

F
849
L35
W34
2010

An Interview with Marty Walsh

An Oral History Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood

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

© Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood
University of Nevada Las Vegas Libraries 2010

Produced by:

The Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries, Director: Claytee D. White

Project Creators: Patrick Jackson and Dr. Deborah Boehm

Transcriber and Editor: Laurie Boetcher

Editor and Production Manager: Barbara Tabach

Interviewers: Suzanne Becker, Barbara Tabach, Claytee D. White



Preface

In 2002, Marty Walsh and her husband purchased a home in the John S. Park Neighborhood. Three aspects attracted them to their 1941-built home: the quality construction; the aesthetics and details of the house; and the “old-fashion human element” that she associated with her grandparents. Marty describes their relocation to Las Vegas after living for nine years in Ireland and her joy of discovering the John S. Park community.

For her there is a neighborliness that they found in the form of the Neighborhood Watch. She feels the neighborhood still has work to do, but the gentrification has had splendid results as new “urbanites” replace original homeowners.

From her artist point of view, she also provides thoughts about the impact the artist community of musicians, painters, and creative artists has had on the neighborhood.

Even though she is relatively new to Las Vegas, she is well researched in the historic aspects of John S. Park location: once a fertile plot of land where Mormon settlers raised fruits and vegetables. As for the vision of the future, she sees it as a bit dreamy, but hopes to see it come to fruition and is thrilled with historic district designation.

Interview with Marty Walsh

July 19, 2007 in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

If you'd just like to begin by telling me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, where you were born, when you were born, you know, a little bit about your family.

I was born in 1957 in Detroit, Michigan. I'm the middle girl of two sisters. We lived there till I was 13, then we moved to Louisville, Kentucky, and then, after I left home I went to college in Cincinnati, to the Art Academy of Cincinnati. You couldn't count the number of places I've lived since then. [Laughing] Once I got a taste of the road, I've been a lot of places. I've been almost in every state in the United States. Then, when I moved to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, I met my future husband, and then we traveled around Europe.

Wow. How long did you do that?

Well, we lived in Ireland for nine years. We designed and built our own house there. And from there, we took lots of little trips. But right after we got married we each sold everything we owned on Martha's Vineyard, put backpacks on, and went to Europe and just traveled.

And what year was this?

Nineteen eighty-nine. And so we went all over. We were actually like two little kids heading off to Timbuktu. That's where we were going to go. And then the Gulf War started and there was no way my Irish-born husband was going to travel with an American down through the Gulf region, so we just stayed in northern Europe, and did all that. And then I got pneumonia, and we got really scared that here we are, just

vagabonds, with nowhere to go, and here I am sick, so we better make some roots somewhere. So we went back to Ireland and his parents gave us some property, and we designed and built our own house on it.

That's really great. That's amazing.

So that's my short history. [Laughing]

It sounds like a fascinating history. So you were there for nine years?

Mm hmm.

OK. And how did you end up in Las Vegas? Did you come to Las Vegas after that?

Yeah. Nine years of weather that it rains probably 340 days of the year, we said, oh, we need a change. Well, who would've thought we would've wound up in Las Vegas? It was as opposite as you could get. You might as well be on the moon.

So, we came to Louisville, Kentucky. Since I was in Ireland for so long, we came back so I could visit my parents, because I hadn't seen them in so long. So once we got back to America, because Pete had to get his green card sorted out, we did that while we were in Kentucky and visiting my folks. And then, once we were there, we did our research of where work would be, cost of living. We just did our research on where would be a good place that we could live with our crafts. And Las Vegas like kept coming up on all the profiles.

And is he an artist also?

Well, he's a carpenter, but he would really shoot me to go on record to call him a master carpenter, because that's what he did all his life in Ireland. And he is probably one of the finest carpenters that you'll ever find in America. Because in Ireland he worked in a mill shop where he could make—I mean with our house that he built, we had teak logs that

came in, and he made them into windows. He built a circular staircase for the president's house in Ireland, out of ash, and figured out all the angles and the sine, cosine, all the stuff you do; I mean, he's a master. But he would really shoot me to say that. He said, I'm just a carpenter. Don't even go on about that. But, I like to anyway. [Laughter]

As you should. So, Las Vegas—I mean had you ever considered Las Vegas before?

What were your general thoughts of the city at that point?

It's funny because, when we got married in 1989 on Chappaquiddick in Martha's Vineyard, before we went to Europe, we bought an old VW bus and traveled 20,000 miles around the United States together, for six months. That's what our honeymoon was. And of all the states that we went to, and our Rand McNally United States road map, the only comment on it was the State of Nevada, and we wrote a big UGH on it. We said, We will never come back here. This place is horrible. And then we went to Ireland for nine years, came back like I said, and now we often laugh at how is it that we're in Nevada? And it was the gas prices were too high, and it was dry, it was hot, it was boring, because we traveled that [America's] Loneliest Highway across, and said, who even would live here? It's like the moon.

There's nothing. There's nothing out there.

And also on this 20,000-mile trip that we did, we purposely took back roads. We didn't go to any tourist attractions, so we didn't come to Las Vegas because we were avoiding it. We took all back roads, all through the whole trip.

Where did you guys go around the U.S.?

We wanted to touch all four corners of the United States. We started out in Massachusetts to Maine, then down to Florida, then over to California, then up to Washington, then

through upper Michigan and back down, until we got back to Martha's Vineyard and sold the VW bus that we bought there, and then hopped on a plane and went to Ireland, and then traveled in Europe. I mean we sold everything because we wanted to travel. Then we kind of grew up real fast. We said, Man, we got to have a home. [Laughter]

And so, the long and short of it, it's interesting that we noted that we would never go back to Nevada. We thought it was the horriblest state in all the fifty states.

It's almost like it was going to pull you back and say, No.

