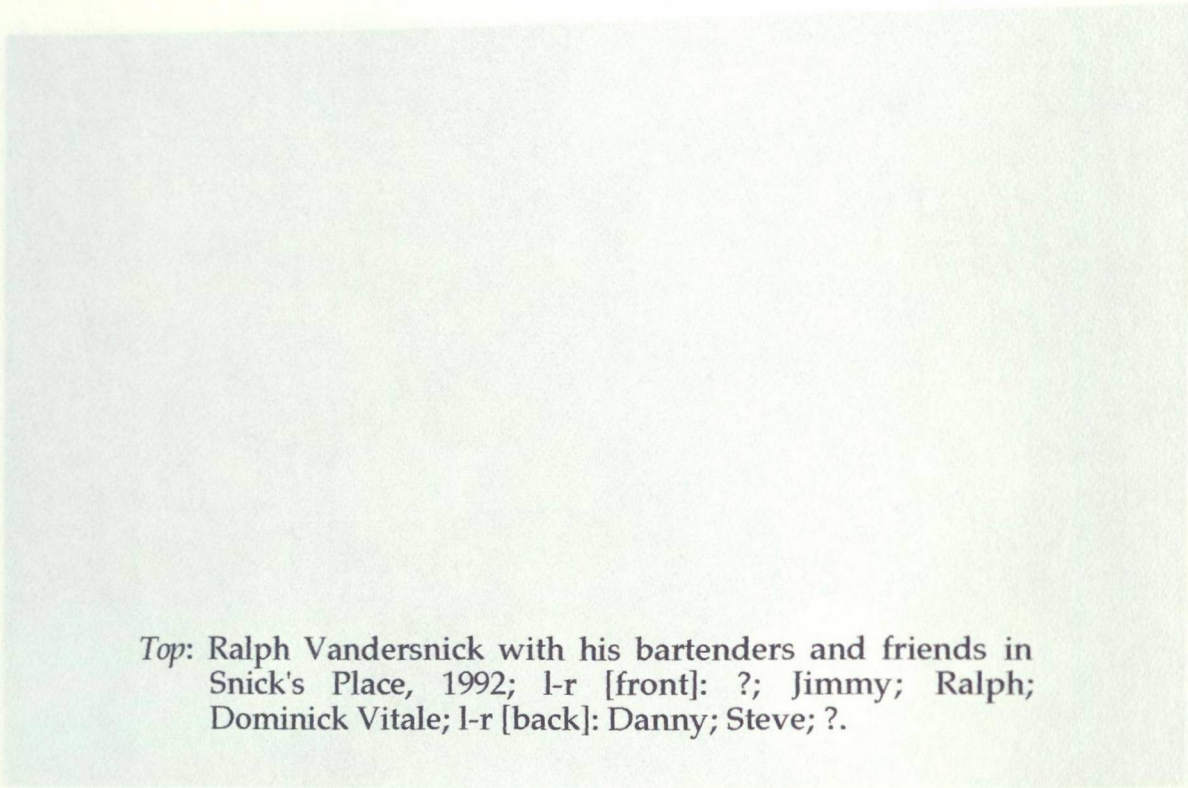
Is this Farmer John still around?

He was in the bar the other day. He's workin' at a bar in Seattle. [*laughs*]

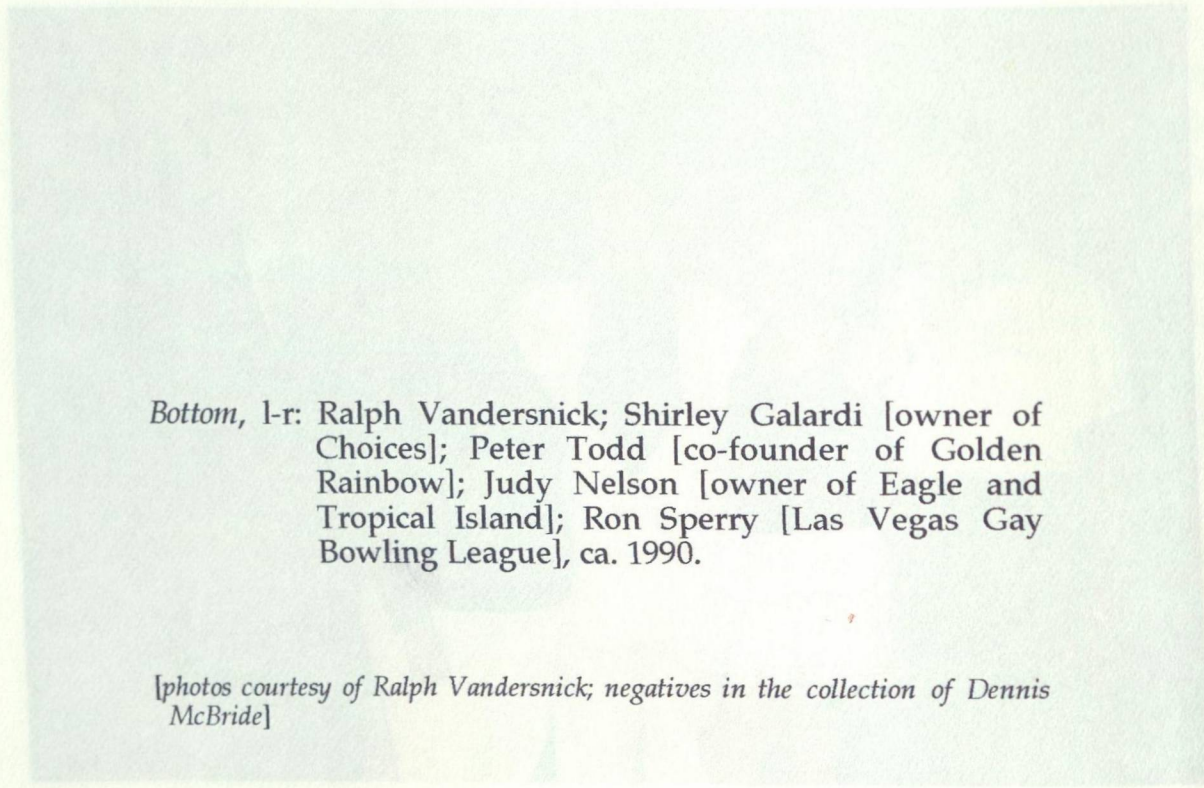
And that kid that used to work for Gelo's³² all the time. He's workin' at a bar in Seattle, too. Real nice guy. Randy!

I remember Randy. Very well. He's up there now?





Top: Ralph Vandersnick with his bartenders and friends in Snick's Place, 1992; l-r [front]: ?; Jimmy; Ralph; Dominick Vitale; l-r [back]: Danny; Steve; ?.



Bottom, l-r: Ralph Vandersnick; Shirley Galardi [owner of Choices]; Peter Todd [co-founder of Golden Rainbow]; Judy Nelson [owner of Eagle and Tropical Island]; Ron Sperry [Las Vegas Gay Bowling League], ca. 1990.

[photos courtesy of Ralph Vandersnick; negatives in the collection of Dennis McBride]

You're probably thinkin' of the other Randy had the big dick. He used to stir the drinks with it all the time.

I don't know. He was tall and thin and black hair.

Yeah. Well, he died. This is another Randy. A good-lookin', short, muscular-built one. Yeah. He's in Seattle now.

And Kenny Kerr³³ had two bars in town, too. You know that.

