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2014

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYA MERON

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Dr. Harold Boyer. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank the university for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

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Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project



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Preface

Raya was born in Tel-Aviv, Israel on July 8, 1935 to Edith and Gerhard Munzner. Her Mother was the daughter of Elsa and David Flachs from Berlin, Germany and her father was the son of Rachel and Zvi Munzner from Mannheim, Germany. Raya's father was jailed in 1931 as a 23 year old attorney, for being "out of the ordinary intelligent, and, therefore, highly dangerous," he was accused of being a communist because he defended social welfare cases. On the day of his release, he fled Germany, crossing the border overnight into Czechoslovakia and onward to Paris to reunite with his then fiancée (Raya's mother) and await immigration papers to the then Palestine, today's Israel. Raya's parents married upon their arrival in Jerusalem and settled in Tel Aviv in 1933.

Raya's father obtained his doctorate in Economics and Law at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Upon arrival in Israel, he got a job counting the out-of-circulation money in the basement of "Bank Yaffet" in Tel Aviv and worked himself up to becoming the Bank's first Director. He needed a challenge and therefore, left "Bank Yaffet" and headed the first Israeli construction company "Sollel Boneh". He left "Sollel Boneh" to head the Economic Department of the Foreign Office and led the negotiations of Israel's trade agreements. When the Israeli Fuel Corporation "Delek" was founded in the early 1950s, Raya's father became its first Director serving until his death in 1954. He was 53 years old.

Raya, the eldest of three children, joined the Israeli Defense Force after completing her education. Following rigorous boot camp training, she was assigned to the Mixed Armistice Commission. After her military service, Raya worked as Secretary at the Foreign Office where she met her first husband who was an Israeli diplomat at the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey and shortly after her marriage, she moved to Istanbul.

Raya was divorced in 1959 after returning from Istanbul. She left Israel shortly thereafter to pursue a show-business career and immigrated to Canada in 1960 to become an airline hostess for Trans Canada Airlines. In 1961, she went to NYC and on to Las Vegas where she became a showgirl at the Tropicana Hotel "Folies Bergere" show in 1962, the Dunes Hotel "Casino des Paris" show in 1963, the New Frontier Hotel "Minsky Follies" show in 1964 and the "Vive les Girls" Road show in 1965 which included the Theaters in The Round ("Melodyland" in Anaheim, "Circle Star" in St. Carlos and the Theatre in The Round in St. Diego). Her final show was the 67 Expo (1967 Montreal World's Fair). Raya left Las Vegas in 1967 and returned to NYC to study Business Administration. On completion of her studies, she worked as secretary and administrative assistant for a Paper Conglomerate in NYC. From 1970 to 1972 Raya worked for the European Space Research Organization in the Netherlands, where she also did some photo modeling. She returned to Canada in 1973 and studied to become a Law Clerk. Raya worked for numerous legal firms and taught law clerks at an evening school. In 1990, Raya moved to Geneva, Switzerland where she worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. She spent a year in Cambodia repatriating Cambodian refugees after the signing of the Cambodian peace agreement. Raya retired in 1997 and lives in Geneva where she spends much of her time writing.



Vive les Girls, Montreal Worlds Fair, 1967

My late father, Gerhard Munzner, was one of the founders of the State of Israel. He was driven out of Germany, and accused of being a communist. When the State of Israel was declared in 1948, it was the United Nations that drafted the borders which were: north of Lake Chula was the border with Lebanon, the Golan Heights was the border with Syria, the Jordan River was the border with Trans Jordan (today's Jordan) and the Sinai desert was the border with Egypt. You really have to read the history and not what the media tells you. Shortly after the Declaration of the State, Israel was attacked by the Jordanians. There was a siege on Jerusalem. The population didn't get food and water. It was completely blocked. That's when Colonel David (Micky) Marcus volunteered to help Israel. Remember that, the American Colonel, David (Micky) Marcus?

The name sounds familiar, but I'm not sure.

I recommend you watch the movie "Cast a Giant Shadow", the story of David (Micky) Marcus (Michael Stone) as he was named by the Israelis. He was a colonel in the United States military, a Jewish guy. Israel had neither army nor ammunition. They were defending themselves against the Jordanians who were British trained, by exploding soda bottles. Colonel Marcus said: "how can this nation defend itself - they have nothing". My late father was sent to New York to arrange for the first boat of weapons to be shipped to Israel. He told me that the ship was supposedly carrying toys, but in reality it carried weapons. My mother accompanied my father to New York to acquire a further degree in physiotherapy at the New York Hospital for Joint Diseases. My mother was the first physiotherapist in Israel who treated children with polio. It was during an epidemic of polio in the 1950s. David (Micky) Marcus organized the Israelis in an army. He taught them how to use ammunition. They were attacked from all sides. After the liberation of

Jerusalem under the leadership of David (Micky) Marcus, while at the camp in Abu Gosh on the way to Jerusalem celebrating the liberation of Jerusalem, one of the soldiers asked for a password because he heard a noise at night. David (Micky) Marcus didn't answer because he did not understand Hebrew, the soldier then shot and killed him. The movie is about David (Micky) Marcus and the early days of the State of Israel, starring Kirk Douglas, Yul Brynner, Frank Sinatra, John Wayne and Angie Dickinson. It is a true story about the creation of the State of Israel and the first of six wars against it by the surrounding Arab countries. To all those who blame Israel for the Palestinian misfortune, I highly recommend they watch the movie "Cast a Giant Shadow". It is a true and factual history of the early days after the creation of the State of Israel. After the declaration of the State of Israel, the Arabs who wanted to stay could stay - it was their country, too. The surrounding Arab countries, however, enticed the Israeli Arabs to leave their land and join their brothers in the neighboring Arab countries. They sold their land and initially ran to Egypt and Jordan and later to Syria and Lebanon. When they arrived there, they were refused entry and were placed in refugee camps, the largest of which is the Gaza Strip on the Egypt/Israel border. Israel has been providing basic necessities to the refugees, while the neighboring Arab countries who placed them in refugee camps, are using them as propaganda against Israel. Rockets are being fired daily at Israeli towns from the Gaza Strip, while Israel is being blamed. Enough is enough. I know my people, trust me. They don't go in there to kill civilians, while the Gaza Strip refugees fire their rockets from apartments, schools and hospitals using children as human shields. Israel has to strike back to protect its civilians, trying to avoid Gaza civilians in the process. Before Israel strikes, they throw out leaflets asking Gaza civilians to leave in order to

avoid Israeli strikes. The hatred between Jews and Arabs goes back to biblical times. My older brother still lives in Israel. We're not in contact. He is an economist, now retired from "Bank Israel". My brother is a borderline communist and I'm just the opposite. When my mother died in 2005, my brother gave her furniture to the Palestinians. I was speechless. He was the executor of my mother's will. We don't see eye to eye. But he is there and it's still my country. I've done my military service in Israel and am a very proud Israeli. The Israeli/Arab conflict continues. Of course, Obama doesn't help. I'd like to see him go. The United States is a mess. My younger brother's widow lives in Salt Lake City and I am in contact with her. The world no longer respects the United States. I'm a voter and taxpayer in the State of Nevada. There's one guy who strikes me as honest. He's a doctor.

Oh, Ben Carson.

Yeah. Do you think he's honest? Is anyone honest? I mean there's really no one; they're all involved in scandals. Americans should get their act together.

So let's talk about growing up in Israel and what that was like.

I was born in Israel or rather Palestine, on July 8, 1935. When I was born, the hospital in Tel Aviv was just being built, so I was born at home. I will be celebrating my 80th birthday this year (2015). Israel was Palestine when I was born.

So which passport do you use? The United States passport. I cannot enter here without a United States passport because I am a United States citizen. There is a fine of \$500.00 if a United States citizen tries to enter the United States without a United States passport. I'm a proud United States citizen; my loyalty is with the United States. Prior to my visit, I had to get a new passport. The State Department is very strict now. The United States

consul in Geneva requested my birth certificate since I did not have my old passport. When I submitted my Palestinian birth certificate, the Consul was surprised. I explained that I was born in 1935 before Palestine became Israel (1948). I asked the consul why am I refused entry to the United States with my Swiss passport, and she told me that the United States State Department has to know the country of birth for security reasons to protect us from potential terrorists, and the Swiss passport does not indicate the country of birth. Profiling is necessary for our own protection. I can fully understand it. I've had problems because my United States Passport says: "Born in Israel", and that is not safe for travel.

My father had three brothers in the United States. My father was an economist. His three brothers were: an internal medicine specialist, a psychiatrist, and the third brother had shoe stores in Cleveland.

What kind of stores?

Shoe stores. For some odd reason, my mother didn't keep in touch with my father's brothers. There was some kind of dispute. I think my mother blamed the three brothers for taking off and leaving their old parents with my father in Israel. My father's parents were from Lithuania. They went from Lithuania to Mannheim, Germany and then to South Africa. My father's three brothers were born in South Africa and then they came back to Mannheim where my father was born. I am trying to write my autobiography. Two years ago, I put an ad on a people search forum because my mother refused to give me the addresses of my uncles in the United States. I thought that I would probably find one of my uncles. In my ad I wrote that I am the daughter of Gershon Meron, formally Gerhard Munzner, who immigrated to Israel in 1932, but I had no response. Four months

later, I got an e-mail, which read: "Dear Raya. My name is Helen Hay and I'm the daughter of James Cope who befriended your parents in 1945." I was surprised. But I didn't know who she was. I thought and thought and thought and finally remembered - it was during the British mandate in Palestine. My mother was a physiotherapist treating wounded British soldiers. My mother brought home a young handsome British Officer by the name of Jim Cope. And my father liked him, and sort of adopted him. Jim spent his free time with us and joined us on our vacation trips. My father loved him. I wrote back to Helen Hey asking: "Is your father Jim Cope?" And she told me that her father liked to be addressed by "James". He was very British. She told me that her father was eighty and asked her to look for me around the world, because he wanted to write to me by mail since he cannot use computers. I sent her my address and received the most beautiful letters from James with childhood pictures of my older brother age 4, myself age 7 and my baby brother a few months old, describing his love and admiration for my father. I was in tears. I still have the letters. I plan to use them in my book. James told me that he married Anna and had three daughters. James was transferred from Palestine to Egypt. My father kept in touch with him. From Egypt, James returned to London where he went to medical school. He told me that he moved from one dormitory to another during his university years and misplaced my father's letter of 1955 but found it unopened a few months before he started looking for me - sixty years later! James told me that he asked his daughter, Helen, to find me. James invited me to visit him and Anna, his wife, in London to meet his daughters and their families. I went to London for ten days. He gave me some documents to read from the British Mandate period. These documents were an eye-opener on what really happened in Palestine. James travelled throughout the Middle

East. He loved Israel. He said that he loved my father. He just adored him. During my visit in London, James talked to me about Israel and my father from ten in the morning until ten at night. By the end of ten days my head could not absorb any more. The documents were very interesting. James passed away a year after my visit, but I stayed in close contact with his wife, Anna. I'm going to see her again. We are in touch. In fact, on the way here I stopped in London and saw Anna. She came to see me at the airport. So this was really quite an experience for me.