I know. Something made us change our mind. I mean something drew us here. Well, all the Internet work that we did, about our profile, what we were looking for, cost of living, type of living, based on our stuff we put in—Las Vegas. I mean he's a carpenter.

So, how long have you been in Las Vegas, then?

I think we've been here eight or nine years now. Almost as long as we were in Ireland.

OK. And how did you feel about [it]? I guess you guys obviously made that decision to go to Las Vegas.

I was really afraid because I'd never been here before and I thought it was like where trailer-trash people lived. [Laughing] I thought it was just going to be really icky. And back then was before there were any TV shows about Las Vegas, so all you ever really heard about was all the, you know, just icky stuff. And I came with trepidation because of all the vices. I fortunately don't have any of those. Pete I was afraid would be prone to like gambling or drinking, and so I was little afraid but, you know, he's done very well.

So we pulled in, not knowing anybody here or where we were going. We drove in and we thought, Oh, well, this looks like the city, and we got off at Charleston [Boulevard]. We got off right like where I'm living now. And we pulled into like the

upper part of the Strip. Because I didn't even see the Strip at that stage. And we went up Las Vegas Boulevard between Sahara [Avenue] and downtown, and I said, This place sucks. I started crying. We pulled into the Econo Lodge. Because we'd been driving forever and we needed a place to stay. And I said, Pete, I don't care how tired I am, get me out of here, I'm not staying here, I'm not staying. [Laughter] I freaked. I didn't want to stay.

And so we happened to have come out and he didn't know what to do with me, so we started driving the other way down the Strip. And then I started seeing the bigger hotels and what looked a little more civilized to me. Because if you've never been here and your fears were about it being like this den of iniquity and you like pull in to where these seedy hotels are and triple-X theaters, it's like, I'm not having it.

Yeah. It's like you have found the den of iniquity.

It's like my worst fears were confirmed. [Laughing] So we wound up pulling into the Tropicana and stayed there until we found our feet.

So when you guys were doing your research and looking online, I mean of course this was, what, almost ten years ago now, did anything about this area come up, did you find anything? Because you're an artist and I'm assuming, you know, you went to art school, so that's something that would appeal to you. Was there anything about this area? Did you guys have an idea of where you might want to live, or were you just going to pull into town and wing it?

Yep. That's our style. [Laughing] That's exactly our style. It was more focused on Pete, with his carpenter [work], because he would be the major breadwinner in our family. As an artist, I'm not exactly, you know, Picasso, living like Picasso. So that was the focus.

And I really wanted to find a way to get him situated, too. He's born-and-bred Irish and, you know, we really had to focus on that because, not being American all his life, you know, we wanted to find a good spot for him. And, what attracted us was it was the fastest-growing city in the U.S., so we figured there would be job security for a carpenter. He was quite disappointed, though, that I don't think to this day he's touched a stick of wood building anything. Everything is fake and steel and aluminum and whatever. But he's happy enough. So it was really all about getting him situated.

Once we did that, I actually had an exhibition that I was booked for in the Art Center in Tennessee. And so, soon as we found him a job and found an apartment to rent, I said I had to find studio space right away, so I got a place out at Park 2000 near the airport, and I just started working. He would go to work in the morning, drop me off at my studio, pick me up at my studio, and we would go home. I had to paint for a solo show right away. So I didn't really investigate Las Vegas until I was done painting. It's my habit, when I'm working on a show, I kind of isolate myself and go for it.

So where was that first apartment?

Oh, my God. I look back on it now. If I knew then what I know now. It was on Sierra Vista [Drive], which is what they call Crack Alley. But we were in one of those Oasis places that looked really clean and bright and we thought, Oh, this is lovely, and it's really close to the Strip and it's central. We rented that right away and we were quite happy. But we're very early birds. We get up early in the morning and go to bed very [early], so we never knew what was going on outside after dark out there. [Laughing] There were shootings, there were drug [deals]. I mean I would never live there now. I can't believe how much danger we were in and didn't know it.

It's that ignorance-is-bliss kind of thing.

Yeah. It was good. I mean, the Oasis Apartment we were in was, you know, it was perfectly safe. We were wondering why there were so many security people around. We thought this is great. [Laughing]

And so how did you eventually make your way to this area?

True to our form, we really like garage sales and finding little bargains and little bits of history. And he was working overtime or something one day, so I went out yard-saleing by myself and wound up in this neighborhood. And I called him at work and said, I found where I want to buy a house. And so after he got off work, we came and we just walked the neighborhood. That was back when there were like no houses for sale. It was when like [there were] 200 houses on the market and that was it. We just walked the neighborhood with Spud, our dog, and asked questions of people, and just said, We'd really like to live here. If you think of anybody that's going to be selling, give them our number. And, you know, that's how we found this house. It didn't even have a "For Sale" sign on it. Somebody heard that we were looking and they kind of liked us because they saw us walking our dog around.

Wow, that's great. That's great.

Yeah. It was a fun way to find it. And plus, the vibration of this place is, you know, a 1941 house, I mean, we love that stuff. History is one of our common grounds, so it suited us really well.

That's great. So, the house was built in 1941, and we talked a little bit about it but if you could talk about the house a little bit and maybe what attracted you guys to it.

You said somebody called you and it was for sale. Were there key things that made you say, Yeah, we'll take it.

Well, it was actually Pete, him being such a fine carpenter. He looked at the house and saw, first, the location, because it's in this big circle on Park Paseo, and it just seemed so wide-open, the space around it he really liked. And he was attracted to the curb appeal for it. I wasn't so. I was like kind of neutral on it. But then he also saw the guest house in the back, and he saw the potential for help with the mortgage. A man usually, and I don't mean to be sexist, is way more practical in these things. I was attracted to like the hardware or, you know, the stupid things that you shouldn't base buying a house on.

Well, but you've got that esthetic eye, too.