I remember the one, Fantasy.

Fantasy, yeah. That was right by Circus Circus [Hotel and Casino].

He had a second one?

Yeah. In the Commercial Center, right on Karen Street there.

Maxi's?

Yeah, Maxi's.

I didn't know he owned that.

Well, he was in there with somebody. Somebody else owned it with 'im, too. He didn't own it by himself. Yeah, 'cause Barry, my bartender, worked for 'im for awhile. That was a nice place. I thought they was gonna make it. They had food.

And another bar, too, I bet you don't remember. When I first come into town [to live it] was in the Camelot Shopping Center right around the corner from the Red Barn. The Phoenix Bar?³⁴

No, I don't remember that one.

Beautiful place. They had food. Oh, it was a gorgeous place. It only lasted like a year, year and a half. When I first come into town we went to eat there a couple

times. The food was delicious. It was done in good taste. It was a beautiful place. It was kind of elegant, you know, like a martini bar. Before-dinner drinks, and they had a little dance floor in the back. I don't know what's there now. All the queens from the Red Barn [went there]. *Divine* place.

Then before that there was a guy that used to own one the bar called Tommy
It was gay? *a bath house right in the area where the Comedians was before the*

Yeah.

Who had it?

the Manhattan the building is the same one, probably getting a new name
 Jim Sims. He's still around. He worked for me for awhile, too. And he used to work in the 1610 and the Backdoor, and he worked at almost every bar in town. She's got heart trouble. But she works on Boulder Highway now at the eating place ... Out by Henderson. They advertise in the paper all the time.

And the Odyssey downtown on Fremont Street. remember that one?³⁵ Who the hell owned that? This real nellie queen managed it and she didn't last long. [laughs] She worked at Toons for awhile, too. What the hell was her name? I can't remember now. The first time I went in there [she said], "Ralph, we're gonna do *this*. We're gonna knock out this fuckin' wall and we're gonna do *this* and we're gonna do *that*." She was so nellie. And when I went back a couple of months later she wasn't even there anymore! [laughs] Don't ya get a big kick out of these queens that say they're gonna knock out walls, they're gonna really make this place go, and I want to work for ya. "I'll make nothin' but *money* for ya, Ralph!" If I heard that once I heard it a million fuckin' times!

And the one on Las Vegas Boulevard, too. It was right next to a Denny's. In fact, they had to use the Denny's restroom. A dyke and her husband owned it. It was a *cute* little bar. It was in a little shopping center. I can't think of the name of it now.³⁶

*Another place. It wasn't a bar. It was the Manhattan Hotel.*³⁷

Ohhh! [laughs] Ohhh! That was right around the corner from Snick's on Casino Center [Boulevard]. It's still there, they still rent out rooms, but it's not a bath house anymore. It was going, oh, quite a while. Shit, I'd say seven, eight years. Oh, boy. And the guy that owned it used to come into the bar all the time and I

cannot to this day think of his name. I was trying to think of it the other night. He was a Frenchman. He's livin' right over here on Chicago Avenue. He owns a house right now. I still see 'im. [pauses] But I can't think of his name. He owned it for years.

Then before that there was a guy that used to come into the bar called Tommy that owned a bath house right in the area where the Confederacy was before the Manhattan opened up. It was a bath house, but I can't remember the name of that, either. It was before I come out here. But they closed it and then they opened up the Manhattan bath house.³⁸

Is the Manhattan the building in the curve you go around getting to your bar?

Yeah. They're rentin' out rooms to older people now.

Tell me about the Manhattan. Were you ever in it?

Oh, God! Yeah.[laughs] They used to have some wild parties, lot of fuckin' and suckin' goin' on. Oh, orgies. Every week they would have circle jerks. Yeah, I been in a couple of those. Oh, I wish I could remember [the owner's] name. We didn't get along too good. He came to the bar one time and the bar was full and he says, "Give everybody in the house a drink but that fuckin' Ralph!" That kind of upset me, you know. [laughs] What happened was, a very good friend of his got drunk one night and broke out my front door. See, that whole front of Snick's was all glass at one time. It was all glass. And it kept gettin' broke out all the time so I just decided to put up fuckin' wood so they wouldn't break the glass anymore. So he threw a bar stool or somethin' happened and he broke the door and I hadda pay \$400 to get a new door and I tried to get some money out of 'im to help me pay for it because I was kind of struggling then. This queen that I'm talkin' about that owned the Manhattan come over one day and he just raised hell and says, "This guy can't give [you] any money. You own the bar here and you can't pay for your fuckin' front door?" And ever since then we kind of, you know, weren't friends anymore. God, I wish I could remember his name. It was a French name. He's still around, Nice-lookin' guy. Frenchman.

Did the Manhattan rent rooms at that time, too, just like Camp David³⁹ did?

Oh, yeah.

What did the rooms look like?

They were nice, they were small. They all had locks on 'em and if you wanted to lock yourself in or whatever. And they had a recreation room where they had a big TV and they showed dirty movies. And lot of times they'd have parties and serve sandwiches and drinks, soft drinks. They couldn't serve any You can serve *champagne* in these bath houses but you can't serve any beer [or liquor]. That don't make sense, does it? Because I remember when I went to Camp David a few times they had a big fountain of champagne in there. When what's-his-name

Keith Draper.

Keith Draper, yeah. He had [Camp David]. And the German guy, Klaus. Remember Klaus?

He died.

He and Keith had [Camp David] together. Klaus died and then Keith took it over, and then [Otto] Ravenholt closed it, the head of the health department. But they really didn't fight it. I think if they would have fought it they would have been still open today. I don't know. They just didn't want to fight it.

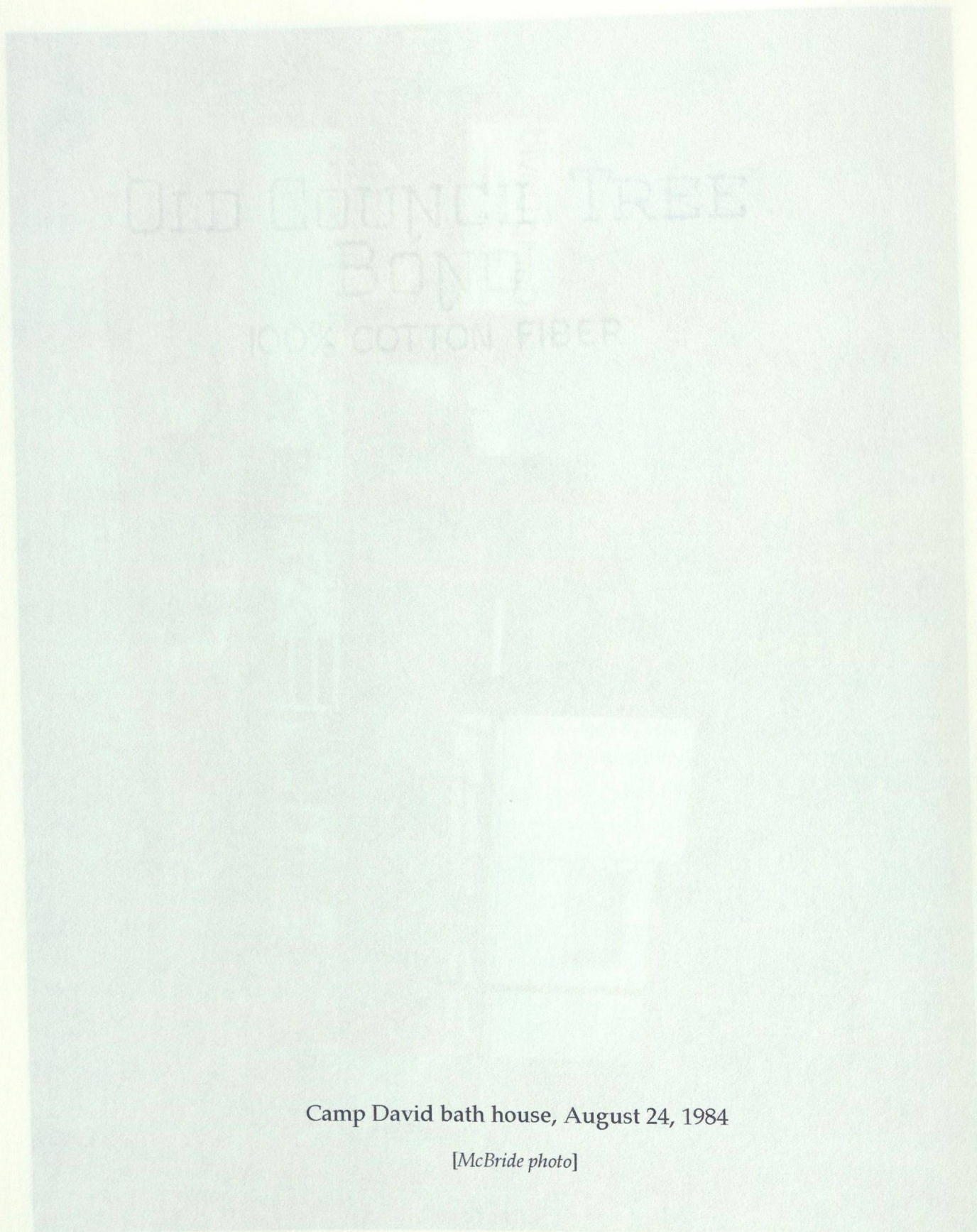
How come the Manhattan was never raided—to your knowledge?

I don't know. He run a pretty clean place. *Pepe! Pepe* was his name! Yeah. Pepe. [laughs] But I can't remember his last name. Pepe owned it. He always kept it real clean and everything. It was immaculate. As far as I know I never heard of it being raided.

Why did it close?

I just think he wanted to get out of it. The law didn't close 'im or anything. I just think Pepe had enough of it and wanted to get out of it.





Camp David bath house, August 24, 1984

[McBride photo]

Let's talk a little bit about Camp David. That was up on [Highland].

[The building's] still there. I forget what's in there now.

I went to many parties over there. That's when we first started the gay bowling league. You've heard about the gay bowling league we have here in town?⁴⁰

Were you involved in starting that?

I didn't bowl, but I was a sponsor all the years that they had it here. I sponsored and I got many trophies. You see all those trophies at the bar. Half of those are from that.

Did they used to meet over [at Camp David]?

Yeah. They would bowl every Sunday morning at eleven o'clock and then after they finished bowling they would pick a bar to go to and that bar would have a buffet. And they would drink in there. A lot of times they'd go over to Camp David and they'd have little parties there. *Real parties!* [laughs] I remember that's when they had that big fountain of champagne. As you walked in the door there, right in the middle of that big room they had this big champagne fountain. And they had seats around it and then everybody would get drunk off that. Then they had the TV room and they had an outside patio. A lot of people'd go out there. A lot of stuff goin' on out there. I went over there to many parties, yeah.

And then did you now Lee Duncan and Lawrence? Well, Lee worked there. He kind of run the place for awhile. They had a two-bedroom apartment upstairs they rented from Keith Draper, 'cause Keith owned the building. I have a lot of pictures of that someplace around here, too. They used to have a lot of parties up there, too, Christmas parties and all kinds of birthday parties and shit, you know. And we'd go up there and carry on all the time. They had this little pudgy dog. Oh, it was the cutest little thing. It finally died. It was 17 years old.

Did Keith and Klaus open it together or did they buy it later on?

They were involved together. I think they had it together.

From the beginning?

Um, hm. Yeah.

It opened after you came.

Did you ever meet Klaus? Good-lookin' man. He used to come in my bar quite a bit. Nice guy. I liked Klaus. He was a sweetheart.

There were some bookstores around town in that time that I wanted to talk about.

Talk of the Town on Charleston.⁴¹

First one on my list!

Oh, yeah! I've been in there a few times. *[laughs]* Oh, God! There was like three or four of 'em right there together. Yeah. And I almost bought that little bar on the other corner over there. It's called the Wagon Wheel or somethin' now. It has big wagon wheel.⁴² I looked at that, too, when I first come into town. I almost bought that. And then I decided not to. It was kind of small or somethin'.

But, yeah, I used to go into [Talk of the Town] all the time. Me and my friend every Sunday when we were off we would fly over there and get in the booths and carry on. Oh, Jesus. *[laughs]* It was *wild!* Just wild.

What was it like inside?

Inside? It was kind of dirty. It wasn't very clean. They had, oh, shit I think there was three stores, three different, individual stores.⁴³ You could walk out of one into another and to another. It was wild. You could pick up anything, anything you wanted to, just anything at all. And they sold the magazines. They had real nellie guys back of the [counter]. I remember three or four friends of mine worked selling magazines and runnin' the place.

Was it principally gay?



BOND
100% COTTON FIBER

Talk of the Town/ Peek-a-Rama adult
bookstore and theatre,
August 24, 1984

[McBride photo]

Oh, yes, yes. I would say so. There was a lot of young people that would go in, too. A lot of minors, yeah. I don't think they ever checked IDs. I remember you'd come out of the booths and you'd see all these young kids lined up there, you know, waitin' to suck somebody off or get involved in somethin'.

Were they hustlers or just kids out for sex?

Just kids out for sex, I would say.

Then there was [a bookstore] about the same time on Paradise. Did you hear about this one? That a guy got killed in the booth. You know where the Crazy Horse is on Paradise? There was one right around the corner in that same [strip mall] there. I was in there a few times, too, but I can't remember what it was called now. This happened, oh, twelve, thirteen years ago and this young kid got killed. I'd seen 'im around. I didn't know 'im real well, but I'd seen 'im. See, they had big glory holes⁴⁴ in there. And somebody cut 'im up. He was really cut up bad.

In the booth?

In the booth, yeah.

No one heard?

That was what they couldn't understand. Of course, you've got the films goin' and everything, you know, and you're sittin' in the little booth and if you're next door you really couldn't hear that, you know. But you'd think somebody would have heard somethin'. But they never did find out who did it or anything, huh-uh. This was in the early '80s, I think.

Did they close the store then?

They closed it for a little while, but they re-opened.

Is it still open now?

No, it's not open now. There's nothin' in there now.

*There was another one called the Denmark?*⁴⁵

Yeah. That [was] out by the American Legion Hall there. Las Vegas Boulevard. A friend of mine worked in there. He used to bring me magazines all the time. I didn't go in there that much but I was in there a few times.

Was it very big?

It was fairly big, yeah. It was not as big as Talk of the Town was, but I think it had fourteen or fifteen little booths.

*How about the Flick Theater?*⁴⁶

Downtown. Fremont Street. Yeah. I've been in there a few times, too. What was that big casino right next door to it? The kids'd go in there and eat and then they would go to the Flick. The restaurant was kind of gayish. We used to go in there and eat all the time. This was, God, '78, '79.⁴⁷ Yeah.

