AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL GREEN

An Oral History Conducted by Barbara Tabach

Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project
Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project*.

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PREFACE

Michael Green, PhD, is an associate professor of history in UNLV's History Department. He is a highly regarded expert of 19th century American history, and gifted storyteller of local Nevada history. He has written several books, including Nevada: A History of the Silver State, a college-level textbook (2015) and writes "Nevada Yesterdays" for Nevada Humanities and KNPR. Dr. Green also serves on the boards of the Mob Museum and the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association.

Dr. Green traces his Jewish ancestry from Ukraine/Russia to New York City, then to California, and eventually to his parents settling in Las Vegas in the mid-1960s. He recalls being a bright but awkward youth, a late-bloomer socially, but one who excelled in impressing others with his knack for the story. By age eighteen, he was writing for local newspapers and seemed

destined for a career in journalism. All that would change as entered college and encountered important mentors. Eventually, the socially shy Mike would meet the love of his life Deborah—and also become a cat lover.

With an historian's attention to detail, Green keys in on the importance and influence of Jews on the history of Las Vegas. As he quips: "I think we have to understand the Jewish heritage to understand Southern Nevada and we have to understand Southern Nevada to understand the Jewish heritage." And though one might want to fixate on the mobster element of history, the general growth and image of Las Vegas over the decades owes much to Jewish people he further explains.

In the third oral history session, the focus is on the Covid-19 pandemic, how he and his wife adjusted, and of lessons learned during this historic era.

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April 4, 2018
May 25, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
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Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project
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Session 1

This is Barbara Tabach. Date: February 26, 2018.

I'm sitting with Michael Green. There's no fancy spelling of either Michael or Green, is there?

No, nothing fancy either way.

We're doing an oral history for the Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage project. We're sitting in my office at the UNLV Library.

Michael, I appreciate your time in coming in. We're going to start with your background. Once upon a time, Michael Green was born where?

Once upon a time Michael Green was born in Santa Monica, California. My parents lived in West L.A. The irony was I was born in a Catholic hospital, Saint John's. My family background kind of fits this project, I guess. I am Jewish on all sides, I guess you'd say. My father's family came to the United States from somewhere in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which my Hungarian grandmother never forgave Woodrow Wilson for breaking up; she thought it was a pretty good thing. The original spelling of the name was G-R-U, with an umlaut, N, which suggests something Germanic somewhere or maybe Austrian. It's hard to figure out exactly where we were. It's hard to get paperwork out of those places. But we may be a bit Transylvanian, which would explain why at the doctor's office I am loath to give blood; I'd rather keep it. Possibly Romanian, although my father visited Israel in the fifties when he was in the army in Europe and recalled going to a restaurant. There was a Hungarian restaurant and a Romanian restaurant on the same block and they all sat there glaring at one another. They didn't always get along too well, so that's maybe my family.

On my father's side, my grandparents came to the United States after World War I. My grandfather, Armand, had two brothers and three sisters. He came over, and if you want to call it chain migration, it's not atypical; I think he and one of his brothers worked and made the money to be able to bring over the rest of the family. They brought over their mother. Their father had died. They would not bring over their mother's second husband, so she went back. Then they had to make the money again to bring her and him back, which, as you can imagine, caused some family stirrings.

My father's mother, similarly somewhere in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, she had several brothers and sisters. Two brothers came to the United States and one to Israel, along with a sister. My father, who was born in 1933, can remember his mother's pain as he noticed she was getting fewer and fewer letters from her relatives in Europe and then none. So we think we know what happened to them. My grandmother’s family arrived around 1925; settled in the Bronx.

My grandfather, Armand, was a tailor. He had been a tailor in the Austro-Hungarian Army in World War I where his claim to fame in bravery was that one day he was sewing a general's tent or something and a battle broke out and he grabbed the tent, pulled it over himself and laid there, and then he finally poked his head up and the battle was over and everybody had taken off and he took off to find his unit. Supposedly he kept deserting during the war, but every time he deserted, he went back to his mother's house, so they found him.

They settled in the Bronx, up around Southern Boulevard, maybe 180th. I took my father back there when I defended my dissertation in 2000, and the building where there had been, say, four apartments on a floor were now eight, and the building that had

been Jewish was mostly Hispanic, apparently Puerto Rican. I pointed out to him, well, it's this generation's turn.

He had an older sister, Irene, who was born in 1930. My father was born in 1933. One of my little regrets in life, and it's certainly his, is that when his older sister went to elementary school, their parents had always spoken Hungarian at home and they sent my aunt home because she couldn't speak English. My grandparents decided not to speak Hungarian in front of my father, so he knows very little Hungarian. My aunt could speak it with some degree of fluency. From the little time I spent around my grandparents, I picked up a couple of curses, and it generally involved an opinion held by my grandfather.

They moved to Los Angeles in 1944. The family was moving westward and eventually the whole gang on my paternal grandfather's side moved out west. My father ended up going to Fairfax High School, which was a predominately Jewish high school. They were very proud of their cheer. *Alef, bet, gimal, dalet. We've got a team that's really solid.*

Oh, really? Oh my goodness.

Really. He ended up out there.

Where is Fairfax?

Fairfax is in the Beverly Fairfax area, if you think of Farmer's Market, Beverly Boulevard near Fairfax, so it was really the heart of L.A. In his boyhood he went to Gilmore Field, which is where CBS Television City is, and would watch the Hollywood Stars' baseball games. They moved around and a couple of times they'd buy a duplex so they could rent a room out.

He was bar mitzvahed officially when the time came. Not an incredibly religious family though they did go to services. One of the great family stories is that my grandfather really had no interest in any of this until the first time there was an earthquake. My grandmother ran to get my father and his sister, saying, "We will all die together," and ran into the room. My grandfather was sitting in the middle of his bed davening. That was the first time my father noticed his father being very religious. An earthquake brings out the best in all of us.

My mother's side of the family, Russian and Ukrainian, which may say something about family feuds as well. I was actually looking into this a little bit. Her father, Louis, was a New York City policeman from 1927 to '47. The family came through Ellis Island around 1907. He was listed as being about three years old. He had an older sister, Bertha; a younger brother, Isidore, who got the nickname B.V. because he wore BVDs. There was a baby, I think, as well and I think that might have been Nathan.

My great-grandparents were both born in Russia. They had no idea of my grandfather's birth date, or at least he had none, except he was told that he was born the winter the bridge burned down not far from Kiev. Many, many years after hearing that, it hit me one day, why would a bridge burn in the winter in Ukraine or Russia? And the logical answer is a pogrom. If we could keep track of all the pogroms, we could figure it out, but I doubt we could.

When his father Joseph and mother, Rose, were going to come to the United States, the story is that they were on a boat going across the Atlantic and it caught fire and another boat came out to get them. They were apparently not far from the harbor. My great-grandmother had all of the family papers in her apron. She was holding her apron

and when they yelled *jump* and she jumped and threw her hands up, the apron dropped and the papers fell into the ocean—or so we're told. Family lore is family lore in anybody's life, but I never saw any signs of papers.

After they arrived here, there were more kids; I think they had eight and I think there were five boys and three girls. My grandfather told me, and then his daughter, my mother, told me, his mother's attitude was girls get married and boys don't. The job of the boy is to stay unmarried to have the money to take care of his parents.

Among other things, my grandfather, they increased his age by two years so he could get out of school faster. He only went through the fourth grade and he could go to work. He was a big kid; he grew to be six-one. They lived on the Lower East Side and eventually went out to Brooklyn. When they were on the Lower East Side, it was obvious they lived in a tenement and the family was expanding.

My great-grandfather worked in garments. I'm not sure exactly what he did. He was also a cantor and apparently had a beautiful singing voice that sadly has not carried through.

It's not part of the DNA, huh?

The DNA stopped somewhere. My grandfather worked at a variety of jobs and he was incredibly handy and capable. He once took apart his Model A Ford, put it back together, he had twenty pieces left over and it ran better. It's called a green thumb for mechanics and I don't have it. I wish I did.

He worked at several different things. He worked on the streetcars, which led to a great old family story that there was a conductor who kept asking my grandfather if he had any Chiclets. When my grandfather took out the box, he grabbed the box. Since my

grandfather worked for him, there wasn't much he could do about it.

Well, my grandfather was capable of operating. So one day he bought a box of Feen-a-mints, which were a laxative, and replaced the Chiclets. The city got even with him because he was the one who got the call to go out to the end of the line because the conductor had abandoned his car. The conductor had to leave after chewing all the Feen-a-mints.

In 1927, he took the test to go into the NYPD and apparently was too light, I think it was. They told him to eat bananas and drink water for three days.

Now, was this the man that was six foot tall?

He was six feet tall. Apparently he was skinny at the time. He never was very heavy, but he was properly constructed, I guess you'd say. Anyway, they told him to do that and he did and came back and got on the police force. He spent twenty years as a foot pad or patrolman or whatever. I probably got my flat feet from him.

When my grandmother—on whom more shortly—died, we moved in with him or he moved in with us. From the time I was nine until I was eighteen when he died, he lived with us, which on the one hand was really nice for all the stories, but then as he declined and was having what we would call today forms of dementia, it was not terribly pleasant.

You moved to Las Vegas—

We'll get there.

This is all occurring in Las Vegas.

He's back in New York. But when he lived with us, we were in Las Vegas. My grandmother's family arrived earlier than the others. I'm not sure exactly when. My Uncle

Mike, Meyer by name, was born in 1898 and they were here, so we know that much. I have tried to find more and could not, yet. I'm still looking. My great-grandfather, his last name was Robinovich, R-O-B-I-N-O-V-I-C-H, and it was somewhat Americanized to Rabinowitz and then my Uncle Mike changed it to Robbins. In the Jewish heritage where you have the Jewish name, he was Avrum Behr Robinovich and somehow, here, he became Barnett A. Rabinowitz. Considering the stories we've heard about Ellis Island messing up names and the fact that to find my maternal grandfather I had to spell his name about ten different ways before I finally got there, I wouldn't be surprised.

He was in the garment industry. The story was that his mother was spectacularly beautiful, another decline in genetics. They had an inn in the Ukraine. His brother Morris came home one day, supposedly, and found a Cossack attempting to rape my great-great grandmother. Now, the kids were old enough to be adults and she was beautiful enough to be of interest to the Cossack, apparently. Morris took the Cossack's riding crop and beat him almost to death, and that is alleged to be the reason we left, based on the logical theory that once you have done that, you better leave. There were a few other relatives who came out who were on that side of the family. Morris went up and got himself a farm in a rural part of New York called the Bronx and it was rural around the turn of the 20th century.

The story was that my great-grandfather, Avrum Behr Barnett, whatever, was involved in starting the Garment Workers Union in New York. But, at any rate, he was supposedly pretty radical. Morris was always convinced the Cossacks were going to come after him anyway for killing one of them, so he would not let my great-grandfather visit him except in the dead of night so that he couldn't be followed, supposedly. One of

Barnett's sons, the one I became closest to, the youngest, Leo, one time we had a cousin who was Morris' granddaughter and they found an old safe deposit box and they were trying to get into it to find what Morris had. She needed assurances or some sort of legal paperwork that they were all related, so my mother signed, my Uncle Leo signed. Uncle Leo said, "Knowing Morris, all they're going to find in that safe deposit box are eight walnuts and a claw hammer." They didn't find anything of use anyway, apparently some stocks that were long dead.

Anyway, on that side of the family there was also an entertainer who did a little bit in vaudeville named Joe Jelinek. He did some magic tricks or something like that in the set of assorted—the family stories I might as well tell. Apparently, he married within the family and married the oldest daughter in this one wing named Lilly whose nickname was the Human Needle because they said if she closed one eye you could thread her, she was so skinny. She had three brothers: Hymela, Mendel and John Kelly. Now, one of the names should immediately raise your eyebrows. First of all, we have to call Hymela, who was Henry, the human whisperer because he once took my grandfather out on the porch to tell him a dirty joke and was whispering it by his definition of whispering and someone from down the block phoned to ask what was going on down there.

The story with John Kelly...The parents of this group, the Mema Ganesy was sort of the great matriarch, was the term, and her husband was Foxy Grandpa, they called him, which he looked like a Foxy Grandpa according to a photo I saw. When they were in the hospital and the baby was born, they asked him what the name would be and he said, Yonkela, Y-O-N-K-E-L-A, Little Yonkel. Whoever was taking it down thought, *Yonkel, what's a Yonkel?* Allegedly thought, *they sound Swedish; they mean John Kelly*.

In turn, at the risk of sounding politically incorrect, which I don't mean to be, they lived right by a Chinese laundry. At the end of the day, the Mema Ganesy would call, "Yonkela, Yonkela," and the next-door neighbors wanted to help, but you cannot say the L in Chinese, so they called him Yongo. We don't know exactly what became of him, but my mother always used to say, if you're known by that many names, you'll be confused anyway. That was the great-grandfather's side. I believe the Jelineks were related to them.

The wife, Ida Blumenfeld Robinovich, was born in the 1870s. Her husband died in the late teens; I believe it would have been around 1919. The youngest at home was nine. There were five kids. She had a brother and a sister who came with them, or got here. One was named Mary and married a guy named Sol Shulman. The other was a brother named Max, who never quite got English. He and my grandfather were driving along one day and after a little while Max said, "Where is the auction?" My grandfather said, "What auction?" He said, "There was an auction sign." "Where?" "It's about a mile back." They turned around and drove back and it said, "Caution."

As it turned out, I was looking into this one day, both my maternal grandmother and Uncle Max lived with the daughter who married my grandfather. My grandfather was not noted for being an easy man to deal with, but he really treated Ida tenderly. She had diabetes; both legs were amputated. He would pick her up and carry her around. She made chicken in a pot every Friday night. My mother, who was about eleven when her grandmother died, to the day she died would not make chicken on a Friday night. She'd make it six nights a week if I wanted, but not on a Friday night. I'll return to Mary in a bit.

Ida and Barnett married sometime in the mid-1890s. They had five children I

know of: Meyer, 1898, who joined the Coast Guard; Charles, 1900, who became an executive with Emerson; Murray, 1902, I think was a clothing executive—he's the only one who died really young; he was in his late fifties—my grandmother Florence was born in '06 although she always claimed '08, but all the records show '06; and then Leonard or Leo, who was born in 1910, and they too lived in Brooklyn. Eventually my grandfather and grandmother on that side were going to meet in Brooklyn. I am not sure of exactly how the other grandparents met.

My grandparents met when my grandmother was a divorcee working as the cashier at a diner that my grandfather frequented. The story was he got mad one day that she wouldn't give him a discount for being a policeman, so to get even, he asked her out.

To get even?

Or something. They got married in December of 1934 and my Aunt Barbara was born in October of '35 and my mother, Marsha, was born in 1941. My mother and father met in Southern California. My mother's family moved out in 1956. The Dodgers moved from Brooklyn to Los Angeles two years later and my mother, a lifelong Dodger fan, said the Dodgers could not make it without them back east, but that jumps ahead a little bit. My grandfather had to overcome his mother to marry my grandmother. It was bad enough that the son was getting married, but he was marrying a divorcee.

Because this is against her rules.

Against her beliefs. Not to mention, if you're going to get married, marry an heiress or something, but take care of them. My grandfather did not have a good relationship with his brothers and sisters and vice versa. Tolstoy has a line about all families having problems, and I suppose this is true of mine. My great-grandfather, the

cantor, died in 1944, and the story we were told was that when he died the four oldest decided to cover the funeral. The baby who would have arrived with them would have been my great-aunt Irene. It would have been Bertha, my grandfather Isidore, Beavy—

What do you mean *cover the funeral*?

They would pay for it. They said to my grandfather, "You're a policeman. You must have connections." Which he did, endlessly. So he got a discount on the funeral, okay. Then the four of them met and when they looked at the price, they accused him of getting a kickback. That was the story. My grandfather said, "I'll tell you what. I'll make a deal with you. I'll pay the whole thing and, in return, never speak to me again." They did, but not much. My Uncle Charlie, my grandmother's older brother, told us once after he and his wife retired to Miami, they were sitting in a restaurant, heard a voice from the next booth, and Charlie said, "That's Lou. My God, They're here? Lou's here?" He went to the next booth and he could tell it wasn't my grandfather, but he looked a lot like him. He said, "I beg your pardon." It turned out it was Uncle BV. Charlie said, "He didn't seem interested in talking." We don't know if BV was antisocial or if it was my grandfather.

My grandfather retired in '47 from the police because, for one thing, he had hit the twenty years and so he could. Second, as my mother once put it, my grandmother became very old very young wondering if he'd come home alive. The third reason was my mother. We all inherit genetic traits. I have inherited some others. My mother was neurotic about her health; I am, but she had reason to be where I really don't. She had horrible allergies, not hay fever, but to medications where almost any medication made her swell up, turn red, you name it. They decided to move to the country where things would presumably be better. They moved to the mountains of New Jersey, if you can call

them mountains, a little town called Rockaway. My grandfather became the police chief of White Meadow Lake, which is a little resort area. Most of people there just came up for the summer and he'd watch the houses in the winter. There was a guy who was the sheriff of Rockaway and they worked together and were good friends.

My mother often talked about her idyllic childhood there because she loved it. She loved the snow though she always planned to be out of it when she was here. There's a rich pastiche of stories from that area, one of which I like to tell people just to educate myself, too. One night they got a call. The town drunk had tried to light the pilot light, so off they went to his house. Well, my mother was the deputy. When she was ten years old, she sat in the passenger seat of the Plymouth, the Black Mariah as it was called, and she held the rifle. She really wanted to be a policewoman when she grew up. They get to the house and there is a hole in the wall of the house through which the town drunk was blown. He was lying up against a tree in the yard, cold sober—it had sobered him up—and with his eyebrows singed off; that was the only physical effect. My grandfather looked and noticed that he went out the wall; it made a perfect silhouette. If you think of Wile E. Coyote going through a wall and it makes a silhouette, it's true. He made a perfect silhouette and he was upside down and by the time he hit the tree, he was right side up. That's the kind of thing my mother saw as a little girl and she got to see an occasional dead body and thought that was great.

She told a story of the time they were out walking and my grandfather said, "Don't move." They looked and there was a snake. He just pointed the gun over her shoulder and blew the snake away.

Now, my grandfather was a good policeman in the time in which he lived. It's a

good thing he had the gun. Uncle Leo told me the story of how they went to the Catskills because you had to go to the Catskills, of course. Among the activities they had was target practice. Leo took a rifle and he did okay. Then my grandfather got up, fired the first shot at the target and hit the tree. The second shot hit a bird going by or something. It was just a disaster. Leo said, "Huh, boy, I feel a lot better with you protecting me as one of New York's finest." My grandfather glared at him, pulled out the thirty-eight Smith and Wesson and fired six into the bull's eye. Rifles were beyond him.

In White Meadow Lake, Rockaway, they had a good life. My Aunt Barbara married and her husband, Norman, and she moved west; the others decided to as well. They arrived in 1956 and my grandfather soon got a job with Union Bank of California and he became the security supervisor at the main headquarters, Eighth and Hill. This meant that every day he got up at four forty-five to be there for the money delivery, which certainly was not pleasant when he lived with us because he kept that habit. One day somebody robbed the bank, took off out of the bank. My grandfather followed him out. The guy jumped on the bus. My grandfather jumped on it with him and got him. One of his proudest possessions was a letter of commendation from J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI was very impressed that he had done this. He retired in 1966 and moved to Las Vegas. We'll come to that.

