

**Interview with Herman Jimerson,
Ruth Jimerson-Carter,
and Leon Carter Jr.**

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

African American Collaborative

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012

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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.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *African Americans in Las Vegas: A Collaborative Oral History Project*.

Claytee D. White
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Preface

Interview with

Herman Jimerson, Ruth Jimerson-Carter, and Leon Carter Jr.

March 3, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Claytee D. White

Herman Jimerson and his younger sister Ruth Jimerson-Carter, along with her husband Leon Carter Jr., gathered on March 3, 2021, to talk about their memories and experiences growing up in West Las Vegas—the Westside.

Herman and his sister Ruth were born in Arkansas and moved to Las Vegas in the Fifties. Leon Carter Jr., Ruth’s second husband, was born in Los Angeles but spent most of his childhood in Las Vegas as well.

Herman has fond memories of Fordyce, Arkansas, a strong, rural all-Black community. He remembers never being hungry, having a dog, and enjoying his childhood. His father had been to Las Vegas in the early 40s when an influx of people created a tent city in the downtown area, and he decided to move back. When his dad told Herman the family was going to move to Las Vegas where he would have better opportunities, Herman had mixed emotions. He liked his life in Fordyce, where everyone knew everyone else. He was sad to leave behind his friends, his dog, and his music lessons.

Arriving in the historic Westside of Las Vegas, he found himself in another strong all-Black community, where everyone knew one another. He remembers a thriving business and professional district, lots of restaurants and clubs, Black police officers, and employment programs like CETA that helped people find jobs and start their careers. He enjoyed seeing big name entertainers like Duke Ellington and B.B. King perform for Westside teens. And he also remembered the 1969 riot that so damaged the neighborhood.

Until he went to high school at Rancho and Las Vegas high schools, Herman had never attended an integrated school. He recalls walking home from Las Vegas High School with Native Americans students who had to be back on the nearby reservation by a specific time. He joined the Marine Corps toward the end of high school and moved to Southern California at the end of his tour. He worked a variety of jobs, bought his first house, and moved around a lot amid a series of relationships.

Returning to Las Vegas around 1975, Herman soon discovered a talent for sales and invested more in real estate. Despite some legal problems, Herman found success in his career and his marriage to Christy. He cared about his old neighborhood and was interested in efforts like

Sarann Knight-Preddy's plans to save the Moulin Rouge and other ways to invest in the community. His testimony supporting the reopening of F Street, especially because of the city's persistent neglect of the Westside, helped lead to the \$30 million reopening of the street to reconnect the neighborhood to downtown. The influx of drugs and deterioration of the Westside has saddened him. Herman doubts the area will recapture the vibrancy he witnessed as a teen.

Ruth Jimerson-Carter's experience on the Westside was a bit different from her older brother's, because of their eleven-year age difference. She remembers the houses where she lived, the schools she attended, and how she skipped a grade to enter middle school. She described her neighborhood a "nice, nice place" where everyone knew their neighbors; the mood was lively, the grass was green, and there were plenty of trees. Doors were open at night; there were no bars on the windows.

More sheltered than her older brother, Ruth sang in the church choir and was not allowed to go the movies outside of downtown area. After graduation, she married, had three children, and worked for Valley Bank's insurance department. After ten years at the bank, Ruth decided to do something different and attended dealer school.

Initially Black dealers couldn't work on the Strip. Even after that changed, they were still expected to gain at least a year's experience downtown before moving on to the more upscale and the better paying properties on Las Vegas Boulevard. Ruth worked downtown at the El Cortez and Holiday International (later known as Main Street Station) before she moved on to the Barbary Coast on the Strip, working there more than ten years and training as a floor supervisor. She experienced harsh "old school" treatment and discrimination as both a Black person and a woman.

When she was passed over for promotion despite her experience and training, she returned downtown to the Golden Nugget, and later moved back to the Strip, to one of its most luxurious properties, the Bellagio. Ruth enjoyed interacting with people from all over the world at the beautiful hotel, wearing a tuxedo while overseeing her favorite game, baccarat. She counts her nearly 24 years at Bellagio as the highlight of her career. Because of Covid, she retired a little ahead of her plans.

Ruth and her husband Leon Carter Jr. moved back to the Westside and are aware of the realities of living there. They see the drug dealing and police raids. Ruth had to continually complain to the city about the lack of sidewalks there, making it difficult to push her mother's wheelchair over the rocks. Ruth and Leon have seen the 100 Plan drawings showing how the neighborhood could change. She was impressed but a little skeptical. The renderings she saw almost made the Westside look like Summerlin, but as Ruth says, it will take more than a sign saying "Welcome to the Historic Westside" to transform the community. She hopes that perhaps in the next ten or twenty years some progress will be made.