Then on the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard—they had those big hamburgers. It's that big gift store now, right across from Holy Cow!⁴⁸ They used to have drag shows in there all the time and they had a glory hole in the restroom. There was the Money Tree and another one right next to it. I know Big John [Huckaba] and another queen used to appear in a lot of the shows there. We used to go see 'em all the time. Then they had this glory hole in one of the restaurants in the back. They used to stand in a line and wait to get in there. Oh, God! [laughs] This one time I went in and this big thing was shoved through the hole and I almost had a heart attack! [laughs] My friend was with me and he says, "Well, get it and take it home with ya!" I says, "No way!" [laughs] They finally got wise to it and they closed it. They had the best big hamburgers in there. They had a little stage right in the middle of the place.

Did you own the slot machines in Snick's?
Did you know that at the time you bought Snick's and turned it into a gay bar, Clark County ordinances wouldn't let places that had a gay clientele—they called it homosexual clientele—have a liquor license?⁴⁹ Was that ever an issue brought up with you?

Never. Uh, uh. I remember when I first come into town and I had to go to a [liquor license hearing]. They have these sittings, you know, you have to go downtown and they approve it. I remember I went with a friend of mine and they approved [my liquor license] and they didn't say anything about it being homosexual or anything.

Then I had to go to a different place for my gaming license. And, oh! The time I went to get my gaming license was the same time that [Frank] Sinatra was there. He was trying to get a gaming license in town here, and they turned *him* down and they OK'd *me*! [laughs and claps his hands] One good one for ya, Ralph!

What kind of background investigation did they do?

Oh, they go back 35 years? Oh, yes! They really go through ya. They want to know everything—your brother's wife's maiden name, they want to know the name of the sheriff [in the town where] I had this little bar back in Illinois. He had to write 'em a letter and say what a nice guy I was, I cleaned up this bar because of the drug scene and all that crap. Then they wrote to my boss in California, that I worked for at California Electronics. He had to put a little note in saying I was a good guy, honest and all that shit. Oh, yeah! Thirty-five years they go back.

What about the bars that you owned in California and the one that got closed?

The statute of limitations! Oh, I was worried about that, believe me. 'Cause this was '63 when I got closed. And I came here, it was like 12 years later. I got ahold of a lawyer to find out about that, 'cause I figured if they got word of that, you know ... He went with me to the [hearing] and everything, and he said, "Ralph, there's nothing to worry about. The statute of limitations is seven years and there's nothin' they can do about it." That worried me.

Do you own the slot machines in Snick's?

No, I don't own 'em. I lease 'em out. I get a certain percent.

How many times has your bar been robbed?

I'd say fifteen. Probably fifteen, sixteen.

Tell me about some of the more interesting ones.

[laughs] Oh, well, the big one was when they came in Most generally we keep the back door locked, but with the change of the shift, the graveyard bartender was getting off and he took the garbage out the back door and had it unlocked. They must have known this because three of 'em come in with shotguns and masks on and they broke open the slot machines. They got about \$5,000 out of the slot machines, and they robbed, I think, six customers in there. They took a \$2,000 diamond ring [from one customer]. One lost a wrist watch, and I think another guy had \$400 on 'im. I figured all together they got over \$3,000 [from the customers alone]. And the other [robberies] weren't near that bad.

But one time, I remember. I was living with Glen [Bricker] then. He dropped me off at the bar. He had to go to work downtown. He dropped me off at the bar and I was supposed to go in at eight o'clock. I walked in the bar and there was a guy standing in the corner by my cigarette machine there. He threw me up against the bar and he had a gun to the back of my head and my bartender was puttin' money in a bag for 'im. He had four guys locked in the toilet and he had the pool table in front of the door. He got probably \$2500 I imagine. And he put that gun in the back of my head. I had a big bag that had my money and checks in and stuff. He says, "What's in that bag?" I says, "Nothin'. Just paperwork." It was in the winter time, cold out. He said, "Get yer fuckin' hands outta yer pockets or I'll blow yer fuckin' head off!" And I heard that gun click back by my ear, you know, and I thought, "Well, I just better pay attention here." Shit, I was shakin' like a fuckin' leaf. [laughs] And then he got the money. He cut the telephone wires and we couldn't call anybody. We had to go next door and call. He left. Then I had to go back to the bar and work eight hours. The police came and took fingerprints and all that shit. They never did catch 'im.

Did they ever catch any of 'em?

They caught one. When Steve [Libby] was workin'. They got him and Steve had to go down and appear [at the line-up]. And he picked 'im out and this guy

got 60 years. Armed Robbery is 20 years, and he had three of 'em against 'im, so he's still in jail.

Then I remember a couple days later when I was workin' back of the bar this guy come in and says to me, "I heard my brother robbed your bar the other night." I stood there like a fuckin' idiot. I didn't know what to say or what to do or whatever. I says, "Yeah, there was some gentleman in here that come and robbed the bar." And he says, "Well, that was my brother. He just lives right over here on Casino [Center] Boulevard." And then he said, "Give me a beer." I think I served 'im and then he drank the beer and walked out. That was weird. That was another weird scene.

When was the last time the bar was robbed?

This just happened within the last five, six months. They got \$400. It was in the afternoon about one o'clock. Dominick [Vitale] called me on the phone and said, "Guess what, Ralph? The bar just got robbed." And I got my friend, Roy. He come over and picked me up and we went to the bar. There was about three or four cop cars and they were in takin' fingerprints and everything. They think it was the same ones that robbed The Backdoor got robbed and Choices got robbed and Flex got robbed.⁵⁰

All the gay bars.

Well, two straight ones, too. The Bottle Collectors across from where my bar is. The Bottle Collectors Bar. And Kooter's [Klub], I think, the other one on Main Street. We have everything on [video]tape, now. And the cop says, "Well, can I see your tape?" And Dominick ran it off for 'im and the cop says, "Yeah, I know that guy right there," and he pointed right at 'im. "His name is Tony. I know him!"

That was the robber?

Yeah. And he says, "By the weekend we'll have 'im picked up. We'll have 'im thrown in jail." And couple days ago Dominick got a call from the police department downtown. They said they had the guy that robbed [our] place and they made an appointment for [Dominick] to come down and pick 'im out of the line-up. Then about a half hour later they called back and said, "The paperwork is

all fucked up. We can't arrest him. We can't do anything about it." That just happened like a couple days ago. Dominick called me.

Before I got the bar—it was about [a] coupla months before I got the bar—this guy that worked there, straight guy, he got hurt. They had a robbery—that's when all the windows were in the front—and the [robber] knocked 'im out. He got cut on the face and he got a big gash on his forehead. They had all the money in the bag and the money flew all over the floor and everybody was grabbin' it! It was a mess, yeah. They never did catch him, either. He flew out and he got away.

The security that you've got—the buzzer and the window—were those there when you bought the bar?

No. Huh-uh.

When did you put those in?

Oh, five, six years ago, probably. I lock the front door quite a bit, but we never had the alarm and the cameras like we do now. We've just had those within the last, I'd say, five, six years.

Is it because of the neighborhood?

Um, hm. Yeah.

The neighborhood wasn't like that when you bought the bar?

It's been like that ever since I've had it, almost. Oh, yeah, yeah. Drug addicts and prostitutes. You've come by the bar. Haven't you been propositioned? And the people stop ya before you get to the bar and they want money? Suck yer dick for \$25 and all that.