Yeah. And the funny thing that was the deal clincher is when he looked in the crawlspace in the attic he saw how finely built this house was; that the rafters and everything, all of the joints in the wood were perfectly crafted, diagonal on the bias, so the floors wouldn't creak, and he knew it was constructed by a fine craftsman. He said, We're buying this. He didn't even consult with me. I mean I just knew. He was so excited about it, and I didn't know why but I know to trust him. So we said, OK, this is home now, so we got it. But he liked the way it was crafted. From all the newer houses that we looked at, it was just—.

I mean I think that's important because, like you were saying earlier, we just don't build things the same way, and it seems that the different areas in this neighborhood have, although different building styles, are still—

They're sturdy houses. [Laughing]

You know, they're going to be standing in another fifty years, whereas some of these newer, modern houses or buildings are probably not.

No, they're almost disposable, like American society is, and when you live outside of the country for a length of time, and then you come back to America, you really have a different view of what America is.

Things there [outside the United States] are so much older. When we thing "old" here, it's only a hundred years.

Oh, that's nothing, compared to Europe. But it was a very big eye-opener for me to see what it was like to be an American by leaving America for a while.

What was one of the major thoughts that you had?

That we're a disposable society. It's like the Roaring Twenties or something. Everything is just big and go and do and worry later. It really affected me like that. It was just like this gluttony, almost.

And so how does Las Vegas fit into that?

I think it was really important that I learned that about being American, so I could live with it in peace with myself. I mean I knew what to avoid. You know, people have their free will and I don't impose my ideas on anyone but it is what it is and if I can live within the parameters of that then that's cool. I think if you're aware of those kind of things then life is what you make it. So I could pretty much live anywhere, if I have that kind of an attitude.

That's a great attitude. So, how long have you guys been in this house?

We've been here, oh dear, oh dear, I'm so bad with numbers and dates. I live day-to-day. Five years, already? Oh my gosh, time flies. Five years. And funny enough, we came

away from Ireland to get a change. We were only going to come to America for a year.

[Laughter] Here we are, still in like one of the longest places we've lived anywhere.

And it is amazing how quickly that goes.

It sucks you in, doesn't it? If the vices don't get you, then you can live here. [Laughter]

So five years isn't a long time but in Las Vegas it can be a long enough time for things to change.

People think I've been longer here. It's like, No, I'm here not very long.

So have there been changes in this neighborhood, in this area since you guys moved in?

Well, there have, because we got here before the prices started to go nuts.

Yeah, you got in, it sounds like, right on the cusp.

Right on the cusp, we really did. I mean the owner that we bought this house from hadn't even left the city yet, and she was like, You know, I could've gotten \$200,000 for this house, and we're like, Oh, I'm so glad we got it when we did, but now it's \$400,000, so lucky we got it [when we did]. And she wasn't even out of the city yet.

You got in at a great time.

Yeah. And we're very lucky, and I think it was intuition or something, I don't know.

And, the changes I've seen. I've seen more even a cycle already, that people came and left, like a generation has moved out, and a new urban classification of people have moved in. But then, the movement has sort of stopped right now, and that's kind of cool that if the momentum is going to stay stable for a little while with urbanites, we can gather together and make some meaningful roots here with this type of a community.

Magazines like *Vurb* magazine, and different things like that, are really the demographic

of people that we want to be down here, or that I would like to see down here, that can leave a lasting legacy of John S. Park. I think if you get a real transient type of thing, the houses just go to pot. So I think the demographic of urbanites being in here can leave a legacy for the neighborhood.

Right. You say it's almost like a generation has moved out and a new one has moved in. Do you mean it just in terms of the demographics of people? Because I know one of the groups of folks that we're talking to are the old-timers that have lived here for like, you know, forty-plus years, the original owners of the house[s]. Well, you know, and sadly of course, just through time, they're disappearing. But have you had a chance to get to know any of them at all?

I did get to know some of them, and that's what I mean by the generation has sort of changed. The urbanites have moved in and replaced the old-timers, and I was just on the cusp of that. I've seen probably eight people in five years that I briefly got to know that have, you know, moved on. I think they took the equity out of their houses and moved where old people go sometimes. And sadly, some have died. And, you know, not to sound vulturistic, but this was where the great pickings were if you're a Mid-Century Modern yard-saler. We found some great stuff.

Oh, the best yard sales are in this area.

Oh, yeah. I mean look at these old fabrics from the forties.

Oh, you got those at a [yard sale]? Oh, that's terrific.

Yeah. Yeah. There were just some great pickings for yard-salers. And it's kind of like the city's best-kept secret. No one in the suburbs knows that this is here. And when you tell them you live downtown, they go, Oh, my God, are you some kind of a creep or

something? It's like, it's OK, I can just smile and say, It's our secret. You can judge me all you want but we live in a great place.

Do you think that that image or reputation is changing at all, especially with the growth of First Friday?

I think just a little bit. I think there's still a lot of work to be done. Because First Friday is just a one-night-a-month thing, that has blown way out of proportion about what downtown is. That's why I think *Vurb* magazine is such a great thing, because it creates a, I don't know if this is the right word, but like a diaspora of it, of the communities around, and they're doing the best work of getting the word out.

That's a good description. Gosh, I have a couple of questions. Because I'm curious if you think, just in the five years that, you know, things have changed, what was it like politically and socially and even culturally when you guys moved here? Do you think that there has been a change?

There has. One of the things that attracted us to this neighborhood very much was when we were walking the dog, looking for a house around here, how many friendly neighbors [there were]. It was very Mayberry RFD-ish. And you know, we lived in a small community in Ireland and it reminded my husband of home. So we felt very comfortable here. So that's one of the main reasons, besides the structure of the house, a good strong house, what was the real selling point. And slowly, as those people started moving out and the [urbanites started moving in], you know, I love the yuppies and the urbanites and that's all well and good, but they're very busy and they're [set] in their ways. And we would have like Memorial Day parties when we first came here. They'd block off the

street and put a bouncy castle out, and all the kids would come, and it was a potluck and everybody would bring a dish, and get to know your neighbors.