My father graduated from high school and then went to L.A. State and graduated. In between, he went in the army for two years in Europe. To this day he's still in touch with a couple of fraternity brothers. One of them became a rabbi and he said, "You wouldn't have thought he'd become a rabbi the time we went out to Catalina and he was so drunk he threw up over the side of the boat the entire time." He went to a reunion a

few years ago and he said, "They all got old."

They all got old.

My father in many ways has not. He's retained his youthful outlook for the most part.

That's great.

He went to work at Standard Register Company and then at IBM. He had a degree in industrial management. I once asked him what that was and he said, "I still don't know." He seemed to be on the executive fast track. As a young man he dated assorted women. He bought a convertible. He came up to Las Vegas. He found it fascinating that when he came up here in the mid-fifties not long after the Riviera opened and stayed here, he needed a neck tie to go to a show. He was between jobs, Standard Register to IBM, and he was living with his parents. My Aunt Irene had married fairly young, had two young sons. By this time my grandparents still were at the tailor shop, though my grandfather was close to retiring. He continued being a tailor in Southern California. He had a heart attack and thought it's about time to quit, so my dad was staying around, helping him out.

One day he was picking weeds, which he loved to do, until he finally got in a town home development where there's an HOA that does that for him, but until then he loved to go out and pick weeds, and maybe this was why. Because a woman was walking down the street and it turns out she was a cousin of my Uncle Charlie's wife, Laura. She said, "Here is a handsome young man." Who she sort of knew. She said, "Bob, are you dating anyone?" He said, "No, actually I'm not." She said, "I know someone." It was my mother. The woman was the mother of Jeff Chandler, the actor. My mother autographed five hundred photos for Jeff Chandler one evening so they could all go out to dinner. That was our brush with celebrity. There's another brush I'll talk about.

Anyway, he called and my grandfather's name was Greenberg. He had shorten it to Greene with an E on the end because they all called him Greenie, so he figured I'll go with an E. My father called and my grandfather answered and asked who was calling and he said, "Bob Green." He said, "Are you some kind of wise guy?" Because his name was Greene. As my father would say, the relationship really didn't improve. They got along. Anyway, he ended up asking out my mother.

Now, my mother had graduated from high school and my grandfather had said with great logic, "I can afford to send you to college or buy you a car to go to work." My mother with equal logic thought, *if I buy the car and go to work, I can make the money to go to college.* Since she couldn't be a policewoman—they weren't being hired—she would have made a great English teacher. What I know of grammar and spelling and the English language, I owe to her. She was a veracious reader of mysteries. Her idea of a perfect day was to start with a pot of Luzianne coffee, which is the strongest coffee known to humanity, a Whitman's Sampler, and an Agatha Christie mystery. At the end of the day they were all finished and that was a perfect day.

She was working for a guy who had an insurance and real estate office in Beverly Hills, a guy named Harold Wolfson who had a client named Frank Gorshin. One of my mother's favorite stories was that Gorshin would call and he would not say who he was. She'd answer the phone, "Wolfson Insurance and Real Estate," and she'd hear Burt Lancaster; other times she heard Kirk Douglas. One day she answered the phone and said, "Wolfson Insurance and Real Estate," and heard whistling. The whistling she heard was "Colonel Bogey's March" from Bridge on the River Kwai. She said, "Who is this?" It was quiet for a second and then Gorshin said, "That was my Alec Guinness." Later, if

you watch on YouTube, there is a sketch where he does Guinness and he's whistling. Maybe he tried it out on her. I don't know.

My parents went on their first date January eighth, 1964.

You know the exact date?

My father commemorates it. My parents used to until my mother died. They went to a Lakers game, which I find hilarious because my mother had no interest in basketball. I have no idea why she went. A month later—they had been going out regularly—she said, "Where are we headed with this?" He said, "Well, do you want to marry me?" She said, "Well, I didn't mean that." And he said, "Oh, you don't want to marry me?" She said, "No, I want to marry you, but I didn't..." So they decided to get married. To the great displeasure of his parents, especially his father, they decided to go to Las Vegas and not have a big wedding. My mother's family figured, *ah, good, we're saving money on the wedding; we're happy.*

They flew up here after work on the evening of March 27th, 1964. The flight was delayed because there had been an earthquake in Alaska. The big Alaskan earthquake was that day and it threw everything off, so they got in late. They ended up getting married early the next morning. Because their names were so close—

I just want to clarify. Your mom's maiden name was Greene with an E.

Greene with an E. My father is Green without the E. Apparently someone from the county sheriff's office came down and they had to swear they weren't related, which very distantly they were, like thirty-second cousins or something. We're all related. Anyway, they got married March 28th, 1964, and I was born March 27th, 1965. I should have been born on their first anniversary; instead I was born the day before. My mother always

complained I gypped her out of an anniversary party. In exchange, I would say, "Oh, I was born March 27th. My parents' wedding anniversary is March 28th." And not say any more, which my mother would immediately offer a correction.

Oh, a mischievous child.

Yes. They lived in West L.A. My first memory, which my parents insisted I couldn't have remembered, was falling and breaking one of my first teeth in the backyard at Ivy Place. About thirty-three years later I would be on my way to my dissertation defense, fall at Kennedy Airport and break a front tooth. Falling runs in the family. Seriously, there are several in the family who have the habit of falling down, not drunk, we just trip.

I mentioned my grandfather retiring to Las Vegas. Around that time my father's older sister and her husband and children had moved to Phoenix. The family was beginning to move out of Southern California. My grandfather on my mother's side, when he retired from Union Bank, decided to move to Las Vegas because he had a distant cousin here. I've been trying to figure out the family connection and I will add to the oral history when I figure it out. His name was Herb Tobman, a very distant relative somewhere, and his mother was the relationship. The hope was that he could get my grandfather some security work off the books at hotels, so they moved down here. They moved into a house or a little duplex on Ballard Drive near Eastern and Charleston that was owned by Bob Glinski, the car dealer. It was not a happy rental situation. There was a big rainstorm and the roof was leaking ferociously. They called their landlord who came over and looked. My grandmother said, "Look at all these pots on the floor. What are you going to do?" Glinski looked down and said, "You should get more pots." They decided to buy a house and they bought a house near Pecos and Washington, which today

we call East Las Vegas and some refer to as the barrio because it has become largely Hispanic. At the time there was one Hispanic family across the street from us, later another one moved in, and for many years it was middle- to lower-middle-class white neighborhood.

My mother did not like being away from her parents and was very close to her father. She was the son he never had. My father was at IBM and on the executive track, it appeared. Every night he was coming home with work and a headache. My mother had had enough and said to him, "This can't go on; this marriage can't go on this way. So here's what you're going to do. Either I'm going to leave you or you're going to quit, you're going to move to Las Vegas, and you're going to get a job as a casino dealer so you won't come home each night with work and a headache." Fine.

The actual date of the move was November first, 1967. I was a little over two and a half. They came in their cars and my mother's car was especially memorable; it was a 1959 Morris Minor, a British car that had been Americanized; the wheel was on the left side. As they drove out here, the odometer broke. I don't know if that was a sign, but it broke at twenty-eight thousand five hundred. My dad and I sold the car after her death. We sold it in 1999. It still ran.

You kept the car?

We kept the car. She always kept the car.

How do you spell that car? I've never heard of it.

Morris and Minor with an O. You see them if you're watching British shows, especially older ones. Morris Minor went out of business because the cars were so well made that they didn't need to be replaced. One of my childhood memories is that my mother found

out there was a company in England that had bought up all the old Morrises and kept the parts that worked, so she was always ordering parts for the Morris. I mentioned my grandfather's green thumb for mechanics. She needed an exhaust pipe and he made one out of orange juice cans and wire and that was the exhaust pipe until we could get it replaced.

Another great story about the car. One day I was outside. I must have been thirteen or so. He had gone under the car to look for something or look at something and he said, "I need to go in further. Lift the car." And I said, "What?" He said, "Lift the car." I said, "How do you lift a car?" He said, "You pick it up by the bumper." All right. So I got my hands under the bumper and got ready for this enormous failure and it came right up. It was a very light car. Built like a tank, but it was a light car. I held up the car and he got underneath further and got it fixed. From that day forward I used to have these nightmares that I'd walk up to the front of the house, look out, and two guys would be carrying the car down the street.

That was one of the cars I grew up in though I never drove it. In fact, my mother always said it wouldn't start for anybody—that was pretty much true—it wouldn't start for anybody else. My father could get it to work, but not easily.

What color was it?

It was basic white. It was painted a couple of times. The guy who bought it, I guess painted it red with a white racing stripe and had my father come out to look at it and he was very pleased that it found a good home. We arrived here, stayed with her parents, and then they bought a house, 861 North 29th Street. Our Realtor was a guy named Ron Rudin, who later was murdered and it was his wife at the time who was accused of the

murder and it was just a total scandal. This would have been about fifteen years ago, much, much later.

They lived near the old temple, that neighborhood.

I think they did, yes. Eventually when my grandmother died in 1974, we moved to 1015 Dumbarton Street, which is at Pecos and Washington; that's the house my grandfather had bought. It was a little bigger, supposedly, so we moved into that one.

My father, through knowing Herb Tobman, got hired as a dealer at the Silver Nugget. You break in at the smaller place and then move up. My father moved over to the Stardust Hotel some time in 1968 and he was there until the unlicensed non-operator of the casino Frank Rosenthal fired him. This would have been in 1977, I believe. It might have been '78. Rosenthal was running the show, of course.

Why was he fired?

For reasons known only to Frank Rosenthal. The story was Rosenthal would just line up people and decide who to keep. Also, my father had been Herb Tobman's guy, which meant that he was part of the old regime, so I'm sure that was part of it, too. But he was there several years after Tobman was out. Then Tobman came back maybe a year or two later and my father did not go back. He ended up dealing at the Showboat for close to twenty years after that. The Tobmans lived over on Pinto Lane. We went to their house a couple of times and I always had this fear when I was three or four I urinated on the pool table or something because in the end we ended up not being in touch and now I'm a Facebook friend of Herb's nephew Scott, but we don't get together or anything, we're just friendly there.

When we moved here there was only one temple, Temple Beth Sholom and my

parents were not terribly interested. There's a guy I know who identifies himself as "Jew - ish" with a hyphen. I guess he doesn't practice. I don't practice. I've never practiced. My father did not push it. He would have liked for me to have had a formal bar mitzvah. My mother very much opposed the organized church, any church. It goes back according to the stories…to two family stories. One involved my great-grandfather, the cantor. His son the policeman came to the synagogue one day. They were auctioning scrolls up at the front. My grandfather in his police uniform saw his father up front and waved, and the auctioneer said, "Sold to the policeman for a hundred dollars." My grandpa said, "No, no, I'm here to pick up my father." They said, "Either pay it or we'll fire him as cantor."

Tough crowd.

Tough crowd, indeed. My great-grandfather begged him to pay it and he paid it and said, "I'm never setting foot in here again." When my mother was growing up in White Meadow Lake there were some Jewish families around there and they decided to start a building fund. They had a rabbi hired and the rabbi absconded with the money. That sort of dampened their interest.

The fun part of this is there was a priest in White Meadow, Rockaway, Father Suhon, S-U-H-O-N. The kids loved him and all this stuff went on at the church, of course. He told them to call him Father Shoe Shine because nobody could say Suhon. The story was that he was always having trouble with his car. He'd be under the car and some oil would spill and he'd start cursing. Then he'd roll out from under the car and look around to see if anybody heard him. It was the biggest secret in town. That combination meant that I was not encouraged, not discouraged. My mother apparently said, "If he wants to, he'll bring it up."

They made you aware of your Judaism.

I was aware of it. The first time I think I was really aware would have been the third grade. There was a kid at school. I think his name was Eric Greenberg. Apparently we're not related anywhere. There was going to be a Hanukkah program and I didn't want to do it, which had nothing to do with any feelings about being Jewish and everything to do with not wanting to be in a show. Eric I remember said to me, "You are Jewish and it is important for our faith that you do this." And I did it. I remember only two lines because I was the narrator. "Why is the story of Hanukkah told? To honor the great Maccabeans of old." I remember that. That was third grade, Walter Bracken, so it would have been around 1972 or three; somewhere in there.

My grandmother died in 1974, in fact, in front of me, which is still something I recall very vividly. We were out to dinner and we were looking at the menu and I looked up and I said, "Grandma, are you all right?" Her color was changing and she fell back. I don't have a lot of memories of her given that I was almost nine. I kind of laugh to myself. My grandmother had false teeth and it was fascinating to me. She would come over to the house and take out the teeth and put them on the table. That was just great for a kid. She could eat potato chips without her false teeth. Eventually my mother's teeth had to come out. She had a very bad capping job at one time. She could eat steak out teeth. I have trouble eating steak with teeth.

My grandparents spent a lot of time at the house. I was apparently a vocal child. One time my parents went in for the open house or whatever at Walter Bracken and the teacher said something about, "Little Michael doesn't talk much." My mother said, "Well, could you work on that so he would be that way at home?" But I did at least learn to be a

little quiet because I realize now—I don't think I realized it then, of course—that we watched a lot of TV; that's what you did in the seventies. I read books, mainly about baseball. I wanted to be a baseball announcer. But the other thing that happened was storytelling. You have grandparents sitting there with parents and we're all eating and, what are we going to talk about? So they talked about their childhoods or whatever. Naturally I wasn't a historian yet or I would have had a tape recorder going.

I was going to ask that. You have it really down to—I guess we shouldn't be surprised you remember dates and all of that. The storytelling of the family history was part of your culture.

Very much so. It was part of the culture. I certainly am in the business of being a storyteller as a history professor. I'd like to think genetically speaking that part...of all the things. I couldn't be as beautiful as the great-great grandmother. I couldn't be as tall as my grandfather. I inherited his beard. He had a thick beard. When he was called into work, they would call and say, "Come in, get a shave and a haircut." He'd get in and they'd say, "Go back and stand by the razor next time." But he had; he had gotten a shave and a haircut.

Some of the stuff that belonged to my policeman grandfather is now at the Mob Museum. I don't have kids. My Aunt Barbara had a very bad relationship with her father. Her kids didn't have much to do with him. Her grandkids never knew him; were born long after he died. There isn't really someone to inherit. I thought, *well, the museum needs stuff,* whatever. There is his nightstick, which is filled with lead. He was a rookie policeman when somebody yelled out, "Thief," and here comes a guy with a purse. Well, in the twenties, a guy with a purse was a purse snatcher. So he stepped into a doorway

and, as the guy went by, reached out with his nightstick and whacked the guy in the head with it and the nightstick broke and the guy kept running. My grandfather's thought was, *let him go*. He didn't need that guy.

But the next day one of the senior cops around said, "Louie, come here. You need a new nightstick and there's a way to handle this." He drilled a hole in the top and poured lead in. He had a sap, which is like a rubber thing that you hit somebody in the kidneys with. He also had a claw, like one handcuff, which you squeeze tighter to get somebody to confess.

Grandpa used to sit there watching TV and there would be stories about crime and he'd grunt and he'd say, "It's not the same since Miranda." One time as a cheeky teenager, I said, "Grandpa, from the stories you have told, you caused Miranda." Granted, he was not involved in that decision.

There is a photo of him at a police funeral giving the side eye to Fiorello LaGuardia. He didn't like LaGuardia. There's a picture they didn't need, which was of my grandparents at a policeman's banquet. This is what being a policeman was like. They had gotten married and there was a banquet and he wanted to show off his brand-new wife and he went to a jeweler he knew on his beat named Rosie the alligator, so named because she was very wrinkled and had darker skin of some kind. He told her, "I'd like to take something for Flossy to wear. I'll just bring it back." She goes, "Okay, here." She gets out this gold and diamond spangled bracelet. She said to my grandfather, "Be careful with it, Louie. It's worth ten thousand." This is in 1935. The mistake he made was telling my grandmother its value. She spent the entire evening with her hand over her wrist to hide the bracelet. He said, "Flossy, you're with policemen." She said, "Yes, that's why I'm

hiding it."

When my mother was a baby or a little girl in World War II, while my father remembers the rationing, my mother had no problem; her father could get anything. When I was growing up, if I didn't clean my plate, my father looked at me funny and my mother said, "What's the big deal?" It's a difference in how they were raised.

Where I come into their lives, naturally there are stories behind it. I mentioned my great-grandmother's sister Mary, Mary Shulman, who married a guy named Sol Shulman. They had three kids, two daughters and a boy. The two daughters both died young; one I think was spinal meningitis and the other was pneumonia or something. Melvin was the last one. When World War II began, Melvin wanted to go off to war and I believe his parents would not sign the paperwork. So when he was old enough, he was going to go, by God. He was going to be a navy flier; that was his dream. Off he went to enlist. They gave him a color chart and that's when he discovered he was color blind. He had never known. This is where my Uncle Mike and the Coast Guard comes in because he knew people with the navy, and so he got the color chart and Melvin took it home and memorized it, however they did it, blue, green, yellow, red. Then he went back and they changed the chart that morning. So he joined the army and off he went and he became part of Patton's army and he was at the Battle of the Bulge.

The rest of this story explains a bit about the lack of practicing and other things. One day a telegram came to the door of Mary and Sol's house, brought by someone from the army. Mary did not say one word. She got up, walked over to the china cabinet, got a chair, climbed on it, opened the cabinet and pulled out the ceremonial or ritualistic plates that you used for Seder, each one, just pulled it out and smashed it; that was all she did or

said. It affected my mother's view of God, of faith. Her earliest memory was that she had the chicken pox. She was three years old. Melvin had had it so he could come in to say goodbye; he was going off to war. My mother resolved someday to name a child for Melvin. She did not like the name Melvin. So instead of Melvin Shulman, she chose Michael Scott. Mary and Sol lived to a ripe old age, but with no children.

When the casket arrived with Melvin, my grandfather, being the policeman who had connections, went to the funeral home. It was a closed casket. He said, "I want to see it." And they said, "No." He said, "No, no. I can close you down. I want to see it." Apparently, it was pieces and it was not all Melvin. He did not tell Mary and Sol that, of course. That is some of my background.

When did you decide that history was going to become your passion as a profession?

Choose your parents carefully; that's the lesson in life. Of course, it's a long story, but I'm a historian. When I was eight years old, I walked into the kitchen one day and my dad was sitting there at the table and there was a transistor radio on it. I said, "What's this?" He said, "I'm listening to the Dodgers." I heard the voice of Vin Scully who at the time—this was 1973—he was in his twenty-fourth year with the Dodgers. He retired at the end of 2016 after sixty-seven years. I heard him and, by God, that's what I wanted to be. Now, to be fair I had had another inclination. I had been to the North Las Vegas Library. That was the closest library to our house and I worked that library hard. One day I checked out a book, Myrtle Tate Myles (with a Y), *Nevada's Governors from Territorial Days to Present*, and I discovered the governor was named Mike and I decided I'd become governor. I got over that pretty quick. Later I found out that Mike O'Callaghan's given name was Donal. I once told him that story and I said, "I haven't trusted you

politicians since."

Well, from this moment I wanted to be the Dodger announcer. I wrote to Vin who very kindly sent back an autographed photo and a letter and a biography. The next year—my grandmother had died that summer—with my grandfather we drove to Los Angeles and I was going to get to see my first Major League baseball game. We had very good seats, thanks to Union Bank. At Dodger Stadium there was a tier—it's still there; they just don't have the same kind of seating—but the third tier was where the press box and broadcast booth are and there were club seats, as they call it. They were the seats that belonged to the sponsors, and thanks to Union Bank we were going to be up there.

We got to the park and that's when my parents informed me that they had written a letter ahead, so we were going to the booth to meet Vin. I probably would have thrown up. Anyway, we waited and then Vin arrived with his pregnant wife. I distinctly remember she was pregnant. My grandfather, who having been a policeman was afraid of nothing, walked up to him and said, "Oh, Mr. Scully, it's a pleasure to see you. I used to direct traffic at Ebbets Field." And Vin said, "I remember you," which he didn't. My grandfather had retired by then, but my grandfather was happy about it. Then Vin went in the booth. We waited. Then a security guard walked out and pointed at me and then did a beckoning finger.

I went into the booth wearing my blue Dodger helmet with my Dodger glove. I walked in and Vin looked down at me from his great height, which was close to six feet, and I'm five seven although at the time I was probably about three foot seven. Vin looked down at me and said with his incredible voice, which I will try to do justice to, "So you're the guy who wants my job." I just gaped at him. Then he brought me down into the

booth, signed onto the pregame show, introduced me to his partner Jerry Doggett. I just stood there, never said a word.

About, oh, fifteen years later I woke up in the middle of the night in grad school sweating and it hit me. Vin had gone on radio live with me standing there next to him. It took that long for it to hit me. I thought, *what if I had chosen that moment to throw up*? "Fans, we have a young man in the booth who is upchucking." He scooted me out of the booth and we went to our seats.

In the fourth inning, my grandfather turned to my mother sitting behind my dad and me and said, "Do you think Mickey could get a foul ball up here?" She said, "The ceiling is so low here, I doubt it." The next pitch was hit right over our heads into the stands. A guy reached up, tried to catch it and swatted it. It came down, hit me on the top of the helmet, going a very slow speed, and dropped into my dad's lap. So what a night. **It's so serendipitous.**

Of course, I know this day, August first, 1974. Well, I was going to be a broadcaster. Everybody at school knew it. When my voice changed, I got a tape recorder, sat down in front of the TV with the statistics, and broadcast an inning of a Dodger game. Then I stopped the recorder, hit rewind, hit play, listened for ten seconds, stopped it, took out the tape and said, "That's it. I'm not doing it. I despise my speaking voice." There are many people who tell me I have a very good voice, but most people hearing their voices don't like it. I did not like my voice.

There are a couple of other things I realized later. One, a sports broadcaster is a hobo. I hate that kind of traveling. When I get somewhere I want to stay awhile. I don't really like being out of the house that much and I'd have to be out of the house. And what

if I didn't get the Dodger job? What if I wound up—

[The position] didn't come open for a while.

No, it didn't. What if I ended up doing the play by play of North Dakota State football and basketball? What a horrible fate. So in the end, no, I wasn't going to do that. Now, the Dodgers hired a third announcer in 1977, Ross Porter, and opening day it's the only time I have come close to playing hooky. I did have a cold and I wanted to stay home. I resented Ross for years; he got my job. Well, I was twelve, so I don't think I was eligible. Partly that. Partly shyness. I was very shy as a kid. In addition, I was skipped out of the first grade, so I was a year younger than everybody else and it affected me in ways that are related to my not marrying until I was almost thirty-five.

I started thinking about journalism. If I can't talk it, I'll write about it. I was in high school and had a wonderful government teacher named Phil Cook who grew up here. His father worked for the gas company and railroad. He grew up in the Huntridge neighborhood. He knew Dick Bryan when they were kids when they all knew one another. I had done a speech contest and not been happy with it. I didn't like doing it. I felt I was treated badly. Mr. Cook said, "You are going to enter the Rotary contest, aren't you?" And I said, "No." He said, "You do want to graduate, don't you?" I had him for government and I needed him to graduate although he wouldn't have done that. But I entered the Rotary speech contest. This was in probably the early spring of '82 my senior year. I won at the North Las Vegas level and ended up going up, and so I'm at the city level. I eventually won the regional. My talk had to be related to the Rotary four-way test. The four-way test that they use is: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendship? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? I may not have it

exact. I did it on journalism because I wanted to be a journalist. At the end of my talk, this guy came up, nondescript, wearing this jacket and tie. He handed me his card and he said, "Give me a call when you're done with the competition." He went on his way.

We get out. My dad had driven me. Mr. Cook was there. One of them turns around to me, "Who was the guy that came up to you?" I said, "Oh, he gave me his business card." And I pulled it out of my jacket. It said, "Robert Brown, President, The Valley Times." I knew of the Valley Times; it was the newspaper that covered the mob; it was the newspaper that covered politics. I had been more interested, frankly, in its TV sports column, but, okay.

After the contest was over, I went over to the paper's headquarters at Cheyenne and Losee, just past I-15. The building was torn down in the last couple of years. It should have been on the National Register. I interviewed and he hired me as a kid reporter. When he interviewed me I had not yet turned seventeen, and he hired me. He hired me mainly because they needed bodies. The paper was bankrupt. Ned Day had been there and he left. All the great reporters that they had, had pretty much left; they were down to a skeleton crew. I went to work at the newspaper. I'm going to skip over what I did at the newspaper to say that two years plus later the newspaper closed and I was already a history major.

But you were writing. You were a reporter.

I was a reporter, editor; I ran the paper at age eighteen, oddly enough. When the paper closed—and I will come back to all of this in a moment—I thought about it and I had been going to school full-time and working almost full-time. I said to my parents, "I've thought about this and I think maybe I'd like to be a college professor. I see my

professors here and I see what they do and I like what they do. Maybe I should do that." My mother and father looked at each other and my mother said, "Thank God." I said, "What?" She said, "Well, we always wanted you to do something like that and we thought you could do better at that and do very well at that as opposed to being a sportscaster or a journalist. We knew you had the intelligence for it." I never knew that; I never knew until that moment that's how they felt.

Why do you think they didn't share that with you?

Because they wanted me to decide for myself what to do and whatever made me happy would make them happy. I am blessed to have had those parents.

I became a historian at the age of seven. I was fascinated by the presidents. I wrote to Richard Nixon. I have his photo. It's buried in a dresser, no longer one of my favorite presidents. I decided to write a history of the presidency, meaning I dictated it to my mother who typed it.

Oh, bless her heart.

Since my mother was indeed a homemaker and she didn't have to go anywhere else, okay, she could do that. Until her death she would recall how many times she typed the word *representative* because I was reciting their background and many of them served in the House of Representatives. It was quite annoying. It's somewhere at home. I still have it somewhere.

When Eric Foner spoke here, and Foner was my graduate adviser, I never told him that story. But he told the story one time that he had wanted to be a physicist or astronomer and he flunked out basically; he couldn't do it. But his first book, he said, when he was nine years old, he dictated a book on the solar system to his mother. I

thought, *well, that's kind of cute; we have that in common*.

The human computer.

But when I entered UNLV in the fall of '82, I was majoring in communications. The journalism department consisted of Barbara Cloud; that was it. She happened to be on sabbatical and I was taking 141, News and the News Media. A guy named Rich Kallan, who was mainly a rhetorician but had a little bit of experience, he'd teach the basic course, especially when Barbara was away. I was a fan boy of journalists and I knew a lot already and I was not excited by the class, through no fault of Rich Kallan. I took the midterm, and I had happened to know the date for reasons that will become obvious; it was October 28th, 1982, and it was a multiple choice midterm and I knew I aced it. Then I went home, changed into a suit, went down to the Las Vegas Convention Center because our managing editor at the paper, Bruce Hasely, had assigned me to cover Ronald Reagan's campaign speech for the Republican ticket. I did not know this: Bob Brown had arranged that when Reagan woke up the next morning at Caesars Palace—I believe it was Caesars—the newspaper that would greet him was The Valley Times; I did not know I was writing it for Reagan's eye. I went in and turned out...I found a room where they had the TV equipment, so I interviewed the guy there thinking, *oh, it could be a sidebar*. I go in and they give me the text of the speech. This is incredible. I've never seen this before. You get the text of a speech. Go in and sit down. It turned out earlier in the day they had been in Reno and Sam Donaldson had a fit when the local reporters were in front of the network people. I'm sitting there and Chic Hecht is talking. Bob List is talking. Barbara Vucanovich gets up, and Reagan. I'm tracking Reagan's speech and I can see he's not winging it. He does the usual where you do a little something at the

beginning, but then he's staying with the speech.

I looked over and I saw Larry Speakes. Larry Speakes was the deputy press secretary. He never officially became press secretary because he was Jim Brady's deputy. When Brady was shot they never—and Speakes was all for this—they never changed the title; Brady remained the press secretary and Speakes was the deputy. I saw him and I thought, *here is the deputy press secretary; maybe there's something.* So I went over and I introduced myself and I said, "I wondered if I could talk to you for the paper." "Oh, sure." "How does the president feel about...?" And he did all that. I have the feeling I was the only reporter here who knew who he was. I have had that feeling.

Anyway, I go back to the paper. I sit down and I pound this thing out; I wrote the stories. We were not then in the headquarters at Cheyenne and Losee because by then the IRS had kicked us out of our building. I believe we were at that time located behind the Strip. I did the stories and went home. It was late. My parents had gone to bed. My parents were early to bed, early to rise. I sat down in one of the easy chairs in the living room. I can remember I was wearing a vest, my god, a three-piece suit. I undid the vest and I'm taking off the tie and I'm sitting there with my vest open in the chair. I said to myself, *you covered the President of the United States. Why are you majoring in journalism when you're doing it?*

Later I talked to Barbara Cloud who said, "You should at least take the basic courses to get the grounding." But I was taking history from Ralph Roske -- a Phil Cook connection. Mr. Cook told me to look up two professors at UNLV who he knew, Roske and Chuck Adams in English. I liked Roske and I liked history and I switched to history. Two people told me not to major in history; one was Mr. Cook who had majored in

history. He said, "Computers; that's the future." He was right, but I didn't have the aptitude. The other one was Bob Brown, who was a very conservative Republican, a lovable Tory, we liked to call him. He said, "Why don't you major in philosophy?" I said, "For God's sake, why would I major in philosophy?" He said, "Because college is the last opportunity you'll ever have to study something totally useless." Now, I don't think philosophy is useless, but that was a conservative Republican. If I may be political for a moment, it is very rare to hear a conservative Republican talk about college actually existing for us to expand our minds.

I became a history major and then in my junior year I'm thinking, *well, okay, I'll go on and do this*. I did my master's here and ran out of degrees. So off I went to Columbia for the Ph.D.

Was that your first experience of getting out of Las Vegas—

Yes.

—for anything besides family trips?

The only non-family trip I had taken before college was to go to San Francisco for a high school journalism conference, which was a wonderful experience. I fell in love with San Francisco and I've always cherished that trip. In college, once I was in grad school, I made two trips related to conferences. I went to a conference in Flagstaff and I went to D.C., all the way across the country, my God. I did go to Reno to work on research for my master's thesis and I did go to Southern California to do research at the Huntington Library, but that was it. If we traveled, it was with family. I made one other trip to L.A. on a history project with a couple of friends from here. I never lived away from home. I had spent less than a month of my life away from home and off I went to the big city.

That explains why people—to people that have been here for generations, you are the historian. It's interesting, before we figure out where we're going next in this interview, when you talked about not liking your voice, I've often wondered why you don't do your own speaking on the KNPR.

It's not related to that. It's not related to my feelings about my voice. Frank Wright, who had been the curator at the State Museum, had been the original author of *Nevada Yesterdays*. There was a guy who read it who I think had been an actor and worked at the station; his first name was Roman, I think, but I don't remember. Eventually the funding dried up, whatever, Frank quit doing it, Frank died, and they decided to bring it back and they asked me. I have enough nostalgia for what I wanted to do that I would not have minded reading it. They said that actually they had gotten somebody to read it, and since it was Richard Bryan, that was pretty good. He has read all but two of them. One, he was out of town. We recorded two, so he's read all but three of them. At one point he was out of town. They were having trouble figuring out when he would be back. He was on business or whatever, so I went in and recorded it. The other one, when Bonnie Bryan died. I checked with the producer and we agreed it would be fine to do one on Bonnie and we said, "We cannot ask him to do it," and I did it. But that's been it.

For how long have you been doing the scripts for that?

It's about fifteen years. It's been around since '03 and I can try to find the day. They were rededicating the Foley Federal Building downtown and I was there as a friend of the family. Mary Lou Foley is the daughter of Roger D., who is the son of Roger T., both federal judges. Mary Lou was yenta; she helped put Deb and me together.

I'm at the event and Harry Reid is going down the line shaking hands. One of the

beauties of Nevada, of course, is we all know one another. He knew who I was and I certainly knew who he was. We got there and he said, "I see you're writing for Richard." I said, "Yes, we're trying to convince him he's not just another pretty face." And Reid said, "He isn't," and kept going. I don't think I've told that Bryan that.

That's great.

[End of recorded interview]

Session 2

Today is April fourth, 2018. We're sitting in my office. This is Barbara Tabach with Mike Green for session two.

We've got a history teacher here. We have somebody who is a born and raised Las Vegan. When we do a project, Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage project, why do you think we're doing that?

I think we're doing it because there is an incredible Jewish heritage in Las Vegas. If you were to look at groups that have shaped Las Vegas in the most ways, not always the best ways—people can argue about that—I don't think there has been a group overall more important. Yes, the Mormon Church has been very important. But if you think about it, Mormons built their mission. They were here a couple of years. They left. You really don't see any significant Mormon population in Southern Nevada with the exception of the outlying Saint Thomas, the Muddy Mission, that sort of thing, again, until Las Vegas starts growing. Jews were present, just as Mormons were, Catholic, whatever religious group you want to talk about, whatever ethnic group you want to talk about depending on how you view Judaism. But then if you look at how did the economy develop, how did society develop, role in politics, in culture, all broadly defined, I think we have to understand the Jewish heritage to understand Southern Nevada and we have to understand Southern Nevada to understand the Jewish heritage.

That sounds like a riddle.

Isn't it, though? Or a tautology I've just circled. But it is difficult and there are reasons it's difficult. I have a friend named John Marschall who was at Nevada, Reno and did a wonderful book on the history of *Jews in Nevada*. He quoted the comment, "Is this for

the priest?" Which John was. I don't think John ever told me this directly, but I'm pretty sure I know which member of the Jewish community said that. But our Jewish community has some roots and connections that frankly are part of a lot of Jewish communities around the country, but they were more prominent here. To put it another way, Estes Kefauver took his organized crime committee to fourteen cities. Las Vegas was the smallest by far. The next largest city was five times bigger. We had organized crime connections here and some of the most significant were Jewish. That's a very difficult thing to discuss for some people.

Then you throw in the thing that frankly has ruined more historians' lives, at least those who study recent history, the telephone. It isn't written down. I did my dissertation on Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party and the Civil War and occasionally I'd come upon a letter that said at the end, "Burn this letter." William Seward, Lincoln's Secretary of State, had the habit of saying, "I have important information to tell you, but I cannot write it; I will tell you in person." Well, I was just ready to kill Seward if he weren't already dead. That's a problem.

It is, yes.

Then you also get into historical memory. Now, there are all kinds of issues with historical memory, but it also includes what in the past we are protecting and what we want to remember. The conundrums are multiple and trying to do some Jewish history here, I have run into them.

I run into it all the time.

I know. Nothing new under the *Sun* or the *R-J*, as I like to say about Las Vegas.

Right. Let's talk about Marschall's book. In your conversations with him I am

assuming you have some idea what prompted him to think that he, a non-Jew, could write this book about the history of Jews.

It's an interesting question about a non-Jew and I think it is partly that John was a scholar -- he retired, and has since died, so I can say this—John was a scholar of religious history. It isn't, oh, I understand one religion; therefore, I understand all of them. But if you are going to study religious history and teach it, you are going to have to have some understanding of it. There was a book about the Supreme Court years ago where the author said, this book is an, *oh hell, nobody else has done it, so I might as well take a shot at it* kind of book. Nobody else had done it. The book certainly spends more space on Northern Nevada than it would have if a Southern Nevadan had written it. That's not the worst thing that could happen, but I also understand it. The sources were right there. It was easier for him to do.

I know from talking to him that he didn't have the same feel—he knew this—the same feel for Las Vegas that he did for Reno, living there. But I also think it's valuable to have an outsider. I am not picking on anyone's memory, but Hal Rothman was a scholar of Las Vegas and a Jew. Sometimes Hal would make pronouncements about Las Vegas that sent me into the ozone layer. One time I was talking with Frank Wright about it and Frank said, "Hal does come up with things that we don't agree with, but he's coming in from having been outside when you and I have been inside so long that we will lose sight of these things." He's absolutely right. That's why when you're writing something, you show it to somebody else; you want the outside view. I think that was all beneficial.

It certainly was an incredible research project that John did. I have found it useful though I have been doing less work on the subject since the book came out, not for lack of

interest, but lack of time, but I found it useful to look and say, "Oh, that's what they did in Reno. What did they do here?" At one point, I was reading the work of historian Leonard Dinnerstein, who has done a lot on Arizona Jews, especially Tucson. At one point it looked to me like, gee, everything that happened in Tucson happened forty years before it happened in Las Vegas, and I could kind of track it that way. Getting that perspective is valuable.

Excellent. You mentioned the religious history. There's an interesting story that is told many times about combining the mob migration here and all of that about Moe Dalitz giving suitcases of cash to synagogues. Put my name up; take my name down until everything is good and then you can put it back up. That's the kind of story. In your research or understanding and also growing up here, those Jewish businessmen, how religious were they really?

My impression is that some of them were. From what we learn from Susie Berman about her father, he was serious about it. Now, her father, Davie Berman, also was reputed to be able to kill a man with one hand. There's a book—I think the author's name is Rich Cohen—called *Tough Jews*. I tell people if you want to understand how we end up with the mob, watch *The Godfather* movies, one and two, not three. But if you look at that and you're a new immigrant and the language is new, the struggles you face, that's how a lot of these people get into it. It doesn't mean they are more or less Jewish, but then I think what *The Godfather* depicts for the Corleone family may be the case for some Jewish mobsters, gamblers, whatever term you want to use, where Michael asks his mother, "How did Pa do it?" It can be very difficult to do.

There is a theory that some of the Jewish leaders of the fifties and sixties, at least

the casino operators who were involved in one way or another, tended to do it for PR reasons. It was good for them to look like a member of the community. Well, they *were* members of the community where the people who criticize corporate ownership have a legitimate criticism is that the corporations, being national or multinational, don't have quite the same investment in Las Vegas necessarily that these people did of necessity.

In terms of religion, there's a story regarding the Guardian Angel Cathedral [home of the Las Vegas Catholic Diocese.]. As I recollect the story, both Benny Binion and Moe Dalitz contributed to it. Binion was in theory Catholic and Dalitz was in theory Jewish, but in those days—and it's frankly still true today in terms of local philanthropy—the first place you go would be the casinos. I do think that some of them meant it, were serious, felt it was part of giving back. We tend to forget they wanted for their kids what they didn't have. Suzanne Dalitz has been working on working out her relationship with her father, what he did, what she did, and I don't doubt that part of it was a story that was told by Esther Siegel—eventually, of course, she married, but her daddy was Benny—and that she was acting out.

Esther Siegel, the younger sister?

The younger sister who died not long ago.

No, that's Millicent.

Oh, Millicent. It might have been Millicent. I'm sorry. It was one of Bugsy's daughters was acting out in school.

It probably was Millicent.

Esther was his wife. Millicent was his daughter, so it was Millicent. Anyway, she was acting out. She was playing hooky. She was smoking. He chewed her out. And she

eventually said something like, "Well, who are you to talk about how I should behave?" He said, "Well, that's the point. I've done what I had to do. You don't." I do think that you see a lot of that in not just Jewish families in that period who might have had a mob connection, but generally in Jewish families where the parents had to struggle and wanted their kids to go on to college and have whatever the American dream is.