Nobody ever offered to do that for me!

Never did? *[laughs]* Not even broads? No? Oh, God! I *still* get propositioned as old as I am! God!

Are there a lot of hustlers hanging around your bar or in that end of town? Boy hustlers?

Yeah. Yeah. I'd say there's more at the Backdoor, though, really. We had that [Living] Ribbon thing⁵⁵—did you hear about that? Everybody that had a friend
Is gay hustling, guy hustling, a big business in Las Vegas like female prostitution is?

Yeah, I would say so. I had a guy used to come into my bar that owned a place just for men. Jack Lee was his name. He ran this place for years and he finally gave it up. He had a lot of, you know, a lot of trouble with the law. They'd go in and raid it, and then they'd let 'im open up again and all that bullshit. Money talks.

Where was this place?

It was someplace on Charleston [Boulevard], I don't remember exactly. I was never to it. But they just had a kind of office-type thing, you know. They made phone calls and he had different people around town in different areas where he could call and they would go for a hundred dollars or two hundred or whatever.

Is that very recently?

That's been ten, twelve years ago.

*Snick's had the second AIDS fund raiser held in Las Vegas.*⁵¹

Second?

Yeah. There was one in November 1983 at Gipsy and Gelo's, and then you had one in January 1984.

Yeah. The doctor, Dr. [Jerry] Cade⁵² came and gave a speech. We had two or three talkers gave speeches. I can't remember how much we took in or anything. [laughs]

It's just me, I guess. Like when people come in the bar, you know, "Give me \$20, Ralph. Give me \$40, Ralph. Do this." And everybody looks at me and says, "Why, you stupid ass, what are you doing that for? You're

*At that time, in Las Vegas, anyway, AIDS was really not an issue. I think it was in '83 we had our first AIDS death here.*⁵³

When it really started comin' out was when Rock Hudson and Liberace [died].⁵⁴ I've had several customers and several bartenders die of it. We had that [Living] Ribbon thing⁵⁵—did you hear about that? Everybody that had a friend die [of AIDS] they'd put a dollar in, then you'd put your name up on a ribbon thing. We took it out to Mt. Charleston. We stretched it all out. God, all those queens were out there carrying on. [laughs] It ran for, like, two or three miles, all the ribbons hooked together. Then they had big party out at the Backstreet⁵⁶ [bar], and they had 'em all hangin' on the wall out there. Lisa Hernandez was the head of that. She gave a big speech. They had Channel 3 out there interviewin' a lot of the customers and stuff.

Snick's was always very supportive of the community. Why?

I don't know. I just figured I had good customers and I was making a good livin', you know, and I just figured ... I always gave to everything. I still give to that Golden Rainbow.⁵⁷ I'm the only one in town that gives five hundred [dollars]. I've done that for 20 years. Every year. Not to be braggin' or anything.

Actually, you should brag. There's another one I wanted to bring up that Auntee Social noted in her column in 1993 when they were working to repeal the sodomy law.

Oh, yeah!

*You were the only bar owner on the spot with a donation.*⁵⁸

That was at the Gipsy. Yeah. We had a couple of parties at the Gipsy. I gave five hundred, I think.

Why do you feel compelled to be so generous when most are not?

I don't know. [laughs] It's just me, I guess. Like when people come in the bar, you know. "Give me \$20, Ralph. Give me \$40, Ralph. Do this." And everybody looks at me and says, "Why, you stupid ass, what are you doin' that for? You're

never gonna get it back." That's just me. I've always been that way. If I was to add up all the money that I gave out in that bar and the tabs and the loans and money just given away, I bet it would be two or three hundred thousand dollars in 21 years since I've been here. Probably more than that. Really. It's just disgusting. I *know* it is! But I'm not sorry I did it. What the hell!

Well, you're very dear in the community.

I've always been there. This one woman come in the bar one day. She wanted \$35 for a prescription to be filled. You know, straight woman. I knew her. I'd seen her around, you know. She was cryin' and cryin'. "Where am I gonna get \$35." Ol' Ralph gets in his purse and, "Here, Lady, go get your fuckin' prescriptions." [*claps his hands*] And you now when you give these people this money you're not gonna get it back. You just know right off hand. You might as well throw the fuckin' money on the floor or whatever. I have a little box of bad checks and IOUs.

What's the origin of the elephant logo [in Snick's]?

I don't know. Everybody asks me. One day I just happened to go into the bar and I said, "I like elephants. I'm gonna be the elephant queen now." And it just started. I don't know where I got it from. And I'm not a Republican. I'm a Democrat! That's the worst part it! If I was a Republican it wouldn't be so bad.

Who painted the [elephants on the] wall back there?

They did that when I was out of town. I went on vacation and everytime I go on vacation, Dominick does somethin' to the bar. Since he's been working for me. He remodels or changes something around or paints or does somethin'. So when I came back into town those fuckin' elephants were back there. I said, "What'd you do, Dominick?" And he said, "Well, *look!*" [*laughs*] They got a guy from the flea market that did that.

They're pink elephants.

Yeah. Yeah.

*I wanted to ask you about the Goodtimes [bar] thing. That Don Dufour who committed suicide near your bar?*⁵⁹

Well *[laughs]* There [were] stories goin' around.

Explain first of all who these people are: Don Dufour

Well, Don Dufour was the lover of Richard Acamo, the one that had the money, [the man] that bought Goodtimes from Jeff [Keysar] who has it now. Richard drank himself to death. Don drank a lot, too. They found [Dufour] not in front of the bar [but] on the other side of the street when those motels were there. He was sittin' in the car and he was shot twice through the neck. It never came out if it was suicide or what happened. But two kids that came in the bar later told me they were in the bar that same night this happened and that [they saw] these two guys walk out past the car. They said they saw the one of 'em shooting through the window.

These two guys [who killed Dufour] walked out of your bar?

Um, hm. Yeah. They shot 'im and then they ran off someplace. But nothing ever came [of it]. There wasn't an obituary, there wasn't anything written up in the paper or anything. I don't even know who claimed his body or anything. There was never anything said about it. Alan [Dattge] was a good friend of his and he called downtown to the mortuary wherever he was and they just said [Dufour's body] was still in the morgue and they didn't know what they was gonna do with it. So I don't know what ever happened. If somebody claimed 'im or they put 'im out in Potter's [Field] or what. I don't know. [Dufour] seemed all right. He didn't seem depressed. He used to come into the bar an awful lot, my bar, and the last time he came in, I think, was a day or two before this happened and he didn't seem depressed or anything. I talked to 'im, I says, "How ya doin', Don?" And he says, "Fine." He'd always buy people drinks, you know, and he was always chipper. But [his death] is unsolved. They really don't know. But they said there was two shots and the gun was layin' on the seat. That red car he used to drive all the time.



Snick's Place, April 11, 1997.

[McBride photo]

—••—

How has life changed for gay people in general from the time you were a kid?

It's more out in the open, I think. Back when I was living in that little town of Atkinson back there before I went to California, when I was 24 years old, I didn't even know myself what a queer or a gay was. I never knew there was gay bars. When I was 24 years old, I didn't know there was such a thing as a gay bar. I said, "What the hell is that?" When I met that kid in LA in '52 or '53 when I worked at Douglas Aircraft and he says, "I want to take you to a bar." He didn't say if it was a gay bar or what it was. He says, "I work at this bar and I want to you to come and see me." So I went in and I saw all these men there huggin' and kissin' and, you know, I thought, "Wow, I kind of like *this*." [laughs] Couple of months later I was workin' back of the bar for the guy! [laughs]

Do you see a difference in the gay kids today than you did 10 years ago or 20 years ago when you opened [Snick's]?