What street was this?

Ninth Street and Park Paseo.

OK, so it was like a Ninth Street block party.

Yeah. Yeah. And we just thought that was fabulous. But sadly, year after year, even in the five years I've been here, it's whittling down to maybe twenty people show up now.

Yeah. And you attribute that to just the changing demographics, the busier folks moving in.

Yeah. With the urban demographic, we love that, but that's kind of the thing that, once it stabilizes, that that can be recreated again, I think, in a new way. But the whole concept could be done. And so now what we do as a community is we spend a lot of our time, frankly, on Neighborhood Watch. And, that's like the ugly elephant in the room, that nobody really wants to talk about, but we do feel united as neighbors because that's what bonds us. We watch each other's houses.

Yeah. And tell me about that because some people you talk to and they say, no, it's a low crime rate, other people say, oh, there's still a lot of crime in the area.

What there is, is a lot of people who try to do crime here but they don't get away with it. I mean not with the Neighborhood Watch we have. I mean it's almost borderline nosy.

[Laughter]

I think that's great, though.

Yeah, it really does prevent it. You could interview everyone on my block and not one person would say that we live in their ear about what their business is as nosy neighbors.

We only know who the shopping-cart people are, and the people that don't look like they belong here, we only know what they are. You can spot a non-belonger a mile away. And we have like this cell phone thing that it's like, He's going down [whatever street], you know. If he's six houses down, then we call the guy six houses down and say, Watch where he goes. Make sure he keeps on going. And we have it where, like just this last month, we've had to call 911, probably we've called them four times just in the last month, for strangers that are on people's property that don't belong there. And they [the police] are here in three or four minutes. Only because we get a lot of it. It's not because they favor downtown, but this neighborhood is a bit of a showpiece for the mayor who wants to promote urban living, that you want to take care of it so it doesn't get a bad reputation. But I think the criminals and the homeless and the unfortunate people, they aren't on the jungle drum beat that we are. We are a strong force. You know, I feel bad for anybody who has to be a criminal but I'm not going to support them. I feel bad for them, but not at my personal expense, or my personal safety.

And it seems like from people I've talked to that have lived here for various amounts of times that the neighborhood has gone through cycles of being a neighborhood to sort of more rundown and transient populations moving in and out, and now with this latest surge of urbanization happening.

People are raising children here.

You're part of the arts scene and the developing arts scene. Do you think the arts scene and the role of artists ties in with the community development at all?

Very much so. I think it's really underestimated what artists, and in that genre I'm not talking about just painters, I'm talking about musicians and actors and other types of

urban professionals, it's really underestimated what they do for a community because the visual-sensitive creative types are the first ones to spot a place like that. They take the risk, because that's generally the type of personality they are. They move in, they start fixing the places up because that's the type of people they are in general. And then other people start taking notice. And then, unfortunately, when the government gets involved and sees this trend of fix-up, they say, Look what we've done, and they start taking the credit for it, not that any creative type would want credit for doing this. I mean it's just historical, anywhere in the world. This is how even developers will pick the next trend. They'll find out where artists have moved in, and they can predictably win on their money, on their bets that that's where the next place is going to be because artists have gone in and done this. So, I think that's what happened in Las Vegas and, you know, the artists are the last person[s] to be noticed by the politicians. They can get their credit and due, and we get farther that way, but ultimately the artists lose, too, because then the property values go up and then the artists have to go elsewhere. If you didn't buy something or lock yourself in, then sadly, you know, you're on to the next place, because you can't afford it, and I've seen that happen to a lot of my friends.

I think if you're going to be an artist, it's so much more than just making pictures or honing your craft. It's only one-third of it. The other part is treating your craft with a business sense, and also getting out of the isolation and joining the community. I mean that is part and parcel, too, of the business, and I think that the artists and the creative types who came here have those well-balanced ideals, and that's what will stand to this community. The ones that just rented somewhere and found the cheapest place they could find are going to be part of that diaspora.

What was the arts scene or the community like when you first came here?

There wasn't one. [Laughing] There was not one. I was desperate. And once I came out of my hole of preparing for this show in Tennessee, I set out to find the arts community, and I couldn't find it. I heard about the CAC [Contemporary Arts Collective], and at that stage they were pretty much defunct and on their very last leg. And so I looked online and I sent my money in to be a member and I waited, and waited, and waited, and waited, and I thought, Wait a minute, this is wrong.

And so, I found the Arts Factory, which had some artists' studios in it but it was very, I don't know, it was very odd. It was like skeletal. It was like the *Mary Celeste*. It was like, where is everyone? [Laughing] So it really wasn't happening. And, lucky enough, I had the skill of being a food stylist and I got to work with a photographer, Wes Isbutt [Wes Myles/West Photography], who owns the Arts Factory, and so I did a gig with him as a food stylist and that's when I started learning all about the inner workings of the Arts Factory, and I was able to entrench myself there and learn about it.

And, before you know it, the CAC started to revive, not because of me, I mean it just started happening, or maybe I plugged in and found other artists and we started stimulating that, and it just started happening.

And then along came Cindy Funkhouser, who began the concept of First Friday.

And this was what year, would you say?

Four or five years ago [ca. 2002-2003]. But five years ago, Wes was hosting, it was sort of a casual [thing], like the jungle drums would beat saying, Arts Factory, Friday Night, five o'clock, and then, you know, you'd hear about it. But there was no official entity. It

was all like within the [arts] community. So it wasn't getting out to the community at large, it was only getting to those in the know, and that was fun, and that was cool.

Tell me a little bit more about your involvement and the development of First Friday.