Oh, it had to be.

During my visit with James and Anna, James showed me a book that my father gave him. It was the Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam, the Persian philosopher and poet. It was the original printing with the most beautiful color illustrations. I would like to get that book, but I'm sure that Anna wouldn't give it to me. My father befriended James with a circle of our friends. One of my father's friends was a judge who was killed in a boat accident. James asked me about the Judge's wife, Susi, and I promised to try and find her. Susi was in a senior residence in Israel, and by the time I found her, she had passed away. Her son lives in Israel and is a former judge and a lawyer now. I'm in touch with him. He's more of a brother to me than my own. Israel is a beautiful country, but things change. People are no longer the pioneers my parents were. They want money. They want good living conditions. So it's very different now.

So what was it like when you were a little girl?

We lived in Tel Aviv at No. 1 Rosenbaum Street. I was in my teens. My older brother is four years younger, and I lost my younger brother, who was twenty-eight when he died. My father was a very left-wing idealist and I was even worse then. As a teenager, I

belonged to a youth movement that was borderline communist. We sang in Russian and my father didn't like that. Every Saturday when we had our youth movement meeting, my father travelled around Israel visiting interesting sights to pull me away from my political meeting. You probably remember our prime minister who signed the peace accord with Egypt, Menachem Begin. One day, a woman with three children moved into our building's ground floor. No one saw her husband who was living undercover. He was Menachem Begin. He had several plastic surgeries because the British Mandate authorities were looking to kill him. The Begins were such modest people. Mrs. Begin had asthma. I remember my 2-year-old brother played with red ink on our third floor balcony and mistakenly poured it down the balcony soiling Mr. Begin's white shirts downstairs. **[Laughing]**. My mother went to apologize. Mrs. Begin said to my mother: "You know, Mrs. Meron, I also have young children."

Okay, great.

They were lovely people. I was the only one in the whole building who talked to Mr. Begin as he was leading the Israeli resistance party that fought the British Mandate. He was considered a fascist. Before I left for London, I promised to keep in touch with him. Mr. Begin told me not to forget my Hebrew and sent me Hebrew books to London. Unfortunately, I did not keep in touch with him. He was a great man and a wonderful Prime Minister who liberated Israel from British rule. If you ever go to Jerusalem, there is a museum about Menachem Begin's life which is very interesting.

We didn't start this interview like I usually start interviews. Would you spell your first name and your last name and pronounce it for me?

Raya, R-A-Y-A. Meron, M-E-R-O-N.

Now, the real last name was a German name, Munzmer, M-U-N-Z-N-E-R. My father negotiated and signed all the trade agreements for the State of Israel. He became a high-ranking diplomat, and as such, the Foreign Office demanded that he change his German name to a Hebrew name. So my father changed his name and we stayed with a Hebrew name - M-E-R-O-N. I was married to someone from the foreign office, actually - from the intelligence service, the "Mosad".

So your parents arranged this?

Pretty much.

So how is it done?

It was someone from the foreign office who told my father about this young brilliant guy. I agreed to meet him. Our families were too different. He came from a religious family. There were no lights on a Friday night and Saturday. And my family was just the opposite. So it didn't work from the beginning. My husband was sent by the foreign office to work at the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey and I didn't like that, because women were expected to stay home and never allowed to accompany their husbands to official functions. Right after our arrival in Turkey, the Turks had the revolution against the Greeks, Armenians and Albanians and it was bad. My parents came to visit. I was very close to my father.

In Turkey?

In Turkey, yeah. They stayed at the Hilton Hotel. Two days later my father announced that he's leaving because he found a bedbug in his bed. The Turks were filthy, even their five star hotels were dirty.

So how old were you when you got married? I was 21. So you didn't go to college?

I went to high school. It's equivalent. Actually, I went to the army before I got married, at age 18.

Tell me about that military service.

Every girl has to do 2 years of military service. My military service was delayed due to medical reasons - I was underweight. I had to spend two months in basic training that is a boot camp, similar in difficulty to the marine training here; it's tough, very tough. The punishments were severe. In my childhood I had polio and, therefore, had no strength in my arms to neither hold a rifle, nor throw live hand grenades.

And you can't be excused for medical reasons?

Yes, my father did that. He had me transferred after boot camp training. I was transferred to the mixed armistice commission that was very interesting. I was discharged early. A year after my discharge, I got married. The military is a good experience for women. I remember one punishment - if the officer found one grain of sand inside the rifle chamber during inspection, the punishment was to clean fifty rifles in one hour. And if the rifles were not clean, then there were more severe punishments. We had turns to wash out the barracks. The Sergeant Major and officers were tough women.

After my divorce in 1959, I sold all my wedding gifts, bought myself a ticket, and off I went to London. At that time, I had stars in my eyes. I wanted to be a movie star. In London the Rabbinical Service was after me to try and reconcile my marriage but I refused and asked for a divorce. I was very, very innocent at that time. I thought that if I go to Hollywood, I would become a movie star. I truly believed that. But how do I get to Hollywood?

And how much money did you have at that point?

Very little. But I took a job working at the Israeli embassy as a secretary. I was terminated a few months later because I had an affair with a Pakistani guy declaring me a security risk. I lived with a friend of my mother's who was a schoolteacher and had two children. While reading the newspaper one day, I saw an ad by Trans Canada Airlines for airline hostesses. I thought that an airline hostess is the first step into the world of glamour. I'll be an airline hostess and once I'm in Canada, I'll go to Hollywood. Right?

[Laughing].

I love it.

So I applied. Out of six hundred girls I was hired. The airline flew me to Montreal where I was trained. I had a typical Israeli mentality - very tough.

So what is the Israeli mentality?

It's aggressive because we are always on the defensive. We are brought up this way. I was flown to Montreal. Somehow someone in Montreal knew that there's a stewardess all the way from Israel. On my arrival in Montreal, I got a phone call from a girl in flight operations named Marcia who wanted to meet me. I went through a month of training, following which I was based in Toronto. Marcia told me that the chief purser in Toronto was a known anti-Semite. My final graduation certificate said: "Ms. Meron is very intelligent but has an extremely aggressive mentality". I was flying on New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas day and I was always picked on by the chief purser. A week before the Jewish Holiday, Yom Kippur, which is the holiest day for Jews when we say a memorial prayer for deceased parents, I asked for Yom Kippur off to say a prayer for my late father. The Chief Purser refused and said: "Ms. Meron, we don't recognize Jewish holidays here". So I didn't come to work and was fired. I didn't know

what to do. I was all-alone there; so I called the chief Rabbi of Toronto. It was a big scandal. There was an article about the Chief Purser treatment of me in the Toronto paper. A letter was written to prime minister, Diefenbaker at that time. Finally, they reinstated and compensated me. I decided to quit and go to California to start a show business career. **[Laughing]**.

So about what year is that now?

That was in 1960. I went to New York, but didn't have a residence permit or working papers. I met a girl in Toronto who was a showgirl at the Latin Quarter in New York and she introduced me to the ins and outs of being a showgirl. I also met an Israeli girl with whom I went to Las Vegas. She had a friend who was going to meet us in Las Vegas and get us work in a show.

So who was this person?

His name was Irving Falk, an oilman from Houston. He was a big gambler who stayed at the Tropicana Hotel. My friend did the driving, since I don't know how to drive a car. We were sitting stark naked in scorching heat.

Why were you naked?

Because we wanted to get tanned and look good before reaching Las Vegas.

[Laughing]. We had beach dresses on which covered us when we saw a car close to us.

On arrival in Las Vegas, Irving met us at the Tropicana and introduced us to the late Jackie Fields who was an ex-boxer and one of the Tropicana bosses. Jackie looked at my girlfriend and then looked at me and said: "You come with me and I'll introduce you to the line captain".

Did you know how to dance?

Not at all. I looked good; that was all. So Jackie took me backstage, and introduced me to the line captain. She looked at me and hired me. I was fitted for costumes and started rehearsing the following day. I don't know how long I worked there. That's what I'm trying to find out. It was an honor to work there. We did two shows a night and three on Saturday. We had to be back stage at 6:00 p.m. for the 8:30 p.m. dinner show. The late show started at 12:30 a.m. Every show had seven production numbers, with seven costume and wig changes. Most of the costumes were very heavy silk brocade with long trains. We had wardrobe ladies who dressed us and placed the rhinestone pasties on our nipples. At the same time, there were three shows nightly in the lounge with the comedian Shecky Green and the Mary Kaye Trio. We often went to see third shows in other hotels as each hotel had a third show in their main showroom once a week, while all hotels had lounge shows three times nightly. We met real wealthy people. Showgirls were catered to from head to toe. We were treated like queens in those years. I spent all my money on clothes. I didn't have any money before, but I loved clothes. I remember when I lived in London; I wanted to meet people my age. In our apartment building was a group of guys who were in the United States military and they always had women and parties. I liked one of the guys. So I asked him if I could come to one of his parties, and he told me that I did not have the right clothes for their parties. His comment made me cry. As a result, I became clothes crazy. I spent my entire salary, everything I had, on clothes. We had one small department store on the strip where we could buy designer clothes, shoes and handbags. It was named "Joseph Magnin". We also had a professional dry cleaner named "Fabulous Cleaners" which specialized in cleaning of the finest fabrics. I had the reputation of the "best dressed girl in Las Vegas". I still have an

evening dress of which there were two sold, one was bought by the singer, Eddie Adams, and the other was mine. They were all hand beaded with sequins and beads of many colors on five full layers of pure silk chiffon. I used to change my hair color and style every week.