Not really, I don't think. Huh, uh. I remember when I had the bars in LA, it's just wildness, you know. Everybody's groping each other, you know. I don't notice that much difference. I think it's more readily open now. Some people carry on out in the streets and out in public more so than they did then, you know.

Do you approve or disapprove of that?

I *approve* of it! You know, as long as you're not botherin' anybody, what the hell? Don't you think so?

Absolutely!

Yeah, yeah. My ... nephew, the one that's a judge, understand[s] me more than any of the rest of the relatives do. And if I get drunk [when] we go out [and I] get a little bit nellie, he kind of says, "Now, simmer down, Ralph. Knock it off, knock it off." And when I put my hand or go like this [swishes his hands around],

he says, "I know you're gay and I love you dearly, but I just don't like to be out in public [with you] when you do that."

And I says, "I can understand." So when I go back I always try and behave. Especially when the little ones are around. Larry [Vandersnick] has two little boys. He has one eleven, one two years old, and my other nephew, his brother, has two little girls and they're small. Then my other niece has two grown daughters and she's got trouble with her daughter now. She's 15 and she sasses her back and I don't know what's gonna happen there.

Do you have other gay relatives?

I have a cousin in Middletown, Ohio that's a *flaming* faggot. [Billy Dennis] is his name. I have a cousin that's a girl. She's a dyke. She's kind of wild. A butch one. But that's [it] as far as my family. But there's other people from the town that are gay.

I want to ask you one last question. What kind of advice would you give to gay kids today?

Advice?

Kids younger than me! In this brave new world. This brave new gay world.

[laughs]. Just be careful and do what you have to do is about all I can say. Be careful and have a good time and do what you have to do. And *don't* trust too many people!

END

*Ralph Vandersnick at the 21st anniversary party
of Sack's Place, October 14, 1997.*

[Bartling photo]



Ralph Vandersnick at the 21st anniversary party
of Snick's Place, October 14, 1997.

[McBride photo]

Notes

1. Rob Schlegel, publisher of the *Las Vegas Bugle* since 1985, is one of the Las Vegas gay community's most important leaders. He has helped found—or played an integral part in the development of—most of the community's principal organizations and activities. In recognition of his service to the community, Schlegel was presented an award at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center's Honorarium on February 25, 1995.
2. For information on gay film star Montgomery Clift [October 17, 1920 - July 22, 1966], see *Montgomery Clift: A Biography* by Patricia Bosworth [New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978].
3. Brando evidently confirmed in an interview with gay author Truman Capote that he had slept with numerous men. As Capote noted in his diary, "' ... Marlon ... said he went to bed with lots of ... men ... but that he didn't consider himself homosexual. He said they were all so attracted to him. 'I just thought I was doing them a favor.' " [in *Capote: A Biography* by Gerald Clarke (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 302)]. For information on Marlon Brando see *Brando: The Biography* by Peter Manso [New York, NY: Hyperion, 1994].
4. Film star Jayne Mansfield [April 19, 1933 - June 29, 1967] was a Marilyn Monroe knock-off who had an IQ of 163. She was never able to establish herself as anything more than a sex symbol in mostly low-budget B pictures. Her first film was *Female Jungle* [1956] and her last starring role was in the unfinished *Single Room Furnished* [1968]. Her involvement with Anton LaVey's First Church of Satan inspired rumors that her death in a spectacular automobile wreck twenty miles from New Orleans was not an accident. For photos of Jayne Mansfield's automobile wreck see *Hollywood Babylon* by Kenneth Anger [San Francisco, CA: Straight Arrow Books, 1975], pp. 282-83 and 296-97. Also see *Fallen Angels: The Lives and Untimely Deaths of 14 Hollywood Beauties* by Kirk Crivello [Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1988], pp. 219-235. Also see *Jayne Mansfield and the American Fifties* by Martha Saxton [Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1975].
5. The enmity between Joan Crawford and Bette Davis is legendary and has its origin in a number of incidents, including their 1935 competition for the affections of film star Franchot Tone. Rumors of Crawford's bisexuality were common while she was alive and evidence of it has surfaced in the years after her death. For information on this aspect of Crawford, see *Fasten Your Seat Belts: The Passionate Life of Bette Davis* by Lawrence Quirk [New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990]; *More Than a Woman: An Intimate*

Biography of Bette Davis by James Spada [New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1993]; *Bette & Joan: The Divine Feud* by Shaun Considine [New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1989]; and *Hollywood Lesbians* by Boze Hadleigh [New York, NY: Barricade Books, 1994].

6. Ernie Kovacs [January 23, 1919 - January 12, 1962] was best known for his two ground-breaking television programs *The Ernie Kovacs Show* [1955-56] and *The New Ernie Kovacs Show* [1961-62]. In their concept and delivery both shows were ahead of their time, and Kovacs himself long after his death has been recognized as a comedy genius. See *Kovacsland: A Biography of Ernie Kovacs* by Diana Rico [San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990].
7. This is Dorothy Frassman whose interview for the Las Vegas Gay Archives Oral History Project was conducted on September 21, 1997.
8. *Nellie*, used in reference to gay men, means excessively effeminate.
9. Blue Chip Stamps, together with Green Stamps and Orange Stamps, were a sales promotion program popular from the 1950s through the early 1970s. Depending upon the amount of money they spent in grocery markets and other retail stores, shoppers received sets of these stamps which they pasted into books. Once filled these books of stamps could be redeemed for merchandise from catalogs.
10. The Red Barn was one of Las Vegas's most famous gay bars, catering principally—though not exclusively—to a leather crowd and rough trade. It was built in 1958 at 1317 East Tropicana Avenue as an antique furniture store. In 1964 the Red Barn was leased to a Mr. Davidson who operated it as a restaurant and cocktail lounge. If Mr. Vandersnick's memory is accurate, the Red Barn was operated as a gay bar by Davidson. In about July 1971, Albert Hood leased the building and *definitely* ran it as a gay bar. The Red Barn closed and was demolished in the spring of 1988.
11. Opened by Maxine Perron at 5110 East Charleston Boulevard as Max and Mary's in the late 1950s, Maxine's was Las Vegas's only lesbian bar. It was a legendary place, earning mention in the notorious Las Vegas exposé *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris. When Perron sold the place in 1981, the name was changed to Maxie's, which it remained until closed in January 1989. The site now is occupied by Duffy's Tavern II. [See *The Green Felt Jungle* by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris (New York: Pocket Books, July 1974), p. 97.]
12. The Toots Cocktail Lounge stood at 417 Las Vegas Boulevard South.
13. This was Antonio's Italian Restaurant at 910 Las Vegas Boulevard South.
14. Judy Nelson bought the Sunset Lounge at 1027 S. Main Street in 1984. she made it into a *mixed* bar: gay and straight in the daytime, gay at night. The bar closed near the end of September 1990.