Once I started plugging into what the CAC was and I went to my first meeting, I guess they were having a revival. I mean it was just by chance I got here when the timing was right, but Diane Bush came along and said she'd be the president of the CAC since it was nearly crumbling, and we had Jerry Misko and some heavy hitters that were just like trying to bring it back up again. We had a great mix of people in that revival and I'm proud to say I joined right when all that was happening, so I was in on the ground floor of the scene when it started happening, and it was so exciting. I almost stopped painting. I probably spent thirty hours a week volunteering at the Contemporary Arts Collective and watching that just pull up from its bootstraps. It was really exciting, and I got really caught up in that. I was on the board and the whole thing. And then it got so big. There were too few volunteers and too many people that wanted to avail of it. And I say that not bitter, but that's just human nature and that's how it happened. I don't say that as a bitter sort of thing. But we really burnt out. And so that anybody that came along the pike that wanted to be part of the CAC, so we could get off the board and do something else, you know, we let that happen.

And it kind of started to falter a little bit but, boy, during the heyday of the renaissance of the CAC, First Friday was going like mad. It was so exciting. And then, you know, things started to take a little turn for the modern art or whoever the big, loudest voices were. It started turning it into this hip hop graffiti kind of a gangstery kind

of a feel, and, you know, with all due respect to that genre, it just kind of killed the golden egg that was happening. Our demographic, the customers that we liked and we wanted, were just too afraid. I mean it was a challenge as it was to get them to come down to this area, and then when we started having graffiti art everywhere, it freaked the suburbanites out, and they stopped coming. I'm just talking about the cycle of it. It's like a historical cycle that, as I see it, what happened. And we saw this as doing a lot of, I don't want to say "damage" but it was just too, too narrow-focused, it just got to be way too insular. It alienated a lot of other people.

So we're in that cycle now where we're trying to bring that back up, and these things don't happen overnight. So, now with the all the high-rises going up and everything, we're hoping that it will [come back]. But it's going to go through a real bad patch before it gets good again because with all the construction, I'm worried about my own business for the next three-and-a-half years because I'm right at Charleston and Main, and with the new stadium that just got approved; yeah, it looks like it's going to go, at the opposite diagonal of the corner of us. And if you think a nine-billion-dollar project is not going to have an economic effect for the immediate future, people aren't going to come down there and park.

Have they talked to you guys about this?

Well, I'm on the board of the Eighteen-B Neighborhood Association, I'm on the First Friday Advisory Board. Hopefully I've been tapped for the Las Vegas Arts Commission, and that position hasn't been appointed yet. I'm waiting to hear. I mean I'll be plugged in and, as a business owner, I think that's part of my responsibility, to see how I'm going to, you know, survive in the next while.

And what types of issues are being discussed between the city and the business owners?

That the Eighteen-B actually opposed this seventy-two-acre, nine-billion-dollar [project], this huge monolith. And so we actually thought it was not going to be good for the district because they wanted to annex two blocks or something of the footprint of what the Arts District was, and we decided as a group to turn that down. But the city approved it anyway, which is their right. Then REI came to Eighteen-B with their plans, and said, How can we work together? And I just thought that was the greatest, that was the smartest thing because, you know, a big gun like that can kill an arts district, and they don't really care, because the Arts District doesn't mean anything to them. It really doesn't. Like I said earlier in the interview, that's what developers do. They look for where the gentrification is happening, and that's where they feed off of. So they don't really care. But these people seemed to care. So we voiced our things. We said, We'd like to see the stadium not right at Charleston and Main, but if you could push it back, and leave that front area of a pavilion, so that it would be more in keeping with the neighborhood. We hate your eighteen-story parking garage being right on Main Street, where the galleries on Main Street are going to be looking into this big monolith. Can you move the parking garage on the other side, put retail along Main Street, and put your offices above? Do you know what? Two days ago, they came back, and they did everything we asked for. I couldn't believe it. I really couldn't believe it. And it got in just under the wire because they went in to show the city the very next day what their changes were. And we unanimously almost got up and applauded. This is a billion-dollar deal, and I mean we had a voice. It nearly brings tears to my eyes. You know, it's going

to upgrade the area, because obviously you don't want a gritty arts district, you know, you can't stay in the grit all the time, but you can compromise and have both.

Well, it just seems like that would be such a blatant contrast to build right there.

It's a big basketball arena. I'm sorry but, still, basketball is not really the demographic of an arts district. But when you're in those basketball games, we're going to have nice sidewalks, lots of parking, and the artists can still do their thing. I mean it's a good compromise.

What do you think of this so-called Manhattanization of the downtown area? As an artist and somebody that's been living down here, what do you think some of the long-range impacts of that could be?

There are two schools of thought in my community about that, and, you know, at risk of isolating some very good friends who are against it, I say bring it on. You know, it's just the nature of the beast. If you're going to run a business in an arts district or be an artist in an arts district, if you've done your homework at all, you'll see that this is the historical process of an arts district. One has to accept it. And I think, even by me accepting that, I didn't really lie down for it, but I knew that it was par for the course, because I've traveled, and seen arts districts go through this so many times. That's why it was so important that at that board meeting that I was at that REI listened to us. I think if I'd have gone in bitter and said, Nyeh, nyeh, nyeh, I hate this, I hate this, but I think by embracing the inevitable, you catch more bees with honey than you do with vinegar. And I honestly credit that attitude that they were willing to work with us. It's really unprecedented.

Yeah, it is unprecedented, and I think that's a good point; that you can't stop it so you need to figure out, it sounds like, how everybody can work together and mutually benefit.

So I say bring it on, as long as everybody wants to respect each other, you know, I think there's enough for everybody, really.

And what type of impact do you think it's going to have on this community, on this neighborhood?

I think it'll be good, as long as the property owners can maintain the integrity of the neighborhood. You also have to accept that, you know, it's going to be high-rise around us. We're going to be the little central park of the middle of the city. There's got to be compromise. You can't have it both ways. We will always have our location, of being centrally located. You know, there's enough sunshine in this community for everyone, so that if you get a shadow blocking your house, it's unfortunate, but shadows move. You're not going to have it twenty-four hours a day. So, you know, we've all got to be a little flexible if we want to move on and live in harmony like this. But, I don't think a lot of people share my views. I think there's just people that are inherently naysayers and they just don't want it [growl, growl, growl].

Well, a lot of people are opposed to change and they see it as potentially negative, I suppose.

And then there's the people like me that say bring it on, but it has to be brought on with sense.

So we were just talking about some of the impending changes happening in this community with the urbanization and the so-called Manhattanization with the

development of high-rises. And you'd mentioned earlier you were wondering how this was going to impact your business and your gallery, and I guess, if you could tell us a little bit about your gallery and how you came to start that.

Yeah. The gallery is inside the Arts Factory and Wes Isbutt is the owner of it and he's always been really committed to the arts. And, you know, as much as he likes to pretend or say that things won't change that much, you know, he's a businessman. I expect the rents will go up. They just will. And anybody who thinks that they won't, is a fool. I just know that he'll keep it this way as long as he possibly can, but I don't know, I'd lose a bet if he didn't unreasonably raise our rents, because, you know, that's the way it's going to be once the high-rises come in. But maybe not for a while because you can't very well charge a lot of rent while you're in the jungle of construction either, because the opposite is really going to happen. How do I know that my customers are going to come down there, in a construction zone for the next three years? So maybe three years or four years later, if I was getting the people in, and it's not his job to get the people down there, if we were getting the people in, then I'd be happy to pay \$2,000-a-month rent, if I was doing \$10,000-worth of business a month. I mean I'd be happy to pay a half-a-million if I was a doing a million. But, you know, we're going to have to roll with the punches, and it may come that my little Trifecta Gallery, my little 500-square-feet of space, it's the tiniest gallery in the whole Arts Factory. We always say that we're small but mighty, because we really are quite a successful gallery. We aren't in debt, we pay the rent every month, we have a little extra money to spend on the gallery, and we're just happy what we're doing and not in debt, but we're not swimming in money because of it. We're doing our thing and happy doing it. But I just don't know how long that will last when the

Manhattanization does complete itself. And, you know, I'm just prepared. That's the way I live my life, though, one day at a time with a smart mind.

You know, sometimes that's all you can really do, when there's so many changes happening.

Yeah, you have to embrace change. You can't fear it.

Yeah, I think that's a good motto. So, sort of speaking of change and shifting gears a little bit, back to the neighborhood, it fairly recently got the designation as a historic district. What do you think about that?

That actually happened again right on the cusp of us moving here. And that was one of the reasons why I thought it was a good bet to also invest here. I was just like thrilled about it, and I was thrilled that I didn't have to go through the red tape of making that happen because I know it's not an easy task. It's a very important task, it's very important to the neighborhood, and that was one of the important things. And see, you know, like we say, 1941, of the forties, is not historic by any other standards, but it very much is by Las Vegas standards, and to destroy what is here would be folly. So I feel like I'm a part of a broader reason for being in this community. It's not just having good neighbors; it's part of history, it's part of posterity, it's that legacy, you know, and those are the kind of things that really make me feel good, to do things like that. I mean I'm only one tiny cog in that wheel but that's all any of us are, really.

Right. Right. I mean it sounds like you foresee yourself being in this area for a long time.

I'm not opposed to leaving, either. You know, I could be here ten years, I could die here, I could be old here, I don't know what.

It's that one-day-at-a-time.

Yeah, yeah, but then I could also be tempted to go live in St. Croix or, you know, the mountains somewhere.

Get that travel bug again.

I know, we have itchy feet. This is the longest we've really stayed anywhere. Well, Ireland, nine years, but that's always home, but we actually physically lived there nine years, and we're approaching nine years here, so who knows? I have no plans at this moment to leave.

I think what's interesting is even with how mobile you guys have been and how much traveling around, you still have what seems to me what it means to have a sense of community. And so, fitting into that, what does this neighborhood or this community mean to you, and has that meaning changed at all since you've been here?

Well, my sense of community was born by living in Ireland, in rural Ireland. I saw how much good that did for children being raised there, for people getting to know their neighbors, and it was just really one of those warm, fuzzy things that I saw was not anywhere where I have lived. I mean growing up in urban Detroit or, you know, a college town, Cincinnati, and, you know, it was a great experience.

How was that community? When you talk about that, what are you talking about?

Neighbors waving at each other, children walking to the shop, past your house from school with just a lollypop and skipping along. You know, you don't leave children alone anymore [in America].

So contact with people, interaction, being able to walk.

The old-fashioned human element that my grandparents used to talk about. And it was lovely to see. And, to find that in John S. Park was in the top three things of why we moved here. Even though we don't have children ourselves. But the idea that somebody would be sitting on their front porch and wave at you. That just speaks volumes to me. Because when we first moved here to Sierra Vista, you could pass somebody in the hallway and they would look down, instead of look at you. It wasn't heard of to speak. And that kind of freaked me out a little bit. And John S. Park really does have that [sense of community], especially with families, people starting to raise children here and things. And I think a sense of history attracts a certain type of person as well. So there's that community element, too, that we have a similar bond, urban historic living. You know, we're circling the wagons with like-minded people.

Right. So the similar sensibility and outlook. I mean I'm always curious to know what it is that attracts people to this area or community, because it does attract like-minded people and like you said way earlier on, you mention to people that you live downtown, and there's still sort of this reaction of people saying, Oh. They either get it or they don't.

Yeah. They say, You live downtown? Do you have a gun? It's like, No. [Laughing] They think you're some kind of wild, wild West cowgirl living down here still. That's just wrong.

Yeah, so I'm always very curious about what it is that brings people down here and keeps them here.

Well, since I've been so involved in the creative community, I don't really know anybody else. All my neighbors that I know are the creative type and I think that's a sector of

society that suburbanites don't understand or feel that it's not in their range to be able to live amongst artists because they might think it's just too bohemian for them. There's just a lot of stigma, that [they] may feel like either they aren't cool enough or they're not brave enough or something, but really, anybody that wants to live amongst artists, if they want to live amongst us, we would welcome that. It's not an isolated club. Anybody can live here that wants to. We don't party every night and we're not crazy bohemians. We're creative people that are seriously living their life as a business. We're not drunk in the streets.

Right. The stereotypical conception of the arts, and artists.

I think that's changing, or maybe I've lived in Las Vegas, this community, too long where we're not really like that.

Has that changed? Was it like that or have you seen changes?

Well, maybe you weren't here long enough, but you do remember the Enigma Café? It was up the street from the Arts Factory. It was pretty bohemian, you know, it was very hippy-like.

Actually I think I got here right as that closed because I've had several people say,

Oh—

Yeah, it's like, bring back the Enigma days. But, you know, it evolves, and this Arts District is unique to a lot of other arts districts because of the transitional nature of this Las Vegas, I don't want to say "society" but the people who live here. It's a very different sensibility than somebody in Terre Haute, Indiana. We just have different things to deal with, you know, and there's a lot of stress here because I think a lot of families live with people within their own family's vices and they hide it or they protect it, and

they have to go out with a happy face, but it may be sad inside the home, and I think there's a lot of stress.

Do you feel that?

I do. I wonder about the people who don't come out of their houses. I kind of wonder, What is their problem? I don't want to take it on and know about it, but I do suspect that thing, and I actually learned that in Ireland, too. You know, there's this old saying about street angel, house devil, that they're like a happy face on the outside. It's almost like the sensibility of the fifties, where the wife went out in her pearls and she had the drink for the husband and everything, so that everyone else knew everything was happy at home, but inside the home—

So there's a façade.

I think there's a lot of that here because of the gambling, the sex, the drinking, I don't know what else, but there seems to be some kind of underground thing here that I don't partake in, but it feels like it's here, so there must be families that, you know, they have secrets to protect. That's so sad.

All families do, I suppose.

I think they do.

Well, so talking about this, do you think there is a relationship between the John S. Park Neighborhood and the Strip or the gaming industry? I mean, it's interesting because this neighborhood is literally in the shadow of the Strip, you know, and I think historically maybe there's been a lot of connections.

Well, yeah, this used to be the suburban [area]. This is used to be suburb in Las Vegas, where the casino bosses and the entertainers lived. That's who originally built all these houses. This was Las Vegas suburbia in those days, which I find really interesting.

Yeah. It's fascinating, actually. Do you think that there's still a relationship between the community and the gaming industry?

I don't think so. I think today's casino workers live in the suburbs. That's a really broad generality, but that's what I think. They're like the huddled masses that live in a certain thing. I don't think they have time to live their life in the city. They are on the treadmill, and they're doing their thing at work and they come home and they do their thing, and they have the kids and they don't have time. But, you know, the creative types who have moved in here, you know, they've got a little bit of time to discover and enhance and to be and to create a community like this. It's my view of it.

Yeah. Yeah. I'm just curious because, you know, people will always ask, you know. It really is so close to the Strip.

Well, when I'm on an airplane traveling somewhere, the seatmate will say, Where are you from, and you say, Las Vegas, [the seatmate says], You mean you live there? And they say, Do you live in one of those big tall buildings? And I say, No, those are hotels. You know, they think we live in hotels, which tells me exactly that—

Well, that's the image people have, those big, shiny [buildings].

It's scary, isn't it?

I mean, try telling somebody you're at a university in Las Vegas and they'll say,

You have a university? Do you guys have slot machines on campus?

Mm hmm. They think you're learning to be a gambler, a professional gambler. I know.
It's really weird.

So it's an interesting reputation that it has, and again I think what's so interesting is it seems like this area, the downtown area, the John S. Park Neighborhood, just really runs so counter to these [beliefs].

It really does. It's like swimming upstream. You feel like a salmon sometimes.

[Laughing]

It's just very unique.

Yeah. I mean I love that idea of living somewhere that people can't mold me into a cookie-cutter shape. I mean I kind of like that.

Which is so common here in this city.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It makes the dialogue a little more interesting because they can't go, Oh, you live in, you know, Sunset, and they know exactly what that's like, because this is different from anywhere in the whole wide world.

It really is.

Mm hmm. It is.

Is there anything that you don't like about living down here or this particular area?

You know what? Well, with all the little robbers and the homeless people and all, everybody's just doing their thing, and I could say I hate that but, as long as we're aware and we try to like keep everybody in their own compartments doing their thing—let me think. What do I hate about Las Vegas?

Or this area, even.

Right now, I don't know what I don't like.

That's great.

Ask me on a bad day and I might have something, but that would be really narrow, because it would be subjective to a mood. You know, do I wish it were different in some ways? Of course. But there's nothing that I really hate about it. I wish it were this and that. I mean it's a fast-growing community but I would like to see the Arts District grow a lot faster.

That's good. I was just going to ask you what types of things you'd like to see happen within the community, say over the next decade or so. Where would you like to see it go?

Well, I think what I'd like to see happening is on the books. I mean I've seen the plans, the Centennial plan, and I've seen the footprint for what they plan to do to link our neighborhood with the Arts District. There are footpaths, streetlights, way-finding systems for people with strollers. I mean I've seen those plans.

And you think it's going to come to fruition?

I think it's still a little dreamy to think that it might. But, at least it's there.

So people are thinking, at least.

They are. Yeah. And the urban planners have a vision that would be my vision, as well, and, you know, whether the politicians will make that happen or not, or whether the casinos can not get in the way of draining, you know, the money for homeland security or whatever, draining that aspect of our life away. It just remains. It's all in the hands of the politicians, really. Actually, it really should be in the hands of the voters but don't even get me started on that.