Where did you live?

I lived behind the Flamingo Hotel, at the Egyptian Apartments that belonged to Jessee Baxter, who was the president of Albuquerque Chemicals Company in New Mexico - a real cowboy. He wore spiked boots, a silver buckle belt and a cowboy hat. He liked me. On my day off, he invited me to visit Phoenix. He had his own plane. So we went to Phoenix and he took me to a cowboy-clothing store, and said to the salesgirl: "Now, dress up this little girl in cowgirl clothes". **[Laughing]**. I think Jesse has passed away. When I last spoke to him in 1985, He was living around the Las Vegas Golf Course. He was very nice - a very cultured man.

Where did you go shopping?

I spent a fortune, mostly at Paul Sperling's at the Flamingo Hotel, Joseph Magnin's on the strip and the Tropicana Hotel dress shop. I also bought furs at the Tropicana fur shop from Flo, the manager. Flo was a little old lady. She was smart. She told us girls to tell the gamblers who wanted us to bring them luck, that it was our birthday and we wanted a fur as a gift. And once we got the fur, we brought it back to Flo a day later and split the price of the fur. **[Laughing]**. Later on, Harry Yagoda, a furrier from New York, sold furs to all showgirls.

How much were you earning to buy those kinds of clothes?

We were earning pretty well, but don't forget that we were hustling the tables, too and

most of our income was from hustling chips.

What does that mean?

After work, we hung around the gambling tables. At that time, there were very rich gamblers, such as oilmen, Arab sheikhs, princes etc. Some of these men lost \$100,000.00 in a matter of an hour. Of course, the gamblers expected a lot more than having showgirls bring them luck, and we always wound up looking for excuses. While we hung around the tables, if we brought them luck, they gave us chips. We would then go to another table play one or two chips, pocket the rest and come back five minutes later for more chips claiming to have lost. Sometimes, I came home with a thousand or two thousand dollars a night. I had no appreciation for money at all. I started gambling my own money and lost. I remember just before I decided to leave Las Vegas, Jackie Fields, one of the Tropicana Hotel bosses who was my mentor, said to me: "Raya, one of these days you will eat your clothes and furs, stop buying clothes, save your money". I was a showgirl at the Tropicana Hotel "Folies Bergère" show from 1962 to 1963, followed by the "Minsky Follies" show at the New Frontier Hotel, Barry Ashton's "Caribbean Carnaval" at the Americana Hotel in Puerto Rico and Barry Ashton's "Mardi Gras Follies" and "Les Femmes de Paris" at the Golden Casino Hotel in Reno. In 1964, I visited my family in Israel. On the eve of my departure for Israel, I joined a group of friends for a farewell drink. A young man at the table next to ours bought us drinks and joined our table. The girls told him that we are having a farewell drink as I was leaving for Israel the following morning and that we plan to stay out until morning when I catch my flight. The young man was the astronaut Alan Sheppard and he brought me to the airport and put me on the flight with all my excess baggage. I received the red carpet treatment when Allan

Sheppard checked me in and I was not charged for excess baggage. On my return from vacation in Israel in 1965, I joined the Dunes Hotel "Casino de Paris" show starring Line Renaud. After the "Casino de Paris" closed, I joined the "Vive Les Girls" road show, first in Lake Tahoe, followed by the theaters in the round in Anaheim, San Carlos and San Diego, and my final show was the 1967 (EXPO) World's Fair in Montreal. I left Las Vegas in 1968 after the 1967 World's Fair and moved to New York where I went back to school, while holding a full time job as secretary. I was penniless when I arrived in New York having lost all my money gambling and buying clothes. I rented a studio apartment across from the Empire State Building, with a foldup bed in the wall and a chair, which is all I had for the initial 4 months. I could not even afford pantyhose!

So were you able to move all your clothes?

No, no. That's another story. Before I went to New York, while I was on the road, I put everything in storage with the Nevada Moving and Storage Company. Just before I left for New York, I wanted to arrange for my clothes to be shipped to New York and went over to the storage company to check my crate. I could not find my crate and found out that the owners stole seven military crates and ten civilian crates and then declared bankruptcy. All my clothes without exception were gone. I had beautiful designer clothes. In New York, I took an office job with a greeting card company, which was Hallmark's largest competitor, "Williamhouse-Regency". I was hired as secretary to the President. He asked me whether I knew how to type? I told him that I was a good typist, while I have never sat at a typewriter before. He knew that I was lying and asked me about my knowledge of English, which I told him, was perfect. During the first dictation, he said: "You will be sitting here until you type this. And if you don't understand any

words, get the dictionary. You will type this without errors even if you sit here all night". Everything I know I have to thank him for. In fact, I'm going to see him in New York. Although he knew all along that I was lying about my skills, he decided to give me a try. **[Laughing]**. Eventually, I was promoted and finally became the President's Executive Assistant. I left New York for Switzerland in 1971, after the anti-Vietnam demonstrations in Washington. I almost got arrested but managed to leave just before they arrested 7,000 kids during the largest anti-Vietnam demonstration. I always wanted to live in Switzerland, which was my dream because my parents went there often. The first seven months after my arrival in Switzerland, I hitchhiked all over Europe with a friend. We slept in fields and barns. We went from Zurich up through Germany to Copenhagen and then further up to Finland, crossed the Arctic Circle over to Sweden, Norway, and came down in Norway. Scandinavian countries were full of American draft dodgers. They were hiding in the smallest villages there. I remember one young man when he heard us speak English, he came over to me and said: "Could you do me a favor? When you return to the United States, please go to see my father and tell him that I'm not bad". He broke my heart. These kids were eighteen and nineteen years old. I tried to settle down in Zurich, but couldn't get working papers. The Swiss are very strict. In those years, you could not get working papers unless you were a nuclear physicist. The Swiss have no financial problems. It's a fairly rich country. They have very little crime. My father's best friend was a very prominent lawyer in Zurich. He represented huge trusts. I sought his help. He was like a father to me. He applied for my working permit. It was refused. And if the Swiss authorities caught me working without a permit, they would deport me without notice. They would even pay my trip back to the United States. Today things have

changed because the Swiss opened the borders to the European Union. Now we have a lot of crime. There are many gypsies begging for money, and the French take jobs away from the Swiss. The French are the worst.

In what way when you say, "They're the worst?"

They don't like Americans. They're very nationalistic. They take jobs away from the Swiss; they never spend a dime in Switzerland but spend their Swiss earnings across the border in France. There's a great deal of animosity between Swiss and French citizens. Zurich is different because the border is much further away. Initially, I worked under the table. My father's friend published a small magazine about Israel. He asked me to sell advertisements for his magazine because ads kept his magazine going. He paid me a percentage of the advertisement sales. The magazine had an administrator who found out that I'm selling ads without a work permit. He threatened to report me to the authorities. That's when I had to leave. I left for the Netherlands and settled in Amsterdam. I found work at the European Space Research and Technology Centre (ESTEC) in Noordwijk near Amsterdam. I lived in a rooming house in Leiden, the oldest university town in the Netherlands. The rooming house was situated at the foot of the main Canal and the other occupants of the rooming house were mostly students. It was a fun time. While there, I also posed for a fashion photographer, both dressed and topless. In 1974, I left the Netherlands for Canada. When I arrived in Canada, I was not allowed to work and all my possessions were confiscated.

But you had lived in Canada before.

Yes, I did. The Canadian immigration authorities claimed that when I left in 1961, I deserted my residency. A friend told me to write to Larry Grossman who was running for

the Ontario Leadership elections. So I wrote him a letter about my late father being one of the founders of the state of Israel and mentioned my work for Trans Canada Airlines in 1960. I received a letter from his assistant as follows: "Dear Raya, we have arranged for you to get the residency. All you have to do is go to the immigration office on Monday morning at ten o'clock, and they will give you residency papers". When I arrived Monday for my residency permit, I was surprised to see a big queue of applicants waiting, while I got the red carpet treatment and was served coffee and cake. Eventually, I became a Canadian citizen.

What kind of work did you do there?

There I became a paralegal. I worked for lawyers, primarily for a law firm that defended the Canadian Indian Nation. That was very interesting. It was fun working there. Initially I had no idea of law clerk duties, as I had never worked for a lawyer. I knew a girl whom I met years earlier, and she advised me to register as a company and then hire myself out. She told me to call law firms around town and tell them that I am an experienced legal assistant, and once I find work for a law firm, I could always call her for instructions.

[Laughing].

Oh, God.

During one of my job interviews, I told the Personnel Director that I had five years legal assistant experience. One of the interviewers looked straight through me, and said: "Okay, I'll give you a chance." I was very persistent and whenever a law firm needed someone to stay overtime, I volunteered. I worked day and night. I read files from cover to cover. The chief of personnel called me one day and said: "Raya, I knew you never worked for a lawyer before, but I admired your nerve and gave you a chance. We would

like to offer you a long-term contract.” I worked at that law firm four years. Eventually, I trained legal support staff and had my own legal placement agency. I worked primarily on personal injury cases. I was quite successful until the Government passed a law that eliminated liability damages, setting a fixed amount to all claimants, for whatever injury they sustained.

Okay. And that's it.

That was it because law firms closed their doors. They couldn't make any more money suing for liability. I was faced with bankruptcy. I didn't know what to do. At that point, I decided to return to Switzerland. Someone told me that the only way to work in Switzerland is in Geneva for an international organization. So I sent applications everywhere, but was told that I have to apply locally. I decided to go to Switzerland, but could not afford the plane fare. It was before Christmas. No one invited me. I was lonely and sad. I bought a lottery ticket hoping for a miracle and won five thousand dollars.

Wow. Great.