15. Nellis Air Force Base.
16. Ralph Lamb served as Las Vegas's sheriff from 1962-80. The Lamb family is one of southern Nevada's most noted and most notorious. Ralph's brother, State Senator Floyd Lamb, served prison time for soliciting and accepting bribes while in office. Another brother, Larry, was acquitted of a murder charge in 1980, then convicted in 1985 on charges of cheating at gaming.
17. The Gipsy is Las Vegas's premier dance club, located at 4605 Paradise Road. A nightclub at this location known as Disco Fever opened in 1979. Disco Fever was called the Village Station from 1980 to 1981. It was raided and closed briefly in November 1980 [see "County Closes Disco" in the *Vegas Gay Times*, December 1980, pp. 4-5]. The Village Station in 1981 became the Gipsy. The Gipsy has undergone a number of major remodelings and renovations, the latest of which was during April and May of 1997.
18. *Playgirl*, first published in June 1973, was a straight woman's alternative to *Playboy*. *Playgirl* featured nude male models and pinups, and was probably more popular among gay men than straight women.
19. 1610 was a small gay bar at 1610 East Charleston Boulevard which closed in about 1982.
20. The October 1976 issue of the *Pacific Coast Times* advertised the Confederacy, "Las Vegas's Only Up Front Gay Disco," at 1151 S. Main Street.
21. The November 1976 issue of the *Pacific Coast Times* notes that D's was open at 115 N. Fourth Street, while the 1976 *Hill-Donnelley Directory* for Las Vegas notes the 4th Street Cocktail Lounge at this address.
22. Le Café, one of Las Vegas's most famous gay bars, opened on August 18, 1954 as the Club Black Magic, a popular *straight* nightclub at 4817 Paradise Road. In about November 1968 Camille [Auber] [Castro] Goudable opened a French restaurant in the Club Black Magic and renamed the cocktail lounge the Club de Paris. Both nightspots held their grand opening on January 10, 1969 and were popular hangouts for Las Vegas's gay community, particularly Strip performers. In about January 1970 Marge Jacques bought the Club de Paris and changed the name to Le Café. Sometime after 1970 and before 1977 Camille moved her Le Bistro restaurant to 4310 Paradise Road as Le Bistro Parisien Bar and Restaurant. Meanwhile, arson fires burned Le Café on August 8, 1978, and again on May 5, 1979. The bar was closed until October 20, 1983 when it re-opened in the old Rebel Steak House restaurant at 2710 East Desert Inn Road as Disco Le Café Bar and Restaurant. The business failed and closed its doors in April 1984.
23. The Le Bistro Parisien Bar and Restaurant at 4310 Paradise Road reopened on April 2, 1977 as the Carousell de Paris gay bar. The opening entertainment at the new bar was a transsexual show advertised as "a softly pouched revue

featuring a clutch of heavenly looking transsexuals." Between 1977 and about 1988 when it closed, the gay bar at this address was known variously as the Garage, Prelude, Lipstick, the Body Shop, and the Upper Level.

24. Willy's Club opened at 953 E. Sahara in Commercial Center in about January 1981. A flier advertising the bar was included with the February 1981 issue of the *Vegas Gay Times*, after which the bar was no longer advertised in the local gay press.
25. The Reef, known at the time of this interview as Ponders nightclub, was located at 332 W. Sahara Avenue
26. This may have been CC's Lounge which held its grand opening at 3827 North Nellis Boulevard on September 28, 1991. Advertised as "The Only 'Family-Oriented' Bar on the Northeast Side of Town," CC's evidently closed or turned straight after October 1991.
27. In Cahoots was a gay bar and restaurant that opened in December 1984 at 5645 South Eastern Avenue at Russell Road. No ads for the establishment appeared after February 1985. There's very little documentation extant about the bar except for this short passage from the journals of Las Vegas activist Christie Young: "In Cahoots—dinner with Rick [May], nice place, lots of food, owner Henry former Stardust [Hotel] 21 dealer."
28. The Cave nightclub held its grand opening at 5740 West Charleston Boulevard over Labor Day Weekend, September 3-5, 1993. One of the city's most popular gay dance bars, the Cave included live music, dinner theatre, and sponsored special events for local gay organizations and causes. It closed in March 1995.
29. Toons Saloon opened at 2327 S. Eastern Avenue on March 15, 1991. Noted in Auntee Social's column in the *Las Vegas Bugle* as Las Vegas's first leather bar, that distinction is questionable since the Buffalo has always been considered a levis and leather bar, while the Red Barn [see note 10] welcomed leather queens. The last mention of Toons in the gay press is an advertisement in the February 1992 issue of the *Bugle* and a note in Auntee Social's column that Toons was sponsoring a night of "alternative/progressive" music on Saturdays known as Club Bang Bang.
30. The Jester nightclub held its grand opening at 1243 E. Sahara Avenue on August 28-30, 1992. Despite an "Open Letter to the Community" published in the December 1992 issue of the *Las Vegas Bugle* insisting it was *not* closing, Jester's did indeed close in January 1993. It was scheduled to reopen on February 15, 1993 as a bar called Charades, although there is no further mention of this in the *Bugle*.
31. The Buffalo was the second incarnation of a bar at 5410 Paradise Road. Opened in the mid -1970s as the Other Place, it was known as the Interchange in 1979 before it re-opened on September 6, 1980 as the Buffalo.

In October 1983 the Buffalo moved north to 4640 Paradise Road where it stands today. The Satyricons and Desert Brotherhood motorcycle clubs both have made the Buffalo their home bar.

32. Gelo's Lounge [4633 Paradise Road] started life as Kelly's Tavern, a straight cocktail lounge, in 1957. It went through a number of name changes during the next twenty years: the Valley Inn [1959]; the Rubaiyat Cocktail Lounge [1960]; Lido's Lounge [1962]; Gelo's Lido Lounge [about 1963]; Gelo's Lido Lounge and Chinese Restaurant [about 1968-69]. Gelo's became a gay bar in about October 1980 [the October 1983 *Nevada Gay Times* Calendar notes a party to celebrate the bar's 3rd anniversary]. Jerry, the bar's owner, in 1982 bought the Cantonese restaurant attached to Gelo's and expanded the bar. In 1989, Marlon Tenana bought the Gelo's shopping center and renovated it. Gelo's became Angles, and a women's bar attached to the back of Angles was known as Lace. Angles and Lace opened in June 1989, was briefly known as Angles-n-Curves, but at the time of this interview is once more called Angles and Lace.
33. Kenny Kerr's *Boylesque* opened at the Silver Slipper Casino on May 13, 1977. His show has become a Las Vegas institution, moving several times to other hotels in the last 20 years. In November 1995, the show settled into the Debbie Reynolds Hotel at 305 Convention Center Drive, and is now known as the *Kenny Kerr Show*. Kenny himself is a great supporter of Las Vegas's gay community and was presented with a lifetime achievement award at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center's 4th Annual Honorarium in 1997. The bars to which Mr. Vandersnick refers are Kenny Kerr's Fantasy which opened on October 31, 1983 at 800 Circus Circus Drive, and closed around June or July 1984; and Maxi's, which opened and closed in 1991 at 900 E. Karen in Commercial Center.
34. The Phoenix Bar was located at 5006 S. Maryland Parkway.
35. The Odyssey Lounge was opened and closed in 1992 at 1920 E. Fremont Street. Raymond Harris was the manager.
36. This was the Alibi Room at 3733 Las Vegas Boulevard South located adjacent to Sambo's Restaurant at 3737 Las Vegas Boulevard South.
37. The Manhattan Hotel opened on November 25, 1953 at 1130 Casino Center Boulevard. Advertised as "ideal for working men," and for "men only," the Manhattan evolved into a gay hotel/bath house in the 1960s and early 1970s.
38. This bath house was probably the Sir Gay Men's Spa/Vegas Club Baths which opened at 1413 S. Main Street during the week of May 14, 1971.
39. The Camp David bath house opened in Las Vegas at 2631 South Highland Drive in 1979. It was one of the most popular cruising spots for gay men, but fell victim to the hysteria of the early AIDS years. The place was raided on May 25, 1985, then closed on May 31, 1986. The Gay Academic Union of the

- University of Nevada, Las Vegas held a "last fling" fundraiser for Aid for AIDS of Nevada [AFAN] on October 31, 1986 in the club, after which Camp David was dismantled. Two of the bath house's dressing room doors were used in an office remodeling at the Metropolitan Community Church.
40. This is the Las Vegas Gay Bowling League, officially sanctioned by the American Bowling Congress. The LVGs began in 1978 as informal Sunday get-togethers by friends. Founder Don Crawford approached lane officials at the Showboat Hotel and Casino in early 1979 who helped him form a legitimate league. The LVGs bowled their first tournament at the Showboat lanes on February 25, 1979. The league has grown steadily in popularity and membership. The league's popular Showgirl Tournament, first held at the Showboat on September 1-2, 1984, is a large and well-attended event. By December 1985 there was a second gay bowling league known as the Fun One League. The LVGs bowled at the Showboat Hotel's lanes, while the Fun Ones used the lanes at the El Rancho Hotel Casino. [See "Las Vegas' Gay Bowling League," by Dave Cohen in the *Vegas Gay Times*, issue 19 (December 1979), p. 4; and "Good Times with Community Bowlers," in the *Bohemian Bugle*, v. 8:12 (December 1985), pp. 12-13.]
 41. For a detailed description of the Talk of the Town Bookstore/Peek-a-Rama adult theatre [2232 E. Charleston Boulevard] at this time, refer to Dennis McBride's journal entry for February 6, 1977.
 42. This was the Longbranch Saloon at 2222 E. Fremont Street.
 43. The adult stores in this strip mall, known as the Crestwood Shopping Center, included the Bizarre Leather Boutique, the "World Famous" Talk of the Town, the Peek-a-Rama, and the Adult Department Store.
 44. A *glory hole* is drilled through the wall between stalls in men's rooms or adult bookstores. One man sticks his penis through the hole while another man on the other side sucks it.
 45. The Denmark Bookstore opened at 629 Las Vegas Boulevard North the week of May 12, 1972.
 46. The Flick Theater stood at 719 E. Fremont Street. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Flick was advertised as showing "experimental" films such as Andy Warhol's *I, A Man* and *Wild Hippie Orgy* [1969]. The theater served refreshments and had a small coffee bar in the lobby. In later years it became a sex theater and adult bookstore catering principally to gay men.
 47. The Rendezvous Hotel Casino, known at the time of this interview as the Gold Spike, stands at 400 E. Ogden Street.
 48. This was the Jolly Trolley Casino at 2440 Las Vegas Boulevard South which was in business from 1977-80.

49. Section 8.08.030 (e) of the Clark County Liquor and Gaming Code in 1973 read, "Each licensee who permits his licensed premises to be frequented by or to become the meeting place, hangout, or rendezvous for known ... homosexuals" could have his liquor and gaming license revoked.
50. The Backdoor Lounge at 1415 E. Charleston Boulevard opened in November 1977. Flex Lounge opened at 4347 W. Charleston Boulevard on November 15, 1995. Choices held its grand opening party on March 15, 1991 at 1729 E. Charleston Boulevard.
51. This fundraiser took place at Snick's on January 31, 1984. See "AIDS Benefit at Snick's" in *Desert Gaze*, January 1984, p. 4, and "Snick's Holds Fundraiser" in *Desert Gaze*, March 1984, p. 5.
52. Dr. Jerry Cade is one of the Las Vegas gay community's most loved activists and supporters. Cade, together with Dr. Melvin Pohl, opened the University Medical Center's AIDS Unit on July 16, 1987, and Cade for many years wrote a medical column for the *Las Vegas Bugle*. Cade was co-founder of many of the community's most important organizations, and was honored in 1997 at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center's Fourth Honorarium. For further information on Cade's background and his involvement with local and national AIDS causes see "Cade's Speech Chronicles AIDS Care in Nevada" [*Las Vegas Bugle*, December 1991, pp. 22-24 and 26].
53. Southern Nevada's first AIDS death occurred on March 10, 1983. See "First Case of Immunity Illness in Las Vegas Identified" [*Las Vegas Review-Journal*, March 12, 1983].
54. Rock Hudson [1925-1985] was one of Hollywood's most enduring stars. Even though he won an Oscar nomination for his dramatic role in *Giant* [1956], he's most fondly remembered for his romantic comedies with Doris Day [*Pillow Talk* (1959); *Lover Come Back* (1961); *Send Me No Flowers* (1964)]. Hudson, closeted till the end, was the first major celebrity to die of AIDS.
 Famed pianist and entertainer Liberace was born as Wladziu [Walter] Valentino Liberace on May 16, 1919. His first Las Vegas performance was on April 21, 1955 at the grand opening of the Riviera Hotel. He became a Las Vegas institution thereafter, and one of its most popular performers. Rumors of his homosexuality were common throughout his life, the last two years of which were marked by a sensational palimony suit that made public Liberace's HIV+ condition. Before his health became public knowledge, *Las Vegas Sun* entertainment columnist Dick Maurice broke the story in a small gossip item, "Wish We Could Name Names" [*Las Vegas Sun*, August 29, 1986, 1E]. Liberace died on February 4, 1987.
55. The first Living Ribbon memorial in Las Vegas was staged on World AIDS Day, December 1, 1995. See "Living Ribbon Raises Funds, Awareness" [*Las Vegas Bugle*, November/December 1995, pp. 20-21].

56. The Backstreet Bar and Grill opened in November 1987 at 5012 South Arville Road .
57. The Golden Rainbow organization was established in 1987 by Bree Burgess and Peter Todd [died April 8, 1993] to raise money for AIDS causes. Their principal means for fundraising is an annual production featuring entertainers from shows on the Las Vegas Strip. The first Golden Rainbow production was performed in the Ziegfeld Theatre of Bally's Hotel on July 11, 1987 [see "AIDS Benefit Show at Bally's a Sellout" in the *Las Vegas Sun*, July 12, 1987, 1A]. The organization presents two awards, both of which are named for Golden Rainbow founder Peter Todd: the Toddy Award and the Peter Todd Humanitarian Award. In an article in the June/July 1997 issue of the *Las Vegas Bugle*, "Golden Rainbow is Revising Focus" [pp. 43-44], Rainbow is noted as AFAN's major source of funding.
58. Auntie Social noted in her column that Ralph Vandersnick was the only Vegas bar owner who offered a donation (\$500) for the sodomy law repeal effort in 1993. See the *Las Vegas Bugle*, June/July 1993, p. 15.
59. For background information on Don DuFour's death and the events leading up to it, refer to Richard Acamo's obituary (died August 10, 1990) in the *Las Vegas Bugle*, September/October 1990, p. 25; Auntie Social's column in the *Las Vegas Bugle*, February 1991, p. 9 and an ad in the same issue on p. 40; and "Don Dufour" (died September 30, 1991) in the *Las Vegas Bugle*, October 1991, p. 5.
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