Unlike the Jimerson family, Leon Carter Jr. was born in Los Angeles and spent his early childhood in Compton. His family would regularly travel to Las Vegas to visit relatives and eventually made the move back to Las Vegas. Leon remembers living in several Westside locations. He attended Valley and Las Vegas high schools, graduating from Las Vegas High. He left the area in the mid-Seventies, spending several years in Seattle. He struggled with addiction for many years but always found joy in the arts. He started working with musicians like Lou Ragland of the Ink Spots, handling lighting and technical tasks for entertainers like Antonio Vargas, Bubba Knight, and Bobby Massey of the O'Jays. He enjoyed meeting and greeting people and served as an informal emcee on many occasions. After his return to Las Vegas, he became an important presence at the Art Center and along with Lou Ragland worked with young people. Active in the cultural community, Leon attended the charette that helped form the basis for the 100 Plan for revitalizing the Westside. He hopes the people in the Westside will want and expect better.

[Editor's note: A fuller description of Leon Carter Jr.'s experiences can be found in other oral histories including one with his father, Leon Carter Sr., recorded on January 28, 2021, and another one focused on him, recorded on March 31, 2021. His wife, Ruth Jimerson-Carter, took part in these interviews as well.]

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Claytee D. White

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[Editor's Note: Claytee White's questions and comments will appear in italics throughout this transcript.]

Today is March 3, 2021. This is Claytee White, and I am here with a lot of people. Ruth Jimerson-Carter (RJC),

Leon Carter (LCJ)—:

(LCJ). Junior.

—Junior. That's right. Thank you. And Herman...

Herman Jimerson (HJ): Jimerson.

Herman, could you please pronounce and spell your full name for me?

HJ: Herman, H-E-R-M-A-N. Jimerson, J-I-M-E-R-S-O-N.

Ruth, because I have Leon's on another tape, could you please pronounce and spell your name?

Ruth Jimerson-Carter (RJC): My name is Ruth Jimerson-Carter. R-U-T-H, Ruth; J-I-M-E-R-S-O-N, Jimerson-Carter, C-A-R-T-E-R.

Thank you. I'm going to start right here. I just want you to tell me about your early life. Tell me where you grew up, what that was like, what kind of jobs you had as a young man in high school, before high school, and what that was like.

HJ (Herman Jimerson): I grew up in Arkansas.

Which city?

HJ: A place called Fordyce, Arkansas. My childhood was unbelievable. We had everything. We had acres of land. We had horses, cows, you name it. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, Alice. The last time I saw her she was sitting down talking with my mother telling me that she was coming to Las Vegas to make sure her boys were trying to be somebody. She died while she

was here. When they had the funeral, my mother couldn't go. She was just crying and things like that. It was just horrible, horrible. She thought she had lost her best friend. In talking to my dad about it, he said, "Well, don't worry about it because we'll be okay."

They kind of gave me anything. I want a bicycle. "What color do you want?" Whatever. It's unbelievable. They wouldn't let me walk to school. They had a taxicab picking me up every day to go to school. Things like that.

Whenever my father got mad at my mother, he would say, "Well, son, I'm going back to Kansas City. I'm going to be going and you can come live with me." Oh, okay. They were always getting stuff, dogs, you name it, horses, cattle. I heard my father saying to his buddies and things like that, he would always have people around, "I think we're going to have to be moving; I think we're going to have to be leaving. My wife just doesn't want to be here anymore." And I didn't really get it.

Then one day he came and talked to me. He said, "Son, we're going to be leaving here. We're going to live in another place, and it's a place where you have a lot of opportunities to be somebody. I know you like your friends, but there's so many friends that you haven't even met. I want you to consider that. I know you like your dog. You can get another dog. We're going to make it."

I got kind of excited about that. But by the same token, he would tell his buddies that he was leaving because of my mother. He would be telling me, "Because we're going to have opportunities here." Okay.

So I went to an all-Black school, all-Black church. Everything was Black. The only time we went to town was to get feed, stuff like that for the livestock. We grew everything.

I cried when we were leaving Arkansas. I was sitting in the back of the truck. I must have cried until we got to Texas because I did not want to leave Arkansas. They took my saxophone, my piano lessons, and things like that, which was very important to me at that time.

When we got to Las Vegas, I thought it was probably one of the worst places I had ever seen. My father was here in 1942, and he would talk about the tents and the huts and things like that that people lived in and stuff like that, and that's what I expected to see, but it really wasn't like that. It seemed that all the people that I met had the same story that I had because mostly the Black people here were from the southern states—Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas—and nothing but Black people on the Westside for the most part. It was identical to what we had come from, so it really wasn't different to me at that time until I went to high school here, Rancho High School. That's the first time I went to school with White people. All the people that I walked to school with, all of us lived here. That was the same problem that we had; we did not like this integration stuff because it would only be two or three Black kids in the class. You couldn't talk to anybody. You didn't have fun and things like that. I hated, we all hated integration, so we all had a similar story, all of the kids that I grew up with. I grew up on Jackson Street. We had casinos and things like that. All the Black people had their own businesses, and they were just very unique.

When I was at Rancho High School, I was a very, very fast runner. I could run so fast. I could jump high. We went out for the football team. There was only one other guy there that could outrun me. His name was Joffe. I'll never forget Joffe. He could outrun me and outjump me and things like that. We both went to Rancho. We got cut from the football team and nobody would tell us why. You go in, if your name is not there, you're off. I was very upset about that. My dad said, "You can go to another school if you'd like." Okay.

Then I went to Las Vegas High. Every day all the Black kids would walk back to the Westside. I noticed all the Indians. There used to be a reservation right over there. The Indians had to be home, back on the Westside, by a certain period of time, and it looked so awkward. It just looked so awkward that they had to go back to the reservation by a certain time and because I had to be home by a certain time. That's the first time I noticed something a little bit differently. It didn't bother me, but...

I knew all the Black people here. I knew all the police. We had our Black policeman here. We had Dr. West. We named a shopping center after him. He had a beautiful daughter, and I went to a dance with her. A guy, probably one of the most unique people in the world, was our escort. Not Billy Eckstine. I'll think of it in a minute. It was such a fun thing because we were all Black. We all knew everybody. Things like that. Except when we'd leave the Westside, it was a little bit different. To me Las Vegas has always been known as the Mississippi of the West. I never saw that. I never saw that.

In high school—I was telling Ruth about it earlier before you arrived—I had my car. My dad bought me a truck and then he bought me a car. And I fell in love with this little girl, Luiva Banks, and she had a sister named Barbara. Barbara had a brother in the Marine Corps. One day he came to the school looking for Barbara. He found Barbara and Luiva, and I didn't see Luiva for two weeks. I was so hurt. I told my dad, "I'm going to join the Marine Corps." "You can't join the Marine Corps. You can't do that. I want you to go to school."

What happened with the brother? What do you mean you didn't see her anymore?

HJ: She was with him. She was with this guy, Barbara's brother, for two weeks. She would ride to school with me every morning because I'm the one that had the car. Only two Black guys on the Westside had a car, me and Green. I forget his name. He used to own the Town Tavern.

He said, "You can be a lawyer. You can do anything you want to do. We're going to pay for it. I want you to be somebody." I couldn't see it. I went to join the Marines and things like that. They took me down to the bus station. My father says, "You know, you're making a big mistake. You can be anybody you want to be, but I can't stop you from going. But I want you to know one thing. No matter where you go in the world, if you ever need anything, don't you ever forget that you have a father, and I'll tell you how you can get along without it." He grabbed my mother by the arms and said, "Come on, Estelle." That's when I realized I could never come home again. I knew him. It was over.

Anyway, I met another girl, another lady, and I got married to her and things like that.

How long were you in the Marines?

HJ: Four years.

You got married while you were in the Marines?

HJ: Right. I got to be somebody, so I kept looking for a better job and a better job. I bought a house. That was the first thing that you've got to do. I bought a house.

Where was your first house?

HJ: Pomona, California.

You didn't come back to Las Vegas.

HJ: No. She wanted to have a beauty shop, so I bought a beauty shop. Life is going well. All the sudden life changed. She didn't want to live there anymore. I said, "Okay." We go back to L.A. I'm living in this little apartment, and it just wasn't me. One day she says, "I just want a divorce. I don't want to be with you anymore." I had just bought her a new car. Then I found out that she had had a divorce set up six months prior to that. I felt betrayed. I felt like I had really let my

mom and dad down. You don't get a divorce in this family. That's not the way it works. I couldn't work it out. I met the love of my life and married her.

How many years later? Are you talking about the same woman now?

HJ: No, no, this is a different wife. I'm divorced from the first one. She got the house, everything.

Then how much time lapsed?

HJ: That I was single?

Yes.

HJ: About a year. I met this girl, and it was like, oh my gosh, the love of my life. I had the best job I had ever had. I was district operations manager for Arrowhead Water Company up in Oxnard. I had a beach house, a new Cadillac, perfect. She didn't want to live there anymore. Then I came back to Las Vegas. That was 1975. I came back to Las Vegas and what am I going to do? I don't really know.

My mother cleaned houses for all of these people. They were some of the top people in Las Vegas. She said, "Well, what do you want to do? I'll talk to Mrs. Cashman first." "Okay, I want to be a dealer." "Okay." She sent me down to the Union Plaza to talk to a guy named Frank Scott. He owned the place. I go down there. He said, "Okay, yes, I know Mary." Anyway, I had to go to what they call a break-in place across the street for a little while, then I come back to the Union Plaza.

Things are getting shaky, kind of crashy. I come home and my wife was gone. She had run off with another guy. I got the kids and things like that. I'm sitting down talking to my mom about it. She said, "You're trying to do too much. You buy a house, you buy a car. You think it's

yours, but it's not. It's her house. You do the outside and let her have the inside. I notice you're kind of tough on these people. You've got to lighten up." I said, "Okay."

My wife had run off and she was in San Francisco. She'd call me to come and get her. Okay. I flew up there, drove back to Las Vegas, and I looked at her. "Where do we go from here? Where do we go from here?" She said, "We're going to be fine." But it really wasn't that great with me. Now I'm getting used to divorce. I said, "Okay, we're going to end this." "Huh?" "Yes, we're going to end this."

But while she was away, I was at a hotel called the Dunes Hotel. It's not here anymore, the Dunes hotel. I was gambling. This lady just kept staring at me. She just kept staring at me. I walked over and gave her my phone number. I said, "Here, you call me. If you ever need anything, you call me." Just like that. I left with that. About six months later she calls me. "This is Claudia." "Oh. Hey, how are you?" "I'm in Las Vegas." "You're kidding." "You told me if I needed anything to call you." "Yes, yes, yes." "I'm here with my boyfriend." "Oh okay." I had another girlfriend I was living with at that time. "I can't come and see you," blah blah blah. "But you're got my number." Okay.

She got one of these places where you go in and they find you a job. She went there and they got her a job at the Barbary Coast, and that's where I was working. I don't know. She was just a beautiful person in her way of speaking. Everybody was in love with this girl. One of the guys had been a friend of mine for the most part, and he would give me a note to give her. One day I gave her the note, and she said, "I don't really have any use for him. I like you." "Me? What about your boyfriend?" "Don't worry about him because we're just friends." Oh okay. Then we'd go out here and there and things like that.

There's a game that my uncle used to talk all about, baseball. That was his thing, baseball. "Life is like baseball and if you want to win it, you've got to practice on the ball, you've got to practice swinging the bat. You've got to practice." I would tell her about that game one day. "If you want to make it, if you want to get to third base, you've got to have somebody to drive you home. That's the way life is." He had told me that story many times, and I had told it to many people. But a couple of days later, she says, "Well, I like you, man, and I'd like to be with you, but we've got to get married." I said, "Really."

I was fighting a case, too, attempted murder, you name it; I had eleven felonies. She was the only witness.

She who? This new woman?

HJ: Yes. She was the only witness because two witnesses disappeared. Couldn't find them anywhere, so I've got one witness left. And we found out if we were married, then they couldn't accept her as a witness. I said, "Okay." She said, "When do you want to get married?" I said, "We're getting married today. Come on."

But you didn't have any witnesses then.

HJ: Right. That's how I beat the case.

She was telling me about another part of what we did for a living, what she was doing. She was like an OPC. She would sit up in the casino, and as people walked by, she was stopping them and invite them to go to a presentation. She was making about three or \$400 a week. But the other side, you're making \$1,200 a week or more. I said, "Really?" She said, "Just come and take a look at it." I said, "Okay." I went there and I just happened to meet the owner of the company. He walked up to me. He said, "Carter. Is this the guy you've been telling me about?" And she says, "Yes." He looked at me and he said, "Are you coming to work?" I said, "No."

“Why not?” “I’m not a salesperson.” Then he says, “You know that and now I know that, but the people don’t know that. If you’re interested, be here tomorrow at eight o’clock.” I was there at eight o’clock. We started making quite a bit of money. The first year I think I went over a \$100,000. It was 1981.

What company is this?

HJ: At that time it was called American International Vacation Club. We had land divisions all over, things like that. I’m trying to learn how to be a salesperson, but it didn’t work for a couple of months. Then I just started telling people stories of where we came from. “I come from Arkansas, and we had fifteen hundred acres of land. It paid for everything.” Just stories. I became one of the top salespeople in the company with her.

Before you go on I want to go back just for a second. You said something earlier—I’m going all the way back now—you were talking about the reservation and Native Americans having to be back on the reservation at a certain time.

HJ: Correct.

Explain that to me more. I’ve never heard that before.

HJ: If you come from the Union Plaza, there’s a railroad track behind it. Coming from Las Vegas High is where I went to school, coming back this way you would have Indians walking with you, but they would have to go to the reservation. The reservation is just right over—

Right. On Main Street.

HJ: Right. It was like I couldn’t understand where they were going. Then that’s when I found out that they had a reservation, and they had to be back at a certain time. That was probably the first time that I realized there was a difference between us, Black people, White people, and

things like that. Before I never really thought about it. But anyway, with the races going on in Las Vegas, I didn't see it at that time, not at all. After I got married—

You're getting ready to go back now to the job?

HJ: Yes.

You mentioned a police officer. Was there a special police officer on the Westside?

HJ: Yes.

Who was that person?

HJ: Moody, Herman Moody.

You're talking about Herman Moody, okay.

HJ: And there's another one. There were two of them.

LCJ: Was it Bolden?

I don't remember their names. There were two of them.

RJC: Moody. You definitely remember him.

HJ: Yes, yes.

After you talked about that police officer, you talked about dating Dr. West's daughter.

HJ: Right.

I didn't know Dr. West had a daughter. I thought he had two sons.

HJ: It was his stepdaughter. He married a lady that had her.

Dottie's daughter?

HJ: I don't know her mother. I just knew this was not his real daughter. Black History Month or whatever, at that time, during that month of time, the Black stars working the Strip would have dances and things like that for the Black kids.

Where?

HJ: We went to the Culinary Union Hall. Upstairs they've got a big auditorium there.

The Culinary Union, where it's located now?

HJ: I don't know where it's located now.

Wyoming and...

HJ: Yes, yes. Yes, that's where we went. Duke Ellington; that's his name. Duke Ellington, one of the most suave people that is just incredible. He impressed me so much. It was incredible.

But the only time that you got to go to parties at the Culinary Union would be Black History Month?

HJ: Not necessarily. That's just an event that we had. See, I grew up on Jackson Street. I knew everybody down Jackson Street. They all knew me. I could go to the clubs, go in there and sit down. I saw B.B. King. I saw Duke.

How old were you when you started going into the clubs to see—

HJ: Fourteen.

They let you come in at fourteen?

HJ: Yes. They all knew me. We had a pool hall down on Jackson Street. I could go play pool. I learned to play pool very well. I guess I'm skipping a lot of my childhood.

I want to know all about Jackson Street before we get back to what you were doing later on in life.

HJ: Jackson Street went from H to D Street.

It didn't go over to C? This was before the freeway, right?

HJ: There was no freeway here.

Right. Didn't it go all the way over?

HJ: No. It stopped. We're talking about D Street where all of the businesses were and things like that. You had people living down Jackson Street on the other side.

You're talking about the business portion stopped.

HJ: Yes.

But the street did continue?

HJ: Yes, the street kept going there. My sister and her husband owned a place there called the Malt Shop.

RJC (Ruth Carter): Johnson's Malt Shop.

Do you know Brenda Williams?

HJ: No. Then they had the Carver House on the end. Then you had the Elks Club.

Where was the Elks Club located?

HJ: On D Street and Jackson.

Oh really?

LCJ (Leon Carter Jr.): Yes. It's where the Muslim temple is. And it used to be a library.

HJ: And the Carver House was on the corner. It was real, real nice, the nicest club we had. You had the Louisiana Club. I forget the names of these clubs.

Town Tavern.

HJ: Town Tavern. I used to go in there a lot. That's where I saw Bobby Bland and B.B. King.

Was the bowling alley here?

HJ: The bowling alley, yes. We lived across the street from the bowling alley. I used to bowl.

Las Vegas was so unique based on where we come from because we lived on acreage. You talk to people from Louisiana, same thing, all Black, no integration and things like that. We hated this

integration crap because all of a sudden we've got to go to school with these White kids and it just didn't make sense. I guess that is part of my childhood. I skipped a lot of that.

I think those were the questions that I wanted to ask. They would let you in the clubs early on.

Go ahead now and talk about the work that you were doing.

HJ: My job? Anyway, I did that until a couple of years ago, actually. But we got divorced in 1992.

This is the second wife or third wife?

HJ: This is the third or the fourth, one of them.

I think it's third.

HJ: I'm not a difficult person, I don't think. I'm the kind of person, if it's not working, call my lawyer. I don't like to argue, I don't. I'm a very violent person. I don't like arguing. I'm never hit my wife and things like that. If you're not happy, call a lawyer and let's break this stuff up. You haven't spoken to me in three days, I'm done. Like my mother was saying, you've got to give a little bit.

RJC: Compromise.

HJ: Yes, yes. This was a tricky divorce because everything was going so well. Everything we touched turned to gold.

Why was she unhappy?

HJ: People. People. She was White and I was Black. We made so much money, and all the White guys would send things to her. I don't know. Then when her mother came here—her mother wanted to come to Las Vegas.

From?

HJ: New York. And she lived with us for probably a year or so. I'm thinking—I had bought three properties at that time. But they were building on the property down on the corner from me, Las Casitas, Tropicana and Rainbow. "What I'm going to do, I'm going to buy a fourplex here and let your mom be the manager. How does that sound?" "What?" "Yes, yes." Because I could tell that she wasn't making it with me. One day she went to the backyard and looked in the pool. There are all these Black kids. She just freaked out. "Who are these people, Herman?" I go, "Those are my kids and their friends." It was a little tough. When her mother questioned her being married to me, it kind of got a little bit more difficult. Guys at work, "Is he bothering you?" "No, he's my husband." Here we go again. This is the third or fourth time you brought this to me. "If you're not happy, you know who to talk to. Talk to the lawyers and get this stuff straightened out so you can go ahead and be with who you want to. How does that sound?" "What?" "Yes. I'm done with this." That's what we did. That's the way it was.

Anyway, I'm not getting married anymore because this is not working out. This is just not working out. This is what I did for all of my years that I remember. I can see my mom and dad. They would sit down with a piece of paper, a notebook, and they'd write down how much money they've got and what they're going to do and things like that. I thought that made sense, so I believe in that. It's kind of like, this is what I'm doing, and this is where we're going to go, because I saw my mom and dad do that. I never saw them broke. They might have been, but I never knew it. They were always buying properties. Even while we're in Las Vegas, they're buying land back in Arkansas. I do believe that real estate makes sense. I tried the stock market a couple of times, and it didn't work for me. But this makes sense.

When I got divorced from that girl, we cut up seven properties. It was devastating, devastating. Well, I had this client one day and he liked me for whatever reason.

You're still working at the same place?

HJ: Same company, but I'm selling land now in Colorado. We bought twenty-eight thousand acres and cut it up. I'm one of the partners. I'm a vice president now, so I'm talking to the big shots. I'm talking with this guy, and he was telling me about his life, his children, and things like that. Then he was telling me about this daughter that he had that would like to come to this country. Really? "Yes, she's a really wonderful person." I'm going to Hong Kong on vacation. He says, "This is where my daughter is. Give her a call when you get there, and she'll show you around." Okay.

Did he know you were single?

HJ: Yes. When I got there I called her, and she came down and we talked all day. She had a desire to come to this country and a desire to be married. She said, "But I'm not going to marry you because I know what they do to Black people in your country." "Really? What do they do?" "Well, they're prejudiced and things like that." "Oh, I didn't know that." I was not aware of prejudice and things like that. "Really?" "Yes."

I came back home. I started calling her. I called her one day and said, "I really, really like you." She said, "Wait a minute. Let me give you my ring size." I said, "What? We're moving a little bit fast here. I thought you didn't want to come here." "Well, if you're not interested, don't call me anymore. Stop calling me." Okay.

I waited about a week, and I called. Her brother answered the phone. "She's not available." I'm like, "What?" "She's not available. What do you want?" "I want to talk to Christy." "She's not available. I already told you that." I said, "Oh. When you see her, tell her I'm going to be there tomorrow." That's how I met the wife I have now [Christy]. I sat her down

and said, “This is who am. This is what I do. This is what we’ve got to deal with. If I come home late at night, don’t worry about it. Whatever happens, you’ve got to believe in me.”

Where did you live during this period? When you first came here, you lived on Jackson Street.

HJ: I lived on Jackson Street. When I left Jackson Street, I went to the Marine Corps—no, no, no. From A Street.

A, as in apple?

HJ: Yes, on A Street.

Under the freeway now?

HJ: Well, it’s on the other side of the freeway. I’ll tell you a story about A Street. While I’m living there they made a movie. They made a movie with Sammy Davis Jr., the Rat Pack. They made a movie down there. I sent them to my sister’s restaurant. I met them, later years, in Beverly Hills.

After I left the Marine Corps, I bought the house in Pomona, California. When I left Pomona, California, I moved to Ventura, California. I left Ventura, California and moved back to Los Angeles temporarily, and then I moved back to Las Vegas in 1975.

In 1975, where did you live?

HJ: The first place was down on...

RJC: Those apartments down there? On Lake Mead.

HJ: Yes, close to that area over there. Two days before my wife ran off, I had put a deposit down on a house over on Oakey. Not that I don’t like the Westside, that’s what I wanted to do. And it never went through because she was gone. Then after that I lived in an apartment complex off of Flamingo. Are you familiar with the Greystone?

Where on Flamingo is it?

HJ: Well, it's not really on Flamingo. Flamingo and Algonquin.

That's not that far from UNLV.

HJ: Right. From there I went to prison.

RJC: It wasn't long, a couple of months.

Are you going to tell me what happened?

HJ: About what?

When you lost all your witnesses and all of that? This is the same time, right?

HJ: Yes. I go to prison. They tried to give me forty years and things like that. But I got married to the witness.

Right. Were you innocent?

HJ: Was I what?

Innocent.

HJ: Yes and no. Yes and no. I'll tell you what happened. Another guy fell in love with this girl.

This is the girl who—

HJ: I married.

RJC: Dianne.

This is Dianne who...

HJ: This is Claudia.

Is this the one where the two of you kind of got wealthy together?

HJ: Yes. He fell in love with this girl, and they were just an incredible thing. At that time I lived in an apartment on Algonquin, and I had two of my girls living with me. I came home one day and one of them is just shaking, shaking. She had urinated on herself and things like that.

How old are the girls?

HJ: At that time twelve and thirteen.

RJC: Fifteen.

HJ: I knew based on what he was saying who it was.

He who? I missed something. Your daughters were shaking. What had happened to them?

HJ: He threatened to come in and take everything out of the house.

He who?

HJ: This guy that liked my girlfriend. Because she had told him that everything in the house was hers. They're going to live together, whatever. Well, everything in the house was mine, but that's what she told him. He was going to come in going to take the stuff out. I had a little gun. I take my gun—and I had called the police about this guy several times, threatening me and things like that. I got to where he's living. I knocked on the door. When I knocked on the door, this guy opened the door and came straight at me. I had a gun in my pocket, and I had a knife in my hand, they call it a stiletto. He ran right into me and then he just kind of backed up and sat down on the sofa. Then here comes the big guy. He's going to attack me. Remember I studied karate for a lot of years, so I kind of knew how to handle myself, and I messed him up quite a bit. Now here come the police. The police came and I threw my hands up. "Yes, I've got a gun in my pocket." Okay. That's when I went to jail.

My mother comes to visit me, and she says, "I want you to tell me what happened." I told her exactly what happened. She said, "Okay." Then she went and tells the lady that she worked for.

And who is she working for?

HJ: Cashmans, some prominent people here.

She's working for probably some Mafioso, also?

HJ: Yes. And this is what was my turning point into not necessarily making money but being careful with it. I'm sitting in jail and here comes these lawyers, a guy named Oscar Goodman, George Foley and...I forget the other guy's name. He says, "I think we can get you out of this." What they were going to charge me would be a little over \$100,000. "But I think we can work it out." A hundred thousand dollars? It was kind of like I was going to give you \$100,000. Where am I going to get it from? Then they tell me—my brother and my cousin Rob, they went and got these lawyers—they say, "Your brother says you can pay that kind of money." "My brother said that?" "Yes, and that's why we're here." That's when I found out that my brother thought more about me than I did. He had more confidence in me than I did, and that's when I started changing a lot.

But anyway, after the divorce settled down and stuff like that, I met the girl. She's Filipino. Well, I guess. Her father is Japanese and her mother is Chinese. I call it Chapino. But she speaks the language.

Which one?

HJ: The one I'm married to now.

I know, but which language does she speak?

HJ: She spoke Cantonese, Mantonese [sic], Tagalog. She's a very bright lady, very intelligent. I got married to her. I said, "Okay, this is who I am; this is what I do. I look bad on paper, but don't give up on me. You can have anything you want. You can go to work, whatever you might want to do. I don't want to see your money. Whatever you want to do." Twenty-five years, I've never seen her paycheck.

She's a lucky woman.

HJ: I wouldn't say that. But that's who I am. What I did, I feel that Las Vegas is probably one of the best places that I could have come to at that age even though Las Vegas is supposed to be the Mississippi of the West. But it was good for the people that were coming because we were coming from a place that wasn't integrated, we had land but that's all we had, and to come here and live on the Westside with nothing but Black people, we were used to that.

You got here originally in 1958?

HJ: Yes.

How old were you then?

HJ: I don't remember. I was born in 1943. I think we came in '57 because they had just changed the Homestead Act. Are you familiar with the Homestead Act?

Where you get the land.

HJ: Five acres and things like that.

Did any people get land here from the Homestead Act?

HJ: Yes. That's how Las Vegas got started. You'd get five acres and...

That was because of the railroad.

HJ: No. It was to populate the community. When my dad would talk about the huts and things, the tents and stuff like that, he couldn't understand it. Because when my grandmother came from North Carolina—she was freed when she was ten years old—they walked from North Carolina to Arkansas. They got free land for clearing land, and there was nothing. My dad said they would clear the land and help build houses. The same thing will happen in Las Vegas, because they were living in tents and stuff. But it's going to be a city, and you have an opportunity to grow with it.

Do you know anybody who got the five acres of land?

HJ: Not personally. Yes, I do, as a matter of fact. But you go that way where I lived at—you probably never heard of these people. But Decatur. What they would do is they would give you land, and then how you got your mail is by the street you live on. You go out that way, but these are mostly White people. But the land was ours. We had a big thing. I don't remember exactly what year it is. I could find out. When they closed that street right here, my mother was really upset about it. There's another lady, I don't know her name. You know her name, Ruth.

Katy Duncan? When they closed the streets? Trish Geran? Katy Duncan?

HJ: No, no. What's that lady that would come over here and talk to Mom? I almost brought the paper over here today.

RJC: That was Trish.

LCJ: That's Trish.

HJ: Is that her name? And they were trying to figure out how to get it open. Okay. There's a park down the street called Lorenzi Park. We used to go there, the Lorenzis. But they put in their will that that land will be given to the community for Parks and Recreation. But they had some games. They came here from California. They came here and started doing little stuff. They had a big fight out there at the park. Jan Jones was the mayor at that time, and what they decided to do was shut the Westside down. You can shut the Westside down in thirty minutes.

Are you talking about in 1969 when the riots took place?

HJ: Yes. No, no, no, not 1969. This was later than that. Anyway, I heard what they had done, and she was really upset about it.

I had...not a meeting. I was in the audience with a guy named Martin Luther King, and they were talking about protesting and protesting, and he made a statement that you can protest all you want, but you've got to find out if what you're protesting for is legal or illegal.

Where was that meeting with Martin Luther King?

HJ: That was in Los Angeles, Nickerson Gardens.

That was back when you were living there?

HJ: Yes. I got a feeling. I went to a meeting with a guy named Joe Neal. He was a politician at that time. They were talking about protesting and things like that. I came over here three times to protest with them.

From Los Angeles?

HJ: Yes. That was with Ruby Duncan. You ever heard of Ruby? Okay. That's when we did another program that we were working on. It's like, what happened when you have a community here that it needs help? It needs jobs; that's what they need because they would go down and couldn't get jobs and things like that. When you wouldn't hire Black people on the Strip, I come and protested with that.

How many marches did you participate in?

HJ: Three.

The big one with Ruby Duncan, and what other ones did you participate in?

HJ: Another one, I'm trying to think of the name of it. CETA program.

And they protested on the Strip?

HJ: Yes, from this down to the Union Pacific.

Union Plaza?

HJ: Yes.

Downtown, not the Strip but downtown. Downtown?

HJ: Well, to the hotels down there. Union Plaza.

Starting where?

HJ: Jackson Street.

Okay, just downtown.

HJ: Actually, it wasn't on Jackson Street, but close to it. There's a place over there, the Golden West Shopping Center. The CETA program is a program that, in other words, whatever you would like to do, if it works for the community—let's say you'd like to be a cook. We could go to one of the casinos, and they put you on a training program, and the government would pay the fees and things like that. Once you complete it, you would have a job.

This is part of EOB?

HJ: Yes.

Now I know you're talking about the mid-60s.

HJ: Yes. Now, we had a cousin, and he was in charge of the Equal Opportunity Board here. He used to come all the time to visit mom—I forget his name—Rayford. I think that was...it wasn't Carter, but Carter really backed it up pretty good. I forget the name of the president that put this program together for us.

Probably Nixon.

HJ: Nixon?

Probably because it was part of the...Pop—what was it called?

HJ: I don't remember, but the name of the program is CETA. I got a little cousin. I was talking with her a few months, and she said, "That's how I got my job." Okay, great. We put that together. I'd come over here and go to the meetings with them and this and that. It worked out. Then they finally got—now I was in the job training program or whatever.

But anyway, when they closed this down—

Okay, now you're in 2000 something?

HJ: No. I don't remember what year it was. I can find out.

Right. This time when they were building the Smith Center.

HJ: When they closed this down...

Yes, okay.

HJ: Because at one period—I can get you the years if it's important—but at one period when the Black people started moving away from Jackson Street, and I'm talking to people that I went to school with and things like that that were doing other things, realizing an opportunity here that we grew up around and was walking away from. I had a friend named Glen, and Glen has a mother named Sarann Knight.

Yes, Glen Walker. You're talking about your friend Glen Walker.

HJ: Yes. She met this—well, she didn't meet; she already knew him. He used to be an entertainer here, and they wanted to stay here and help the Westside grow up. His name was Bob Bailey. He got into real estate. He helped Mom and Dad buy this house. We put together what you would call a coalition—I didn't have a lot of money, but I had a little bit—to buy the Moulin Rouge.

This is in the '80s when Sarann tried to buy it?

HJ: Right. You know Sarann? Really? Then she got a—

She could never get financing. Tell me about why she could not get the financing.

HJ: Because the guy that owned the place said he would never sell it.

That was Leo Frey?

HJ: Right. You know Leo Frey. He would let it fall down. On top of that they changed all the zoning on Bonanza. It used to be zoned commercial. When I grew up here, they had car lots down there and grocery store, stuff like that. They changed all the zoning, and so if you can't get

zoning for a casino, the property is worthless for the most part. Leo said he would not go that way.

Then she opened up a credit union.

Wait. After she had the Moulin Rouge?

HJ: Yes.

What credit union?

HJ: I don't remember the name of it.

You're not talking about the Westside Credit Union?

HJ: Yes.

That was Woodrow Wilson.

HJ: Anyway, this woman was a part of it. I wasn't a part of it, but she was.

Wasn't the credit union much earlier in time than Sarann owning the Moulin Rouge?

HJ: She didn't own. He wouldn't sell it.

Right. Her name was associated with it.

HJ: Yes, yes.

But the credit union was earlier?

HJ: Yes. The thought process was this. The CETA program, it worked out pretty well until they got Sarann—not Sarann. I forget that lady's name, out of it. We feel that what we need on the Westside are jobs, jobs that pay more than minimum wage. We're not going back to when minimum wage was a dollar and a quarter an hour. But that's what I feel and what we as a group felt. I didn't realize that when my daddy came here, he became a casino porter. There's nothing wrong with that. All of the Black people here were in the kitchens and things like that.

Yes. This was before integration when you got here.

HJ: Yes. If you're going to live here, how do we change it? How do we go and find out some things and come back home? We had three or four different things that we tried to do, but it's tough when you don't have anybody that lives here that wants to participate.

Didn't you have people at that time like Bob Bailey—

HJ: Yes.

—Dr. West—

HJ: Yes.

—and Dr. McMillan and—

HJ: Yes.

—Lubertha Johnson? What do you mean people who didn't want to participate?

HJ: Well, you need more than them.

Okay, but those were just four of the names off the top of my head.

HJ: Right. You need more than that. It's the community to try to get people organized and things like that. Just protesting down the street, people don't grab that.

I got this guy's card, I think. I met with him a few months ago. Total idiot from my point of view. He's a minister, something like that. McCurdy?

William McCurdy, the new commissioner?

HJ: No. This is his father. He tried to get me to support his son. But anyway, it's just not that nucleus here that we could put together.

Now we are in today?

HJ: I haven't really tried anything lately here. I'm going way back to the '70s or whenever.

These are just things that have happened on the Westside in my lifetime. I remember the Brown Derby. I remember all of this stuff around here.

What were the clubs on Jackson Street when you lived on Jackson Street?

HJ: I don't remember the names of them. I know the Louisiana Club was on the corner of Jackson and...What is this, F, maybe G, something like that?

RJC: This is F.

HJ: The Town Tavern was across the street there. The Moulin Rouge was down on the Bonanza, and they were shut down for the most part. We went in and opened it up a few times, but we couldn't get anything going there, as far as buying it and stuff like that.

But I'll get back to this because I know you're running out of time. This is the big thing right here, to me.

Tell me what happened when they closed F Street.

HJ: That's what I'm going to tell you now. This lady come over here talking to mom right here. My mom, she was crying and things like that. "Why are they messing up our community?" Well, I knew why. They were trying to cut it off. You could shut this place down, if you have more race riots or whatever you might want to have here, thirty minutes they could shut the Westside down. You can't get in, you can't get out, and they shut that down.

I got another friend named Joe. He just died. And he's got a friend Lawrence, and he's a Black attorney, sharper than a tack. He said, "What we have to do first, we've got to find what they're doing wrong by doing that." Because none of the Black politicians knew anything about it. Nobody knew who approved that place to be closed down.

Ricki Barlow did not know?

HJ: They claimed they didn't. What we did is we went back into the time the United States was put together. We went back into colonies and things like that. