

AN INTERVIEW WITH SERGIO “CHECKO” SALGADO

An Oral History Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History 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 *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

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Some pseudonyms may have been used to protect participants' privacy.

PREFACE



Sergio “Checko” Salgado was born in Las Vegas, Nevada at Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital, a hospital whose name is unrecognizable to the majority of the people that now make Southern Nevada their home. Although the building still operates today, it is known as the University Medical Center of Southern Nevada, Nevada’s Level I trauma center and one of the largest public hospitals in the United States. Like the rest of the Las Vegas Valley, the hospital has undergone numerous transformations, and since the 1960s the Salgado’s have borne witness to the most dramatic changes that Las Vegas underwent in the 20th and 21st centuries.

He was raised near Sandhill and Stewart in a house surrounded by undeveloped desert, and was educated at schools that have preserved their namesake if not their original building. He was in the last class to graduate from Las Vegas High School’s original campus Downtown. He became involved in Las Vegas’s punk movement in the 1980s, and it was through the lens of this subculture that his political consciousness flourished. Through the creation of zines after school with his high school friends he began to cultivate his writing, interviewing, and perhaps most importantly his photography skills.

A stint in Reno as a journalism major made him realize his passion for photography, and at the age of 22 he was taking commercial photographs for the biggest clients in Las Vegas—clients which included the Riviera and the Rio Hotel and Casino. He has seen and documented the changes that have occurred on 28th Street throughout the years and saw the changes that occurred within the punk community in his youth as the spread of white supremacy infiltrated the Las Vegas Valley.

He is a photographer, instructor, and conservationist, whose work documenting the communities that he has been a part of and the Nevada desert that he has called home have led to local and national recognition. He has spoken before the U.S. Senate and has had his co-curated exhibition, Basin and Range, recognized by the Nevada Arts Council. In 2019, his exhibition, *28th Street*, was the first exhibition housed at the East Las Vegas Library.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

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Today is June fourth, 2019. This is Laurents Banuelos-Benitez. I am in the Oral History Research Center. Today I am joined by...

Barbara Tabach.

Elsa Lopez.

Monserrath Hernandez.

And we are interviewing Sergio “Checko” Salgado.

Sergio, can you do me a favor and spell your name for me?

Sergio, S-E-R-G-I-O. Checko, C-H-E-C-K-O. Salgado, S-A-L-G-A-D-O.

I like to start at the beginning. Could you tell us where you were born?

I was born here in Las Vegas, Nevada at Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital, which is now UMC.

How do you identify?

I grew up in a generation where there wasn't too many Latinos. In my school, it was a buffet; there was everything there, so we never really spoke about that in our class. Like, *well, I'm Mexican and this is what I'm about.* We all kind of hung out. I didn't notice anything about identity until later on in high school. But we never really spoke about that in—I went to four different elementary schools. I lived in the same house, but as the schools started getting built closer to my house, I started going to those schools, but it was always the same thing.

What was the first school that you attended?

I went to Cyril Wengert, which is in Winterwood. Then from there I went to Ira J. Earl, which is an old school over by the air force base. Then they opened a new school closer to my house, Elbert B. Edwards, and then another school three years later and that was Oran K. Gragson, so I got to go in both of those schools when they were brand-new.

Where was your childhood home located?

Stewart and Sandhill.

How was that area during that time?

It was kind of desolate. There was huge desert in front of our house, which was our park, so all the kids from the surrounding neighborhoods played in that desert; that's where we went because there were no real parks. The closes park to us was probably Hadland Park on 28th Street, but we didn't venture that far.

Why not?

It was probably like a mile and a half away from us. There was a lot of activity in the Charleston and Lamb area; there was a bunch of stores there. There was one of the first 7-Elevens on our side of town, which was Lamb and Stewart. Those were our little areas besides going out into the desert to play.

BARBARA: *Who was in your neighborhood? Who was your group that you would go play with in the desert?*

Well, it was mostly me and my cousins because my closest friend was probably a half a mile away from us. It was a lot of my family playing together and hanging out together. I didn't really have too many friends in the neighborhood even though at school I would see them, but then after that everybody would kind of disburse.

Can you tell us a little bit about your parents? You're already in a unique position because we've already your dad for this project, but can you tell us how you remember him in your childhood and tell us a little bit about your mother?

My dad has always been a very social person. In Mexico he grew up in a community where they were really active. My dad had a club, as he called it; it might have been called a gang back then. He had a group of friends and he was kind of the leader of this group. There was a bunch of them that ended up leaving Juarez and Chihuahua and coming to Las Vegas. They were tired of Juarez; there was opportunities; El Paso was dry, so they came out to California to work. When they were heading back to Texas, they stopped in Vegas and they were like, *man, this is great; we should stay here*. I know he was here for a few years, like '58, and then he came back later in the early sixties with my mom.

My dad was always involved in stuff and that came down to us, too, so we started getting involved. I look at what my dad was doing and his friends—Jose Gutierrez, Eddie Escobedo, and there were a few others—and they started a committee. That's what we were raised around. We would go to these fundraisers. It was like, *oh my God, I've got to go to the park again for this thing*. Now that I look back on it, I'm like, *man, we were really privileged*. We got to do a lot of stuff because my dad and his friends were really involved in the community.

Eventually that led into Latinos for Democracy, which was a group that was going around registering people to vote, and that was in the early nineties, I believe, so I got to see the political parts now. It was pretty neat because I got to see a lot of things firsthand and I think that really encouraged me as well. I got involved in the punk scene, and that was stimulus to me. It's like, okay, this is how you do it; you've got to do it yourself; you've got to do all this stuff; you've got to make your own propaganda. I was already learning that from my dad and his friends.

As far as my mom, my mom has always been really quiet and reserved. My mom is the most incredible person in the world. I've never heard her cuss; maybe yelled at me once as a kid. I wasn't an angel, but the thing is you learn how to respect my mom. She was in a sense the matriarch of the whole family because her brothers and sisters also moved here eventually; she came here first and they followed. But the plan was that my dad was taking her and moving so far away that the family wouldn't know where they were at, and they eventually found them and they all lived here. Now they have kids here, too.

You mentioned you were in different organizations with your father. One of the ones he mentioned in his interview was the (de Mexicana). Can you tell us a bit more about that?

(Mexicano) was developed in the mid-seventies. They had already been doing these big fundraisers and concerts, promotions and stuff. At one time they were renting the Sahara Space Center, which is at the Sahara hotel, and they would have all these huge performers, like Vicente Fernandez, Celia Cruz, big, big performers at the time, Los Ángeles Negros. Major tours would come here to Las Vegas because of my dad and his friends.

Then eventually they wanted to get more involved and actually give more opportunity to the kids. If I can remember right, there were forty or fifty members and all these people had families. They started doing folklórico dance and more of the history. If you want to do some research, try to look into the PBS archives; it's probably about '76, '77, there is a bunch of us singing in a choir and we're singing the Mexican patriotic songs, which I don't even remember anymore. We were on TV. Eddie Escobedo had a TV show also on Saturdays, so he would introduce musical acts on there, so now you had this thing on PBS. We would come out. They would do folklórico. I remember my dad being in a skit there once. My dad was kind of a beatnik, kind of Bohemian, so it was this play about these guys that are sitting around drinking and talking about life, and that's on TV. It was really weird because I would go to school and be like, "Yes, I was on TV yesterday." *What? What happened?* But it was kind of normal for us. *Oh, we're going to be on TV; oh, we're going to be on that again.* That was one of the things they did, but they really pushed the kids to do that.

Eventually Eddie got more involved and they started creating scholarships. I think I was one of the first in '88 to start getting the scholarship. They helped me out. But they were smart about; everybody got something; everybody got taken care of. But they pushed us into positions that normally we wouldn't have the opportunity to do; they created that for us. They are the forefathers for me.

You mentioned your elementary school. Can you tell us where you went to middle school and what that experience was like?

I went to Roy Martin Junior High School, which is on the corner of 28th Street and Stewart. I was second or third generation that went there. My sister went there and I had an aunt that went there as well. It was weird because I didn't really hang out with the kids from 28th Street and I lived

more of a neighborhood that was mixed; we had Asian, white, Latino, and then when you went to 28th Street, it was all Latinos, pretty much. It was kind of like, *whoa, who are these guys? It's kind of scary*. But they never messed with me. It was okay. But it was different; it was a different school. It is totally not how it is now; I think it's predominantly Latino now—actually it's a magnet school or an academy, so it's a little different. You have to enroll to get in there now. Before it was like whoever came, came. But it was a mixed bag, also. We're still seeing that time where there is still a mix of different cultures; it's not predominantly Latino; everything is mixed in. There were fights; people didn't get along. That was expected at that school. I don't know. It wasn't my favorite. It's junior high and it's, this school sucked. The building was bad; eventually it burned down.

It actually burned down the year before I went.

Oh, you went there, too?

Yes, I went there, too, and it burned down the year before I went, so I dealt with the construction. Twenty-Eighth Street has a reputation in this city, not the greatest reputation. I was wondering if you can speak on that while growing up and going to school in that area.

Yes, yes, that was the thing. I just did an exhibition in honor of 28th Street because it was one of the first centers, a Latino hub. I know a lot of families, especially with this exhibition, they came there and started there on that street and they've gone on to be really successful. There are doctors, people in law enforcement, people in construction; they've had really successful careers, but that's where their families came from.

For us it was a scary place. Eventually, since we were Latino, we were kind of involved. I know my sister ran with those guys and we knew the people. We knew who they were. We would see the names on the walls and it was like, *oh my God, that person was here*. We never knew who these people were until now I see them later and I'm like, *I was scared of you my whole life and you're just some little chump*. That was the thing is we identified with that. But I wasn't a *cholo*. I grew up in the environment. My uncles were all into lowriders really hardcore, so it was part of our culture, but I never dressed in flannels or I wasn't part of that culture. We did a little bit, I guess, maybe when we were in elementary school, but we were almost like white boys; we dressed like everybody else: the polo shirts and topsiders; that's who we were. We weren't really *choloed* out.

When I went to school there, I respected them. I knew, hey, man, I know where you guys are coming from. I started understanding them a little bit better. I never felt threatened from them because my sister was friends with them, so they knew, *oh that's Checko's sister; we can't get involved*. If they started messing with me, I could just tell my sister, *hey, these guys are messing with me*, and nothing would happen, but it never came to that point.

But it is an interesting community and there are some good people that came out of there and I think the problem is that they need to be recognized more. The culture itself, it developed the 28th Street, the gangbangers that were there. I got to study them more over the summer when I was working on this project and it's pretty intense what they were doing. But they were self-promoting, too. They did a good job of it; they scared Metro.

I was wondering if you could speak a little more on your childhood, games you remember playing with your siblings, and traditions that your household would have.

Me and my dad and my sister we would—my dad wasn't really an active guy, like, *let's go play softball*. It was like, *I'm going to teach you guys how to play pool*. We would play card games, board games. I remember as a tradition in our house on Tuesdays, somebody would pick the game, and if you won the game, whoever that person was would get to pick where we got to eat that day, so it was a big deal. *Oh my God, we're going to go out to eat today*. It was like Tuesday tacos, and that was before Tuesday tacos. I was like, *tacos on Tuesday; let's do it; that's kind of cool*. Those were the games we played.

I really just played out in the desert. We were desert rats. We built forts. We jumped bikes. We built bikes. We did crazy stuff. We started fires. I remember putting out fires and starting fires at the same time, like putting other people's fires out. That's just how it was. On that side of town in those days it was the edge of town and whatever happened, happened. It was whacky. But most of the playing that we did was at school because once school was out everybody kind of went off in their own directions and you wouldn't see them again until the next day. But when I was with my cousins that's what we did, we played games at my house. You were kind of your own. The dirt bikes and desert was the biggest thing. Most people that grew up in this neighborhood, or actually in this town, will tell you that it was catching lizards, making forts, riding bikes; those were your activities unless you lived next to a park.

Now going a little bit forward to high school, where did you go?

I went to Las Vegas High School.

What was that experience like? I want to clarify, did you go to the original building downtown?

Yes, downtown. My school was the last students—they had the student squares—Class of '88; that was our class. I had just left a school where I was more into metal and now I was getting into punk rock and I started meeting these other kids that were into punk rock. I didn't really do anything incredible in school. I was good in school, but my community was outside of school. I hung with a bunch of skaters and bike riders because we were already riding bikes and then the rest of the punk scene, but I didn't really get involved.

My freshman year I thought I was supposed to be in sports, so I was into wrestling, and that ended up being a bunch of us leaving the practice and then walking down Fremont and going to Thrifty Drugstore and make magazines. Instead of going to wrestling practice, we would go make magazines at Thrifty's, so that was kind of odd. I was into the wrestling. I was so skinny and getting my ass kicked. I was like, *this sucks; I'm not a jock*. I'm trying to find myself at that point because you go into this school where there are a hundred more kids than before and it's trying to figure out *where did you come from?* and trying to find your place there. We eventually developed our little group.

I wasn't really active in school. I was AP student and Honor's student, but I didn't really give a shit about the school.

BARBARA: *What does it mean to make a magazine?*

To make a magazine, we would make a zine. You make these little magazines. What we used to do is empty our pockets and put it on the copier and then make ten copies and then we would do other stuff and write stuff, poems and weird pictures and whatever we had in our wallets, and then everybody had a book. That's what we did.

ELSA: *Can you talk a little bit more about what that was like? You mentioned also that you made punk propaganda and all of that stuff.*

In the punk scene—I was in the second or third phase of this. In about 1985 I got into. My dad turned me on to surf music, and then from there it just escalated. My dad is like, *how did we get to this?*

Yes, we made fanzines. We would go to shows. My dad was a photographer. My sister was also into photography. I would borrow their cameras and go out and document this stuff. Either I would borrow my dad's VHS camera when he was at work and film everything, or I would borrow my sister's small camera when she was out with her friends. I would sneak it out and go shoot and document everything. We started making these magazines. I had a magazine called The Beefy Burrito; that was the first one. I went around and I interviewed a lot of people in town because I wanted to get into journalism; I just didn't know how to do it. I had an X-ACTO blade and I got some of my dad's supplies, Letraset, which any typographer would know, which is the first type of letters where you would rub them down. That's a big thing right now.

I got to use all that stuff, and my dad was cool about it. My dad didn't care as long as I was doing something. If I was being productive, my dad was for it. He wasn't there a lot because he would work, but he was like, "Oh cool, you're doing something. This is great." He was stoked on that, so I really appreciate my dad for that.

I would go interview people. Then eventually I was like, I'm going to start interviewing bigger band or bigger people. In the end one of the bands I interviewed was Meat Puppets, but for me

when I was seventeen years old that was a big deal. One of my favorite authors or poets was Lawrence Ferlinghetti and I got to interview him. That was great. I was like, I want to do this.

BARBARA: *You actually met him?*

No, no, we wrote back and forth.

You wrote back and forth, oh my God.

Yes, yes, I swapped little postcards with him.

That is so cool.

Yes. I told him how much I appreciated him. For my senior trip I actually went to City Lights bookstore and I was hoping to see him.

Anyhow, I pushed myself to go to that. Then I went to school for journalism in UNR and that was so bad. I wanted to leave Las Vegas. I was like, *I'm done with Las Vegas; I want to move on.* Then I moved to Reno, which is kind of like going down, and then I ended up coming back.

But as far as the zines go, yes, those were really fun and it got me to a lot of spots. I got to shoot a lot of bands, so I got more into photography; I got more into documentation. I've never stopped.

MONSERRATH: *How would you approach someone, being seventeen years old? Hey, I want to interview you.*

A lot of times I would have a copy of the magazine. The first interviews I did, I did them with friends, so it would be like this, interviewing one band. Everybody would kind of take turns hitting. Then eventually I kind of figured out there has to be some type of interview process because we're just going off and there's no sequence to the questions. There's no before, middle, end. Then I started learning how to do questions a little bit better.

Then I just went out on my own. I was like, *screw it; these guys aren't going to do it with me anymore*, and this is starting to pull...I was getting reviews in other magazines about it. It wasn't like incredible literature. It was this high school kid writing. I'm sure there was a bunch of typos in there. I know there is a lot of spots where I'd look at the originals and it was just a bunch of white-out, big sections of white-out. But it was fun. It helped me to get into the process. It showed me layout, how to do proper layout, how to do the sides better, how to get a picture printed properly, but I learned that all on my own with trial and error.

I was really shy as a kid. I had a band, too. I was like, *I'm on stage and I'm going to be doing all this stuff. Why can't I go on down and talk to these people?* "Excuse me; excuse me." I remember those first times. I didn't care. I just kind of pushed myself forward.

I was wondering if you could talk about the origins of that punk band that you had.

I had a band with some friends; it was like a metal band. None of us amps. We just had guitars. Eventually my friends were like, “Let’s start a punk band because you’re going to be a punk now, so we need to start a band.” I was probably four or five months into learning punk rock and we started a band and it was called Schizoid. We were just kids. We were fifteen years old. We did ‘Beat Down the Desert.’ I have a video of it. It’s pretty funny. We’re playing and I think we had ten songs. Then we ran out of songs and everybody starts, “We love Schizoid, la-la-la-la,” the whole crowd, and then we played the set again. We played the set again. Then we eventually started getting all these shows. We were just whacky and we were having fun and we would jump around a lot. We were teenagers, man. We were just going nuts. Eventually we started opening up for bigger bands and other bands were getting jealous. “How come Schizoid gets to be the band for this?” *Well, because these people want to see Schizoid; they don’t want to see you guys.* I wasn’t bragging or nothing. I was like, “Oh my God, we get to play with these guys.”

Eventually a friend of ours—we were seventeen—we decided we were going to play in the Bay Area, in San Francisco. We went up there to play and people were like, *what the hell is this?* We were so odd, but we were having fun. Then they invited us back. We played there probably four times, but every time we went it got bigger and bigger and bigger.

Eventually a guy approached us. He was like, “I want to make a record for you guys.” He produced a record for us, a ten-inch record that we’re on; it was a compilation, but it went out of print. It was really good.

Our drummer eventually kind of went crazy and he left the band. After that point I was graduating and I was like, *I don’t want to be here. The band is done. What have I got?* That’s when I went to Reno. But that was the first punk band that I was in.

The Latino community actually has a strong presence in the punk scene.

Now it does.

Can you talk about that?

Yes, because it wasn’t there before. There was probably like four of us and we all knew each other because we would sit in the back and ramble a bunch of *cholo* terms or just speak Spanish to each other. Now it’s predominantly Latino here. It’s crazy. I’m just like, *whoa, what the heck?*

What do you think about those two separate communities that attracted to each other?

I don’t know what it is. Maybe it’s the rebellion, using your voice. Everybody is using their voices now, which is really good. Back then we were a small community that were doing this. It’s weird to see that mesh. The other day I saw a kid that was totally camouflaged, like hunter’s cap and Bass Pro Shop type of shirt and punk boots. I’m like, *whoa, how does this work?* But

that's how it is now. You can come in in a suit and a tie and be wearing huaraches, right? It works.

Yes, the mesh is really weird, but I guess it was bound to happen. But back then there was only a few of us and we knew who we were. There was no discrimination; everybody was cool—well, that's not totally true. That's another story. One of the biggest skinhead Nazi movements started here, too, from the punk scene that we were in; it eventually broke off into two groups.

Can you tell us about that?

This is going to be long. You guys have enough time?

MONSERRATH: *Yes, we've got time.*

BARBARA: *Yes, I definitely want you to talk about that.*

Let me start from the beginning of this. We got into the punk scene and we started meeting all these people. We would go to their houses and have house parties.

What year are we in?

Eighty-five, '85-86. What ended up happening was we became friends with a bunch of people. It was really cool. Touring bands were coming in and they were staying at our houses. A few bands stayed at my house with my parents there. "Hey, Mom, can this band stay here?" Sometimes I would just let them sleep there and they are like, "Who are these people?" Situations like that.

There was also outside influence coming in, but one of the things that came in... There was a big construction boom in the late eighties. A lot of these punk rock kids were dropping out of school and going to work construction because there was more money in that. They were doing that and what ended up happening is a friend of ours—his name is John Bangerter, his uncle was the governor of Utah, big family. A lot of people from Southern Utah moved to Las Vegas, but they were also part of the downwinder community in St. George, in that area. They were all sheepherders. In the late fifties, early sixties they were doing aboveground testing and they would calculate it so that when the winds would not blow into Vegas, they would blow that way, and so these people got contaminated and they got sick. What happened is the Bangerter family moved to Las Vegas and they got involved in the peace activist scene. We would go to the Nevada Test Site. We would hold these big protests. We would go to the DOE. We learned about protesting from them, how to make signs, how to actually do a news release. It was really crazy. We were young kids learning how to do all this stuff. The Bangerters were really influential in the peace scene. We had a group come from Sweden, even; it was hundreds of activists from Sweden that came over and they hosted them. We got to see a lot of stuff.

Eventually what happened is Johnny Bangs started getting more involved in white supremacy. These are people that we would hang out with and hug and all the sudden they were starting to

create a divide. This is like '87-88 that this is starting to happen, more '88. Eventually they become Nazi skinheads. They were considered the Christian Identity Skins. They were being influenced by a gentleman by the name of Tom Metzger. Tom Metzger ran a group called the White Aryan Resistance out of Northern California and he was influencing them, sending them literature and all this shit. It was just bad.

Eventually we started fighting each other. One time we had this big unity scene where we were protesting against the test site, and now we're fighting each other. Those guys eventually went on 'Geraldo.' I think there was one famous scene where they crash a chair on somebody. Those are a lot of Vegas that are in the audience and on stage, so Vegas had an influence outside of Vegas.

What ended up happening is... They were anti-government. Remember, the government rained on them, killed them or gave them cancer, so they were against the government. They were really anti-establishment and then they got even more anti-establishment by becoming white supremacists. There are some shows if you want to follow up on Johnny, if you want to see something interesting. One of the first reality shows was based on him that they followed him around. Also, there is Ruby Ridge, which was in Idaho, where a gentleman was pent up in his house. They had killed his kid. Johnny and those guys went up with guns and rifles and tried to get in and support him. Wherever there was any chaos, white supremacy chaos, Johnny and the guys were there.

BARBARA: *Do you remember them doing a protest somewhere here that they were confronted by leaders in the Jewish community? Do you recall any episode?*

Actually, in the late eighties, '87 or '88 is when this is happening, the JDL, the Jewish Defense League, came and helped us, and they actually got a lot of these guys and beat them, not to death, but pretty much screwed them up. Then the International Music Workers Union showed up and they supported us, too. It was crazy. Remember, we were all tied in with all these other groups. Once they heard that that was happening, calls were made and all the sudden people we didn't even know were showing up. It was a weird time. We were on the news. It was in the papers.

But there is also stuff that happened that nobody ever knew about, like these mass riot fights that we had out in the middle of the desert because we didn't have a club back then. We had a few clubs, but the city would always close them down. There was a councilman by the name of Steve Miller. He was dick. We all hated him. We went to protest him and everything at City Hall. We were against him. We made these huge signs. We were really active in that sense.

One time he closed down the Glass Club that we had, so we had to start doing shows out in the middle of the desert. There was a huge thing. These guys came in vans. We were ready. We're like, *holy shit*. We had nowhere to run. They're coming at us. We had this huge fight. It was lame. It sucked because we were fighting our friends; that we were just friends with a few

months ago, and now we're punching them. I was like, *this sucks; I don't want to be here*. It got worse after that, but I was gone, so I don't know what else happened. I know people started carrying guns, which back then was crazy. Now it's like, oh I've got two guns in my car. Not me. I'm just saying in general. Yes, it got a little out of hand.

I want to ask one follow-up question to that. From other oral histories that I've done, I'm guessing it might be the same group because of the timing. Do you remember how they left town or how they evaporated or what happened to them?

There were two movements; there was one in the late nineties as well from the Orange County Skinheads. The skinheads died down and they moved away.

They did move away, okay.

Yes, they moved mostly to Southern Utah; some to Idaho. There is one now that is a sheriff; he's a white supremacist sheriff and he's from Vegas. I don't know what town he's in. I'm afraid to follow up on that. The Orange County Skins got pushed out because there was a kid they killed. I forget his name; we called him "Spit." It was two kids that were taken out to the desert. They said there was going to be a party and they killed them out in the middle of the desert. That was in late nineties. They just acquitted two of the guys that were part of that murder. Yes, there were two risings of that, so late eighties and then late nineties.

It was nothing to be around. It was bad. I actually got invited to go to a party, and when I walked into the party, all it was was skinheads. I look back and my friends are gone and I'm like, what the hell? It was kind of a setup. I remember they came up to me. We're talking about these big guys. These were construction workers and we were scrawny kids. They came up to me and they're like, "Gecko, Gecko." I had maybe like forty skinheads in my face by myself. My friends are already gone. I'm like, *okay, how do I play this out? This is lame. I don't want to get my ass kicked*. I walked through them and I walked to the very back to the kitchen to the keg and I poured myself a beer. I'm just sitting back there drinking. Then I finished the beer and walked out. They didn't do shit to me. I was like, *if I'm going to get my ass kicked, I might as well just have another beer*.

Can you take us to you leaving Vegas and going to Reno, and what was that experience like?

That was really odd. I got some money from the Mexican social club, (Mexicana), and I had some other money saved up. I had never been to Reno. I enrolled there. The first day I went to Reno was the day before school. I remember I was really into mountain bikes at the time. I had packed my bike on the bus. I built it at the bus station and then I rode to school. I had no idea. I had a big bag and all my stuff in it. I just went straight to school.

It was a neat experience. The campus itself is beautiful. The classes were really good. But the school life was like if you weren't a cowboy or a jock, then you were kind of on your own. I was like, well, I could have done this back at home. That was a thing, going back there. I spent two years and went to the School of Journalism. I didn't like it. It wasn't what I expected, these classrooms where there was like a hundred students in the lecture, and I didn't like that. I liked it to be a small, intimate area where we're having a conversation. *How is your project going?* If you didn't sit in the first two rows, you weren't really part of the class. It kind of turned me off.

One of my electives was photography. I was like, *cool, I'll learn how to actually do processing and stuff*, and I got in love with photography even more. I was interested already because of my dad, but then I really went forward with that and took those photography classes.

I read a lot of books because there was nothing to do. I looked at a lot of art. I got really involved in art. I was in Honors in art. I knew art was my thing because I was really passionate about it. I had an art historian teacher that actually was taught by people from the Bauhaus, so her passion was into it. I was like, *oh my God, it's like I'm getting this second nature, but it's coming in good; this really makes sense, everything that is happening*. Eventually she retired. I'm like, *oh, this is starting to be sad again*.

I made a few friends there, but most of the time I spent by myself. It was just a weird community. Once again, if you weren't a jock or a cowboy, you were kind of just left on your own.

I eventually came back to school and then a friend persuaded me to go to Denver to go to school to the art institute there for photography. That was a whole other process. That was actually pretty fun because a bunch of us went instead of me just going by myself. UNR is a great place. I heard it's better now, which is good. At the time I just couldn't handle it.

You went from Reno to Denver?

I spent two years in Denver. I went to the Art Institute. I went there for photography. It was expensive. The last year I was there I remember going to plasma, going to work, buying supplies, and then going to school; that was the routine. Go to plasma, go to work, buy supplies and go to school.

What is plasma?

Where you go and give blood. That was paying for my paper, my chemical because you had to pay for all that stuff. I came back the summer of '91 or '92 and I was working because I was paying back my student loans. I think I was working at a butcher shop by then. My friend is like, "Hey, man, I can get you in this place. You're going to make a lot of money." I'm like, "Cool, I need a lot of money right now to pay off these loans." I was like, *what the hell am I doing working in a fricking butcher shop?*

That was here in Vegas?

Yes, Larry's Great Western Meats over on Valley View by the Meadows Mall. It's still there. A friend of mine came in one day and he's like, "Dude, you've got to get out of here, man." I go, "Yes, I know. I'm making pretty good money, but I'm not a butcher. What the hell am I doing?" He came back to me in a few days—it was really weird—and he goes, "Hey, I found a job for you working in a studio. It's this up-and-coming studio and they need an assistant pretty bad because the other guy is leaving." I'm like, "I'm there."

I put my two weeks in and eventually I started this new job working as an assistant. Pretty much the certificate I was going to get from the Art Institute was going to get me this job that they just gave me, so I never went back to school. I just stayed in the studio and worked in that environment. We were the leading studio in town. Our competition back then was a group called Sampsel and Preston. We were big. We had all the major accounts. I'm twenty-one, twenty-two years old and I'm already in the thick of it, doing aerial photography in helicopters, doing all the billboards. I'm like, *I'm already doing it, so I don't have to go back to school to get a certificate telling me that I can do this.*

Eventually we worked so hard that I got burned out on the whole thing. It was too much. I was like, "Dude, you've got to hire somebody else, please. Man, this is too much." I was working twelve-hour days and we worked every day. But we had all the accounts and the guy was kind of money hungry. I was like, *dude, I get it, but I don't have insurance.* I'm starting to learn about insurance now. I was like, *maybe I should get insurance.*

My dad was like, "You've got to get out of that job. You need to work in the casino. You're going to get benefits and all this." That's one thing I've never done. Yes, I could have done all these other things with it, but I didn't want to do that because the rest of my family were involved in the casinos, in the Culinary, and I honor them for that, but I did not want to do that; that to me was soulless. I knew people that had a lot of money, but then they never followed through with anything they wanted to do or took the risk and tried to do stuff like that. My dad kind of understood it. He was like, "I didn't get to do a lot of stuff, either, but you've got to pay the bills." I go, "Well, I'm going to go see a concert, but I'm also going to shoot it so that I get paid for it and I'm also going to make friends with the people there so I can get more work." That's what I eventually started doing; I just started putting myself into those places.

But as far as the studio goes, I ended up leaving the studio and I ended up working retail, which was really weird, but that's how I started getting all my equipment. I started buying all my stuff and learning about it.

Where did you work?

I worked at a place called Sahara Camera, which is over there on Eastern and Sahara. Then from there the owner of this other store, Casey's Cameras—her name is Geri Cody and she actually used to work here—she came and got me. She goes, "You want to come and work over here with

us?” Which was like the rad store. I’m like, “All right.” I went over there and I worked there for twelve years and I became the manager. Retail is just crazy. I always make a point to people, I go, “If I were to become the mayor of Las Vegas, you can two years of Peace Corps, two years of military, or two years retail.” That was one of the requirements because of the interaction with people and how to treat people. I learned a lot from that.

I had friends that were in the same spot as I am and had become very successful monetary-wise, but sometimes they’re not completely happy. I’m not saying I’m living in this euphoria, like, *oh my God, this is total nirvana*. But I got to do the things I wanted to do, so I’m happy for that. I’ve been places that most of those guys never got to. Even though they’re financially successful, they never really pursue that stuff. They’re like, *okay, I’m a doctor and I’m going to be a doctor tomorrow, too*. As a photographer I get to go to all these different places and get involved. I’ve been places where I’m not supposed to be, where I have to come in and document it and turn in my cards or my film and walk away because it’s a government job. Aaron can tell you that, too. He knows stuff like that where you go in, you have to sign a nondisclosure form, and all the sudden they release this brand-new product and you can’t talk about it and you’re just looking at it, and then two weeks later there is a commercial, the unveiling. I’m like, *oh yes, that’s what I was shooting a few weeks ago*. There are situations like that that I think for me are pretty neat.

Sorry, I tend to ramble, so you’ve got to cut me off.

No, you’re fine. I was wondering if you could go back to that first job that the studio had you do, if you remember what that was like.

The first job? Actually it’s kind of funny because I was into light painting. Light painting is when you turn the lights off and you have a camera open for a long time, and with a flashlight or a lighter you create these patterns. You can make circles. You can make your name. what I was doing, I was cutting out stuff with my dad’s X-ACTO blades that I got from him for making my zines, I was making these stencils, and I did earth, wind and fire; that was one of the first things I did. That actually was used by Opportunity Village for a billboard campaign. I had my first billboard when I was twenty-two and I won an ADI Award for that. That was my portfolio to turn into this guy. *This is what I can do*. Eventually they reused the images and they created that whole thing, which was pretty cool.

It was fun. I had all the equipment I needed, everything that I had at school plus... This guy’s dad invented the Weed Eater. I don’t know if you know what a Weed Eater is. It’s a little machine that you go and trim the—

Yes.

His dad invented that, and so he had all this money. He went to RIT, Rochester Institute of Technology. He came back and he set up the studio and he had anything he wanted. I was like, *oh my God, I get to use all this high-end equipment and this is part of my job*. It was really, really

fun for a long time, actually. It was really, really good. But then he wouldn't stop getting accounts. I'm like, "You've got to hire people, please, man. This is killing me." I'm twenty-two or twenty-three years old and I'm getting fried out. We did a lot of campaigns.

Any particular favorite one?

We did the Riviera; we did all their shows, so Splash and La Cage. We did some country and western themes that they had that was kind of cool. The La Cage one was really good because that was one where it was me and another guy. He actually let us go out and do the shoot ourselves and we did all the campaign for them.

They invited us to the show later that night. What happened is, the way the stage was set up is that there is the main stage and then there is a walkout and then there are seats around it. We got carte blanche and we got to sit right there on the side. The guy who does Tina Turner, I forget his name and he's still around town. He still performs. I think he's in the new La Cage show, wherever that's at, because I did see him on the billboard. He came down and I forget what song they were doing at the end. But he comes off the stage and he picks me up out of the audience and brings me up on stage. The grand finale is me on stage and he's holding me in his arms with all the cast around, singing to the audience, and everybody is just laughing. Everybody is standing up. They didn't know who I was. I was like, *all right, I've got to do this*. That was actually really fun.

The aerial photography was really good, the photography stuff from the helicopter. I was just like, *I don't think they were going to teach us this at school*. That was really good. I got to do some really cool stuff.

But after a while I was just like...I think if he would have hired somebody or listened to me, I think we would have still been doing this, but eventually he folded. Everybody left. Nobody wanted to work with him anymore because he was just such a hard ass. I think he's a professional gambler now.

BARBARA: *Who was the client for the aerial photographer?*

We did the Rio when it first opened. What else did we do?

You were up shooting buildings as opposed to the growth of the valley; that type of aerial photography?

Yes. The Rio had just opened. We went around and did three-sixties of that. I forgot what else we did. We did some other aerial stuff here in town. We never went out of town. It was just here in town. The gentleman, he was the CEO at the Circus Circus, Larson I believe was his name. He let us borrow the helicopter. It was really cool. It was incredible. I loved it. It was just going up there and shooting a film camera and not trying to move while you're in a vibrating helicopter. It was fun. It was really cool.

What kind of equipment were you using at that time?

We had Nikon F-3s, which were high at that point, and Hasselblads. This guy paid for the good stuff. If he were still around, he would probably be having all the high-end digital right now. He was successful, but he didn't know how to manage his group and eventually everybody just flocked away. I would see the ads in the paper: Here is an opening for this. I'm like, *no way, that's where I used to work*. I didn't work there again with that guy.

MONSERRATH: You've curated a bunch of photography shows. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Back in the day we didn't really have a gallery space. Most of the gallery space was run by people here on campus. I wasn't part of that group. We had a coffee shop across the street called Café Espresso Roma and that's where we had our shows. Everybody that had a show there was like, "Oh, you're having a show at the café?" it was like a big deal at that point because we didn't have anywhere to go.

What year was this?

Mid-nineties, so about '94 or '95. The first show I did was with Polaroid transfers. Back in the day—I think the films came back recently—you would take a picture with this film and you would separate it; there would be a positive and a negative. The negative would be just the opposite of the positive shot that you got. Then you would rub it on paper and pull it and you have this old-timey looking image. I did a bunch of stuff with light painting in that and that was in '95.

I really got into art and I was like, *if I'm going to be doing this, I want to be pushing my work*. I got a job with a few of the weeklies here in town. I started buying more of my equipment. Eventually I started traveling out and shooting all these photos of the desert. I grew up in it, so I was documenting that as well. I noticed I had a knack for it. From my punk rock days of organizing shows or putting stuff together, I took that and then brought that into the art side. I started doing these group shows and fundraisers.

One of the things we did, we did a fundraiser for the Navajo Tribe and we raised money with artwork where we bought them blankets and axes and delivered it to them. We created artwork first and then sold the artwork and then used the money and bought them supplies. People got into it.

Also, there is new remnants of a new peace group coming. I had already been involved with that process, so I was kind of their tie-in to that and we started working on that. I learned more fundraising and organizing from them and then eventually started hosting shows. What I would do is I would have concerts and art shows together; they would be meshed in. A lot of times you go to a show and that's it, but I wanted to present visuals. Eventually we had different types of foods and the smells. We wanted to enhance all the senses. In doing that I started making bigger

group shows, so bringing other people from different communities in. I would pair people together that would never come together, but I see a lot of people having these associations now, which is kind of funny.

When I came to school here, I was like, *I want to keep pushing this art and I'm going to have a little bit more of an army behind me*, which was my students in my class. We would go through the process of learning the technical side and then focus on a certain subject. Did we do anything in your class?

I think we did, but I can't remember off the top of my head.

I try to do something each semester and focus on something. In 2011 was our first show. What we did is I got all my prior students—I had only been teaching here three years, but I teach summer school as well, so I had a big group of kids—we got them together and then we worked on these shows where I would pair people together. Say I would take a picture of this wall, one person would be on one side and one person would be on the other, and they would take the same picture. It could be black and white or you can alter it. Then we would put them together and make what's called diptychs and triptychs. I would take three people to the arcade, like the Pinball Museum, and they all had to set up their shot. Then we would look behind on the screens and then take the picture and mesh them together and it was this whole other image. It was about bringing those people together; that was one of the first things.

I went back to school and I took a class with Susie Newbury. She is an art history professor. We got into land art. One of the things we had to do is we had to visit a piece of artwork in person. At one point I had a free plane ticket. I was going to go to D.C. and go see Jackson Pollock. But I was like, *I've got to pay for the hotel and all this stuff. There has to be something closer*. Everybody was going to the Bellagio. Everybody was going to the Strip. I'm like, *I don't want to go over there; I want to do something different*. I visited Double Negative, which is outside of Overton on Mormon Mesa; that's a piece built by Michael Heizer. It is two big trenches that he built. I never really was for the guy because he destroyed the desert and I wasn't about that, but I'm going to go visit the piece. I've got to go make peace with this piece.

We drove out there and I was kind of blown away. Walking into this—if you ever get a chance, go to it—but I walked into this spot and it was like going to a basilica in Europe, but there was no roof. There were just these huge walls you walk into. Instead of maybe the saints on the wall, it was birds or there was movement in the earth you could see. It was really interesting.

I started thinking, *you know what? Nobody in Las Vegas really knows who Michael Heizer is. He's an international artist, but nobody knows who he is. Why don't we do an exhibition down here? Why don't we focus on what this place is about and bring some easels down here and have an exhibition, kind of impromptu?* I came back to town and I'm talking to my friend, Sierra Slands. I go, “Hey, what do you think of this idea?” She goes, “Oh my God that would be great.

We can get more people involved. I have a list of people.” I go, “Oh cool, I’ve got a list, too.” We started going through and then we started piecing it together.

Two or three days later I’m downtown and a friend of mine is putting a petition together. I go, “What’s the petition for?” She goes, “It’s to save City.” The same guy, Michael Heizer, has a place called City, which is in Central Nevada outside of Alamo and it’s one of the biggest sculptures in the world. It’s not an erect sculpture; it looks like a skateboard; it’s a little over a mile long. I’m like, “Oh my God, that’s crazy because I was just working on a show about this.”

We ended up hooking up together—I mean, not romantically, like as partners—and started working on this show. Within a month or two, the show was already going off; people were wanting to get involved. I brought some other people in and I had a group show at Donna Beam, and that was called the Basin and Range Exhibition. There was Professor Julian Kilker from on campus, a lot of alumni. I brought some outsiders in as well to try to get some outside community involved with this university, too. The show was a success.

From that I ended up going to Washington, D.C. and I spoke with the Senate. I met with a bunch of different people. I met with all these organizations and now people are trying to support me. I’m like, *man, where were you guys twenty years ago?* But it happens when it happens. The show got picked up by the Nevada Arts Council and traveled around the state for two years, so that was going on.

Then the next year I got in a show called Home Means Nevada, which is a photographic exhibition based on the outside lands of Nevada, so there is all these different areas around the country, and we worked with a lot of researchers. There is a gentleman; he’s a diver that goes in to see the pupfish in Ash Meadows. He’s one of two people in the world that are allowed to do that. We used his photos. There are all these different things.

We opened that show at the Reynolds Senate Building, so it was at the U.S. Senate Building in Washington, D. C. We did this huge show in a rotunda and it was just all photos about Nevada, and then that got picked up by the Nevada Arts Council. That’s traveling right now.

The thing was with the Basin and Range area work, the original land art out there, I got involved with that group, and then all the sudden I’m one of the leaders of the group now because it was a really small group. I’m still involved to this day. I’m like, how do I create propaganda for this area, but make it positive and also get my students involved? We started making these campaign posters and then we got involved in other places: We got involved in Gold Butte; we got involved in Sloan Canyon. We would make these promotional posters to promote the area. The idea is that the students had to go there physically and take their own photos and be a part of that process, not like download it and kind of read about it; you had to physically go there. That’s what I started doing with my classes. It’s been crazy. We just finished one right now—actually, it wasn’t an exhibition, but we worked with emergency crews and made these safety posters, so I was involved with the city and the county and that was a big deal.

I'm starting to ramble. That's it; on and on. Every semester I'm like, oh yes, we did that; didn't we?

How did you end up being an instructor here at UNLV?

I was invited. I ran a store and one of the women I worked with was Catherine Angel who heads the photo department. She's like, "Would you be interested in teaching a lighting class? We don't have anybody teaching lighting." She goes, "It's not a lot of money." I go, "I'll try it. I do workshops here, anyways, but I don't have a degree." I didn't have a degree at that time. I definitely don't have a master's. I can't do it." And she's like, "No, no, don't worry. It's just kind of a part-time thing. We need the class."

I developed the class on my own and then eventually it went to two classes, and so then I started writing that for a while. Then I introduced another class. I go, "I see a lot of designers, but they want to learn photography, too. Can I create a new class, photography for graphic designers?" That became the new class. Now I'm at four classes. I'm not full-time, though, but I teach four classes.

What she said is that the pay is horrible. But the thing is, is that I learn so much from the students—I took other jobs in the meantime because I would see these kids going out there, and one of the things I remembered from school is that the students aren't given the opportunity. You're taught all this stuff and you're like, all right, go for it. For me, what I was doing by these exhibitions is that I was creating ties with outside community and outside agencies and their students were getting hired, so they were already working their portfolio and already working into a job. This semester alone I have four kids with full-time jobs. I have kids that make more money than me, seriously, and they hire me. They come back and they're like, "Hey, you want to be the photographer on this project?" I'm like, "Yes, sure."

But that's something I learned from my dad because my dad had the opportunity to make all this money, but he was always about, let's make sure that everybody else is taken care of. We've got enough; we can eat; we're good. But this guy doesn't have anything going on, or this family just got here. I think that's something that we got from our dad, me and my sister, actually. That's something that we've always had. There are conflicts sometimes, like, oh we could have gone on vacation, but you used your money to travel with your students to go do this.

That's the thing, if I can inspire a group of people to get more involved, especially in the community and in the environment; that's going to be better for us in the long run because we're creating our future. That's how I see it. I have conflicts with other professors because I step on their toes, not intentionally. I'm like—well, we're on the record here—I'm like, what the fuck are you doing? You're supposed to be helping these kids out. You don't have to give them a job, but at least encourage them because you just gave them this information, and what are they going to do with that? I don't know, it's a different way of seeing things. But I've always been for the students. And the pay has been lousy. You can put that on record, yes. But I've always been for

the students. For me, when I see them go out there and do jobs or they send me letters, like, *thanks to you, Checko, I got to do this; I appreciate it, or, I just got hired for this other job, thank you so much*, that to me means a lot because I know, hey, I did something good for this town. It's my town.

ELSA: *I'd like to hear you talk more about being a teacher. What kinds of students do you have?*

Luckily I don't have any beginning students, but I have some students now and then and there's ebb and flow, but most of them want to be there. I encourage them to always use their passions when they're doing this. The name of the class is Commercial Photography, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I want you to become a commercial photographer. You might use this for social skills. Say, you're going to work for the Red Cross or maybe a rape crisis center, you're creating the propaganda for that now and you know how to bring the message to that because your passion is being involved in that group, but now you can use propaganda, which that's what it is, to give it a positive light, to encourage people to get involved.