So I bought my ticket to Switzerland. I gave up my apartment and stored all my possessions with a moving company for possible shipment. I'm now a Canadian citizen and have a Canadian passport, American passport and Swiss passport. I was forced to have an Israeli passport because I was born in Israel and therefore I will always be an Israeli citizen requiring an Israeli passport for travel to Israel only. When my mother died in 2005, I had to go to Israel for her funeral. I traveled on my Canadian passport. When I arrived in Israel, the passport authorities refused to let me in until I pay one hundred and seventy-five dollars for an Israeli passport that's valid five years. I was furious.

Did you pay the five hundred dollars?

I paid one hundred and seventy-five dollars. In Israel, I bought some gifts for friends in Switzerland and asked for reimbursement of the value tax, but was told that this did not apply to me because I was an Israeli even though I have not lived there since 1959. As an Israeli citizen, I could qualify for Israeli Old Age Security since I paid old-age Security there although I didn't have enough contributions. But if I have old age security contributions in another country, they add that country's contribution and pay me the Israeli Old Age Security, so when I got back to Switzerland, I applied. I was refused claiming that in order to receive Israeli Old Age Security, I would have to live there permanently. I was furious. I don't go there anymore. And even if I give up my Israeli nationality, for the Israeli authorities, I will always be an Israeli. Middle Eastern countries have strange immigration rules. I have a friend who is Lebanese. He holds a Lebanese passport. Whenever he goes to visit his relatives in Lebanon, he needs a Lebanese visa.

[Laughing].

So did you ever dance anymore? Any more entertaining?

After Las Vegas - no.

And you danced here for about five years?

Five years, almost six years. I was also working for a choreographer and producer named Barry Ashton.

Oh, I've heard that name.

I was one of the Ashton Girls and we worked at the Americana in Miami, Puerto Rico, and at the Golden Casino in Reno. I had a lot of fun. The best years of my life were spent in show business and especially here in Las Vegas.

Oh, that's great.

I really liked it.

Why didn't you decide to stay after the clothes?

When I lost all my clothes, I realized that it wasn't a real life here, and that I could do better. Life in Las Vegas was one big permanent party.

So it was a big party?

Yeah, you stay out all night. You sleep all day. The Dunes producer, Frederic Apcar, told me one day: "I don't like your nose, I want you to go and see a Dr. Murray Parks in Beverly Hills and have your nose done." I agreed. I feared that with an ugly nose, I wouldn't be hired for future shows. Dr. Murray Parks was the best plastic surgeon in the United States. I had to pay Dr. Parks in advance. He took pictures and I was operated. Plastic surgeons think they're God's gift to the world. When I woke up from anesthesia, I had a cast on the outside of my nose stuffed with cotton on the inside. I was miserable. The morning following surgery, Dr. Parks stood at my bed, and said: "I came to admire my work. Where is your makeup? I'll come on Friday and I expect you to have full makeup on." My nose turned out perfectly. I didn't know why the doctor was so expensive and obnoxious, but looking at my nose, I understood. When I went for my post-operative exam before returning to Las Vegas, I met a lovely old lady who looked like a doll, while waiting to see Dr. Parks. She told me that her name was Mrs. Ira Gershwin. She was the sister-in-law of the famous composer, George Gershwin. On my return to Las Vegas, I joined the Vive Les Girls Theater In The Round road show. I loved my nose because I always wanted to have a typical American nose and the surgery gave me an all-American nose. During our show at Melodyland in Anaheim, my mother came for a visit. My mother was a German Jewish conservative woman who would never

accept me being topless on stage. Therefore, I spoke to Mr. Solomon, the co-producer and business manager of the show, asking him to explain my nudity on stage to my mother. Mr. Solomon calmed me down and said: "Don't worry, Raya, I'll take care of her." My mother came to the show. Mr. Solomon told my mother that all the girls are protected at all times and are escorted home by a chaperon after the show. My mother believed him and traveled with me to St. Carlos and St. Diego where we continued our Theaters in The Round tour. At that time I didn't know that I had to file tax returns. I didn't know what taxes were. I was very innocent. The taxman caught up with me in Anaheim. Luckily, I kept all my bills and most importantly, the clothes purchase receipts.

And that's right. The clothes could probably be deducted.

My mother helped sort out and organize the bills. She was shocked to see that I spent a hundred thousand dollars on clothes in one year. She was furious at my extravagant lifestyle. I had to pay back taxes. I thought the good times would never end. Luckily, I left Las Vegas at the right time. I have friends here who were showered with gifts and money from gamblers. My friends spent money on lavish homes, jewelry, cars, clothes and furs. When the real estate market collapsed, my friends could no longer pay their mortgage and lost all their savings. Now they're over seventy, forced to continue working at minimum wage salaries and no pension.

So which job allowed you to have a pension?

When I went back to Switzerland, I couldn't get working papers. A friend told me to apply to international organizations in Geneva and I found a job as a secretary, but was bored to tears.

Okay. But international organization means what?

The United Nations, World Health Organization, World Intellectual Properties Organization, World Communications Organization to name a few.

Oh, for the UN. Okay.

Oh, yeah. Initially I thought it was interesting. I worked for the refugee agency and my boss was pretty decent. But when I saw the corruption there, I lost interest. Our taxes were wasted on enriching UN diplomats, while the refugees were refused their basic survival rights. If you dare criticize the UN corrupt system, you were terminated without notice. Since I worked in the private sector prior to working for the UN, working for the UN in Geneva was very boring - I finished my work by ten o'clock in the morning and sat around doing nothing until 5:00 p.m. No one does any work at the UN. The staff members' cafeteria is full from early in the morning until closing time at 5:00 p.m. My boss decided to send me to Cambodia for field service to help with the repatriation of refugees. I don't know if you know anything about the history of Cambodia where the communist regime of the Khmer Rouge killed two million people. After the peace treaty was signed amongst the Cambodian factions, we were brought there to repatriate the refugees. It was a very hard assignment because most of the land was mined.

But you weren't bored anymore.

I wasn't bored, no. Our refugee camps were on the Thai border. They were manned by Thai policemen who raped our refugee women. It was sickening. I have hundreds and hundreds of photographs, but they're all in albums. Shortly after my arrival in Cambodia, while on our way to one of our reception areas to pick up supplies, the driver of our car collided with a truck. We had no seat belts and I went through the windshield. I had a very bad whiplash. The UN refused to evacuate me for treatment. There were no doctors

in the area but for one Red Cross doctor whom I went to see because I couldn't turn my head. The doctor told me that she was too busy with amputations and gave me pain medication. I had several local Cambodians helping me who were in refugee camps when they were children but were lucky to have been granted asylum by the Australian government among others, who now volunteered to help us. They were engineers. They helped us with the repatriation of refugees. We received our monthly salary in Geneva and an additional two hundred dollars a day while in Cambodia as "Hardship Allowance".

For what reason?

For being there. I was finally transferred to the Capital, Phnom Penh. When I arrived there, I demanded to see a doctor. There was a German military field hospital in Phnom Penh and I went there. A German neurologist looked at me and ordered my return to Geneva. He wrote a detailed medical report. On my return, I went to the UN medical service that are all French military. The medical officer told me that he didn't get any medical report, which my legal counsel found 3 years later hidden away from me, at the bottom of my medical file. I found a good doctor in Geneva who worked in Cambodia for the Red Cross. My doctor requested that I be placed on disability, but his request was ignored. My doctor waited a month and then wrote the UN a demand letter, as follows: "Since you refuse to place my patient on disability, I order sick leave for an undetermined period." I was forced to retire without any compensation. My life was threatened. For three years, I was moving from one temporary shelter to another. The Jewish community helped me. I couldn't afford the rent of my apartment. The UN sent me a letter as follows: "You cannot work anymore, so good luck." I fought the UN nineteen years and won. But

what I won is nothing compared to what I should get because you cannot fight the UN in a civil court. You can only go through the internal system of justice and the internal judges are corrupt diplomats. Luckily, I did win. The judges concluded that the way I was treated was unacceptable. I get a minimum disability pension, but I can live with it, and the UN has to pay 100 percent of my medical care for life.

Oh, that's huge.

Yeah. That was a hard pill for them to swallow because I get physiotherapy, osteotherapy, massages and more without limitations. I was just elected officer of Republicans Overseas in Switzerland, although there's little we can do there, we try. There is an American lawyer in Geneva who defends many abused UN staff members and he is trying to pierce the UN diplomatic immunity, and if he succeeds, then I will appeal to the United States Supreme Court. If Republicans win the 2016 elections, then we have a chance because they will reduce the United States donation to UN programs due to lack of accountability and corruption. You know how much money disappears there? Remember the Food for Oil Program in Iraq? Sixty some odd billion dollars disappeared. I'm keeping my options open. One day I'll move back to the United States. For the time being I'm staying in Switzerland.

If the lawyer does what?

If he pierces the immunity. We cannot sue the UN in a civil Court because the UN is immuned through the diplomatic immunity.

Would you ever move back here to live?

I was shocked to see what became of Las Vegas.

What was shocking, what part?

The clientele and the fast food restaurants. Beautiful elegant hotels, with fast food chains like McDonalds??

And they also have the nice restaurants.

The Bellagio does.

Well, Bellagio, the Wynn.

I haven't been to the Wynn. I've been to the Bellagio. I like it very much.

Me too.

But then you have to pay a lot of money.

Exactly.

The food at the Bellagio is superb. There's one restaurant - "Michael Mina", which is very expensive. But then there's another one, a seafood place - "Sensi" - which is excellent and not as expensive. It's quite reasonable. There are many kids all over the hotels.

When you say "kids," are you talking about fifteen-year-old kids?

Yeah, teenagers, young adults.

Well, young adults, yes.

I wouldn't take a toddler into a casino. That's unacceptable.

Some of the hotels have designed it so you have to walk through the casino to get to your room.

That's true.

I've seen two shows.

What did you see?