That classic immigrant story, as you referred back to *The Godfather*, absolutely. On the other hand, there are leaders of Jewish backgrounds who come into Las Vegas who don't come for the gaming and they have left a substantial imprint. Among those, who do you think about?

Although it wasn't gaming necessarily, although the family ended up having a big impact on it, the Mack family I think stands out.

I so agree with that.

Oh, yes. Nate Mack came here, I believe, in 1929 and was a classic combination of what Jewish people did in a town and what Las Vegas was like. He got involved in everything. If there was something to be invested in, he'd invest in it. Eventually, as I recall the story, he's the one who put his son and Parry Thomas together because he was involved in the bank. Then you think of what Jerry Mack accomplished after Nate and then what Joyce has done since. They have been an incredible family, played an important role here. We think of Mack often in connection with being the guy with Thomas who was loaning money to casinos, but there's a lot more to the story in terms of real estate, business, community leadership.

I think of the Katzes, Edie and Lloyd. Lloyd came here to run the Huntridge theater and I guess he might have had another theater or two in town. Edie got involved

in various community activities in the way that at the time the wife and mother would do in the pre-Betty Friedan era. She had a lot to do with what Lloyd did. Lloyd desegregated his theaters before he had to, which frankly is a brave act that a lot of people do not think enough about. When you take that kind of position, there is a pretty good chance that you're going to offend some of your customers, and he could well have; he probably did. In the years after they came here, they're active in the temple; they're active in the Jewish community generally. Edie and Jerry Countess, I believe, started the *Jewish Reporter*. In later years after Lloyd had died and she was married to Gil Yarchever, they're involved, too. Indefatigable would be a pretty good word.

There is, by the way, a great story, which brings me to another figure who came here in connection with—not questionable, but not exactly traditional activities. The story, which Ralph Denton told me—and he was close to both of the people involved—is that they were working on raising money for Temple Beth Sholom. Lloyd Katz delivered an impassioned speech about the temple being in danger and we must come together. One of the members of the temple, a fellow named Hank Greenspun, stood up and said, "By God, this is terrible. We need to do something. I pledge ten thousand dollars." This brought great applause. Then Lloyd said, "Well, I think that's great, but where is your pledge of ten thousand from last year?" Hank's response was, "You mean my credit isn't any good in this joint?" Edie later told me Hank was actually the shill or the beard. Hank would speak up and then other people would jump in. Hank did not have a lot of money in those days.

Hank Greenspun came here in 1946. When I say questionable, he had a client named Joe Smoot who wanted to build a racetrack and he ultimately built a track pretty

much where the Westgate would be today, in that vicinity. But Smoot was actually a bit of a con artist, which meant that I'm sure he endeared himself to Hank's heart in certain ways, but also offended Hank in other ways. The story is that Hank came out here with him and they stayed at the Last Frontier and it was early in 1946 and they went swimming. It's winter and they're swimming. Hank apparently went back to his room, called Barbara back in New York, and said, "Pack up and come out."

The irony of which is, by the way, James McMillan, civil rights leader, one of the reasons he came out here was that he was living in Detroit and practicing and he heard from somebody and then he called Charlie West, who was the first African-American doctor here, and said, "How is it out there?" He said, "Seventy and sunny." It was February. McMillan turned and looked out his office window and the snow was covering it. I think he had a second-story office. So that was that. There's something to be said for the weather here.

The weather does draw people here, yes.

At certain times of year. But anyway, Greenspun came out here. Again, I think it's something that was endemic to Las Vegas, but also in a way to Jewish people coming into a new area trying a bunch of different things because Greenspun got into a magazine, *Las Vegas Life*. He ended up investing in a radio station, which became 1340 KRAM. It's no longer KRAM. He met Wilbur Clark and was involved in the Desert Inn. Then, of course, he went off with the Haganah, and disappeared for a while and eventually came back.

Was he here because of casinos? No, no more than a lot of the other non-casino workers who came here. But the casinos were the driving force. Today when they say,

"Well, the gambling is not the profit center," no, but it's the foundation and it has been our foundation here and that's something we have learned to live with.

But obviously Hank Greenspun went on to take over a struggling tri-weekly called the *Las Vegas Free Press*, which had been started by *Review-Journal* typesetters who had been locked out in a fight with Don Reynolds over whether they would have a union. Nate Mack loaned Hank the money. It was a thousand down and a hundred four thousand to come. I do not know whether the International Typographical Union ever got the hundred and four thousand, and I don't say that out of cynicism of Hank Greenspun, not at all, I just don't know. It turns out Greenspun beat a couple of Northern Nevada editors to get it. There were a couple of rural editors in Northern Nevada who were trying to get it. He turned it into the *Las Vegas Sun*, made it daily, and it became a force in the community and it got a lot of national attention because Greenspun took on, among others, Joe McCarthy and Pat McCarran. It's the basis, in a sense, for the Greenspun empire.

Greenspun did the logical thing; he started buying land, which his staff didn't always appreciate because he didn't have the money to put into the paper. But the land eventually turned into Green Valley. He invested in Channel 8 when it was just starting as the first TV station in 1953.

I believe Brian Greenspun told me this story. They were at dinner one night at home and there was a story about how Don Reynolds was bidding for a contract to get something new called *cable television*. Hank said, "Eh, Reynolds is going to lose his shirt on that." Danny, his other son, said, "No, this is going to be big. You should get into this, Dad." Hank said, "Well, if you think so, I'll do it." Hank would do just about anything for

his kids, so he went out and bid and won. He did pretty well for the Greenspun family.

One would say so, yes.

The interesting thing to think about with them—and this is something Brian Greenspun told me and it's in a book chapter I wrote about Hank Greenspun—Brian Greenspun said he took his father out driving when Hank was dying. This would have been '89. He died of cancer late that year. He said, "Did you ever imagine this would happen?" Looking at the valley and the growth. Hank said, "Absolutely." Brian said, "You're lying." Hank said, "No, I knew this would happen, but I thought it would be your grandkids who would see it." Or something like that. There's vision and then there's vision. You see it happening right now, not necessarily, but the Katzes, the Greenspuns, the Macks, there are a lot of families—and that's an important point, families, not just the one person.

That's a really good point. No one has ever even said it just like that. It is a legacy that begins there.

There's a legacy. If you think about it, think of the Jewish casino operators. They really did not leave the kind of family legacy here that the non-casino involved or the more peripherally involved—Hank Greenspun was involved and Brian has been involved, but it has never been their main bread and butter. You don't have descendants of Dalitz, Entratter, Levinson, to name some of the big casino operators, playing a significant role here, and that's not a criticism of them; they went and did whatever they did. But it may be that for Jews who were not involved in the casino industry that they didn't think of the Strip in the same way or they thought beyond the Strip.

That's an interesting observation.

Again, I don't want to be seen as questioning the others. We were talking about

involvement in religion and in philanthropy. They did a lot for the community. They got a lot out of it. That's okay. But they did a lot for the community, too.

When you were a kid, would you have been at the age when casinos would do holiday—like Easter egg hunts—activities?

I think, in fact, Hughes had stopped it at the Desert Inn when I was a kid because when we moved here in '67 that was about the time he didn't want the kids loose because, oh, he'd get the mumps or whatever he thought was going to happen. But I was aware that there were events they did for families there. It's a transitional period. It's not yet quite corporate. Let me back into this a bit. I have been very happily involved in the Mob Museum pretty much from the beginning.

It's a great museum.

Thank you. I contributed a little. I was talking with the curators and said: *"What is going to be difficult for you—and me, since I'd be involved—is making organized crime in Las Vegas from the forties to the sixties interesting."* Because in a lot of ways it wasn't. Now, there are some really interesting characters, of course. But it's when you get into the seventies that things run amuck.

There is a documentary that Ned Day and Bob Stoldal did, *The Mob on the Run* [1987], where they're interviewing Larry Leavitt, who was the prosecutor, and he's talking about Frank Rosenthal's TV show. He said, "It's vulgar. In retrospect, it's an embarrassment." I cannot imagine Moe Dalitz or Jack Entratter or Davie Berman doing anything like that. There was a new level of arrogance that, as it turned out, a Jewish figure, Rosenthal and some others were showing at the time. I think they treated Las Vegas differently and I think we look back at them differently. I think there are certainly

fonder memories of people like Dalitz and Entratter.

Here is one of the problems with trying to understand the Jewish community, and this story puts me in a slightly unfavorable light because I told a lie. It goes back to this: In 2005, PBS aired a documentary on Las Vegas and the American experience, produced by Stephen Ives who had worked with Ken Burns and who was a very talented filmmaker. In the course of it, there were some things that went on that did not thrill me, one of which, to be egotistical about it, was that I didn't end up in the finished product. I was on the cutting floor. I understood why that happened, but it would have been nice. Okay, I understand media. It happens. To put it this way, they virtually ignored pre-gambling Las Vegas, very little on that period, partly because a documentarian needs footage. If you're doing a documentary on Las Vegas where there is footage but it's later, very well. However, they also told me in the course of producing it—originally I think it had been four hours and they cut it to three—PBS said, "Get in more of the women." This is PBS.

We go ahead to where there are budget cuts in our system, and one of the entities on the chopping block was the University of Nevada Press; it was in danger of closing. I think I had an impact. I have been on the editorial board there for close to twenty years. We met—in our case, it was a video conference—with the chancellor at the time. The issue was, why do we keep the press? I said, "Well, I want to tell a story." I changed the story, though I had an experience that was similar. It went like this: I said, "I did a book chapter on the history of the Jewish community in Las Vegas. Now, if you think about it, this is a fascinating community because there is a community. But there is also a mobster community. There is a gambler community. There is an entertainer community; we tend

to forget that, too, not necessarily living here, but if we think of Jewish entertainers who performed here."

I thought, *this is the kind of book where I can go cosmic. I don't have to settle for Nevada. I can do a best seller. This will be great*. I talked to a couple of publishers back east and they said, "Just do the mob; just concentrate on that; that's the stuff people want to read."

Without the University of Nevada Press, publishing those dull old scholarly books on Nevada, we wouldn't learn the things we need to know. That's part of the problem with the Jewish community; the sexy or interesting part is not necessarily the part that is most vital to understanding being a Las Vegan, although being a Las Vegan means understanding and dealing with our image, which we owe in large part to Jewish mobsters.

That's a really good point. Whenever I do presentations based on this project, especially the adult crowds, they come thinking I'm going to tell the stories of mobsters. It's like, well, I can't do oral histories of the mobsters; they're dead, and that's the basis of my work.

Here's another great story about a mobster and it tells how the world works. I am married to a woman who is, in fact, Jewish through her mother. My mother-in-law, Lenora, is one of the great characters I ever met. She visited Las Vegas; she didn't live here. Lenora was a communist at Berkeley, before that she was a WAC during World War II, and she was the first woman elected to the city council in Merced, California. She was an activist to her toenails.

When my wife was a little girl—her parents met through communists at

Berkeley—went to the Unitarians because there was no Jewish temple, and so they held services on the military base and her father had been a conscientious objector during World War II and would not go on the grounds of the military base. My nieces and nephew are not really practicing that much, but they do Passover and Hanukkah, and my nephew went on Birthright trip to Israel and came away with a very different point of view than he arrived there with.

I don't know where all of that leads except that it relates to the many different ways we are Jewish, many different ways we perceive being Jewish, and the many different ways we are perceived.

I did not have that kind of political background that Deborah grew up with. Thinking about the Jewish community here, the post-war generation, if they had not personally gone through World War II and personally gone through the additional horrors in addition to battle, meaning the Holocaust, they were well aware of it in a way that my generation cannot be, and I wonder if that dilutes some of the activism and involvement. You could have the Moe Dalitz who had the laundry concession in World War II and made some money from it, of course, but, at the same time, he did it. There is some consciousness of this.

You were going to talk about Carl Cohen.

Carl Cohen was an executive at the Sands and most people, if they note the name, think of him as the guy who belted Frank Sinatra. The story from that, to give the background, is that Hughes had bought the Sands. One of the great myths is that Howard Hughes cleared out the mob—he didn't—and it was in part because he kept some of the same people and then when he got rid of them, he brought in Mormon executives who didn't

know anything about gambling because it is against their religion. I've had several people tell me, "Oh, the skimming got better; you could get away with more."

Anyway, Hughes had detested Sinatra forever, something to do with who got Ava Gardner, and he cut off Sinatra's credit line and Sinatra was unhappy after his marriage to Mia Farrow had gone south, so I guess he drove his golf cart through a window. Then he went to the coffee shop, Cohen had told the hostess, "Keep him out," because he knew what was coming. Sinatra, in the heat of passion, was unstoppable. He got in there and I guess he got a couple of words into his dissertation and Cohen let him have it.

When I did Ralph Denton's oral history, he talked about having to raise money to run for congress. This is one of the reasons I would never run for office anyway, besides having a big mouth. For example, he went to Moe Dalitz's office and there were a bunch of people sitting there for the same purpose. You could go in and get the one thousand, two thousand or two hundred dollars, whatever. Ralph just shook his head and walked out. He just didn't think that was right. He went to the Sands and he talked with Carl Cohen. This was in 1964, so think about the year for a minute. Carl Cohen said, "What's your position on civil rights?" When they were finished talking, Cohen said, "A thousand is not good enough, Ralph. I'll be right back." He went to the cage and got a couple thousand more.

Carl Cohen's kids, as I remember the story, one of them became a theatrical producer, another became a doctor. They didn't stay here and have that big an impact, but they went out and they did indeed live the idealized second generation life, if you will. That stands out to me because you don't hear a lot about that. I don't know whatever became of Eddie Levinson's family or Jack Entratter's beyond his widow who is still in

Las Vegas. I do think that's kind of interesting.

It is interesting.

We also tend to forget that just because you're in the casino business doesn't mean you don't have other business interests. Wilbur Clark: the street running into the UNLV campus from Tropicana is Wilbur; that's because he subdivided that area. Moe Dalitz went in, along with Allard Roen—he always tends to be the forgotten man in all of this and I believe his name was originally Rosen—with Irwin Molasky and Merv Adelson. As Gene Moehring would point out in his history of Las Vegas, they essentially built Maryland Parkway, at least after the Huntridge section, but Sunrise Hospital, Boulevard Mall, the country club, the medical buildings. Then Mervin's father, Nate, inspires them to start the hospice, which is a marvelous contribution to the community. I don't think Moe was involved in that. He may have been. I've always found it funny that then Molasky and Adelson went to Hollywood, got together with Lee Rich and Earl Hamner and created Lorimar Productions. I don't say this unkindly about Molasky or Adelson, but more for their connections to Dalitz and Roen, I said, if you want to do the carom shot, mob money helped finance John Boy. I could see J.R. Ewing since they had *Dallas*, but John Boy? But it is the reminder Las Vegas is everywhere. These connections exist everywhere.

Do you ever reflect on the spiritual side of the Jewish community considering that Temple Beth Sholom was the only act in town for the longest time and now we have twenty, almost thirty, any given day, synagogues, congregations?

One of my odd experiences as a historian is working on the history of a law firm, Lionel Sawyer and Collins, which has since gone under. Sam Lionel, a prominent Jewish figure

in Las Vegas, came here in 1954 and has been practicing law ever since. In fact, we're doing this taping on April fourth and in three days he will turn ninety-nine and he is still in there each day, nine to five, and arguing cases, which makes him rather frightening, of course. It was not, for me, the happiest experience trying to do the law firm history. I'll almost call him Sam's protégé—it might have been accurate—Jeff Zucker, who has been active in the Jewish community here, told me he did some of the work for Temple Beth Sholom's move from 17th and Oakey.

That Sam did.

Jeff Zucker, his specialty is real estate law or business law, and he did some of the work on moving from 17th and Oakey out to Summerlin. He said, "The original incorporation papers"—he said this with great delight—"were Las Vegas Jewish Community Incorporated." It was the whole Jewish community. Well, they're conservative. There are some pretty radical Jewish religious groups out there. Everybody was in Temple Beth Sholom. It's okay. It's our temple. That was 1943 and there were a couple of hundred Jewish residents at the time.

Ner Tamid began in the early seventies [1974]. I can remember some of this as a kid, hearing some of it, and then later hearing more about it; that yes, that was reform and isn't it nice that now there's a conservative synagogue and a reform synagogue. One of the main reasons Ner Tamid got off the ground was when Temple Beth Sholom put Joe Yablonsky on the board. Yablonsky was the FBI agent in charge here. On the one hand, he was—and I say this with the affection of a policeman's grandson—known to take some of the ethical curves on the accelerator rather than the brake, but he also said, "I've been sent out here to plant the American flag in Las Vegas and clean up this town,"

which a lot of people resented. Allegedly, a member of the Jewish community, as I understand it, walked over to his table at the Riviera one day where Yablonsky said, "I was sitting there. It looked like a meeting of the mob. I was meeting with someone else. One of them came over and looked at the other guy and said, 'I guess you don't care who you're seen with.'"

Well, Hank Greenspun developed a hatred for Yablonsky. *The Las Vegas Sun* did a lot of stories about whatever Yablonsky was doing wrong. Moe Dalitz had no use for Yablonsky; Yablonsky was targeting him. The two of them were instrumental in helping Ner Tamid. Was it because they were suddenly Reform Jews? I don't think so.

I always think of this joke, one of the great old Jewish jokes. A Jewish man has been stuck on a deserted island for a long time. It's like Tom Hanks with his volleyball in that movie [*Cast Away*]. They finally get to him and they say, "How did you eat?" He said, "Well, I took a couple of sticks and I sharpened the ends and I dug a little fire pit and I could rub sticks together to make fire and I'd spear a rabbit and cook it and I had something to eat and there was vegetation I could eat then."

"Well, what did you do for shelter?" He said, "That lean-to over there, it faces away from the rain, so I'm okay if it rains."

"What did you do for spiritual comfort?" He pointed to the side of the hill and on the side of the hill were two beautiful synagogues. He pointed at one and he said, "I built that." They said, "What about the other one?" He said, "I won't go to that one."
I appreciate this, I do. I think there was a bit of that with Temple Beth Sholom and Congregation Ner Tamid. Both of them have prospered. They've done incredibly well, and I don't mean financially though they seem to be in good financial shape, but beautiful

buildings, large congregations, active in the community, a lot of programs going on. I think they are still the two standard setters.

But one of the other things I noticed is that if you look at the other synagogues, most of them do not have a building. What's the first thing you do? I don't care if it's a synagogue, Episcopal Church or cathedral. A building fund. A lot of the people who have been involved in building synagogues here have already done it. They came here from Ashtabula or from Nacogdoches or wherever they came from. Once you've done that once, as some of them have said to me, you don't want to do it again, so it's fine to meet at the community center in one of the Sun Cities or to rent a small storefront or whatever, which makes it look, I think, less permanent than people think it is, though a few have come and gone.

John Marschall told me he went down to Carlsbad and interviewed Mel Moss and Justice David Zenoff. He asked, "How many Jews in Las Vegas do you think belong to a temple?" One of them said, "Oh, no more than ten percent." The other one said, "How can you be so pessimistic?" And the other one said, "I was being optimistic."

It's a difficulty in Las Vegas. Every now and then, inevitably there will be a news story, a feature story about the minister who holds services for the people in the production show who can't go because they do a midnight show and they can't get up early enough Sunday morning or whatever. Major League Baseball had that—Baseball Chapel—because they played on Sunday; it was hard for them to get to church, so they'd do it at the ballpark. That's a problem here. A lot of people here depend on Friday night for economic livelihood. If the temple is meeting Friday night, which is when you think they'd meet, it might not be that easy. If you're Orthodox that's another matter; then you

have to be careful.