We're in a visual age, right? We go through Instagram, how long do you stay on an Instagram photo? Five seconds? That's how fast we have to be and we have to capture people's eyes, get them involved. *Oh my God, what's that all about?* The poster of (Bachi Wing). *Oh cool, I want to go see that; we've got to go to that.* It was the poster. It could be the lamest thing, but if it's being promoted properly... We know that it can be like, *really, you guys are into this? This is horrible.* But the poster is great; that's what brought you in. How about making that and switching it to more of a positive, more of a positive aspect?

Anyway, sorry, what was the question again?

That was the question, but I had another question. Can you describe what the art scene was like when you first starting out here in Vegas, when you came back?

It was very divided because there was the university art scene and then there was the rest of the community. It's kind of funny now because now I work with these guys, and I'm like, man, the art community is so much stronger. There is all the inner fighting that I've seen here. Academia, they fight each other. Even when they're on the same team, they start fighting each other. I kind of knew that was happening, but I was like, *I don't want to pass any judgment; I don't know what's happening.* Then when I finally got involved in the department, I was like, "You guys are bad. Encourage these kids, man; get their work out. You've had your time in the spotlight and now it's time to give it to somebody else and push that." That's where I'm clashing with these other people.

What would you say the art scene is like now?

The art scene is great. There are probably like two or three different art scenes now where at the time there was probably one or two. There was a smaller community that really didn't have any money and then there was academia here on campus. But eventually people started learning how to use the Nevada Arts Council and how to write grants; that's all it's about now. If you're a good grant writer, man, you can do so much stuff. People get hired to be grant writers for organizations, but we learn how to start doing that on our own. We were like, *oh my God, a thousand bucks*. Then it's like, *what do we do? Oh yes, we're supposed to buy all this stuff and host this*.

I went to the Day of the Dead festival in Mexico and I documented that. They don't do that anymore; they don't let you go out of town with NAC money, Nevada Arts Council money; you have to do it within the state. But at that point they were like, yes, go for it. I got a thousand bucks and I went to Mexico and documented Day of the Dead for a week. Then I came back and I used those images for three exhibitions, and part of the exhibition is in the permanent collection of the Barrick Museum. I look at the photos now and go, *oh my God, those are bad; I've got to go back and redo them*. But I got money, I got involved, and I started pushing myself.

That was one of the first Day of the Dead festivals there was, so before there was Winchester and all that I already had my exhibition. My dad will tell you that, too. I think he might have made a point about that before.

What part of Mexico did you go to and photograph?

To Oaxaca, which I don't know anybody there. I just went. I pulled a Reno: just landed and started walking around and see what happens. I eventually became friends with a lot of people. We slept in graveyards. We went to all these little towns because every little town has their own festivity, different styles, and I got to document all that. it was intense. It was really cool.

You mentioned what the academia scene was like. What about the community scene back then; what were some of the themes that would pop up?

As far as community there has always been art scene here. John Pacheco who you guys need to interview has been involved in the art scene for a long time, Latino. There wasn't really a meeting place. That's the problem with this city; it's so dispersed that there is no meeting area. Eventually when Julie Brewer and Cindy Funkhouser started First Friday that was kind of the meeting point. *Oh, we can actually go here, downtown. I don't want to go downtown because it's nasty, but this is where we've got to meet*. Eventually people started coming in, which also influenced that community. People started coming to the community now. There are a lot of people that teach here on campus that live in those communities over there because they're like, this is the hub where the culture is at.

But the thing is that Las Vegas is so spread out. There are communities in Summerlin, in Henderson. A lot of people come here to retire, you've got to remember that. A lot of people

come here to retire that are notable people. We don't hear about them, though, because there is no central scene. Back in the day this was the central scene, Maryland Parkway; that was it. There were three cafes, five record stores. Normally when you go to a town, usually you're like, I don't know this town. Maybe I'll go by the university and get some information and I can see what's going on. Here, you can't do that anymore. They just tore down the last of that building, thank God, but that's where Roma was at. There was a record store in there and there was a huge Kinko's. We did all our fanzines there. We would meet other kids that were doing fanzines. But this was the hub; Maryland Parkway was the heart of the town for us.

Then when it started dying down, they started pushing it more towards downtown. That's when Tony Shei and those guys eventually came in and bought those properties. As far as a center for art, I don't know, it's starting to happen again, especially with Alisha Kerlin getting involved now—she is the director of the Barrick Museum—things are starting to change. She knows what needs to happen. But it was stagnant for a long time. Art was being developed the whole time, but it wasn't active; it didn't have heart like it does now. It's actually pretty exciting. Things are going on and I'm glad for that; that there is hope for the kids.

MONSERRATH: *You mentioned First Friday. When did that start becoming a thing? What year did First Friday really get going?*

Two thousand two, I think, is when it started. Actually my Day of the Dead exhibition was the first exhibition at First Friday in the common area. It was pretty intense. After that there was a party called the Get Back, which I was also a part of; I did the visuals for them at one point. I would say about 2002 is when they started it. It was pretty cool because you would go and hang out with the artists, have a glass of wine, you'd kick back. It's not like that anymore. Now it's just a big party and back then it was a controlled party. People actually wanted to go and hang out with the artist and say, how did you do this? What are you working on? There was this great conversation. Now it's just loud and...

Too many people?

It's too many people, yes. It's going to happen here in the next few days. Maybe we can go document that. But it got crazy and out of hand and eventually a lot of us stopped going that were a part of that art community. I don't go to First Friday anymore. It's too nutty. I don't like doing it. But I do see a few people coming back into it. It's going off. It's good.

Do you feel like it was overtaken by hipster or people like that, or do you think it was just a trend and everybody started going?

I was for the whole thing of people showing up for it. That was the idea: to show your artwork. But I think also there was this corporate element that got involved that bought it and it became this whole other thing. It wasn't so loose. You were trying to create this hardcore structure in an art community. We as artists are rebellious; we're going to go in different directions and do

different things. *I don't want to be over there; I'm going to put my stuff over here on this wall.* That's just how it is. That's the nature of the beast.

But with that structure it became very regimental and it kind of lost its heart. People are like, fuck this. This is not about who we are. I was already gone by then. I wasn't into anymore. But a few friends tried to go and support it. They're like, "We've got to be behind this. Zappos is helping us out." I was like, "Zappos wasn't there in the beginning when we were still doing this. We were able to pull this off without them." Nothing against Zappos, but they were trying to make a point that we're Frist Friday. I'm like, *no, dude, we had this already before you were here. Where were you twenty years ago when we really needed your help and we didn't have anything? We had empty buildings that we were doing artwork in.* Now they thought, *well, we're going to make it better.*

I think the problem is that a lot of people come from out of town and think, *you guys are cowboys; you guys don't know how to run it,* so they were like, *this is how it's going to be done; I did this in New York.* Well, this isn't New York. This is a whole different town and it is a cowboy town. But you've got to find the right families to deal with and things will go good. But that's the problem is that people come with these outside influences, which there is nothing wrong with that, but I think they make it like, this is the rule; this is how it's going to happen, like we don't know shit. Sorry. That's a broad question.

BARBARA: *I'm glad you said that because I was a consumer in the early years of First Friday and we actually bought paintings down there. We wanted to support local artists.*

Exactly.

Of course, things change, but that's the party part of it. It doesn't mirror up with the artists the same way.

Yes, I know. That was the thing about that is I was able to kick back and have a conversation.

And a glass of wine.

And a glass of wine; that was a big thing. We had actually started bringing our own wine. But that was the thing is that nobody gave a crap, and they eventually, no alcohol; you can't do that. Then Metro is involved and then they're sitting up these gates. I'm like, *what is this?*

MONSERRATH: *It's like a whole festival now.*

Yes. It just killed it. It wasn't a personal community thing.

Can you actually tell us the origin of the name Checko; where that came from?

It's like Bill to Willian, Sergio is to Checko. But I've had it since I was a little kid. I would go to school and be like, *why is everybody calling me Sergio?* My real name is Sergio Alfredo, and I

hated the Alfredo even though my grandfather was a great guy, but it sounded so geeky and here I am going to school; Alfredo is coming. I hated that because then I'd leave school and everybody knew me as Checko. I was like, *that's who I am*. But the other thing is I kept with the name because my dad has the same name; I'm the third. But the thing is my dad has done a lot of stuff in this community and I don't want them to mesh with me. *Oh, you were in the punk scene? No, that was my son. Or, you helped establish this? No, that was my dad.* That's why I always push Checko on the stuff. Also, for my photo credits I would put Checko. The check comes Sergio Salgado; that's how they pay me. But the credit is always Checko. I made a name for that. Everybody knows me as Checko. They don't even know my name anymore. They're like, *oh, your name is Checko, right?*

You sign with a check mark and O, right?

Yes. I just put that in there. I tell my dad, "I'm just going to make it legal one day, just make it Checko."

You probably should because—it was funny—I came in this morning, and they were like, "We're going to interview Sergio." And I was like, "Who?" And they were like, "Checko." I was like, "Oh, Checko, yes."

Yes, yes. That's what I get involved in. I always make them put that name down. Nothing against my dad, but my dad has done a lot of stuff and I don't want to take his spotlight because he's worked his ass off. Did you give him a two-hour interview?

Yes.

That probably wasn't even enough. There is so much stuff that he probably doesn't remember that he did.

Jose helped him out a lot, kept reminding him of things. Your dad's story was really interesting. I ended up calling him a Mexican Forrest Gump because every story he had was like, you just were there at the right time.

Yes, yes, I learned that, too. The first time I brought my dad, we were here with Aaron and he's talking about this stuff. I'm like, "What?" Aaron is like, "Yes. You didn't know that?" I go, "Dude, that's the first time I've ever heard this. He's never told me this. He's done all this stuff."

BARBARA: *Talk about your family and culture and all of that. When we first met we talked a little bit about Spanish, the language. Talk about that part of your life.*

I grew up speaking Spanish. When I went to school at Cyril Wengert, I didn't know English. I just got on a bus and I'd go to Cyril Wengert and just kind of look around. I didn't know how to communicate. I used my hands a lot. It was bad. My parents spoke English, but they were like, "Well, we can't teach you because our English is bad." That type of thing. It was my older sister

that actually taught me to speak English properly—well, to this day I can't speak properly. But the thing is that we spoke English. It was tough. I still speak Spanish with my parents; that's how we communicate. But now that we have newer kids in the generation, my kids and my sister's kids, my parents speak English to them. I'm like, "Don't do that. Speak Spanish to them. We teach them English. We want to have them know both sides because they can communicate and rise higher and not just have one language on them." I've always been taught that if you're bilingual, you have more of a chance of getting into different areas, which is true. I've had people talk shit about me, not knowing I speak Spanish. I'm just like, *oh cool*, and then I start talking to them and they're like...

But that was a thing...It wasn't frowned upon in school, but there was no ESL classes. There was nothing like that. If you had to learn English that was it; you had to learn English. Me and my dad always have this conversation. Listen, wherever you go, if I go to Germany, I need to learn how to speak German; otherwise, I'm the ugly American just speaking English and that's not right. Don't you think it should be the other way as well? If somebody comes from any country, say, Latin American country, they should learn how to speak English. It's not out of disrespect, but that's how the laws are. I'm not saying it's illegal, but I'm saying you should learn English because it's going to help you get into a better job. You might run a crew where nobody else speaks English and you're running the whole thing, which happened to me. But, also, you're going to be able to communicate better and understand the laws or any type of business. *Oh, that guy doesn't speak English, so we're going to have a hard time with him.* Even though you might be the most intelligent person, when you come here you don't get to show that. I see a lot of doctors that come here from other countries that are doctors and they're working as busboys or doing these jobs. I'm like, shouldn't you be in the hospital working? But I think we kind of put those barriers up. My dad is like that, too, and he finally started agreeing with me. I go, "No disrespect towards people that speak Spanish, but learn the English part, too, but keep both, keep that going." That was the thing, we speak Spanish at my parents' house, but outside of that it's English.

But you teach your own children to be bilingual? Are you trying?

My wife is from Poland, so my son is learning Polish. He is trilingual. He knows a little bit of Spanish and he actually knows Polish better than he does Spanish, and that's a hard language. Yes, we're trying to push him to get into that more.

How are you blending those two cultures, the Mexican and the Polish?

It's weird. I met this woman. I never thought I was going to marry a Polish woman for one thing. Yes, the cultures are different. They're Eastern European. In Latin America we're more loose. We have siestas. Over there, no, you've got to work. I hate using this word, but they are very regimental there, precisely, this point, that. He gets that left side, very strict, and then he comes with me and it's like, "You want to hang out and listen to some music, man? Do you want to

play your guitar?" I give him more of that right side feeling. It's good to have both sides; you have to. It's a weird dynamic. He looks like a little white boy. He's got blue eyes, light brown hair. He also understand Spanish, so he'll know. I'm like, "You know what they said?" And he's like, "Yes, this is what they said." But he just can't speak it properly.

MONSERRATH: *How did you meet your wife?*

I ran a nonprofit group called Nevadans Organized To Better Address Diversity, Not Bad. We did a film series here at the Flamingo Library for ten years. It was an international series and then just became an annual film series. I was the host, so when people would come in, I would sit them down or escort them, talk about the movie. She walked in and I thought she had come to see the movie, but there was free internet there; that's the only reason, because she was communicating with her family back in Poland. She's like, "I didn't know there was movie." I'm like, "Yes, come out and see the movie." She came back and then she was hanging out. I go, "Hey, do you want to go get some food?" Because she didn't know anybody. It was these weird circumstances, almost like the 'Forrest' Gump thing where she ended up coming back to my house and I cooked her dinner. We had a party that weekend earlier, so I had a full turntable set up and vinyl everywhere. I go, "What kind of music do you want to listen to?" And she goes, "I like Santana and Miles Davis." I'm like, "Perfect." That's what I put on and we've been together ever since.

Oh, nice.

BARBARA: *What brought her here?*

They used to do these junkets from Poland. Their economy was barely coming back; this is about ten years after the wall fell. They would come here and make all this money and then go back and pay for school. They were out during break. She was pursuing her master's. She came here, got some money, and then she went back. Then we kept in touch and eventually I went to visit her in Germany; that's where she was going to school. Then we started hanging out a little bit more and eventually we were like, well, you want to just get married? That's how it was. I tell everybody I met her online.

I like that story. One of the things we said before we started the interview was that we wanted to make sure you talked about mentors in your life. There was one in particular we were discussing. I'm sure you have others.

Ron Mason was one of them. He is a graphic designer here in town. He worked for CSN and he helped me out a lot. He helped me land these big jobs. He taught me how to do business proposals, which I never had the idea of how to put together, especially big ones; how to really fight for yourself. He was really cool. He eventually got sick. I got to talk to him towards the end of his life. He would call me out of nowhere. If it was a call from Ron, it was like, everything goes away; you've got to talk to Ron. But I knew he was slipping. It might have been

Alzheimer's that he died from, but you could hear it in the conversation; he was just starting to slip. It was sad, but he was my guy. Whenever he called, boom. He wouldn't call me Chekco, too. He goes, "That's not professional." He would call me Sergio. He would call me out of nowhere. "Sergio, can you be here in twenty minutes?" Across town. I'm like, "Yes. Yes, I can." I would have to drop everything because that's the kind of guy that I looked up to.

Gerri Cody, who was my boss—her husband actually owned it—she worked here in photo services.

She was great.

Yes. She was another mentor. She actually pushed me a lot. She would bust my balls. It was the kind of thing, like, *okay, I understand; I got it, thank you*. You had to listen to her. I love her. She's awesome.

Catherine Angel, who was my boss here, she's been really helpful on a lot of stuff that I would put projects out or ideas. She tells me how to put it together, who to talk to, how to approach certain things. I've gotten involved in so many different types of groups that I never thought I would be doing at this point in my life, but they've taught me along the way how to get these conversations started, starting from nobody knows who you are to running it; that's how it's been happening. They have been really helpful.

Of course, my parents, they're big mentors. My sister, who actually is a little bit older than me, taught me English and also tormented me most of my life because I was a little kid, but she was good.

Did she have a career here in Las Vegas?

Yes, she works for the city. She was born here, too. She was born here in '64. She has a whole different way of looking at things, too, so it would be kind of good to interview her.

Ron was good. I know I'm missing somebody. Eddie Escobedo was really good to all of us. He was a mentor to the whole community.

Eddie Escobedo, Senior?

Yes. Yes, he was really, really good. I don't know who else to put on that list.

Talk about your mom a little bit more.

My mom's dad was a big band leader; that was in Mexico. My grandfather had another weird history. He studied music on accident. I'm just going to do this really quickly. When my grandfather was really young, him and his brother were walking by a bar in Chihuahua City. There was a big gold rush at the time, early 1900s. These guys were having a shootout in the bar and one of the bullets went stray and hit my grandfather. It didn't kill him, obviously. What

ended up happening is that this guy had so much money—the guy he ended up killing—he felt really bad, so he took my grandfather to the hospital and took care of all his medical bills and on top of that he gave both the kids the choice to go to school anywhere they wanted to in Mexico. They wanted to be musicians, so they went to music school. Here are these little Indian kids that wanted to play music and they learned to become studio leaders, eventually big band leaders.

They moved to Juarez and my grandfather ended up getting together with one of the most beautiful women in the city, which was my grandma. She was a light-eyed, blue-eyed lady. She was Mexican, though. He was a big band leader. He was a big deal. We're talking about thirties now when there is prohibition going on when people would cross over into Mexico to go to the casinos. The casinos never left our life. It's always been a part of my life. My grandfather was there.

They eventually had my mom; that was their first kid. She had a privileged life. They would travel around. She told me all this stuff they did. Eventually they had seven kids. The other thing with my grandfather, he was also a guy that helped people out. He made all this money, but Teresa, her roof is falling and we're going to fix her roof. It was the same situation; I'm the third generation of this giving process.

My mom eventually met my dad and then they came to Las Vegas. She worked at the Sahara the whole time; she was there until she retired. She actually worked with Eddie Escobedo.

What did she do at Sahara?

She was a casino porter, just cleaning. I think she started cleaning the rooms first and then they liked her so much that she ended up working and cleaning the offices for the CEOs and stuff. I got a lot of my knowledge from that because what happened was at one point there was a girl named Sue Landau, the Landau family owned it, and they were really good to my mom. If there was a party, my mom would come home with, *oh, look at all this food. Oh my God, we get to eat that.* We felt all rich. We were poor, but we got to get turned onto that. She would always bring these catalogs because they were a pretty big family at that point, so we would get all these high-end catalogs, like Saks Fifth Avenue and Cadillac. We had no business doing that, but we learned about a lot of that stuff.

My mom was very modest and she was very nice and everybody took care of her. They used to do the telethon there for Muscular Dystrophy, so Jerry Lewis would go there, and that's where they had the telethon. I remember one time she brought me a Frisbee because I was into Frisbees and it was signed by Jerry Lewis. She was really bummed about it. I'm just like, what? I was a little kid and I didn't know what was happening. Later on I found out that he made her cry because he was an asshole. I guess what happened was—this is what I've heard from other people—is that when my mom took the Frisbee to go get it signed for me that he was a dick. *What, do I have time to do autographs for everybody?* He made a big deal out of it and my mom was really hurt. She is a very sensitive woman. She came back with the Frisbee and she was all

kind of bummed. I never understood until later on when she told me that happened. But other people had witnessed this, too. I always had a resentment towards him because this is the sweetest woman in the world.

She is the older sister, too, so she had had to watch over her brothers and sisters. Eventually they would get in trouble and all the sudden I would wake up and be like, *there's my uncle on the sofa; something must have happened*. But he knew that was the house that everybody could go to.

My dad wasn't a dick, either. He wanted to escape them, but they eventually followed, but they would live at the house. My dad never charged them rent. He took care of them. He fed them. He was a good guy that way.

That's the things is that everybody would come to my mom. If there was any problems, they would come talk to my mom. My mom would talk it out and call people and make peace. She is awesome and she's always been like that. I've never heard her cuss. My dad is another story. She is just a saint. She is just such a good woman.

One of the last things I want you to reflect on is the East Las Vegas Library opening up and what it means for that library to be there on 28th Street and what do you hope it does for the community there.

Oh, I think it's really awesome. First of all, they never had that big of an opportunity; that's one of the most high-tech libraries currently in the city. What I hope that happens is that other people from the outlying communities come in and get involved there. It's still a bad neighborhood and these kids need hope. I think by these people coming in and donating their services, whether it's teaching a class or talking or doing a workshop, that they're benefitting these kids because the prior kids didn't have that opportunity. You would have to go and find it somewhere. A lot of them ended up on the streets. Some of these people that are in my older photos are on the streets, homeless in that same block. They still live there, but now they're homeless. I don't want to see that for these kids. We've never had that opportunity on this side of town, so I really want it to be successful and that was my idea for the show.

My friend Darren is the curator for all the galleries in town for the library. I go, "Hey, I see that they're building a library on 28th Street. Who is going to be the first show?" He goes, "I don't have anybody yet. You want to do something?" I go, "Yes."

My idea was to go back and find these people that grew up there and bring them back to that community so they know, *hey, this is still your community; you grew up here. Be a part of this library*. That was the idea is taking pictures of them in front of their old houses if they were still there, but also getting their old photos so they felt like, *yes, we did grow up here; we did have a community. We lived in government homes. We were poor. But we all hung out together*. They actually had a better community than our side of town, which was a few blocks away. As my

friend Safine says, “We had to play with each other because our backyards were the same to everybody’s backyard.” We all got to hang out with each other. That’s what I’ve been pushing. I was like, “You guys need to come back and help this library prosper.”

The other problem is there was talk in admin in the Library District that this was going to become another homeless shelter. What happened is they closed the library on Las Vegas Boulevard and they were thinking that all those people were going to come down Bonanza hill and be at this library, and that’s what we’re trying to stop. I have nothing against homeless people, but the thing is that the community has to take pride in this area and get involved.

It was the opening, but there were lines of people getting books. I’ve never seen that, seriously, at a library besides a school library, but not in a regular public library where there is a full line of people. There was probably thirty, forty people deep checking out books. It was like, *oh my God, this is a good sign*. Half of them might be late. Who gives a shit? At least they tried. That’s the thing is trying to create that sense. That’s not my community. I know the people that grew up there, but I didn’t grow up there. My idea is just to get them back, get them involved in their own community, and start helping that area out again.

Can you share some of the stories that stood out to you as you were putting together that 28th Street show?

I’m driving down the street and thinking what the stories were. A lot of it is just people coming here and not knowing where to go; they arrive in Las Vegas and they have no idea. North Las Vegas was starting to pick up with Latinos, but 28th Street was really the hub; that’s where you went because there was the same language, they could help each other out. Safine was telling me that his parents had to go to Roy Martin to learn how to speak English so they could actually fill out forms, like an application or do the power bill; stuff like that, the stuff that’s important. That’s why I pushed that whole English thing. It’s like, “Hey, man, you’ve got to learn how to do this stuff yourself; don’t let somebody else try to take advantage of you.”

I’m just thinking of the different families that came out of there. Olivia Diaz is here. She grew up in those government homes. Dino Gonzalez, who is a doctor that works here in town that does a lot of AIDS research, came out of that neighborhood. He would be good to speak to if you can track him down. Edwin Suarez, who is a friend of mine that I grew up with, is now a physical therapist. He has three locations. Those are the success stories to me. Some bad stuff went down and I don’t want people to think that that’s what happened. That’s part of the story, it is, and I can’t say it didn’t happen, but I wasn’t there to proclaim that, like, *this is what it’s all about*. There’s other people that actually worked their asses off that come out of there. I can’t think of a specific story.

ELSA: Can we briefly go back to your punk scene? You mentioned the shows and I’d like you to describe some of the shows. You described them just briefly as weird, but I want to know what weird mean. Also, where were these shows taking place?

Because we didn't have a club, most of them took place in the middle of the desert. You have to remember that a lot of these guys were construction workers. What would happen was at the end of their shift, they would take the generator from the construction site and take it out there to the middle of the desert. The lighting was sponsored by my dad; he didn't know it. The photography lights that he used for his photo sessions, I would take those lights and we would use them. Somebody would bring a piece of carpet. All the equipment was hashed together. Yes, we had some big shows out there and it was in the middle of nowhere.

There was no overhead, so all the money went to the bands and maybe paid for gas for the generator, but all the bands got taken care of. We had a really nice scene. What happened was that the scene itself was from all the high schools at the time, so we considered ourselves Punk Rock High because we didn't really hang out at our school. We didn't go to the game on Friday; we went to the shows, and we all went there. But we didn't like, *oh you went to Valley*, or, *you go to Western*; we didn't recognize any of that. We were all part of this family, so it didn't matter where you lived.

We had some kids whose parents were filthy rich doctors here in town. I won't mention their names. All the sudden, "Hey, you want to go back to our house?" I was like, *what? You guys live in a mansion? You're part of the punk scene, so you're supposed to be poor like us*. But that's how it was. Eventually we looked past that because we all worked towards the same goal, creating stuff for us, because we never really had a center; there was no youth center for us. You just go out to the middle of the desert, which you've been doing you've whole life, and do your thing.

They were weird because you've got to remember we're teenagers, so you're going through that process of trying to find yourself. Some people are really crazy looking and other people are very modest. You'll see a metal head, some guy with long hair, sitting next to some Goth chick, standing next to some skater, standing next to a skinhead, which they weren't really Nazis just yet; they were skinheads. Eventually they became Nazis. We didn't know that was going to happen. Everybody was different and everybody was accepted. If you had one eyebrow, who gave a shit; we're all going to hang out and talk. I guess that was kind of the weirdness of it; that it was so many different personalities and styles of people.

There were some kids that had no homes. They would go to the show. "Can I crash at your house?" Knowing that they didn't have a house. After the party it was like, "Hey, can I crash at your house tonight?" Not knowing that their parents kicked them out weeks earlier. There was stuff like that happening, so we were helping each other out that way.

We had a community. When things would arise, say we were doing this protest over here, SOL, we would have that place packed. We would spend a day at somebody's house making signs and really get involved. But it was also this political process because we got to learn politics. We were boycotting; we were against Reagan. We were fourteen years old, fifteen years old. *Fuck*

Reagan. Why? Because of this. We had everything written out; this is why: we're against this treaty and this is what he's doing and this is what's happening. We were politically active more than we were in school. I noticed that also a lot of the kids from the punk scene were actually the same as me; we were AP students or Honors students. We were really involved in stuff, so we got to learn a bunch of different politics and ideas and we'd bring those to school and we would be still the weirdos at school, but we were smart.

What were some of the other bits of activism that you guys took part in? Besides opposing Reagan what were some of the other types of protests?

Animal rights. That was late eighties. This group PETA had started, so we got involved with that. Another group was the Animal Liberation Front, ALF, which was really radical. They're the kind that would go into labs and take the monkeys out and then burn the lab down. We didn't do any of that here, at least I don't think so.

The Department of Energy, there is a Department of Energy office over by the convention center that nobody knows about. It's just like this building. We knew where it was at. One of our friends' dads worked there, so we found out...I go, "Hey, look at where this office is at." We eventually went to the office, and they're like, "How...?" It was supposed to be top-secret, but we were in the front protesting. We're like, *we know where you guys are at.*

At City Hall; that's on TV. We actually got interviewed for that. That was against Councilman Steve Miller, who actually used to have a club down the street called the Kitty Cat right here on Paradise. He had a nightclub, but he closed ours down. Yes, he was an asshole. There were a bunch of songs written about him, too.

We did a bunch of environmental stuff. We were doing environmental stuff before it was even a big thing. We were really involved because we wanted to preserve these areas in town and outside of town. Yes, we got really involved. When we get involved everybody would come with certain types of research. It might have been wrong, but we were like, *okay, this is what we're going to read.* Because we would get everybody on the news, so we would have to know what to say. We were little kids, though, but we were a threat.

BARBARA: Who were some of the other people in this group?

Actually there were some kids that went to school here. Jake Gibson was one of them. Another kid from here was Sean Sloan. There was a guy named Danny Breeden. Actually that's a mentor, Danny Breeden. He helped us. That was a big deal. He's the guy that paid for us as little kids to go to shows and he would pay for us to go on tours and he was a really big supporter. I'm trying to think of who from the community...Jerry Oliveras actually had a radio show here on campus, KUNV; it was a punk rock show when actually KUNV was the number-one radio station in the country in the late eighties. It was really big. Rob Rosenthal, also the program director for that, was big.

It was mostly guys. There were a few women, but they didn't get involved until later. We totally denied the women. They never had a voice and now they're like, *oh damn*; they went full force. They plowed us, which is good because they weren't really...It's not like they didn't get a chance to speak because they did. Actually Johnny Bang's mom, Mary Bangerter, she was an instrumental voice. She was hardcore. She knew all the treaties and knew everything about Russian treaties and U.S. treaties and going back and forth. She helped us out a lot, too. There's a lot of people. At the time there were probably maybe three hundred people, which in the late eighties in Vegas was kind of big.

That would be big. The population was small.

MONSERRATH: *How are you politically active now?*

I try to be middle of the road although I can let my freak fly, but the thing is that I'm in different situations now. I'm out in the public more, especially when working on the Basin and Range, I had to work with a lot of ranchers that are against us. These same ranchers, full circle, are also downwinders. I was like, *oh*, and I'd start name dropping, the Bangerters, the Whitmores. *Oh, you know them*. Then they would kind of come at me different. I don't wear like a big fuck-you on my shirt or anything like that that says anything. I try to dress like nobody knows anything about me. In fact, with Trump a lot of my friends started coming out and saying a lot of stuff. A friend of mine was like, "Hey, man, what's going on? Do you support him?" I'm like, "No, man, are you kidding me? I don't support this. This is bullshit." I go, "But the thing is that I'm at school, too." In situations where I deal with the ranches, I didn't come to them and say, *this is who I am*. I just started having a conversation with them and trying to find a ground that we both support. I know about Nevada. I start singing the state song to them. They're like, *okay, all right*. They're kind of checking me out. Then I start dropping the names of the families; I'm friends with these families. And they're like, *oh okay*. Then we start having a conversation as opposed to going right in their face and being like, *fuck you, this is what it's about*. I can't go into their land and tell them how to run their area because on the Basin Range area there is a bunch of cattle ranching and sheep ranching and it's their land; that's where they grew up. I can't go in there and tell them how to change it. It's like if somebody came to your house and said, "This bathroom is horrible. I'm going to change it right now." *Wait, dude, that's my bathroom. What are you doing?* That's part of who you are.

That's the thing is I have to be kind of middle of the road, but I can. I guess I lean more toward the left. I was raised by a grandfather that was hardcore Republican and he taught me all this other shit: war and history and learning an appreciation of that. Eventually I was like, I don't want to be like that. I understand and I know it. I can have conversations. Also, becoming a teacher, I don't really want to put my stance at hardcore even though we've done campaigns for the environment, but I've gotten people that are totally conservative. They're like, *yes, we've got to save this land*. That's what it's about, trying to get people that are opposites to get on the same board and be on one ship. We're not always going to agree on everything, but at least let's come

to a middle ground where we can have a conversation and know, hey, I don't totally agree with you on that, but I dig what you're doing, or, thanks for helping me out on this.

Also, dealing with the Nazis, some of those Nazis eventually came back and they're my friends again, which is really weird because my friends are like, "Why are you friends with those guys after all they did?" I was like, "Man, we were kids. We went through this crazy shit." Now they're peace activists again. I don't get involved with them too much because I'm like, I've seen your crazy side already. But, at the same time, it's like, good; this is a good direction; let's work with this. Yes, it's weird.

Your family has been here for such a long time, can you talk about how the Latino population has grown since you've been here?

Oh my God, crazy. When I started school there was—I still remember the girl's name—Yesinia Vasquez, me, and there was one other kid; there were three of us in school. Eventually there was five. Then I met this other kid who became our best friend, Cheech. All the sudden there's five kids at schools that were the Mexican kids at school. When I came back I was like, oh my God, the population is growing big, especially the construction. Now there are a lot of Mexican hands coming over here and working the construction. You're going to go where the money is at. You've got to support your family. Now it's crazy because I go to my parents' side of town and all the signs are in Spanish. I'm like, *whoa, what happened over here?* It feels weird. This is kind of like East L.A. or Mexico in a sense. I have nothing against it, but it's just like, oh my God, it's really, really grown. We are a majority now, aren't we? We're not a minority.

Close to, yes.

We were having this conversation with Claytee White, the director of the Research Center, but she was talking about where Latinos were all over Las Vegas. We're pretty diverse. But she narrowed it down to North Las Vegas, North Town, and the east side being the central hubs. Between the two, would you name east side more of the Latino hub than North Las Vegas?

Twenty-eighth Street was the hub. That definitely was the hub. North Town was scattered. There was also a large black community there and there was a poor white community there. I know a lot of my friends that grew up in North Town that are Anglo. North Town was mixed. But Twenty-eighth Street I think was the heart of the Latino community. It was predominantly Latino. There were a few older ranch families that were there, but predominantly Latino in that area.

Would you say the Latino community that is now the east side branched out from 28th Street?

Yes. Yes, definitely. Honestly, just find where the government housing was at that point; that's where they were at. There was government housing in Henderson, too, so there's some communities there. Down here by Sam's Town, there's a few pockets there. But, yes, definitely...I think that's the other thing is that a lot of the people that weren't on 28th Street were further down by us, scattered though, and eventually those two groups meshed together.

MONSERRATH: *What do you think of this new term Latinx being used to describe what used to be the Latino or Hispanic community? What do you think of that?*

Everybody is using the X. I had an exhibition in October for the Latino artists in town. I did that in October and we made it Americanx because we were trying to denote any type of pronoun. I don't know. It's different. I see this in my classroom, too. I have students that want to be recognized as something and it's not that I don't want to do it; it's that it's hard for me to do it. Imagine Laurents' show is up and the next day—I've had him for a month and a half—he goes, "I want to be described as a she now." I'm like, "Dude, you've got a beard and I'm still..." Nothing against that, but I'm like, okay, how do I do this? We're going through a time right now. I know there are a lot of us in the older generations that are feeling it. you don't want to be rude, but all the sudden it's like, hey, I've known you for this long and it's taken me a little bit to...I'm trying to work with you. Give me a little bit of time. I'm not disrespecting you. But that's what's happening. It's a weird time. It is, isn't it? Now you have to be careful what you say. Some of the things that we used to say are offensive now and you're not trying to be offensive. You're like, hey, man, I was there; I was fighting for these causes, too, but I wasn't at this point. I didn't think it would ever get to this point. It was never in my peripheral that this was going to be happening, which is good. I guess Latinx is...I don't know. What else can you do with it? You don't want to be Latino or Latina. Isn't there a third gender as well, right?

Non-gender binary.

Right. I guess what else can you call it without giving it all these names? It's tough. I'm getting used to it. I'm not against it. It's just trying to have a conversation using that terminology. Me and my dad actually are on the same side of this, which sometimes we don't, as far as Hispanic versus Latino. You're going to hear the differences between that because people say that a person who is Hispanic is of Spanish decent where somebody that's Latin is Latin American, so that goes from South America all the way up to Mexico, so that's how we identify as Latinos. We're not Hispanic because we're not from Spain. You're going to hear this conversation. There is always this conflict. Ed Fuentes had a really cool sign that said, "Hispanics are Republicans and Democrats are Latinos."

Yes, because if you talk to Cubans—

They're Hispanic.

—they're Hispanic.

Because they identify as being more Spaniard. They don't want to be described as being indigenous where we in Latin America were indigenous; that's who we are; that's where we're from. These guys came over and invaded us, but we still have our pride in who we are. Usually Cubans are...mostly Cubans that I know, sorry. That's a whole other story.

In your father's interview he actually mentioned that your family has roots in the Yaqui Tribe.

Yes, Yoeme. The other name for Yaqui is Yoeme; it's Y-O-E-M-E. My great-grandmother was Yoeme. I got to meet her. She passed when I was nineteen or twenty years old. Yes, we have our roots in that from Sonora.

Did that influence you guys' household? Were there traditions from that tribe that were passed on, or was it just something you guys claimed?

It was kind of funny because when I was seventeen or eighteen I was reading all these books, and my dad gave me a book; it was Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan*. He goes, "This book is based on where our roots are from, from Mapina." That's my great-grandmother. "This is who we are."

I got into and I got more into it, involved with it. I eventually started working with the Yaqui Tribe in Tucson. But we were outsiders even though I could show them a photo of my great-grandma. I'm like, "This is pure blood right here." We were still outsiders because we weren't part of that tribe; we didn't grow up with them. It was weird because you're like, *yes*, and then you show up and, no, you're not a part of this.

There is a funny movie—well, it's not a funny movie—in the late seventies or early eighties there was a movie called 'Breaking Away.' It's about this kid who rides bikes. He looks up to these Italian bike riders and he's just some poor kid on a ten-speed. He races these guys and he's like, *oh my God, I've been waiting for this day to hang out with these people*. They throw a bike pump in his wheel and make him crash. They didn't want anything to do with him. He felt like, *I'm with you guys*, and they didn't want anything to do with him.

That's how I felt when I went to go see the Yaqui Tribe. What I did—I was so pissed—there was a huge cactus that grew in front of the reservation offices. I cut a piece of the cactus off and I brought it home with me. If you ever come to my house, I have three of this huge cactuses growing. It was kind of my fuck-you to them because I was like, man, I'm trying to help you guys. They didn't know who I was, but they were like, "No, you're not; you're not indigenous, you're not Yaqui." I'm like, "What are you talking about? Look at these words. I know the terminology; I've studied it." But it was like we were pushed away from it.

Are there other points in your life where you felt this experience of *pocho - ni de aqui ni de allá*?

Yes. I don't dress like I'm Latino, right? I'm not necessarily Anglo. Yes, I'm kind of in this middle section where I don't identify completely with one side or the other, and there's a few of us that are like that; that we can have conversations and know we've been discriminated against. I didn't have a lot of discrimination—I'll be honest with you—I didn't have a lot of discrimination growing up, not till later, not till later, like with the Nazis; that was a whole other thing. Because I'll go into communities where it's all Latino and they're like, *you're not Mexican*. I'm like, *what? Yes, I am. I speak Spanish. You don't speak Spanish.*

Or, *you don't eat that. You're not Mexican.* After I left the butcher shop, I stopped eating beef and pork. That was thirty years ago. I stopped eating that. I made the point: if I leave this butcher shop, I'm never going to eat this stuff again, and I always kept that point. But then you have *carnitas* and *tripas*; Mexicans eat the cow from the toe down to the lips. *Oh, you're not Mexican; you don't eat this.* I'm like, *yes, but you're going to get cancer from that later on.* They never think that. But, yes, there are sometimes those conflicts. But my dad had always been a guy that—and my grandfather had always pushed history on us, so we knew the history. This is where this comes from. This is what this is about. What do you know about your history? You don't even know your history?

I've been in situations where...I went to a party and there were all these gangbangers. One of the dudes was saying, "I can't get a job." I had been drinking, I'll be honest with you. I go, "Dude, the reason you're not getting a job is because you look like a *cholo*, man. Nobody wants to hire a *cholo*." "Oh, what's up, man?" And then all these dudes surrounded me. It was kind of like the Nazi thing, but now I'm dealing with my own people. I go, "Yes, dude, nobody's going to... You've got to dress the part, brother. If you want to be a *cholo*, do that when you get home. You're not going to get a job. No one is going to hire you, dude. You've got flip-flops on and high socks. Nobody's looking for that."

I remember I saw this big guy coming towards me. He goes, "He's right, man. You guys are all fuck-ups." It was another big *cholo*. He was their buddy. He goes, "That's why, man. Listen to this dude, man. That's why we can't rise. That's why people look down on us."

That's the big thing is I want our people to rise, but I also want it to be part of a community. I don't like the isolation. Of course, there are certain things that we can't share completely with other people because they didn't grow up in it, but I want to come to the table and everybody do their part. I hate the whole isolation thing because it's happened to me and I've done it to people, too. But then I look around and it's like, why do I have to do this? I don't have to play this part. I'm Mexican, but my wife is from Poland, for God's sake. One of my best friends is black. It doesn't matter. We bring all our cultures to the table.

That's the big thing, once again, with the English thing. It's like, cool, participate, be a part of the structure, get involved in the politics. You can have a voice in saying what goes in this park,

but you've got to be able to communicate because I know you're not stupid. You have to come up and say something.

BARBARA: *Pierogis or tacos?*

Actually the best tacos I've had are from my wife.

MONSERRATH: *What?*

Her pierogis are okay. Her tacos are really good. Yes, she knows how to make Mexican really good. I didn't teach her, like, you've got to make tacos. All the sudden it's like, "What are you doing?" "I'm going to make tacos." Then I'm like, *oh my God, hers are so good.* They're better than my mom's, but I've never told her that.

Have you taken her to Mexico?

Yes. We have an uncle, my dad's cousin that practically runs this town called Puerto Pinasco, Rock Point as they call it, and his family have been there since '20. They're shrimp fishermen. Between him and his wife who is Dumas, like from *Three Musketeers*; that lineage—some of that family lives there—between them they own half the town. It's a big prosperous town. Phoenix goes there to kind of hang out and I think they have a Club Med. There are some good places there. I took her there. It was fun. It was kind of dry and she wanted to see some other stuff. I was hoping to go to Mexico this year, but we'll see what happens. I'd like to take them. I like going down there. I don't have anybody—besides my uncle in that town, I don't know anybody else. I just kind of go up and show up and start talking to people.

Any last stories you would like to share? Any thoughts on this project?

I think this project is fantastic. The other thing is that I'm glad because it's Latino, so it's not just certain people; it's not just Mexicans. I think you interviewed my friend Paco Alvarez?

BARBARA: *No.*

Not yet?

No. but we will.

Maybe his family?

His family had interviewed for a different project.

Oh, for a different project.

Yes. We will. We'll get him.

There are different types of Latinos that were here. I think there needs to be a spotlight on them. I think actually one of the first prominent Latino groups here were the Cubans. They were coming over. Batista was out, Castro was in, and they had already worked in the casinos and they came here. But John Pacheco has been here since '47, on 28th Street. There were also Mexicans working in the railroad. Jessie Alvarez, I don't know if you guys know her, she went to school; she was one of my students. Her grandfather worked on the railroad here.

I would love to do a railroad story.

Yes. I would talk to her dad. Her dad was born here, too. Her dad and my sister were born around the same time, '63, '64. He went to Rancho and my sister went to Vo-Tech. Her grandfather worked on the railroad, and he's still alive. There were also people that worked in the mines here. Out at Goodsprings, also there were a bunch of Latinos that lived out there.

We need miners. That would be good. You touch upon occupations that we haven't gotten yet.

I don't think any of them were allowed to work at the dam. From what I understand, it was only Anglos that were allowed to work on the dam.

We had a handful of blacks.

A handful of blacks that also worked at Timet, also. They worked at Timet doing the magnesium. There wasn't too many Latinos there. It was mostly black community. Yes, there are probably photos in this library of Goodsprings where they have these little kids. I remember seeing the photos really young. It was like, oh my God. I asked my dad, "Do you know these people?" I figure he knows everybody. But back then you could.

I really like this project. It's meant to happen. But it also gives prominence to the people that have been here a long time to show what they've done; that things just didn't happen overnight. It was a process. I don't know what they went through, my dad's generation. He even said that the only time he got discriminated was when he was in Pahrump doing a thing for the Mexican social club. That's the only time he ever felt discriminated here.

I think he shared that story.

I like that we're a part of this community. We're a part of this thread. Especially in this time right now where we're being cast upon as rapists and all these other things, we actually are a part of this community and we do make a difference. But that's the thing is that I want us to show that we're a part of it. There are other parts. You guys already did the documentation on the Jewish community. I'm sure there's going to be one for the Asian community. That should be coming up, right?

Hopefully.

Just to show that Las Vegas is a buffet. It really is, it's a buffet of different types of people. Where else can you go and become really successful? You don't have to have a degree to work on the Strip and become super successful, really you don't. Even back in the day when these guys were making good money, they didn't know shit. They were working as a porter and all the sudden they're a bartender and all the sudden they're running the bar. But you had those opportunities here. Put a spotlight on that because we are a part of the fabric, and we've come to help; we've come to work; we're not taking unemployment.

Some people are on government stuff. My dad was always against that. "You better get a job. No unemployment for you." I've never had it. I've been poor, but I've never gone for government subsidies or anything like that. He said, "That's not what we're about. We're not about taking away. We're here to add." That was one of the big things that he always pushed.

Checko, I just want to say thank you for your time.

Sorry, you let me ramble here for a long time.

No. This was fantastic.

[End of recorded interview]