Well, that's a pipe dream all over, I think.

Yeah. That's as la-la as you get. [Laughing] The power is in the hands of the voters but the voters are like sheep, or they just are just non-imbibers of voting.

That's a tough thing.

Yeah. I mean we can't solve the world's problems in an interview [laughing]. I guess I would like for more people to vote. Have an educated vote.

Always. Always. All around. Well, gosh, we've talked about a lot and we've got, on this disc at least, about ten minutes left. Is there anything that we haven't touched on, that you feel is important to people understanding the community or, you know, the history or what John S. Park Neighborhood is all about?

We did briefly touch on some of the history, but some of the more detailed points about the history of this neighborhood are what fascinates me, and I would like to learn more. In fact I haven't gone down to the Hall of Records or anything like that to really [do] detailed research [in] old newspaper articles and things, but from the oral history of the older people that have left the neighborhood, I've learned a lot of really interesting facts just about this property here at Park Paseo in that the original owner began the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [SPCA]. And, you know, that in itself, as a pet owner and a pet lover, is a really good reason for preserving part of that history, and, you know, maybe eventually there'll be a program to put plaques out, or a brochure that will have different aspects. I mean there already is one, the walking tour of John S. Park [published as *John S. Park Historic District Walking Tour*] has a few things, but I think that was written maybe six years ago, and there's been more information gathered and it could be updated with some interesting facts, like this was the original SPCA.

And also that, I don't know how large the plot was but I do know that this area before it was homes was the garden for Las Vegas, where they grew the fruits and vegetables for the Mormons and the workers and everything, and the ground is very fertile and that's why we have some really surviving, beautiful trees. I will say that, when we first moved here, one of the things that attracted us to this street were the huge mulberry trees. And that's what really made it look at Mayberry RFD, that the street was like an umbrella, like a cave. Ninth Street was like a cave of shade, which was such an oasis. And, you know, in the five years that I've been here, we maybe have five of those trees left. On one side of the street, something happened where in the last five years like two of them have gone every year, Davie Tree has had to come, and I don't know, there's maybe no preservation order on the trees, but it's not the canopy that it used to be. I don't know whether homeowners feel that it's a danger to their property, and they've had them cut down. Some of them got diseases and they had to go.

I was going to say, do you think there's some kind of disease that's maybe [affecting these trees]?

Yeah, but it's really on one side of the street.

I want to say thank you for taking the time to talk with us. I think we were talking a little bit about the history of the area, the actual physical history of the land and of this house. A lot of people agree with you that that's one of the more fascinating things about living here is that this particular area has so much history. You mentioned that this was a very fertile area. What else do you know about this part of town or just, you know, even this area, these couple of blocks, that you could share with us?

Well, I think because it was built in 1941, this house in particular and a few beside us, there are a lot of little nooks and crannies that we often wonder about, like what that little nook is that might be for the phone. We've asked our neighbors, Do you have one of those? We have one of those. That's kind of fun. And really kind of off-track from your question, one asset is the neighbors, the like-minded people who are the temporary custodians of all of this, where we look out for each other and help each other. I mean, that's an asset you just can't buy. And it's the history of this place that brings the type of people that are for that sort of thing. I don't know, the original fencing, this is the original [detailing], some of the shutters on the house that have tulips on them, there's just architectural details that are just so sweet that are not done anymore.

Right. And now, luckily, those have been preserved.

Well, they kind of have. If you look at the neighbor's house, this abandoned house next door, the chain-link fence has a hole in it and somebody has taken an old shutter from the original part of the house. It's all weather-beaten and everything. It has the tulip in it. It's nailed on their house upside-down. I mean, you know, that's a photo I need to take before somebody just knocks that down as rubbish. But it's kind of a sign of the times of the history of the people before us that looked at that as junk, and now I look at that as something sweet. That would be a great way to visually end this interview, is the old shutter being used to fill a gap in a fence.

Well, we'll have to get a shot of that, because it is a sign of the times and the change.

And I absolutely love talking about this. I can't believe that somebody who has been here for such a short time has so much to say about my community and the history that brought us here. I think what brought us here has kept us here, and otherwise, where we

were only planning on being here for a year. God bless John S. Park. It's made my life better. I'm happy.

Well, I think that's great, and thank you so much for sharing your experiences and your stories with us.

It's my pleasure, absolutely. I never thought I'd have so much to say about it.

Yeah. Yeah. That's why we wanted to get the project going. Well, thank you.

Good. Mm hmm.

INDEX

A

- Architecture/Architects
 - Mid-Century Modern, 11
 - REI, 19
- Arts
 - Arts District, 19, 26, 30
 - Arts Factory, 16, 22, 26
 - Trifecta Gallery, 22
 - CAC, 16, 17
 - Enigma Café, 26
 - First Friday, 12, 16, 17–18
 - First Friday Advisory Board, 18
 - Las Vegas Arts Commission, 18

H

- Hotels/Casinos
 - Tropicana, 5

J

- John S. Park Historic District Walking Tour*, 31

N

- Neighborhoods

- Crack Alley, 6
- Eighteen-B Neighborhood Association, 18, 19

P

- People
 - Mormons, 32
- Personalities
 - Bush, Diane, 17
 - Funkhouser, Cindy, 16
 - Miles, Wesley (Wes Isbut), 16, 22
 - Misko, Jerry, 17
- Publications
 - Vurb* magazine, 11, 12

S

- SPCA, 31, 32
- Streets
 - Charleston Boulevard, 5, 18, 19
 - Las Vegas Boulevard, 5, 6, 27
 - Main Street, 18, 19
 - Ninth Street, 13, 32
 - Park Paseo, 8, 13, 31
 - Sahara Avenue, 5
 - Sierra Vista Drive, 6
 - Strip. *See* Las Vegas Boulevard