I've seen the Blue Man Group. I loved it. I bought the DVD. And I've seen The Jersey

Boys and that was lovely. I was told that the Jersey Boys movie is better than the show because it goes into much more detail. These were the only shows that I saw. I am running short of money now because I had to pay for my surgery in advance. I always wanted to see our national parks. So I booked a tour by Trafalgar Touring Agency; fourteen days, seven national parks. We flew from London to Las Vegas where the tour started. I would recommend this to everyone. I'll show you some pictures. It was the experience of my lifetime. In Las Vegas we checked into the Tropicana hotel, and the following day, we met our travel director who happened to be a Native American geologist. We couldn't have had it any better. We went from Las Vegas to Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon and Salt Lake City. From Salt Lake City we went to Yellowstone National Park, Rapid City, Mount Rushmore, the Tetons National Park. It was incredible.

Great.

We returned to Las Vegas fourteen days later. If you get a chance, take the tour. I'd like to do another tour of the national parks. I bought some lovely turquoise jewelry on the way like the necklace I am wearing. **That's beautiful. I saw that when you came in.**

That is simply beautiful.

The Navaho people were so nice - I love them. That was in Monument Valley. Have you ever been there?

No.

We never take the time to explore our surroundings. I lived in New York across from the Empire State Building. I've never visited the Empire State Building.

Oh, you're kidding. Okay. Oh, yeah, I go to all the sites here in the city, the Grand

Canyon.

Well, we've been to the Grand Canyon, too. I was disappointed because, I was scared to death. They have no guardrails and they have so many accidents there. It was very crowded. We saw Yellowstone and the Old Faithful geyser. There were hundreds of people waiting for Old Faithful to erupt. In Yellowstone and another park we stayed in lodges in the park and the rest were four-star hotels. In Monument Valley, we stayed at Goulding Lodge. It was at Goulding where John Wayne stayed while filming "The Stage Coach". At Golding, we were invited to a cookout dinner by the Navaho chief who told us about the Navaho and the problems they still have with the government for mineral and water rights. That was very interesting. On the way back, we stopped in Cameron on the Navaho Reservation that covers Utah, Arizona and Nevada. They have a store and a restaurant. The food is delicious. They have handmade rugs at a starting price of thirteen thousand dollars. These rugs are small and they hang on the surrounding walls. They have vintage jewelry, which are old pawn items. I got a bracelet there. The middle of the bracelet has a turquoise stone and on the other side of the turquoise is a silver buffalo.

Oh, that's beautiful.

So I spent a little too much money. But why not?

But your operation is already paid for.

Operation is paid for. That's done and I am reimbursed the moment I get back to Geneva and submit my claim. So I feel very sorry for people here with Obamacare. Do you have it?

No. I have insurance through the university.**Which collection were you studying over in Special Collections?**

Photos and articles from the 60s for my autobiography. I had fun there. I saw photos of so many fine performers whom I knew personally. I'm looking for photos of the shows I was in - Tropicana, Dunes and the New Frontier. The photos are old and some are fading. As the only showgirl from Israel, I had numerous publicity photos and articles in the Las Vegas Sun, Review Journal and Fabulous Las Vegas Magazine. I was on the cover of Fabulous Las Vegas Magazine. Remember that?

Yes.

They had all the Fabulous Las Vegas Magazines but for the one I was in 1962. I think that I started working here in August 1962. And I'm looking for newspaper clippings and programs of the shows. They have a wealth of material, but I need the time.

Oh, yes.

I would need to spend a few months here to research the years I worked in Las Vegas.

After our show, we used to go to the Sands Hotel and Carl Cohen, President of the Sands, would buy us Chinese food. I remember one evening I was sitting in the Sands lounge with a couple of the girls from the Tropicana show. A young man came over to me and told me that the "King" would like to buy me a drink. The people behind us were bosses from the Tropicana. The Tropicana at that time was owned by people from Alabama. Vegas was very segregated in the 60s. I looked back to see who offered me the drink, and at the back of the lounge was Nat King Cole. I love Nat King Cole's singing. He was my favorite singer. I agreed to join Nat King Cole's table. A few minutes later one of the Tropicana bosses came over to me and said: "Raya, you want to keep your job, don't you?" At that time, Sammy Davis had to sit at the back of the lounge. Often, he could not even sit at the back of the lounge and had to return to his room after his show. I was

shocked. Of course, I didn't want to lose my job, so I refused Nat King Cole's invitation. But this was Las Vegas then. I was invited one time with a friend to Sammy Davis' suite. I saw Sammy Davis, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Peter Lawford and Joe Bishop - the Rat Pack - whenever I had time off. I saw the best of the best in Las Vegas. I saw the last show of Judy Garland. That was depressing.

Because she had lost her talent?

No, she didn't. She couldn't stand up. They had to prop her up on stage.

Because she was intoxicated?

Yeah. When Elvis performed at the Sahara Hotel, I met Sal, Elvis' hairdresser. He asked me whether I would like to meet Elvis and took me up to Elvis' suite at the Sahara hotel. I couldn't believe my eyes. Elvis was bloated, he looked sick. He had the most beautiful blue eyes. He was just sitting there, head bent and staring at himself, surrounded by his bodyguards whom he called first lieutenant and second lieutenant. They kept him high. It was pathetic, really. I also met Paul Anka who still lives in Las Vegas. I was introduced to little Paul before he turned eighteen. We couldn't go into any bars because he was not allowed to drink. So we hung out in coffee shops. I have an autographed photo of him. I also have an autographed show program of Liberace at the piano. I saw his show at the Hilton when he first introduced little Barbara Streisand. I met Louis Prima and his accompanying band of Sam Butera and the Witnesses. I also met Teddy Randazzo, Larry Storch, Harry Belafonte and so many great performers. While having a drink at the Flamingo Hotel one evening, I was approached by Ray Charles' Manager who asked me whether I would like to meet Ray Charles. I was so excited to meet Ray Charles, whose music I loved. His Manager took me to Ray Charles' table and introduced me to him. Ray

Charles, who was totally blind, ran his hands over my face and arms and said: "You are so beautiful, my dear". Showgirls and dancers of the three main shows (Lido de Paris at the Stardust, Casino de Paris at the Dunes and Follies Bergere at the Tropicana) from time to time, after their last show, went to watch the sunrise at Lake Mead.

Las Vegas is unbearably hot and hard to breathe for lack of air circulation.

In what way?

The heat and the pollution. I never suffered from shortness of air. Maybe I'm not used to it anymore, but I come from a hot climate. I went to the pool and lasted five minutes. So I stay in the room most of the time. I saw two shows. I went to eat at the Bellagio twice. Have you ever eaten at the "Sensi" restaurant?

I'm not sure. I've eaten at a couple of those, Olive and a couple of others I guess where they have all those nice restaurants that overlook the water falls. I've been to several of those.

The Bellagio is beautiful.

Oh, it is. I love the conservatory.

Oh, yes. Isn't that wonderful?

I love art. When I lived in Las Vegas, I got interested in turquoise. I met a Native American and stayed with him and his wife learning how to make turquoise jewelry. I often went to Turquoise fairs. In one of the fairs I bought a half shell, which was all inlaid with turquoise and coral. During a fire, it burned and some of the stones came off.

It would be nice to have good eyesight again.

And that's what Sheppard Eye Clinic is going to do for you.

I'll show you some of the photos I took on my national park tour. This is the Grand

Canyon, but the most colorful is Monument Valley, which is incredible. The Guide took us to a place where they had a museum of covered wagons. We had dinner in a covered wagon.

Wow. Oh, isn't that something? And it's large enough for, what, six people to easily have dinner. And how do they serve it?

Oh, they serve it like any restaurant and it's delicious.

I mean they can't walk around the table.

No. They just give it to the first person at the table to pass around.

Okay. And where is this?

This is in Rapid City. I'm going to look up my notes. We saw so much that it's really difficult to remember. This is our guide. He's a Native American geologist.

Oh, that's great.

It was an experience of a lifetime.

Oh, that's beautiful. This rock formation is where?

I think it's Bryce Canyon. But you see it just goes on and on and on. Look at this - Arches National Park. Just one beautiful picture after another - you never have enough of it.

That is great. it's after seven.

I'm sorry I took up so much of your time.

No, no, no, this is perfect, perfect interview, perfect stories about Las Vegas, perfect.

It is July 14th, 2014, and this interview has taken place in my office here at UNLV at the library. So I think that's all the information I need. So I really appreciate this.

Will you send me a copy of it?

Now, here's what's going to happen. As soon as this is transcribed - it will be about a

month from now—we're going to mail the draft to you.

Wonderful.

So that you can read over it. If we put the address just like this, there is no code after Switzerland?

The code is 1203, Geneva, Switzerland.

Okay. So that's all I need?

Or you can keep in touch with me by e-mail, okay? I'd like your card, so that I can email you. I will be back for the second eye surgery. If this all goes well, I want to come back.

So we should hold this and not mail it to you.

Mail it to me, but I will come back probably in a year's time if all goes well.

So what we're going to do is in about a month we're going to mail this to you.

Okay, sure.

We'll ask you to make corrections and then we're going to enclose an envelope so you can send it back to us. Then we add a preface and if you have photographs that you want to add to it, we can do that.

I hope I find some. It's one of the reasons that I came. I can send you what I have at home.

Exactly. This should be from your personal collection. And anything that you would like to add to the book. This is what it's going to look like. Once we finish it, we'll have it bound like this.

Wonderful.

And we'll send you a copy of that and there will be a copy here in the library.

Wonderful. What do you do this for?

So that researchers can use it.

Oh, great.

For the history of Las Vegas. So if anyone comes who's doing research on dancers and showgirls - and we have a lot of people who do that - yours is one of the interviews that they would want to look at.

That's wonderful. I really enjoyed it. I hope I didn't tell you too much.

No, no. I think it's great and it's a good look at Las Vegas in the 60s. I like the part that you told us about the showgirls in the casinos at nighttime. We know that the owners of the casinos wanted the women to stay in the casino with lovely dresses on and entertain customers, just talk to customers. But you told us another side that you also would get the kind of propositions.

That is correct - we hustled chips. That's what we did.

See, I didn't know that. No one has ever told us that.

Well, I got involved in gambling. I loved it. People were watching over me here. I went to the Sands Hotel one day after the show. I just got paid. I sat down at the blackjack table and I lost everything. Carl Cohen, President of the Sands, told me to let him know when I wanted to go home and he will send me home in a taxi. All of a sudden, I started winning and had racks of chips of all colors in front of me. Carl Cohen took me and my chips to the cashier's cage and gave me a receipt for six thousand dollars and sent me straight home in a taxi. He told me to return the following day to collect my money and I did. We lost any respect for time and money in Las Vegas. I had no concept of the value of money. I didn't have a car, and didn't know how to drive. I always wanted a nice big shiny American car. So a friend took me to a car dealership and I got a beautiful Pontiac

Bonneville, big and shiny. I think it cost around six thousand dollars. The car was delivered and parked in front of my apartment and it was sitting there [Laughing]. And then I lost it gambling a week later.

You lost it?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I loved the dice tables.

Oh.

I was introduced to Prince Ammed Shaheen of Kuwait one evening. He had lost \$200,000.00 and asked me to help him get credit at one of the casinos where I knew the President. He was refused credit because in those days, credit was not available to non-Americans. I wound up having to give him money for a taxi to take him to the airport. I have never been reimbursed. Today you couldn't pay me to go to the tables. But in those years, I was young and careless and my leisure time was always in the casino. I had no real social life.

Well, wasn't that considered a social life? What do you mean you had no social life?

The people we met in the casinos were old pot-bellied men who wanted to buy us. They wanted a pretty girl to stand by them and bring them luck and they were so obnoxious. So we lacked a healthy social life. We wound up going out with musicians who took advantage of us. For a young girl in those years there was no future. It was just a game. I left Las Vegas at the right time, but I know some girls who believed that the good times would never end and they are in bad shape today. I do a lot of sports and take dance classes. I enjoy life. I have many interests. So anyway, can you drive me back?

Yes, I can.

Okay, thanks.

Yes. I'm going to close up the office.

[End of recorded interview]

APPENDIX

APPENDIX



Raya, nude showgirl at 1 year old with boyfriend, 1936



Airline Hostess for Trans Canada Airlines, 1960,1961.



Hilton show in 1962, when Liberace introduced young Barbara Streisand

CAPITOL BOND
THE COTTON
FOR POST-CONSUMER

Notes: Rogers, Tray, 1962, 1963



Follies Bergere, Tropicana, 1962



ISRAELI BEAUTY — Radiant Raya Meron, Israeli representative in the Folies Bergere's international field of beauties, shows off her showgirl charms in the French spectacular, staged twice nightly, three times Saturday in the Theatre Restaurant of Hotel Tropicana.

KANE, PA.
REPUBLICAN
D. 3,125

SEP 1 1962 *Byholter*



OLD VET—Raya Meron, 22, who carried a gun for 18 months in the Israeli army, displays some of her qualifications for the "Folies Bergere" firing line in Las Vegas, Nev., where she currently is on a "tour of duty."



UPI Photo

Whether the background is the desert in Israel or a plush club in Las Vegas, Raya Meron always makes a pretty picture. The 22-year-old beauty, who served 18 months in the Israeli army, currently is appearing in the Folies Bergere at the Hotel Tropicana, Las Vegas.

World Telegram 31 Aug. 62

Jack Boritz

AUGUST 25, 1962

COMPLIMENTARY

25c

Fabulous

LAS VEGAS Magazine

©



IN THIS ISSUE . . .
Read — "Be Sure of Your Candidate"
By Jack Carter — Page 3

Fabulous Las Vegas cover page, 1962

Viewing the Action...

By MIKE NOVELLO

THAT smiling ex-footballer from Texas who plays such great piano in the Driftwood Lounge of the FLAMINGO HOTEL is BOB SIMS. BOB'S smile stretches over twelve months as he celebrates his first year at LANSBURGH'S Castle. He has a long-term contract that makes him anxiously playing toward his second year. Our heartiest congratulations to BOB ("Mr. Clean") SIMS, a great musical talent.

Ice skating in the desert?? You are so right, podner! The Day Dream Ice Arena at the DAY DREAM RANCH offers ice skating in the desert from sundown to sun-up. This giant 45' by 100' frozen oasis, for lovers of the silver blades, had their grand opening this past week with adults and youngsters, experienced skaters, and beginners, along with the "show kids" from the Strip, taking advantage of Nevada's first outdoor ice arena. As I watched on opening night, I envied the smooth gracefulness of some of the skaters. The most beautiful of all was one, MARYVONNE HUET of Paris, who has been skating for thirteen years, six of those years professionally. She was three times Senior French Ice Skating Champion and won the 1957 International Professional competition in England. She also was a member of the French Olympic Team in the 1956 winter games and toured throughout Europe. MARYVONNE

now lives in FLV with hubby, EDMOND SEIFERT, the sensational acrobat in the "Lido" Show at the STARDUST HOTEL. Ice skating in the desert has finally come to Vegas at the Day Dream Ice Arena. Why not take the whole family? DAY DREAM RANCH is located 1¼ miles south of McCarren Field, left on Warm Springs Road for three miles.

SIRKKA, your most gracious Manager of the RIVIERA BEAUTY SALON, would like to welcome every woman for the ultimate in beauty culture. Her stylists include MISS DEE, MISTER CLEMENTE, MISTER LEE, MISTER JAN, and ROSEMARY for manicures. This Salon has long been a favorite for Vegans and visitors alike.

Handsome JACK HILLIARD, whose tremendous singing voice is heard nightly in the Driftwood Lounge of the FLAMINGO HOTEL, can well be proud of his first Las Vegas engagement. This guy's musical appeal had applause turn into a two-week option and we're really happy that this couldn't happen to a nicer or more talented guy.

We hope by press time and your reading this item, that HENRY DUNN of HOTEL TROPICANA, will have the eye ailment licked at Sansum Clinic. Best wishes, HANK!!

EARL NORAGER'S newly opened
(Continued on Page 15)



THIS WEEK COVER

... features the newcomer to the 1962 Folies Bergere' at Hotel Tropicana, Raya Meron. She graduated from the Hebrew University in Israel, and, spent 18 months in the Isralia Army's Intelligence Division. Raya's background includes ballet, acting, and swimming. She measures a well compact 36-22-37. Fellas, she's single!!

AUGUST 25, 1962

7

Fabulous Las Vegas Magazine, cover photo of Raya, 1962



to Raya
always
Paul Anka
6/3/61

PAUL ANKA

Personal Management
IRVIN FELD



MORRY ZENOFFS'

MORRY'S STORY

There's a very pretty girl in Vegas town who gives some different slants on Israel that one usually gets talking to visitors, or by actually visiting the country itself.

She's so pretty in fact she's capitalizing on her beauty—earning her living by it—as a showgirl in the famed Tropicana line.

She's Raya (pronounced Rya) Meron. Raya, she informed us, means "friend" in Hebrew.

If you think all show girls are just beauty and nothing else, then you'd better invite Raya over the next time you have kasha.

Here's a gal who fought as a soldier with the Israeli army who graduated from Hebrew University; who studied dramatics at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in London; who speaks German, French, Hebrew & English; who is a daughter of a former Heidelberg University doctor of economics and law and whose mother escaped from Nazi Germany via a cattle wagon.

How does a 25 year old Israeli beauty think on topics that come to one's mind during an interview, such as we had this past week?

Religious life in Israel?—It's not important in Israel with the youth there, because you aren't in competition with other religions. You seldom go to the synagogue, except for the high holy days. You are a Jew and everyone around you is Jewish. You are proud of it. You have fought for it. And now—your mind turns to other things in life.

What's in the mind of Israeli youth then? — to get an education, seek out some other country to win a place in your profession. Or, to settle down

and enjoy a modern Israeli way of life.

What about these other girls in the line? — The foreign girls seem the better backgrounded. They've had to work for what they have. Their parents didn't hand them everything on a silver platter.

In Europe, girls have to work for what they have. Their parents didn't hand them everything on a silver platter. In Europe, girls have to work long hours, at a lower standard of living and and achieve maturity and self dependence faster than American girls.

How do you like it here? . . . I love it, especially the fine standard of living and the better opportunities to be successful in almost any field.

Who has been your greatest benefactor here? — Jackie Fields and his lovely wife. The star of David which I wear always was given to me by them. Jackie helped me get my job at the Tropicana when I came here without much money, a job or a chance for one.

What do you do on your night out? — sleep, sleep and sleep. One time I slept 48 hours. I read a lot, go to other shows often and I usually cook my own meals.

What are your aspirations? —to become an actress either on the stage or in pictures—altho I hope to take a tri-back to see my mother and two brothers in Israel in December. (her father, imprisoned by the Nazi before obtaining releast to Israel, is no longer alive.)

What about men? — not interested now. Career comes first. Don't want to get involved.



Hollywood, Calif. - My profound gratitude to Governor Bert Combs of Kentucky who this week commissioned me a Kentucky Colonel. The commission was made possible by Colonel Anna Friedman Goldman, Secretary and Keeper of the Great Seal. Her husband, Mel Goldman, presented my commission and conferred the honors, with my wife Betty and Charlotte Rogers, famous Hollywood publicist and one of my dearest friends, as witnesses.

Colonel Goldman has devoted 29 years of her life unselfishly to the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, which has collected thousands of dollars for worthy charities. She maintains two homes, one in Los Angeles and the other in Anchorage, Kentucky. Both homes are filled with plaques and other tributes to her constant service, including one that refers to her as the "fairy god-mother, saint, and true friend of the enlisted men at the Armored Force School at Fort Knox, Kentucky."

Incidentally, Mrs. Goldman is the U.S. Army Center's only woman tanker. Thank you, Colonel Goldman, from Colonel Glazer, who is proud and honored to join a long list of famous Kentucky Colonels including: President Kennedy, Gracie Allen, Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor, James Cagney, Bill Corum, Bing Crosby, Jack Dempsey, Walt Disney, Adlai

Stevenson, Henry Ford David Ben Gurion, J. Ed Hoover, Art Linkletter, M Pickford, Ed Sullivan, other notables.

WHEN Frances Faye opened at Gene Norman's Cencendo on the Sunset Show she was approached by Jewish lady from Sydney Australia who said she meant it a point to include Los Angeles in her itinerary in order to catch Frances' performance. "Gee" replied the pianist-vocalist "and now have to drive all the way back." (Publicist Paul Puhan added: "It won't be bad if you make all lights.")

MEL Blanc voice of "Bunny" and others is recovering nicely from his fatal auto accident. He discarded his wheel chair leg brace and gets around with a cane. A proposed operation on his left knee may be avoided, thanks to recovery gains.

Mel missed most of new Jack Benny series managed to work in four of 13. In one episode, he seen walking in with an umbrella, which serves as a cane but conceals his injury.

Blanc is still making "Flintstones" cartoon on television. He's the voice of Barney whose wife's name Betty, which is my wife's name, so there you have Barney and Betty in quite by coincidence.

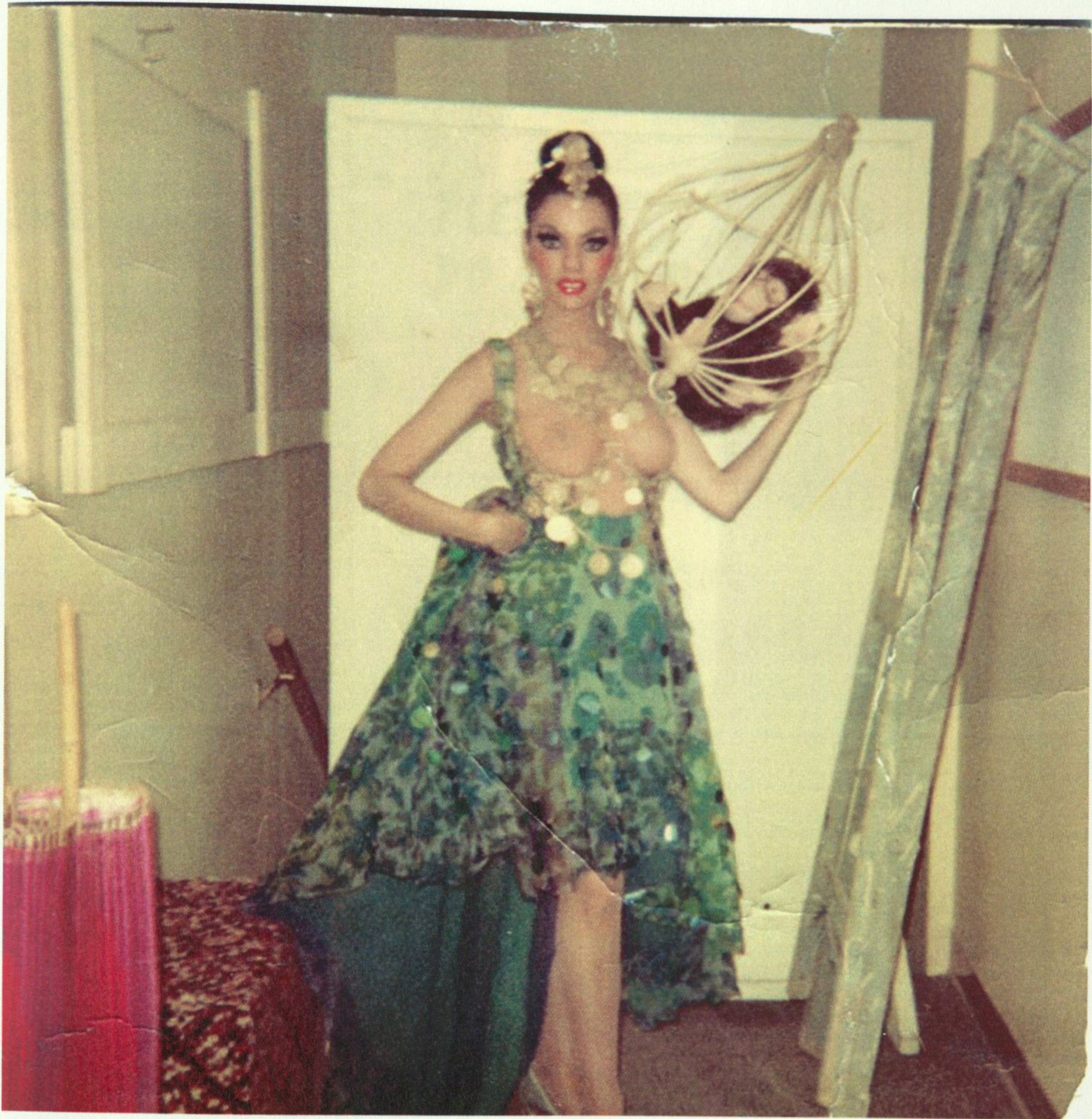
SKYLARK Records has released a single record which is a must for every Jewish home. One side "My Bar Mitzvah Day" recorded by Barry Manilow. Backside is "My Bar Mitz

JEWES OF DENMARK CRITICIZE EMMIGRATION

Swartz, Sperl, Sidney, Robert, and know temple more the new By that at have y years another member-ack and as so pping in listening and hear- sermons I have readers well as own that ar' were always lovely. and the ed, coif- ant and v every- ch a se- ring the omment- eyed the nt a cig- grounds. t comes services, rs I am veyone onderful coached and Mor- sermons d from nce was ook for- ur serv- Sunday for Kol have to singing vitz son Kravitz. age, but Every- ide it a Martin al moth- family is as Veg- r in our do, that by (15)



Barry Ashton's Caribbean Carnival, Americana Hotel, Puerto Rico, 1964



Barry Ashton show, 1964, Puerto Rico

MARDI GRAS FOLLIES

Produced By **BARRY ASHTON & WOLF KOCHMANN**

Costumes By **LOYD LAMBERT**

Music By **VAL GRUND**

Special Choreography By **JAMES STOKER**

Sets & Lighting By **WOLF KOCHMANN**

1. "MEET THE ASHTON GIRLS" — The Company
Featuring: Jack McCall
Clair Olah & Mark Holiday
Martha Aguilar & James Stoker

4. **GENE DETROY AND THE MARQUIS CHIMPS**

2. **ROLA & ROLAN**

5. "CONCERTO IN GREY" — The Company
Featuring: Clair Olah & Mark Holiday
with Carol Roberts & Jack McCall
& Martha Aguilar

3. "THE SACRED IDOL" — The Company
Starring Illusionist — **JOHN DANIEL**
with Carol Roberts as Princess
Clair Olah as High Priestess
Jack McCall as Witch Doctor

6. **POMPOFF THEY FAMILY**

"Spain's Royal Family of Comedy"

7. "TIME FOR MARDI GRAS" — The Company
Featuring: Terry Olsen & Mark Holiday

All Illusions Created & Designed By John Daniel

Furs by Winter of New York • Jewelry by Albert Weiss • Wigs by Celia Creations

Martha Aguilar
Be Ann Lee
Jewel Peterson

Ilga Austric
Kathy Lynn

Elizabeth Driscoll
Shannon Malone

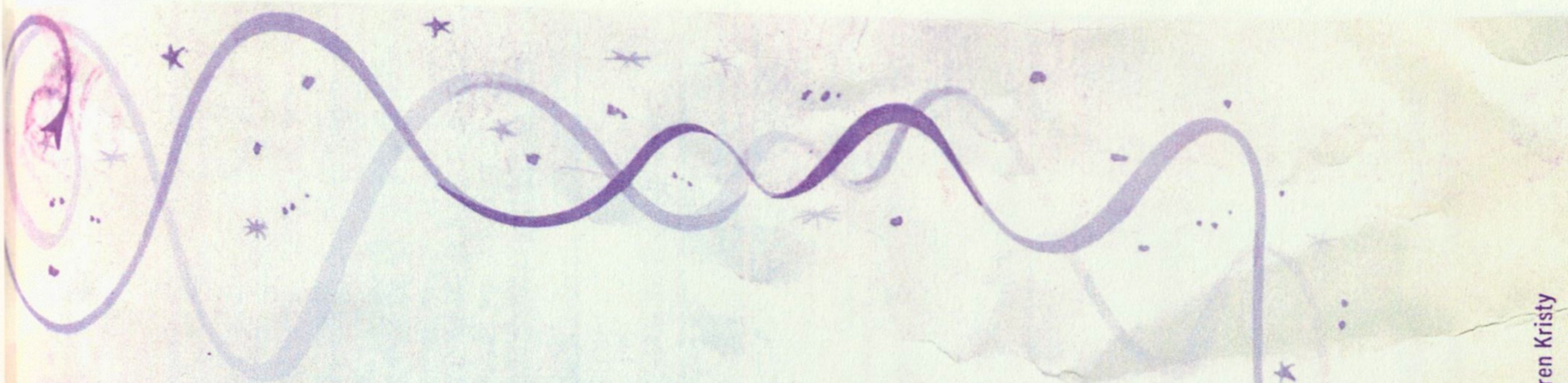
Cheryl Elliott
Raya Meron
Carol Roberts

Nola Hoffmann
Cathy Murrell
Fran Stevens

Karen Kristy
Terry Olsen

THE FABULOUS ASHTON GIRLS

LEAD DANCER: Clair Olah



Barry Ashton's

LES FEMMES de PARIS



Produced and Directed by **BARRY ASHTON & WOLF KOCHMANN**

Costumes par RUBEN

Musique par VAL GRUND

Choreographe Speciale de JAMES STOKER

Scenes par GLEN HOLSEY

1. "CHEZ MAXIM'S 1900" featuring:

Le Proprietaire: Jacques Kayal
La Vedette: Marie Andre
Premiere Danseuse: Yvette Monjour
Can Can Boys: James Stoker,
Fred Hoffmann and The Company

2. LOS GATOS FRERES

From the THEATRE OLYMPIA, Paris

3. "LOVE FOR SALE" featuring:

The Old Pro: Marie Andre
The New Recruit: Yvette Monjour
And The Company

4. JACQUES KAYAL

From the "CASINO de PARIS"

Illustrations Created & Designed by John Daniel

5. THE ARTISTE FROM MONTMARTRE

Monsieur PAUL BURKE and his models

6. THE KITCHEN AT MAXIM'S

the Company
Starring John Daniel as "Chef de Cuisine"

7. MARIE ANDRE

Star of the Follies Bergere
assisted by James Stoker and
Fred Hoffmann

**8. ANDRE TAHON et LA COMPAGNIE
DES MAROTTES**

from the "Lido de Paris"

9. PARIS IS THE SAME TODAY:

with The Company

Jewelry by Ciro's de Paris • Wigs: Creations Celia

THE FABULOUS ASHTON GIRLS

Martha Aguilar	Sheri Crews	Sandy Daniel	Cheryl Elliott	Nola Hoffmann	Karen Kristy
Kathy Lynn	Raya Meron	Cathy Murrell	Starla Pepple	Barbara Rebeske	Arden Moreno
		Be Ann Lee	Linda Rogers	Lyn Wilson	

DICK RICE AND HIS ORCHESTRA

With the addition of this hotel tower the Golden will become the largest hotel entertainment-resort-gaming facility ever constructed in Northern Nevada. Construction on this fabulous addition is scheduled to begin soon.

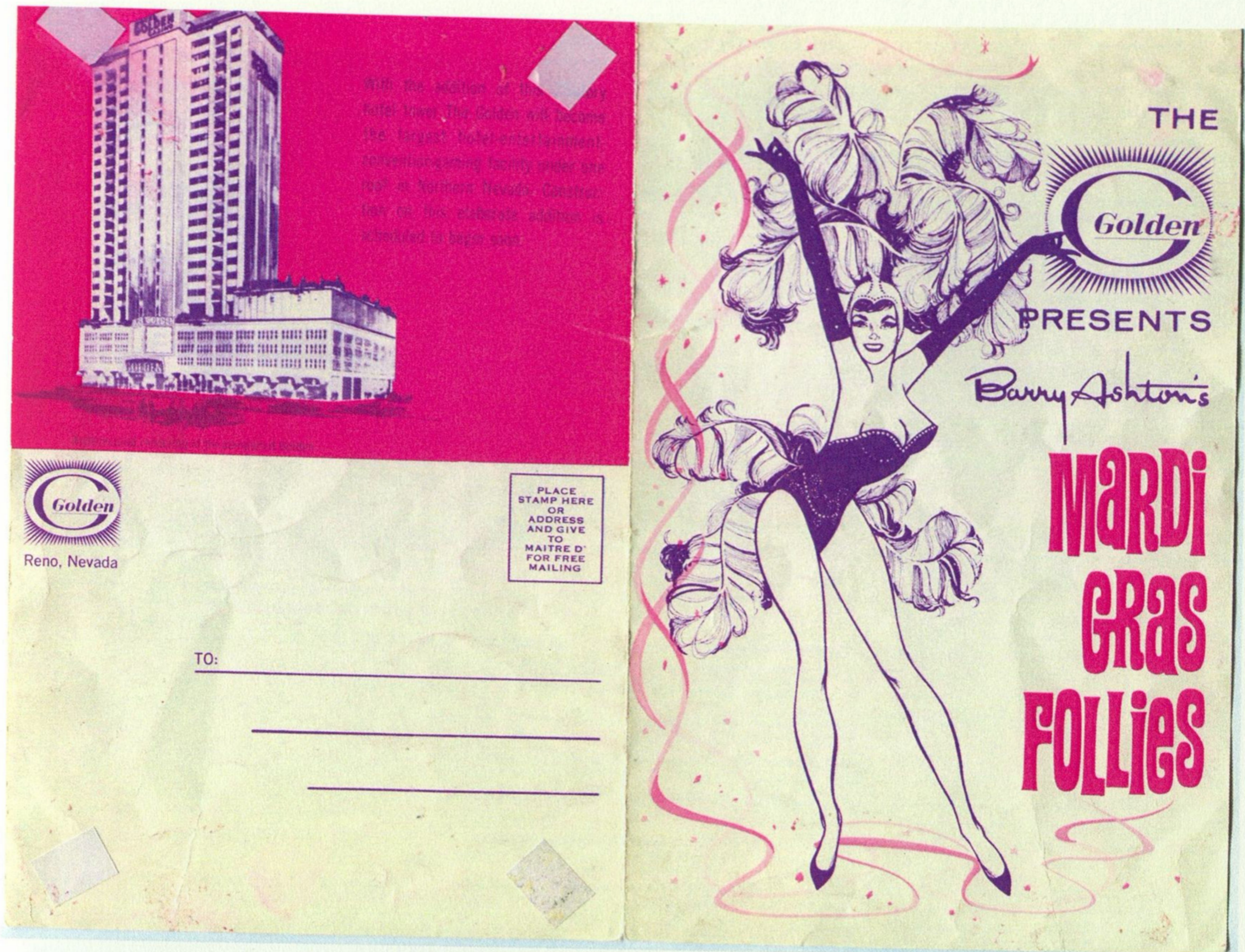
Golden Casino
RENO, NEVADA

PRESENTS
Barry Ashton's
LES FEMMES de PARIS

TO: _____

PLEASE STAMP HERE OR ADDRESS AND ZIP TO RECEIVE YOUR FREE MAILING

Barry Ashton's show at the Golden in Reno 1964



Barry Ashton's show in Reno, 1964

Casino de Paris, Paris, 1965.docx



Casino de Paris, Dunes, 1965.docx



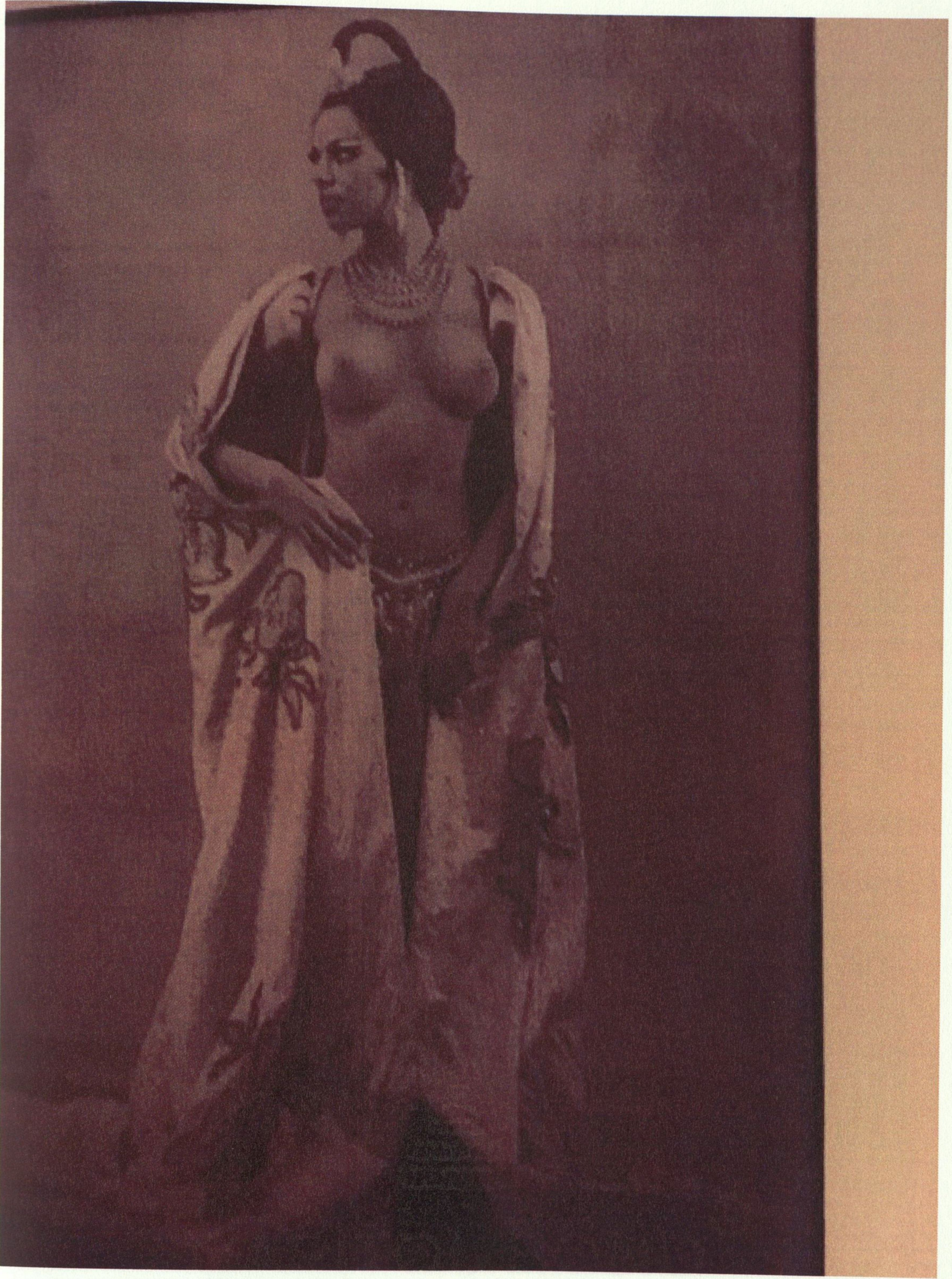
Casino de Paris, Dunes, 1965



Casino de Pars3, Dunes, 1965



Vive les Girls, Montreal Worlds Fair, 1967



Vive Les Girls at the 1967 Montreal Worlds Fair (67 EXPO)



Vive Les Girls, Montreal Worlds Fair, 1967



Vive Les Girls, Montreal Worlds Fair, 1967



Modelling in the Netherlands1, 1972, 1973

Modelling in the Netherlands 1972



Modelling in the Netherlands, 1972,1973.docx



Modelling in the Netherlands, 1972, 1973

Modelling in the Netherlands, 1972, 1973, 13.docx



Modelling in the Netherlands,1972,1973,13.docx



Modelling in the Netherlands7, 1972, 1973.



Modelling in the Netherlands,1972,1973.docx

Modelling in the Netherlands 11, 1972, 1973.



Modelling in the Netherlands 11, 1972, 1973.



Modelling in the Netherlands8, 1972, 1973



Modelling in the Netherlands, 1972, 1973.



Modelling in the Netherlands6, 1972, 1973



Raya, age 82, cruising Route 66