Since I'm in an anecdotal mood—I don't think I told this last time—I have a colleague who is an Episcopal priest. He called me and said that an online course, just for the heck of it, he made the due date for assignments Saturdays at 11:59 p.m. It doesn't really matter when; he let them turn it in. A young student emailed him and said, "I can't do that. I'm Orthodox Jewish, so I cannot be on a computer Friday or Saturday." I said, "That's bull. Once the sun goes down Saturday, tell her to get on the computer." Nice try.

Seriously, I think it's a problem in Las Vegas and it may become a bigger problem. Now as we increasingly see a service economy around the world, we may see this as more of a problem.

Simultaneously, though, right now the Chabad movement is increasing. Their presence in this city since 1990...When did Rabbi Shea Harlig first come, '94?

Yes, sometime in the nineties. It has grown enormously. Good. More interest. More power to them. Then the question becomes, what are the sacrifices you may have to make? Actually if you are committed to Chabad, they're not necessarily sacrifices. Those who are not involved may look at them as sacrifices.

In growing up you didn't affiliate with Temple Beth Sholom, or any of that.

No. I have to laugh. I don't mean to make light of practicing any religion, much less Judaism. The only Jewish services I ever attended were funerals. I believe the first time was for a guy who I think probably should remain at least last nameless, but who was a good friend who lived on the same block as Governor O'Callaghan and Judge Foley, both of whom did his eulogies in the temple. Judge Foley, Roger D., began by saying, "You wouldn't think an Irish Catholic federal judge's best friend would be a Jewish bookie."

But they were; they were best friends.

I came to the synagogue; it was Ner Tamid in the old location on Emerson, I guess it was. I had borrowed my father's yarmulke. My father has occasionally gone to services over the years. In the corner were two guys in pinstriped suits. People don't believe me, but this happened. One was saying to the other in a gravelly voice, "I've got a hot one at Santa Anita in the eighth." I thought, *this is a great funeral.* I went and sat down next to Judge Foley's daughter Mary Lou, who is a close friend who introduced Deb and me, or pretty much set us up. I took out my dad's yarmulke and I put it on. She looked at me and said, "I didn't think you had one." And I said, "Well, this is my dad's. Mine has a propeller on top."

Of course, I went to graduate school in New York City and the dorm I was in was 544 West 110th—the things you remember—between Broadway and Amsterdam. There was a synagogue right next door, which I never attended. One day I was giving directions to a friend of mine. I said, "You can't miss it. It's right next to a synagogue." He said, "Mike, everything in New York is right next to a synagogue." Which I should have thought of, of course, but I didn't.

Or a deli.

Yes. The nearest deli, which was a good Jewish deli, was owned by a Korean family.

Really?

Yes. There's this marvelous theory in New York that the best Jewish delis were owned by Asian people and the best Asian restaurants were owned by Hispanic people, or something like that. I did not practice, did not get involved. I don't regret it. I do regret not knowing more.

Knowing more...?

I would know more about Judaism. I would know more about the Jewish community here if I had been involved, if I had been—I hesitate to say it this way—religious, but I wasn't and I'm not, and that's another reason I have not pursued trying to write—put it in quotation marks—the history of the Jewish community here, one of the reasons. On the other hand, it would also be beneficial not to be affiliated because there are rivalries. There are feelings. Gee, what a shock. But this would be true in any group, I don't care what church you belong to. I wrote a history textbook on Nevada. I am sure there are people in Northern Nevada who say, "He didn't pay enough attention to us." Well, too bad. The previous textbooks were written by Northern Nevadans. But I did try to pay attention to all parts of the state, but even then I'm not going to know it the way I would at least approach knowing this place even if I don't think I know it that well.

When you think about yourself—and if I'm getting way too personal, just let me know—but spiritually, your wife was raised Jewish.

Quasi-Jew. I use the term *Jew-ish with a hyphen*. But certainly I would say they were a Jewish family.

You never chose to go into another religion or spiritual world.

No.

I do feel through the oral histories of those who label themselves not very Jewish that there is something that filters through culturally of being Jewish.

Is the term, if I remember correctly, *tzedakah*? I may not be saying it correctly. Not necessarily feeling part of Judaism, but feeling part of being obligated to do something for society.

Tikkun olam.

I am terrible at pronunciations including in English. I can spell, but I can't pronounce. I always tell students when I'm calling the role the first time, "I will butcher your name; and if I don't, I'll have to try."

Every time I thought to myself, *it might be tzedakah,* I thought, *no, that's Neil Sedaka*. My family was not political, but if I think about it, my one grandfather being a policeman felt he was doing something for society, helping to protect society. The other grandfather, certainly one of the things I knew was that he had brought over his whole family; he had to work like hell to do it and he did it. That may be something that is filtered or handed down.

It's funny that things prick you, will get right under your skin that you don't expect them to do. I was told at an early age about the relative for whom I am named. As time went on I have been more conscious of that. Did I tell the story the first time?

I don't think so.

My cousin Melvin?

I don't remember you talking about who you were named after. That's an Ashkenazi tradition to do that.

This is also part of a family controversy. My maternal grandmother had an Aunt Mary who married a guy named Sol Shulman. They had three children, two girls and a boy. The boy was the youngest, Melvin. Melvin would have been born around '24. The two daughters died, not at birth. They were little girls. One, I think, it was meningitis or another disease at the time that they couldn't cure. Melvin, when he came of age, wanted to enlist in World War II. He was going to be a naval pilot; that's what he dreamed of

doing. He went down to the recruitment office—his parents never would have let him—before he was eighteen. He could have gotten out on hardship as the only child.

He got to the recruitment office and they gave him a color test, which I think is probably important for a pilot to be able to distinguish color. That's when Melvin learned he was color blind, which is something I've almost inherited from him; I'm not color blind, but I have trouble with certain shades. At a physical exam last year, my doctor said, "You know you're almost color blind?" I said, "It has been mentioned." Which is why people will say, "Oh, you're dressed very nicely today." I'll say, "Well, I'll tell Deb." Somebody said, "You're sexist." And I said, "No, I'm color blind. There's a difference. Maybe I'm sexist, but that's not the reason she keeps an eye on this stuff." Melvin failed the color test.

My grandmother had four brothers and the oldest, Meyer, was in the Coast Guard. If you're in the Coast Guard, you probably have some connections to the Navy. Meyer or Mike, Uncle Mike—Meyer Rabinowitz is the one who made it Mike Robbins—he got ahold of the color test. Melvin sat at home memorizing the colors. He didn't know what they were, but he was memorizing them. It's written down as blue, green, yellow, red, or however they do it.

He went back and that morning they had changed the color test. Melvin was, to put it in the vernacular, screwed. He enlisted in the Army and he felt strongly about this; after all, Hitler was trying to obliterate his people. He died in Germany just before VE Day.

My grandfather, the policeman, had connections. When the casket came back, he said, "I want to take a look in there." It wasn't Melvin. There were pieces and a couple of

the pieces were clearly not Melvin; they were African-American. When they arrived to tell Mary and Sol, Mary went over to the china cabinet, took a chair and climbed up on it, and started breaking the ceremonial dishes, just smashed them. That is the only thing she said or did.

My mother was then three years old and she had the chicken pox, which I waited until I was twenty-eight to get. Her first memory was Melvin coming in to say goodbye. Melvin, I guess, had had the chicken pox, so he could come in. She resolved she would name a child for Cousin Melvin who had been killed. She hated the name Melvin, so Melvin Shulman would be Michael Scott Green.

My dad said that—or he did say when my mother was around—that they were trying to decide whether my name would be Michael or Daniel. She said, "No, it's going to be Michael." Then if I were a girl, would I have been Makayla or Debbie Lynn? My mother said, "He would have been Makayla."

Interestingly, being more personal, his parents objected to naming me for Melvin because they said, "If you name him for someone who had a short life, then that jinxes him." Now, not in so many words, but I guess their rabbi might have told them that.

I have not investigated this. I probably should. My mother went to her grave believing they went to a synagogue in Los Angeles and had me named. I don't know.

So your baby naming was in—

I wasn't in a synagogue.

Oh, you weren't, okay.

So did they get somebody to say, "Hey, he's not here; he can't be here," but named me? I don't know. In any case, I am named in theory for Melvin Shulman and I am conscious of

that, not that it's always there, but every now and then the skin gets pricked. Maybe I am thinking, *there is somebody I'm named for who gave his life for something he believed in*, and that's when I am more upset with my own moments of cowardice, which we all have and I certainly have had.

I'm sure you over exaggerate that.

Possibly.

That is interesting. There is a connection to who we're named after, if we're named after someone. Other than your baby naming and some of the history growing up here, any other connections to the whole history of Las Vegas, Jewish and non-Jewish, that really resonates as Mike Green?

In me? In other words, not the historian.

Just you.

I think I told the story of Lefty Rosenthal. I haven't thought of myself as somebody who's made history. I certainly don't think I have. I could probably come up with more things if I sit and think about it.

When I do lectures about Las Vegas, one of the theories I have of Las Vegas is that Las Vegas is Kevin Bacon as an urban community. I understand it's down to four-point-seven-five degrees thanks to the Internet…But I always say Las Vegas runs on six degrees of Kevin Bacon. I have done for over twenty years the Leadership Las Vegas History Day for the Chamber of Commerce. I always ask them first for the list of class members, which includes where they work. I will start pinging them when I am talking. I'll say, "Barbara, you work at the UNLV Library. Now, it's kind of interesting that the library is named for Lied, but was originally Jim Dickinson. Here is somebody over here

who works at Las Vegas High School. Now, you're connected through education, but Dickinson started UNLV at Las Vegas High School in 1951. You have these connections. There are all these connections."

I knew the Wengert family. Ward and Ree Wengert—Ward's father was Cyril, one of the early arrivals here—lived next door to Oscar Goodman. I used to joke that I'm one degree from Oscar. Now that Oscar and I are on the Mob Museum board together and work together on projects, I don't need another degree. But we all have this in Las Vegas, the weird ways things happen.

In the mid-eighties, I was taking Gene Moehring's 'Recent America' history course and was introduced to a woman in it, Mary Lou Foley, who I mentioned earlier. She and I became friends. I have always been weirdly shy. People think of me as an extrovert. I've had to overcome a lot. I still have a degree of shyness with prominent people. They're important people. I say it with great affection that one time we went over to Mary Lou's house. We were going to go to dinner. Judge Foley was in there. Well, this is the big federal judge here, right? When you go into somebody's house and the federal judge is in his slippers conked out on a recliner, it takes away some of the gloss...to the point that my graduation, I guess in '88—it might have been '86, but I think it was '88—he was getting an award and he was on the stage and we made faces at each other as I went across the stage. I thought Bob Maxson [UNLV President] was going to have a heart attack that some grad student is making faces at a federal judge and I'm going to have to step in.

Mary Lou was getting married and her cousin Helen had an engagement party and I was invited to it. She put me at a table with two couples; one of them, then Linda

Cooper had been married to the Cooper of Cooper Birch and Howe Advertising, which is now Faiss Foley Warren. Linda was with her future husband, Bob Faiss, who merely invented gaming law. I don't think I exaggerate when I say that. It's a small world. Linda and I worked together at The Valley Times and had remained friends and here was Bob. I met Bob. The other two people at the table were Ralph and Sara Denton, whom I had never met. Frankly, while I had done some Las Vegas history, I had seen the name Denton fly by, but didn't think much of it. They spent the evening telling stories.

Eventually Grant Sawyer's oral history was published, which Ralph and Bob largely talked him into. It was done by one of my dearest friends, a guy named Gary Elliott, who would go on to be a professor at the community college and help get me hired there. Great characters I have known. Gary was a retired DEA agent who got a Ph.D. in history. Perspective is valuable. I'd be complaining about some problem at work, and he'd say, "Green, quit your whining. You've never been shot at." Which was true and still is. Gary, meanwhile, had been shot at by drug lords. So this job seemed easy.

Eventually the time came where Sawyer's oral history was done. About the time Sawyer died, Bob was saying to Ralph, "You should do yours." Ralph asked me what I thought. I said, "Yes, you have a lot of things to tell." "Well, I'll do it if you do it."

I did Ralph's oral history, which beyond building a friendship with that family, means an incredible amount to me, getting to know all of those people introduced me to a lot of people and issues I wouldn't have otherwise encountered.

There was an organization here called the Hualapai Club, a men's club. It was very big when Jan Jones was mayor and she was made the first female member of the Hualapai Club. They met at the Union Plaza. One time Ralph and I were going to meet

for lunch there. I go in. "Hi, I'm waiting for Ralph Denton. I'm sitting at the bar." Ralph walks in with Howard Cannon. I'm going to meet Howard Cannon, some dumb history professor, or history grad student at the time. Ralph said, "You know Howard Cannon." I said, "Oh, of course, I know Howard Cannon." Topped only by the time Lloyd George said, "Do you know Chief Justice Rehnquist?" I said, "No, Judge George, I don't know Chief Justice Rehnquist. I don't move in those circles normally."

Doing that oral history taught me a lot about Las Vegas that I wouldn't have otherwise known; knowing Linda and Bob, similarly. If I may quote my all-time favorite prosecutor, John J. McCoy of *Law & Order*—

Ooh, love him.

Yes, Jack McCoy. Whenever the show came on and he came up on the credits, I'd say, "My man." Steven Hill as DA Adam Schiff was my main man. I loved Adam. McCoy said, "Life is a funny old dog." Mary Lou knows everybody. Frankly, if you're a Foley who was born here in 1950, there's a pretty good chance you know everybody, but Mary Lou really does.

I had a horrible dating life. It was quite awful. Part of it, just to tell a little bit more about myself, I was skipped out of first grade, so I was a year younger than everybody. But that was me. Now I'll come back to this story. I had trouble in school getting to know girls. I was a year behind the girls I was in class with.

And boys are already a little less mature.

Yes, we're bad enough, in a lot of ways. Mary Lou had actually just tried setting me up with somebody and it hadn't gone well. Deborah was married to Michael Paskevich who was the entertainment writer at the *R-J* and they got divorced. I had done Leadership Las

Vegas and Deb was in the class that year. We were talking at the reception afterward. She worked at St. Rose Hospital in development and they were doing their history. I knew that and I mentioned that and I said, "Can I help you with anything?" "Oh, I'll let you know. Here's my card." I said, "Oh, great." I thought she was kind of cute. It turned out she believed me; that's the silly part. She got in touch with me about doing something for that history. I thought, *well, so much for that*.

One day in December of '99, Mary Lou called me and said, "You're probably going to get a phone call from somebody you met." Yeah. She said, "Deborah Young." I said, "She was in Leadership." Yes. "Well, what's the deal?" She said, "I saw her at an event and Deb said, 'Mary Lou, my marriage is done, the divorce is done, I'm over it, get out your Rolodex.'" And Mary Lou said, "I don't have to. I know someone you should talk to."

Deb called me. It was appropriate to mention Jack McCoy. People ask, why do you remember this? It was January third. She had gone out of the country for the holidays. She called me at ten a.m. just as A&E was starting *Law & Order*, right between semesters and it's Monday at ten a.m. and I can watch Law & Order reruns. Everybody who knows me knows I'm doing that, so who's calling me? I answer and we ended up going out to dinner that Friday night. That was January seventh. Six months later to the day I proposed. A year later almost to the day we got married. We got married on the sixth because it was a Saturday and getting family in and out with a Sunday wedding would have been problematic.

We were trying to figure out where to get married and Deb said, "You should pick somewhere historic." What's historic out here? There are things that are historic, of

course. There are various venues, but they're not really historic. We were talking with some friends, the Dentons and the Faisses. They said, "What about the Boulder Dam Hotel?" Huh. We ate dinner in the restaurant. The three ladies went out to evaluate it and they concluded it would work. The hotel was not yet open, but the mezzanine area was open where the shops are and the museum and then you had the ground floor where you went into the restaurant. We got married there. Linda Faiss jokes to this day that Bob Faiss never cleaned a bathroom at his house, but he cleaned the bathroom at the Boulder Dam Hotel for our wedding. It was a wonderful wedding that would not have been possible if Mary Lou doesn't set us up and, at the same time, I don't happen to meet the Dentons and the Faisses, though I might have met them through Linda. That's Las Vegas; these are the odd connections you make. It also has given me opportunities that usually someone who is doing history, even at the local level, doesn't get.

Let's go back to the beginning. John Marschall knew a lot of people in Reno, got to know people here, but couldn't have quite the entree not living here. There are other people who have done history here. I mentioned Hal Rothman and Frank Wright earlier and I mentioned Gene Moehring, who have gotten to know a lot of people over the years. At the same time, growing up here, I had an advantage.

Now, I mentioned the Wengerts. Ward Wengert's sister, Shirley, married Bob Brown, my boss at *The Valley Times*. Shirley went to Las Vegas High School, as everyone did then. In the early eighties, I guess it was a twenty-five, thirty-year reunion or something, Bob told me that he had lived in Las Vegas over twenty years and when they went to reunions, there were people who wouldn't speak to him because he hadn't been born here. There's still a little of that.

That brings me to another historical irony. My first real...I'll call it splash for lack of a better term, in local history was that I was reading a book, and I'm pretty sure it was Katharine Best and Katherine Hilyer, *Playtown U.S.A.*, that talked about the newspaper war of the fifties between the *R-J* and the *Sun*. I did this term paper on it that became a published article, and it was the first scholarly article I published on Las Vegas. It was in the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. For it I interviewed Hank Greenspun. I wish I had taped it. Or if I did, I wish the tape still worked. It's been over thirty years. I'm sure it is disintegrated somewhere. But in the course of researching it, I encountered a line from Al Cahlan in the R-J. "In Reno," he said, "you had to be voted in by the ruling elite." And I said something like, the irony was that Hank Greenspun came here and Al Cahlan by then was part of the ruling elite, and Greenspun wanted to get in there. Subsequently, the Greenspuns were part of the ruling elite, which is not a knock or a nasty thing to say. I'm not part of the ruling elite. I have no aspirations to be. But I grew up with some notion of who they were.

You're an observer of that.

I'm an observer of it, which gives me a bit of an advantage, I think, which has helped me.

I love it.

[End of Session II]

Session 3

Today is May 25th, 2021. It has taken us quite some time to get back together. This is Barbara Tabach and I am here in my office at UNLV with Dr. Michael Green. Hi, Mike.

I hear there's been a little pandemic.

Oh my gosh, yes. What have you been doing this past year?

Well, the interesting thing is I was teaching a graduate course for the first time, which was quite meaningful to me. I've been to community college where you don't even do upper division normally. In the middle of it, *kaboom*, from meeting each week in person, we go online. We decided to use the discussion board instead of Zoom at that point.

Now, I should go back a little bit because, interestingly, the pandemic probably affected me less in certain ways in a couple of other things that happened earlier that year. One is that my father died. Now, it was not connected to the pandemic, and Deb has said correctly that the pandemic would have driven him nuts. It would have been very hard to keep him locked up.

Was he living at home?

My dad was living at home and, in fact, was at home until two weeks before he died when he had to go to the hospital. He had developed a foot infection. He called me in the middle of the night and said, "I just can't take the pain anymore." I called 911. The paramedics took him to Desert Springs. They drained the wound, put him in the hospital, and then he went to a rehab center. While he was in the rehab center, they had barely started any physically therapy, which I find disturbing. They had, however, been checking him. There was going to be a meeting on a Tuesday morning with an

administrator there who handled his case. They were going to talk about what they wanted to do. I got there a little early and we were talking. He had been hallucinating a bit, which I thought might be medication. All of a sudden, he said, “I think I’m going to pass out.” And he did and that was it. It happened in front of me.

Now, the odd thing about this is, if I had not come there for that meeting, they would have found him later that way. I had what I think is the blessing of knowing what happened. My attitude has been based on a conversation he and I had had. When he turned eighty-four, he said, “I’m on borrowed time.” I said, “Aren’t we all?” He said, “No.” My father was eighty-four when he died, which he was, and he said his mother was eighty-seven. She had had a stroke several years before. His sister had died a couple of years before at the age of eighty-five. He said, “So, I’m on borrowed time.” I said, “Well, we all are. Make the most of it.” He died at eighty-six, and I said to Deb, “He stuck the landing,” and he really did.

But he was living independently until two weeks before he died when he had to go in the hospital. He had all his marbles. I can’t ask for better. The funeral is related to this, and I share of it because of its connection to Judaism in this case. He always said he wanted a rabbi. He was not excessively religious, but he did occasionally go to services. When we went to Bunker Mortuary, I said that he wanted a rabbi, and they said, “Oh yes, we have a guy we call on, and it’s three hundred fifty dollars.” We called him Dadoo, which is the name of a character on the animated show *Animaniacs!* And Deb leaned over to me and said, “Dadoo would say, ‘To hell with the rabbi.’” And I said, “I know, but we’ll do it.”

Well, my father and I have a dear friend Jim Wallace who I taught with at CSN who is an Episcopal priest. My dad had taken one of his religion courses, and then we had an informal breakfast group. I thought it would be nice if Jim had a role in the service, so he did the eulogy, which was very difficult for me because he also talked about me and my relationship with my father. This is my useful advice to people trying to get through a funeral without totally losing it. We're sitting there by the graveside, it's too cold, and I have chosen not to wear a heavy coat; I'm wearing a suit, which was stupid on my part. But as I'm sitting there shivering, trying to keep control, I looked at the casket.

Now, Deb had recently been binge watching a show called *The Closer*. Kyra Sedgwick is this detective. In one of the episodes, two of the senior detectives go to the funeral of an old retired detective. One of them does the single-most inappropriate eulogy probably ever delivered. There are pallbearers, and one of them says, "My god, how much weight did he gain? This is incredibly heavy," and he drops the casket and it bounces down the steps, gets to the bottom, turns over, opens up, he rolls out, followed by the body of a dead woman who, it turns out, was related to one of his old cases, and that's the case they have to solve on that episode.

I'm trying to make it through Jim's eulogy, and I suddenly said to myself, "That's an awfully big casket. I wonder, could there be two people in there?" And got through it.

When we were done I was called on to shovel the dirt. The rabbi pointed out that you can hold the shovel either way, though the preferred way is to turn it over. When I got up I looked at the people who were there—there were about twenty friends of ours—and I said, "Since you knew my father or knew of my father, you know he would have

preferred with my capabilities that I take the easy way," which I did. But I remember thinking his casket was going on top of my mother's, and my mother did not buy into religion. I could imagine my mother thinking, why are you throwing dirt on me?

I had tried to maintain the right perspective, I guess you'd say. Then Deb did the bulk of the work, got his home into shape to sell. During the pandemic, it turned out it sold easily.

But not long after that Gene Moehring died, and Gene was the preeminent historian of Las Vegas. I had first taken a class from him in the fall of '84, and we were close. Gene had a bad last six months or so. That's in the rearview mirror when the pandemic begins. Maybe to me the pandemic beginning wasn't quite so bad.

Then there was also a meme I saw at the beginning of it that said something like, "Nerdy academics have been socially distant their whole lives. What's the big deal?" In a way, I benefitted from that. I was a loner growing up. I did not have close friends. I had very few friends as a kid. In a sense, I reverted. We still were in touch with people. In fact, through Zoom we were able to get together, in quotation marks, with people we normally would not see, good friends in San Francisco, good friends Back East, family, and so on. In that way, there was a benefit of the pandemic, I think, that we learned we can do these things, and we had the technology to do it.

It was probably harder for Deborah who is no longer in the development trade, although she was still consulting for UNLV, but working from home was not something she normally did whereas I work from home. In that way, it was less difficult for me, I think.

I have referred to being neurotic, or worse, about my health, so I was morbidly worried about getting COVID, which was good because I observed the protocols as closely as possible. I missed the contact, certainly, the human contact with students, with colleagues, but also with society in general. I was talking with a couple of my colleagues to whom I'm very close, and we were talking about how much we missed just hanging out in the hallway or leaning into one another's offices and chatting. Then almost simultaneously we said, "But there are also people we don't really miss." Maybe that's another benefit.

It was difficult to me the night we decided to get together with friends on their back patio during COVID.

This is about how far into COVID are we talking?

Probably it was April or May.

All right, even the first couple of months.

First couple of months. We drove across town to their home. It was a Friday night. We sat on the patio and we visited and we had a pleasant time. Then driving home, driving through the Strip on Flamingo and seeing nothing; that was striking, moving, whatever term you'd like to use. It helps bring it home, notwithstanding I didn't think I needed it brought home to me, but it helps bring home how big this is.

In the course of it, I lost a friend to COVID, Felicia Campbell, who was the senior UNLV faculty member and a good friend. I have another good friend who nearly died of it who was exposed by stopping at a diner on a trip, and they weren't going to eat there, but they were going to take it out, and the owner said, "Oh no, stay here and visit," and in

came a group of anti-maskers who gathered around them, making fun of them and yelling at them.

Because they were wearing masks?

Because they were wearing masks and then took them off to eat when they shouldn't have stayed there, as he'd tell you.

Where was that at?

It was somewhere on the road in Arizona. Of course, we had some of that, too.

All of that, I'm going to say, affected me in certain ways. I realized how difficult it is to ration your empathy, but how important it is. I am the type who cries over seeing a dead animal on the street, and I still do and would. But there are certain people on whom I am no longer capable of wasting my empathy, if you will. I got vaccinated as soon as it was possible for me to get vaccinated, as did my wife. Likewise, our families and close friends with an exception or two who I cannot understand and for whom I have no sympathy. Now in emerging, I think we've lost sight of something. If you are vaccinated, if you have Moderna or Pfizer because those are the better ones, I guess, because the Johnson and Johnson has less effectiveness, you have 90 to 95 percent protection, which is essentially a flu shot. I can go out and about without a mask. The person who is not going to get vaccinated is the one that can't, but that's also the person who will now go out.

I did not go to the gym for more than a year and became conscious of it one day when I came to my office, which is on the third floor of Wright Hall, and went up the steps at the normal clip I would go, and somewhere around the second floor thought that death was imminent, so I knew my cardio was affected. I'm not a lover of the gym. There

is an old story about Phil Graham, who published *The Washington Post*, claiming he formed a group called Athletics Anonymous. He said, "When one of the members gets the urge to exercise, you call and somebody comes over with bottle and gets you drunk." That's really my inclination. But I wanted to get back there.

Well, I'm still wearing mask in there. I wear a mask if I go to the market. We were among the many people who had the Instacart deal and had someone shop for us. We did not go out to these things. We'd go for walks, but we did not go out. As I look back on it, I regret that we didn't say, "Well, let's go to Mount Charleston; let's go to this park or that park." Instead we pretty much hunkered down in the house, which I think a lot of people did, probably for the best overall.

But it was a difficult time and I have great sympathy, empathy for kids in particular who lost part of a school year that they can get back, in my opinion, but lost some of the socialization that I think is so important. In that, I saw a bit of mirror of myself. I referred to this. I was skipped out of first grade, and on an intellectual level it was the right move; on an emotional level, I don't know to this day. I did not, I think, learn the social skills I should have learned in school. I've known people from high school to say, "Oh, you didn't miss a thing," but I may have. Some people are going to have to re-acclimate.

I'll liken it to this, and it may seem a little racy. When I was twenty-eight, so this was 1993, there was a family across the street from us, the Hepworths. One of the daughters, with the whole family moving back to Iowa, used a kind of in-vitro fertilization to have a baby, and then did it again. As the doctors put it, something

happened that wasn't supposed to. She rolled seven, the McCaughey septuplets as they're known.

Well, the youngest of the Hepworths across the street, Dennis, was then about, oh, six, seven years old. Ours was the first place Dennis go to go to alone crossing the street. We babysit him and he was fun in certain ways. But one time he went back home, and my father said, "You know, we spoiled you, but you spoiled us." Because I was a little blob who sat in the corner; he didn't need to worry about me.

Anyway, Dennis came over. I sat him on my knee. I read him a story. The next morning his mother called and said, "Dennis has come down with the chicken pox. You all have it, right?" Wrong.

Now, at that time I had a good friend who was having trouble with his roommate, and so he was pretty much living with us except at night when he'd go home late enough that he could avoid his roommate. I had gone to bed late, and in the morning about two weeks after bouncing Dennis on my knee, I turned over in bed and when one arm hit the other arm, it didn't land flush. Well, my parents did a count, still at home, and they counted two hundred forty-eight, and they missed two where I didn't let them look. I had about three weeks of this until it all went away. I had a full beard for the first time in my life, and I will never have another one. That may have caused more itching than the chicken pox. My dear friend Gary Elliott said, "All you need are the little things on the side by your ears, and we'd call you Rabbi Green."

However, once I was able to reemerge into public, I realized when I had an itch, I'd scratch it, and it often didn't matter where the itch was and that's the point. We might

have lost some social skills in this, but in a way that may be a good thing. We may be a little more open about things, I hope.

That's a fresh way of looking at it.

It's a different way to look at it, I like to say. But only when you've been twenty-eight and had the chicken pox do you look at it that way.

That's old, yes.

It was old. When I was a kid, I was out playing with two neighborhood kids one day, Melvin and Tina. The next morning one mother called and said they had the chicken pox, and thirty minutes later the other one called and said they had the measles, and I didn't get either one. My mother asked our pediatrician, Dr. Lund, at the old hospital at Eighth and Ogden, and he said, "Well, maybe the germs killed each other off." Which is maybe why I didn't get either. That's why I also tell students when class begins, "I want you all vaccinated." I was saying that before I really felt this strongly. I said, "I don't need your little mumps or mumpettes, either."

You talked about the protocols where all of us are suddenly needing masks and hand sanitizer and all of that. Did you have trouble locating any of these needs?

In our house Deborah is a marvelous quilter, so she made masks, not a ton of them, but she made enough for us to function. She used good fabric, not the KN-95 or the various medical ones. We ultimately have gotten those. But we had masks and we washed them and we tried to follow those rules.

Hand sanitizer we had no trouble getting. The Mob Museum, which I'm associated with, has a distillery and converted it to make hand sanitizer. I didn't actually need it, but I thought, well, this is helping. We didn't have that problem.

It was funny that we couldn't have Trader Joe's because they didn't use Instacart. I can name many a person who probably had terrible symptoms of withdrawal for not being able to go to Trader Joe's.

When was the first time you actually entered a grocery store, then?

Oh my. Probably late in the year. I didn't mark the date, but late in the year I did. To this day when I go to Sprouts, which is the one nearest our house, I wear the mask. For a while I was wearing two masks; that was one of the protocols at one point, or one of the suggestions. I wore gloves, which saved a little wear and tear on my hands, when I was out and goes to one of my conspiracy theories that Dr. Fauci may have owned stock in a hand lotion company and he's part of the plot here if there is a conspiracy theory. But, yes, I should have marked the day that I said, "Okay, we're going to the store." Deb actually was more willing to go to a store than I was. She went to Trader Joe's sooner, for example, and she has a booth in an antique mall and would go person the booth. She would wear her mask, and the place required everyone to wear masks at a time when it was a bit debated.

It may be in my case that I suffer easily from guilt, which certainly must have something to do with my Jewish background. But as an example, I could have taught on campus except that I would have been responsible for sanitizing the classroom, and I don't think I could have stood it if one of my students had gotten sick. My thought would have been, oh, I didn't sanitize it correctly. Maybe that is just having too tender a conscious, I don't know.

How did you transition from in-person, normal classroom setting to what the needs were in March?

Of course, everyone in education essentially spun on a dime. I was lucky that I was teaching one class, just one class. I am the executive director of an organization, the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association. It is the only branch of the AHA. The AHA is the historian's equivalent of the American Medical Association or the American Dental Association. One of my compensations, since I don't get money for it, is a course release. I was teaching the one course, which made it much easier. In the fall I was teaching the seminar where students wrote the papers from the ideas they had gotten to write in the colloquium I taught in the spring and an honors U.S. survey. We were asked whether we wanted to offer those in person. I don't think at the time they had decided to offer everything online, but they ultimately did. Do it synchronous or asynchronous, to use their term? I decided I really didn't want to make them sit down at the computer Tuesday and Thursday morning at eight thirty and do this, and I think I was conscious that they have other problems. Whatever adjustments I had to make, they also had to make. I did it online in its entirety.

I had taught online at the community college. In fact, that was a true blessing in a couple of ways. At the community college, teaching online meant I did not have to teach five classes on campus, and it gave me more free time, not because I didn't work hard at the online courses, but because I could deal with those at the time that worked best for me. It didn't happen, I would not normally do this, but if I couldn't sleep at three a.m., I could go in there and work on my course. I can't do that with an on-campus course. That part was a blessing. Also that was a blessing in a sense that I pretty well knew what to do to offer an online course. It was less difficult for me, I think, than it was for a lot of other faculty, not because of any particular talent, but just the experience I had had.

I regret it because I was teaching a graduate course where I think personal contact is of the most importance ultimately, at least at the university. It worked out. I think the students did well.

Did they complain or express difficulty?

They really did not to me, and it's partly that I am inclined to cut them a lot of slack. As an example, one of my students' mother was dying, not of COVID, but then she had to deal with COVID and her kids being at home on top of her mother dying. "Oh, you can't turn in that report on time? That's all right." I think that is my job in that case to be accommodating.

They made clear they would have liked to have been in person, but they really didn't have a choice in the matter, nor did I, nor should we have. We should not have been meeting in person.

I did float the idea of meeting outside. If I understand it correctly, there were concerns about liability at that point.

How many students were there?

In that class there were nine, so it wouldn't have been a big deal. But over the years I've thought at time, wouldn't it be fun if I had a lecture class? Just take them out to the amphitheater, sit them out there, and we'll spend the day outside if it's really nice. Now with PowerPoints, it's a little harder.

The students I encountered, who are admittedly advanced students because they were either graduate students or honors students, were understanding and accommodating. At the same time, I had an honor student who referred to difficulties at home made worse by the pandemic that from the way she described it, probably involved

domestic violence. She was a bit opaque. But I saw that, remunerated for a few minutes, and then emailed the associate dean of honors who said, "No, we need to report this." That student withdrew and, of course, I could not violate her privacy or confidentiality even by asking her what happened. I'll always puzzle over that, but I had to do it and I think I did the right thing. But I have no doubt that overall COVID made those things worse.

I feel lucky our house is about twenty-three hundred square feet. I have my own room, so to speak. Deb has her sewing room. We didn't have to be on top of one another. I think of people in New York City in a studio apartment or wherever, or even out here in a studio apartment, and even if you really like one another, it's a bit much. That is something we really have to reckon with as a society, I think, that there is a tendency to think one size fits all.

What was the biggest personal obstacle you had?

I think it was probably just the desire to be out and be among other people. While those Zoom conversations help, they don't entirely fix the problem.

What did you learn about yourself through this whole past year or so?

I think I learned I may be a little more resilient than I thought, honestly. I did, as I say, obsessed to a degree over making sure I didn't get this. I don't want to get this, which reminded me that I should be a little less neurotic about certain health issues, but it also reminded me of the value of being neurotic about certain health issues, which I think was good.

Certainly our marriage did not suffer. There are some marriages that suffered; some that did not. Ours didn't suffer. I don't know what it was supposed to do to

improve. I think we have a very happy marriage. But I think we both realized we can be in the same house all day together.

You still like each other.

It's fine. Yes. There's an old line that is usually attributed to the wife based on society some time ago where the wife would say, "I married you for better or worse, but not for lunch." I can laugh a little and say Deb did all the cooking except when we ordered out. I grill a bit, not on the outdoor grill, though. She does the barbequing. I do the indoor grill. I, in my opinion, do very good salmon and chicken. But she did all the cooking, which I say is attributable to the infamous experiments involving cinnamon chicken—I was trying something different—and the time I tried to grill calamari steaks, which just doesn't work, but that was before COVID. I do the dishes, so I feel that I do my part. But I was saying that Deb did not want to risk letting me control the kitchen.

I ate healthier, which was better for me. I lost twelve pounds, and I have fought a lifelong battle of the bulge. I unfortunately gained back seven as we began to reemerge and I have more access to the chocolate I like to eat.

It's interesting because a lot of people…because they didn't exercise as much.

Right. I found that is something that is different for me. I started going to the gym around '08 when I woke up one morning with horrible back pain. I called the doctor and she immediately sent me to a physical therapist, because she asked if there were any other symptoms and there weren't. He asked me to walk across the floor, and he got bug-eyed when I did. He told me to take my shoes off first. I said, "Have you ever seen flatter feet?" And he said, "I have, but not often." He said, "You're going to do two things. You're going to get inserts that are specially made, and you're going to go to the gym and

get on the treadmill." I said, "Well, we have an exercise bicycle, a recumbent bike that I use occasionally. It was functional more as a coatrack. He said, "No, wrong muscles." I was conscious that I was not on the treadmill doing about…generally I would do easily a mile and a half on the treadmill, two miles on an incline. I mentioned the cardio. But that meant that I tried to walk a bit more. I was swimming more during the season. Something as ridiculous as saying, "All right, I'm just going to keep working across the house as often as possible," that helped, and eating healthier. But it was beneficial in the sense that now I know I can lose the weight, so I'm going to.

This is a little thing, but I think it relates to a problem a lot of people had in COVID where you do get on one another's nerves. In my case it was not a person, it was the cats. Since I presume this is going into both my oral history and COVID, this bears explanation. I have had two dogs in my life, one when I was a little kid, the other I was a teenager, and adored them and loved dogs. But then I was away for graduate school and then came back and was moving around a bit doing research, then my mother got sick and my dad, I don't think, wanted another dog, and so I didn't get another pet. I didn't feel that big a loss, but there it was. When I met Deb, Deb was recently divorced and they had had a dog and two cats, and because she let him have the house, he kept the dog and she took the cats. I had never encountered cats on a regular basis, and I thought, well, what happens if I don't get along with them? If I say, "They go or I go," the chances are I go. I developed a great love for these cats, neither of whom really loved me. One of them didn't love anybody but Deb, and the other, truthfully, was too stupid to know who anybody was. It's strange to say that of cats who are associated with intelligence, but Maddie was possibly the single-dumbest creature ever. Cleo was an evil genius. I will

underscore the point. I once asked the general manager of the NPR station here why they always played the "1812 Overture" at two in the morning. Because Cleo figured out how to put on the clock radio and she would put it on if she wanted to be fed during the night, and it always seemed to me cannons were going off when KNPR came on, so I thought it must be the "1812 Overture."

They died. Both lived to be sixteen. Cleo was older. When Cleo died Deb said, "We need a succession plan," and we got a brother and sister, Kirby and Abigail. Mainly because Deb was still working full-time and I was working from home, they became my cats in a lot of ways. To relieve Deb of certain burdens, I tend to the litter and all that good stuff. Kirby is a puppy at heart who follows me around the house.

A shadow cat.

He's a shadow cat. Abigail is a duchess; she really isn't that interested. She wants you to scratch her stomach when she wants you to scratch her stomach. They would come into my office and fight over the lone basket, so Deb got a second basket. They just fight over who gets the one they want to be in at the time. True brother and sister. Both of them like to walk across the keyboard and get your attention, et cetera, and it really was getting to me early in the pandemic. I yelled at them a bit. I have a temper and I am not by nature incredibly patient. Deb pointed out that Kirby actually seemed depressed because I was yelling at him. It reminded me to be more careful with my temper, which I had already learned but needed reinforcement. That's another influence of the pandemic, I think, telling me that there are certain things you have to accept a little more and not get quite so upset about it.

Nothing wrong with that.

No. Yet, I would say I am probably too patient with a lot of students. I think there are students who would tell you that. Psychologically speaking it may be that because I am so patient on the one side, I lose patience more easily on the other. I certainly have no patience with inanimate objects. If the car doesn't run right…

You're not going to throw anything, are you?

I'm not going to throw anything, but I may kick the car. I did once actually fix the car by kicking it, honestly. Something was a little out of whack and I kicked it in the right spot and it was better. That's the one time my temper paid off.

Talking about patience, during the pandemic one of the topics that we all seem to do is consume more news. Would that be true of you and Deb?

We did in terms of news about the pandemic, but we were careful about this. I have gotten more careful over the years with discussing my politics in class. But, frankly, the 2016 election changed a lot of the ways I think of this country and its history. In my case it changed it for the better because it made me more aware. I referred to lacking empathy or having empathy that I have to ration, and this is now especially true of Trump supporters and Republicans who go along. We would watch MSNBC, the liberal, I say in quotation marks because it's far less liberal than people think. But we could not watch the news and see Trump; we just could not and we quit watching. At the same time, I get *The New York Times* daily, I check a lot of websites, so we kept up and we would see various items here and there. We were avid consumers of news about the pandemic where possible within the limit of not having to listen to or look at certain people.

This also reminded me anew of a line my graduate advisor had about history where he said: "We're similar to science in that we have a theory, we go into the

archives; that's our lab, and we look for the information to see if our theory is correct; and if it isn't, then that's how we have to address it."

Well, a lot of people expected scientists to have all of the answers immediately. Maybe it's our training, maybe it's that we're reasonably intelligent or have respect for learning, we realized, no, we're not going to know the answers right away. It has made me angry, and I don't think that's understating it or overstating it, when people now are saying, "Well, the CDC should have done this. (Dr. Anthony) Fauci and company should have said that." They didn't know and couldn't know.

Deb and I have a close friend in Southern California who is a retired pathologist from USC's Children's Hospital who worked with Fauci at one point in his career. He said, "He is as smart as you think. In fact, he's smarter." But he had told he thought we would have successful treatments before we had a successful vaccine. In fact, we have been more successful with the vaccine than with the treatment. Notwithstanding that from being a news consumer I know, Donald Trump was treated with something that some people have gotten that has helped them a lot, and it probably saved his life. But the vaccines have been incredibly successful incredibly fast. I bow to scientists, anyway, and I say as a baseball fan that my Dodgers are paying outlandish money to people like Clayton Kershaw and Mookie Betts when the people who should be getting the money are the scientists, but I think they're intelligent enough to realize it, too.

It may have also given me an increased respect for the scientific community, which at times I have felt some disrespect for, and still do, on the grounds that some scientists don't seem to understand that the humanities are helpful to them.

There is some balance there that we need to encourage.

Well, it's interesting. Deb every Christmas and birthday gets me what we call "bathroom reading." I think it's a good term. Books you then give away. They're just fun reading. She got me a book by Alan Alda, who is one of my favorites and I loved *M*A*S*H.* growing up, I still love *M*A*S*H*. He founded a center for scientific communication because he said, "Scientists are terrible at communicating," and that is what brought home to me in all of this. I think of the jokes about Barrack Obama's anger translator. In a sense, we need scientific translators. I think Fauci, as an example, is really pretty good, but there are others where they are talking and your eyes glaze over if you're not in the field, which is not a problem unique in academics to scientists, I assure you.

Most of your news was through MSNBC and the newspapers?

MSNBC, no, not during most of it. We started watching again after Biden won. We could stand it if Trump wasn't on TV all the time. And by the way, I would add parenthetically I was in graduate school in New York City '88 to '92, at the time of the Central Park jogger; Trump was around and about.

Horrible, yes.

He is an evil, awful excuse for a human being, and I concluded that then, but I certainly do not need that exposure. We didn't watch CCN, MSNBC and all that. I trust *The Times* on everything but political coverage, websites for other newspapers—*The Washington Post*, *L.A. Times*. I check the local papers, of course. That and what people share on Facebook if you edit yourself is not so bad, and so trying to keep track in that way. I would check the CDC website. Is there a change in the protocols? Or if there was some item I saw, "Oh, they've changed this," and I'll look there; I think I'll go to the source.

It's the historian in me. Reading a speech by Lincoln is probably better than reading a historian's summary of it, and I think there's something to that.

You're pleased with how your process worked on that, I'm sure.

It seemed to work all right, I think and hope. And if we were overcautious, so much the better.

When did your father pass away in this? Was COVID already…? I can't remember.

It was starting, but he didn't have it.

It didn't affect you staying in touch with him?

It didn't affect us at all. He was in Kindred Hospital on Flamingo, but, no, there were no closures yet. This was in January of 2020, so there was no issue there. We were getting the house cleaned up and repaired to sell during COVID, which could have led to some adventures, I suppose. We have a yard guy who will do any kind of work, and if he can't do it, he has a guy. Santiago brought in the crew that worked on the house, and so we'd go over there. Okay, we all wear masks and observe our protocols. Are they really observing them? Well, I'm not sure. But my attitude was "I am wearing my mask and I am not touching anything, getting my hands dirty, so okay." We did have to deal with that. Of course, our Realtors had to deal with the fact that they could not show the home in the usual way, which was fine and we still got the asking price and it sold within two weeks, which is incredible.

You moved during COVID.

Well, my father's stuff moved. I have heard people refer to how you might languish during COVID; ennui might be another word. There is stuff from my father that I really have not gone through closely. I've sort of leaved through the photos; they're in a box.

How much of that is COVID and how much of that is whatever stage of grief it might be, I don't know.

There is also the factor that for some reason I am overcommitted. Part of the reason is that I think I am the historical profession's version of Ado Annie in *Oklahoma!* And she was known as the girl who just can't say *no*. But I have said *no* to things. But there are things that I have to do and that takes time. Then if I am working online and I want to take a break—*oh, isn't that interesting; I think I'll click on that and look at that story in this publication*, or whatever—there are other things to divert you. But there are things I resolve to do and get back to. We have a historian for that side of the family, and she is interested in the photos, and I don't have kids. The photos will logically go to her grandkids and on and on. If there are photos of value to Las Vegas history that's another matter, but most of it is, say, my father serving in the army in Germany in the mid-fifties or something like that, not necessarily of interest here.

I do wonder if COVID had something to do with that and if I have actually languished a bit. Part of that also may be a line I read from Justice Brandeis, who is a hero of mine, and should be. But he once said, "I can do twelve months' worth of work in eleven months, but I cannot do it in twelve." One month a year he got completely away. I've never done that. Even the one time we traveled to Europe, I was teaching online. If a computer was available, I sat down and checked. I probably need to do that, but then I don't see where I have the time.

Now, another benefit for us in dealing with COVID is that we have a condo in Pasadena. This may make me sound like the overpaid college professor, so I want to explain this. My wife, Deb, moved here in 1990 with her then husband. They got married

shortly after moving here. She had lived in San Francisco and had been buying an apartment and she kept it and rented it out. In 2008, I had a one-month fellowship at the Huntington Library and stayed at a Presbyterian retirement community that rented out extra rooms. We had friends in the vicinity, and Deb came down for part of it, and we saw them together and I saw them separately. We thought about it. We did what's called a 1031 exchange. She sold the San Francisco place and we bought a condo in Pasadena. The logic in San Francisco was it was a 1905 building, meaning it survived two big ones. Would it survive a third? We don't know. There were going to be expenses we didn't want to deal with. It's a four-story walkup. Were we going to retire there? No. Limited parking. It sold to a young doctor, her first place, perfect for her. Pasadena place we got and it's two miles from the Huntington Library, so we rent it to Huntington readers for nine months at a time. It's been very nice and we've met some interesting people. There are a couple we didn't meet. They came, they stayed, they left. If they leave for the holidays, we've worked it out at times where we've come down for the New Year. It's fun. We're two blocks from Rose Parade. Well, we were able to go there a few times during COVID.

Oh. Nice break.

We were able to go early because our tenant left two months early because the Huntington closed, which also meant some financial stringency, or there could have been, because we were going to bill him for the rent anyway in that case. Our next renter cancelled and we thought, well, we're going to eat a lot of money. There goes part of the inheritance, if you will. Ten minutes later we got an email from two Caltech students who wanted to live off campus, so that all worked out.

But being able to go down there was a good break. In addition, our friends there would have get-togethers in the backyard, physically distanced. Something that a lot of people, I think, don't really realize about dealing with COVID in Las Vegas is that in a lot of places it got better in the summer because you could go outside. You can't go outside here in the summer unless you do it at two a.m. and even then it's pushing it. To be able to be outside there was a nice change, so that helped us psychologically, I think.

Oh, for sure. Did you do more binge watching of TV shows or movies or anything like that?

Deb and I discussed the fact that we are the most boring couple.

I doubt that.

In the history of couples. We don't binge watch. We have Amazon Prime and, in fact, there are some things we watch on there, but we often don't. For me, one of the blessings during COVID was that they finally reached a deal to carry my Dodgers out here. I could watch my Dodgers. Deb could watch her Giants. We watched a lot more baseball. When baseball wasn't being played, the Dodger station was showing old games, some from my childhood and some from before, which I reveled in. There were other programming they did that was related. We didn't feel the compulsion to say, "All right, we are now going to sit down there and we are going to watch *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* even if we don't think it's that good." That's where we are unusual; we weren't enthralled with it. There were a few things we would watch. We tend to favor mystery shows from overseas; I'll include Australia because Phryne Fisher is an idol of ours, and a couple of other shows, but mostly British shows, and we did watch some of those. We did not binge watch and we are not movie-goers all that much, occasionally. But we didn't feel left out there.

I do regret that I didn't do more reading.

I was just going to ask, did you do more reading?

The additional reading I did was mostly work-related, though I sat down with some other things that I had worked on. But most of my reading is for work. This takes me to Gene Moehring. Gene was the only emeritus faculty member we had at that time who was not teaching or writing. One of them, Colin Loader, continued teaching his History 100. Tom Ryan and Andy Fry have office space and they're publishing books. Sue Fawn Chung doesn't have office space; she's publishing a book. Gene told a friend who told me one time, "To me reading history books is work." And it had never quite been put that way before, but it crystalized it for me. There are many history books I enjoy, but I am reading it for a purpose. I didn't really feel like going back through and rereading the Nero Wolfe mysteries again, though I'm due to do that again soon. I did actually read a couple during this. Gene's comment was, "When you retire you're supposed to do something different. You have retired from your job. Now you do something else." A few months into his retirement we had lunch and I said, "So, what are you doing that's different?" He said, "A lot more vacuuming." Christine put him to work. We also did extra cleaning; that's something else we did. We have a woman who has been cleaning for Deb for thirty years. For about three months, Rosa was not coming. Plus, even when she wasn't there, the thought at the time was that you get it off of surfaces, so we were regularly cleaning things. Now we know that surfaces are not the main transmitter. But we put more effort in, I'll say that.

Houses were never cleaner.

No, no, we're never going to achieve this again.

Do you think about the future? What have we learned, we as a society? I don't know if we could localize it for Las Vegas, or make it bigger.

It's difficult because…I'll play the historian. In 1918 and '19, we had this horrible flu pandemic that the government didn't actually handle well. What was the country's response? Shortly thereafter, they elected a new administration that wanted even less regulation. In some ways it's miraculous that Americans voted for a bigger government candidate in 2020. It should have taught us—what the whole COVID experience should have taught us is something more about caring for one another, the idea that you are wearing your mask for yourself but for others. It should have taught us that government has a role to play. Even if you are not a fan of government, there are certain things government has to do that private enterprise cannot. Unfortunately I think the people who were disinclined to feel that way, write off the whole thing, and the people, like me, who weren't inclined to feel that way just feel it more strongly. It may have polarized us more, and that's scary. It should have led to us saying, "Wow, we have found easier, better ways to cast our ballots," because so many places did mail-in, and instead we have these dolts—I don't know that I can say it strongly enough—who think that led to more fraud.

I worry that we have taken the wrong lessons. But after September 11th, 2001, there were a lot of people who said, "We're going to cherish our families more." Actually, divorces increased. One of the reasons was—and I think this is related to COVID, too—people got a greater sense of the fragility of life and thought, I am not going to do something that makes me unhappy; I am going to get out and do what I want to do, which can be good on some levels and bad on others. It's not because of COVID, but in a way it is, that we are talking on the anniversary of George Floyd, and would there

have been the kinds of results, advancements, benefits that have improved policing; that have made us more aware of social ills if not for COVID? I don't think so because people were at home watching.

I think you're right. I really do. I think that's significant, yes.

Yes. But part of the problem goes to the allegedly apocryphal story of Henry Kissinger talking with Zhou Enlai in planning Nixon's trip to China. Kissinger was a historian. His first book actually dealt with Metternich and other European leaders of the early nineteenth century. Zhou Enlai was an incredibly well-read and intelligent man. They got into a discussion of the French Revolution. Now, the question is whether it was the French Revolution of 1789 or the Paris one of 1968 when there was an uprising in the streets. But Kissinger supposedly said, "What do you make of the French Revolution?" And Zhou Enlai said, "Well, we have to wait and see how it comes out." Now, it is better for my profession if he meant 1789. Even if he didn't, he was right. We have a great experiment in the United States, or so we think of it, and I think it's correct to think of it as a great experiment. You can say it began in 1776 or you can pick another date, but it has been constantly evolving and devolving. The arch does not always bend the way Dr. King said it would, and that means we may not know for sure for a long time.

I'm reminded of one of Deb's cousins who is very conservative politically, and her husband who is a little less conservative. He and I were talking at a family gathering for Christmas in 2016. Note the time. He said, "Now, set aside politics. Isn't this a great time to be a historian?" And I said, "No. I want to be here in fifty years to know how it all came out." And I would be about a hundred at the time, and so it's possible, I suppose, now, though doubtful. But, hmm, that's part of the problem.

We can try to analyze the meaning of COVID. Some of the meanings are not going to be known for a long time, including the people who say, "Well, how do we know the long-term effects of vaccines?" I heard a very bright epidemiologist say, "Well, I can tell you that a year after we tested them, nobody is having side effects, and every vaccine in the past that did not have long-term side effects was that way after a year." I am feeling good about my Dolly shot, as we call Moderna. Maybe we have learned that science can do incredible things if they all work together, as they did, and that can be beneficial. Then we think of the things they could produce and get a little worried, which is why I say nothing like a good history class to teach you of ethical issues of the past.

Do you think there will be classes taught that revolve around this past year?

Oh, absolutely there will be COVID-based classes.

If you taught a class like that what would you want to put in that curriculum?

I would try to make it as broad as possible in the sense that we would look at other pandemics to get a basis for comparison. We would look at the politics of it. We would look at the cultural differences. Zoom is part of it. But you had asked me about binge watching. I think binge watching increased substantially during this. I don't know the numbers. But to attempt to figure that out, I think we have to look at the social differences—racial class, religion. There are religious groups that have insisted they had to meet in person. There are religious groups that realized if you believe in God, you really don't need to go to the place. There would be so many different things to talk about that would then take in more history. For example, if I wanted to look at politics, I'd say, "Isn't it interesting that Woodrow Wilson and Donald Trump both messed up the response?" Now, why? And Wilson had his reasons and Trump had his. We can go back

to George Washington, who pretty much was ready to shoot any member of his army who did not get vaccinated with whatever rudimentary stuff they had at the time, and he was dealing with small pox and other outbreaks. I think it would compare with others through history.

There is a genre in history, if you will, of looking at a year. There will be a book on 1919.

There's that book, I read it ironically right before COVID, *The Great Influenza [by John Barry, 2004]*.

Yes. But even then, they will literally say, "All right, we're going from January first to December thirty-first."

Okay, got you. Calendar year.

Yes. Or they will pick something like the Great Influenza or COVID. We are going to see a lot of histories of this period. It will be interesting to see who is writing them because who writes it has a lot to do with how it comes out, and that sounds awfully obvious. But I had a student cite a book on the Great Society by someone who thinks the Great Society was completely wrong and I think is incorrect historically on numerous levels. But the student was not looking at the book to reach a conclusion about the Great Society, but because it happened to have a lot of statistics. Well, which perspective you come at it from…medical historians are going to address it differently than social or political historians. I think there will be a lot of interesting literature coming out of this. I use the term *literature* broadly. In the history trade, oh, what is the literature of the history? But we're going to get fictional versions that are barely fictional.

This is your challenge, is to make sure these young students, these young minds know how to look for facts.

It's a continuing problem, and not simply because people claim we're in an era of disinformation. I have several uphill battles. One of them is to get people to understand that you italicize *the* in the name of a newspaper or magazine if it is italicized on the masthead. It is *The New York Times*. No copy editor agrees with me, but they're wrong. I will not tolerate impact as a verb in anything my students write. My first dissertation student tried to sneak one by. She said she wanted to see how closely I was reading. I was reading closely.

But one of the uphill battles is convincing people that the disinformation we encounter now is not new, but there simply are more outlets for it. It goes back to an old historical line. Every president, I don't care about their party, thinks he's the most-criticized president. Trump sat there saying he was the most criticized; Obama did. Well, Eric Foner was my advisor and he wrote a history of reconstruction. He's at Oxford when Bill Clinton comes there. When they're introduced, Clinton said, as only Clinton could, "You said Andrew Johnson was the most-hated president in American history. I am." Or words to that affect. My comment on that is Clinton and Obama encountered Sean Hannity; Abraham Lincoln, who is the most criticized according to most historians, didn't. I pointed that out and a student said, "Well, doesn't that mean that Lincoln also didn't have to deal with MSNBC like George W. Bush and Donald Trump does?" And I said, "Yes, you're right." There is more. But if you look at newspapers of the nineteenth century, the disinformation is incredible. What they're saying is probably worse than

what we're seeing now, but there's so much more it now it's inescapable, and more people are inclined to look at their phone and say—

Right, the access is perpetual now.

If it's on Twitter, it must be true or it must be false. If it's on Facebook, it must be true or it must be false. But that problem is still age-old, so we will always be Sisyphus, pushing the rock up.

I will mention something else about the pandemic that occurred to me by checking my watch. When I graduated with my PhD in 2000, I have a distant cousin I've never met. He's not that distant; he is my father's generation. But he lives in Georgia. His name is Harry. Cousin Harry sent me a present. Harry is the wealthy cousin, so he could afford to send me a present. It was a large wristwatch that Deb never liked. But Harry sent it to me, I've got to wear it. When the pandemic began I quit wearing a watch. When we started going out again, I wouldn't put it on. I said, "Until the pandemic is over, I am not doing this." It turned out the battery died and I didn't know it for about two months; I didn't look. For Christmas Deb got me an Apple watch. I said, "I'm not wearing it until I think the pandemic is over." Well, it's over. We're emerging. It's not completely over, but it's over for me.

Because you're wearing it today, just to note.

I'm wearing it today. That's my note. Now, that may be another thing about me that I have no patience for technology. We recently got a new cabinet to put the TV on, and there were so many cords going in and out, we couldn't do it and had to call DirecTV to come out and get the thing plugged in. My response to that is, "They don't need that

many." It isn't whether we need it; they don't. But it's there to complicate things. The Apple watch can allegedly do a bunch of things, and I don't want to know.

Our relationship with time really was altered, don't you believe, in these past months?

That's what I guess I'm coming to. My relationship with it was altered in the sense that I still went to bed when I went to bed normally and got up about the same time, but I was leading my life differently. I wasn't going out. I wasn't going to teach. This past semester I taught a class on Zoom. Each Tuesday at two thirty I'm plopped in front with the students, and that's fine. But it did affect whether it's the time we spend or whether we pay attention to what time it actually is.

I will note one other thing about teaching that I found interesting using Zoom, and this is personal to me, but I think there is applicability. My best friend from graduate school was teaching in Florida and he was teaching a graduate course, but he started doing this before. He would Skype in the author of a book; if he knew the author, get a hold of that author to come in. With Zoom I thought, yes. We were going to do it with Skype in my colloquium in the classroom and instead we do it with Zoom. I used one of Eric Foner's books. Foner came in on Zoom. Heather Richardson, who is a prominent historian and a dear friend, she did it. I just taught this course on the history of modern Las Vegas, and I used six books. All six authors came in on Zoom.

And you might not have otherwise done that.

And otherwise I might not have. And we had other people where most of them probably would have come to the class anyway, and I knew all of them anyway. But it occurs to me I found it so much easier to deal with a guest in my classroom on Zoom than I ever

did in the classroom where, oh, Senator Bryan is coming; I need to make sure he's got parking; I need to give him the right directions because he isn't always on campus. "Senator, you know how to use Zoom?" "Oh yes, I'm great at Zoom." Okay.

Is this something you might continue going forward?

Going forward I was going to start using Skype—we'll call it Zoom for these purposes—but to find ways to do that. Now, if the person is willing to be there, that's fine, but it also means just as we could have a drink with our friends Back East, I think educators have some opportunities here, and I hope we take advantage of it.

What other things in our world are going to change because of the habits that we made in the past year?

What habits, I don't know that it will do this, but there will be fewer people in the office full time. I can remember the president of the community college when I was hired had been at Santa Monica College and once caused a bit of a scandal when he and the other administrators decided that one day a week they wouldn't come into the office. The idea was they were going to go think great thoughts. One of them said, "Yes, I go to the beach and I sit there and I ponder." To which critics said, I think with some justification, "That's not what we're paying you for." At the same time, it can help to be away.

I have traditionally worked at home and I don't spend a lot of time in the office, and I intend that to continue, but I think there are other people who feel that way. I think there are other people, though, who will want even more to be at work. I think we're going to see it go both ways. The people who were locked in together without much space…I have a colleague here, his wife had their first child. He can't work at home with a child there, but, at the same time, he never did work at home, or he did as little as

possible. He'd come to the office. He came to the office throughout the pandemic. He can come in, he's alone in his office, he's fine. But I think we will have more people changing their work habits one way or the other. In the immediate aftermath I expect a lot more interest in going to events and being in places whether it's the movie theater or the baseball stadium or wherever else, just the desire to get out again. Again, Las Vegas may be a little different because we're opening up, supposedly, one hundred percent on June first. One hundred would be the operative number. It will probably be about a hundred degrees. Will we want to do the outdoor things? Maybe not. But I'm on the board of the Mob Museum, and when some of these restrictions were lifted, it was like night and day suddenly where all of a sudden there are a lot more people coming in, and we're going to see more of that, I think.

Now, the Mob Museum never fully closed, did it?

It did. They did have to close down. It was not financially workable.

As a member of the board, were you part of that decision-making?

We defer to the CEO and the staff on this, though we were told what was going on. We got one of the PPP loans, which was good, so people were covered, and there were furloughs and people took pay cuts who could afford to take them. But we tried to keep people on staff on their insurance, and I think did a decent job of it. I think a lot of businesses tried. That's another change we're going to see: There are businesses that are not going to reopen; they already are not reopening. I wonder about the restaurant trade.

I was just going to ask, have you gone out to eat?

We've gone out to eat, and this is my oddball pandemic story, how it ended for us. One day in early March, actually March fourth, I can tell you—

Of 2021.

Of 2021. My best friend in the history department, one of my best friends in the world, David Tanenhaus emailed and he said he had heard from one of his graduate students who had heard from a library employee that was a friend that Boulder City was inoculating educators. They said, "If you're an educator, come on out." Wow. We called out there and they said, "Yes, it's at the Smith Rec Center," which is a building with quite a history. I have a little connection to it. It used to be the community college building there. "Okay, can we make an appointment?" "Yes, can you be here at two thirty?" It was one thirty. I said, "We'll be there." It turned out David and his wife, Ginger, were there at two. We went out there and got our first Moderna shot, visited our friend Sara Denton, who is ninety-six, who was fully vaccinated by then. We just leaned in the door and stayed as far away as we could. But she has lived in Boulder City since 1959. Both of our mothers are gone. She is as close as it gets.

Got you.

Four weeks later we go back. This is why I have a sign that I had given my mother originally because she believed this, saying, "Murphy is an optimist." I get a phone call on the thirty-first, and I look and it's the Boulder City Parks and Rec Department, which is administering the shots. I said, "Hello." They identify themselves and I thought, oh my god, they're going to cancel. They said, "You're scheduled tomorrow at two thirty." I said, "Yes." "Could you come in in the morning?" It turned out they were trying to get the place close down for the afternoon; there weren't that many. We were able to come in the morning and got it done.

Then we thought, well, we've heard about all the side effects. I had a furlough day, so I took that day and the next day as furlough days. Better to be prepared. That night I'm watching a ballgame and I felt a little warm and took my temperature, which I did about half a dozen times a day throughout the pandemic. I'm neurotic. It showed a hundred-point-three. I thought, wow. We both got mild headaches. By the next day everything was fine.

Deb needs product for her vintage booths, and she has what I call a vintage linen mule. You have a drug mule; she has a linen mule. This is a woman in Santa Barbara who has a three-car garage full of vintage linen that she sells at the Rose Bowl Flea Market in Pasadena. We went to California the weekend of April eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, a week after Moderna. Now, when we did that we had scheduled it already. We were planning this before we knew we'd get the shots. We just figured we will wear masks, we will be careful. We ate out. We ate outside Friday evening in Morro Bay. We ate out inside a restaurant the next morning where essentially every other table was removed. It was nerve-racking, it really was in certain ways. It was a little nerve-racking in the sense we knew we were doing this a week instead of the supposed two weeks. But also from the reading I had done on the shots, I realized there's very little difference; we're being cautious anyway; let's do it.

We actually celebrated our twentieth wedding anniversary, which was January sixth, in early April by spending a night in Morro Bay. But I talked about needing eleven months instead of twelve. We spent nights on either side in Pasadena, with friends there, and in between went to Morro Bay, so I drove about a thousand miles during our four-

day weekend, and people wonder why I didn't feel totally rested. But that was kind of our celebration, a little premature technically.

Your anniversary is January sixth?

Yes.

That's an interesting day this year.

It was interesting in other ways because I had my annual optometry appointment. Now, there is a COVID connection, but I'll get to that. I had my first vision exam when I was fourteen and learned why I couldn't see the board too well in school. We went to our family optometrist, Dr. Dougal Morrison, whose father was a longtime dentist here.

Wait. He's a dentist?

His father was a dentist. He's an optometrist. He was my optometrist for more than thirty-five years. He retired. He had brought in a younger optometrist as a junior partner, sold him the practice, and I go to him. I had the regular exams and all that. I have one of those concierge doctors, and Dr. Metzger does the vision exam. This year I said something like, "I don't need a vision exam."

I go. This was another reason. January sixth, that morning—for some reason I have medical appointments on my wedding anniversary. One year I went to have a mole removed. It's supposed to take about half an hour, just fine. They do all the exams and Dr. Coker came in and said, "I want to run a couple more tests. There's something I don't like." He checked something else and he said, "I'm going to refer you. Let me show you." He showed me and that's technology; he can show me that stuff. The essential of the story is that I'm beginning to develop glaucoma in my left eye. That was January

sixth, and I was in there ninety minutes instead of thirty. When I came out, all of a sudden the world was going crazy.

I saw the specialist January twentieth. Apparently my eyes and presidential transitions are connected. But this is a COVID story. He ran the tests and, yes, I have slight…my pressure is not that bad and I have no problem with vision. My biggest problem is getting the drops into my eyes. But they were doing the peripheral vision test, and there are different ways to do a peripheral vision test. There's the one where you look at the machine and the light goes on and you click. For me, the problem with that is that it goes to the reason I always have said I could never have been successful on *Jeopardy*, lack of eye-hand coordination. Usually I'm good for two extra clicks during that exam. But then they do the other more rudimentary exam, or it would seem rudimentary, where the assistant stands there, holds up a couple of fingers, and says, "How many do you see?" Well, she's on my far-left side, and it's the left eye, and she said, "How many do you see?" I guess she's holding out her fingers. I didn't see her fingers. I thought, oh my god, with my neurosis, it's advanced; it's terrible. Then it hit me. I moved my mask down about an inch, and then I said, "Two." She said, "Right."

Your mask was blocking your vision.

When the specialist came in, I told him this. He didn't laugh. He has laughed at other things I've said. He didn't laugh. He looked at me totally seriously and said, "We are already getting literature on this, how masks from COVID are affecting vision tests."

Oh really.

And you think about it, the masks, where do you wear it? Well, depending on the cut of the mask, it may affect your peripheral vision. I think that it is entirely possible there are people from early in COVID who are wearing glasses they didn't.

That's interesting.

It's possible. But that's my COVID optometry story, or ophthalmology story, more accurately. Yes, it was an exciting January sixth. When we got married in 2001, Mark Denton, the judge, who is Sara and Ralph's son, performed the wedding. He said to me before it, "Is there anything historic I could mention today?" Because I'm a history professor. I said, "Well, Henry the Eighth did unload Catherine Parr, or he married Catherine Parr on January sixth." Mark mentioned that at our wedding. He said, "I think this one will work out better."

Now, January sixth is the anniversary of the day my grandmother died, which was an important event for me. But I also like to point out it's the first date of Earl Scruggs and maybe that's the reason I chose January sixth. It actually was because our first date was January seventh, 2000. I proposed July seventh, 2000. We wanted to get married on the seventh, but it would have been a Sunday and that would have made travel more difficult.

Now I remember it and I'll mention it. It goes to another question you asked. My mother died June seventh, 1998. There is a line in an (Errol Wolfe) story where his best friend is killed and he goes to see the body. He had made a promise that he would take two dinars, the currency of that, and put it on the eyes. Whichever one died first, they do that. Then he looks at the person in the mortuary and says, "Thank you. That's all. I have no commitment to the clay." That's kind of how I feel and how my mother felt. My father

felt differently. It isn't as if every June seventh I went to the cemetery. However, my father would go. I had thought about this and I thought, okay, I'm going to go on June seventh. I totally spaced June seventh. Every July seventh I would do a little something to celebrate proposing to Deb. I totally spaced July seventh and that was COVID. That was the different conception or total loss of conception of time. I realized that not long afterward.

The other big moment was, because I had lost weight, one day I'm doing the dishes and I looked down and realized my wedding band is missing, and I thought it might have gone down the drain. We reached down and there was nothing there. I had already run the garbage disposal. Turned the house over, couldn't find it. The most depressing moments I had during COVID were when I realized I had missed those dates because I didn't realize I had missed June seventh until after July seventh, and the other was losing my wedding band. That was, I think, on a Tuesday. Deb said, "Maybe it was time for us to get new wedding bands." I said, "Deb, that's not the point."

I do the laundry every Sunday. Sunday I put everything in the wash. Split the light and the color, whatever. Then I had a lighter pair of pants that I guess I had worn because I had to go out somewhere. I didn't go out too much. I guess I wore it that night. I'm pulling the stuff out of the washing machine and I hear a clunk in the machine. I put in this pair of pants, and I said to myself, "Could it be?" I look in and there is the ring. What had happened, I put my hands in the pockets of these pants. It has a little change pocket within the pocket, and it slipped into that and I couldn't feel it. Was that COVID related? In a sense it was.

Yes, there was the loss of friends and friends who were ill, but the loss of time or the consciousness of it was another loss.

If you were to choose or think about the word that you used the most to describe the pandemic era, what might that be?

Loss. And whatever games we make. There is good that comes out of a lot of things that are bad.

And loss is L-O-S-S.

L-O-S-S. What I said about realizing we can talk with friends, realizing other things that are important to you. We have all lost essentially at least a year of our lives where there are things we did that are good and useful, but we still lost time. We lost people and we lost people to death, but we also lost people in other ways whether it involved employment or their place in society.

I have to say it. Without the pandemic, Donald Trump would be in his second term. That is truly a net gain of COVID in every imaginable way. Let me memorialize my father. We caucused for Elizabeth Warren, Deb and I did. My dad went to the caucus that day in his neighborhood, and he caucused for Joe Biden. He had said when Biden declared, “He’s the only one who can beat Trump, the only one.” My dad, who was apolitical most of his life, became a total political junkie in his last few years. He said to me early in the Trump campaign, “I have seen this before when I was a kid at the movie theater in newsreels. It’s Mussolini.” He was right about Biden. He was, I think, the only person who could have beaten Trump.

Yes, yes.

I don't know that the loss of around six hundred thousand lives was necessarily worth that, but I also don't think that many lives would have been lost if Donald Trump had not been president. I have no doubt of that. That's something else for historians to consider.

One of the more easily cited numbers in history has been how many people died in the Civil War. Usually the number is somewhere around six hundred twenty thousand. Only in the last decade or so, a historian decided, how do we know? One of the reasons we really don't know is that there were Confederate papers in particular that were lost. He compared censuses, one of our great tools, of course, comparing the 1860 and 1870 censuses for the number of people who had died by 1870 who were in the 1860 census, and then looking at life expectancy and all of that. He has concluded to the satisfaction of just about everybody in the trade that the number of dead was about three-quarters of a million; it was much greater because you would have people who died after the war, perhaps, of wounds related.

Sure. I see what you're saying.

There are people who have taken the anti-argument with COVID that the numbers are inflated; there are people who died where they're citing COVID, but it was not COVID. Frankly, that may be true. There were people who were dying who developed COVID, and you cite COVID though they were going to die anyway of the other ailment. How many people died of COVID who didn't even have COVID? How many will die of an illness that isn't COVID, but because they didn't go to doctors during COVID, something wasn't treated? I'll give you an example.

For my fiftieth birthday, Deb, in 2015, gave me my first real birthday party. I had never really had a birthday party as a kid, didn't want one. But she had over some friends,

including hers. Then I was going to turn fifty-five last year. We couldn't have a party. My birthday is March twenty-seventh. We couldn't do that. She decided to make me a special dinner, which was nice. The night before I was sitting there. We were watching something on television. I felt something in my back and thought, oh no, because I knew what it was. I have had kidney stones, and it was a kidney stone. It was probably the worst one I've ever had. I actually knew when I passed it. I have what is called kidney sand or kidney gravel; it isn't big enough to have that treatment where they blast them. It is basically already blasted, and every now and then a little guy is going to decide to move. I'm good with water and all that. However, COVID was a couple of weeks old; I wasn't drinking as much water. I usually drink two full bottles at the gym. I wasn't going to the gym. I didn't think I needed it. On my birthday I had a kidney stone, and I felt it pass the next day. I felt it go out. It didn't hurt to speak of. It was a little, *ooh*, jumped a little.

But Deb told me afterward, "I thought of taking you to the ER." And I thought, the ER is the worst place to go right now. Well, that was a kidney stone, big deal. How many others were affected? Now, I go to an urologist twice a year. I have my appointment scheduled in December. I had gone in June. They had me go. I wore the mask and all that. In December I called and they said, "We are saying to our patients, if you are not having problems, don't bother." That makes sense. But then I thought to myself, how many people are like me who really don't want to go to a urologist anyway? No offense to a wonderful profession. People are like, eh, no big deal, when they should have gone. Now granted, the urologist does less to me, in fact, than my doctor does. I've delayed my colonoscopy. It's about time to do it. I'm due in five years. I also do an

endoscopy because of acid reflux. The doctor's office called and said, "We've checked this. You're at the five-year mark." And I said, "I'm not doing it right now." Now I feel I can do it. Now it's a matter of me not wanting to go at the moment, but I am going to call and it's on my massive to-do list. There are other medical things I've delayed a bit that I could tend to, but I've delayed them for years, going to a dermatologist. I have a lot of marks on my body. I've had them since I was a baby. Nothing's really changed. But there are a couple of things that I should get tended to, but they're not a problem and they've been there for years, so I'm not worried about them. But I might have done it last year. I'm not going to. I delayed the shingles vaccine knowing, well, I've got to deal with this vaccine; I'll deal with shingles later.

Don't delay on that.

Yes, it's time to do it.

Interesting. My mother-in-law had COVID in December. We observed her getting better, getting over it. Nevertheless, they put it on her death certificate. Once you have been diagnosed with COVID and you pass…I don't know when they determine that you've survived it and when they determine you still may have it or that lingering, residual path to death.

I think Felicia Campbell was getting over it or had gotten over it. But, you see, my father provides a good example of this. The death certificate doesn't really tell you much. He had had a quadruple bypass and he was taking medication, so cardiovascular must be an issue and so on. Well, I mentioned our pathologist friend, and I talked to him and he mentioned this. I thought of it immediately because it happened to a favorite teacher of mine that she had a pulmonary embolism. She had had a hysterectomy. She was resting.

She got up from her couch and said, “I don’t feel well.” *Boom*. That’s essentially what happened to my dad. He was in bed and he suddenly said, “I think I’m going to faint.” Well, he had been in the hospital and then in the rehab hospital. Was he doing his normal walking around? No, he was in bed. Very often they’ll put these things on your legs to promote the circulation. I don’t think they had done that. But even if they had, it isn’t going to do the job completely. I think probably a blood clot in his leg went to his lungs. But is that what it says on the certificate? No.

I think back to when my grandmother died, and my mother got the death certificate and it said, “Cardiac arrest.” I said, “What does that mean?” I was eight years old. She said, “It means your heart stopped.” Well, yes, exactly. I was there. She had a heart attack. But cardiac arrest? We all have cardiac arrest. I think we can do a better job on death certificates, truthfully, and COVID may be part of that. I don’t think it’s going to lead the legislation, but it probably should.

I don’t know. It was problematic for us because we needed to ship her body. Once COVID is on your death certificate, you can’t get it off. They want to argue with you about it. We’d list all the other factors, the malnutrition, which if you’re dying of old age, you eventually die of malnutrition because you cease to take food in.

On my mother-in-law’s death certificate, it says, “Ceased to thrive.” Now, she died in Oregon and that sounds like a very Portland way to go, and it was the Portland area. She had Alzheimer’s or dementia, was ninety-four, and ceased to thrive, and that happens.

Yes. There are more poetic ways to describe it. Anyway, anything else you want to share with me today? This has been great.

I’m trying to think of other COVID things. I’ll think of them later, of course.

You can always add them.

Yes, I'll add them later.

This is great.

I realize in glancing at this I did repeat something in great detail from the first one, but I think I did it better in this one. You can do what you want there. When you put them together, you edit anyway.

Right. We do. But thank you.

[End of recorded interview]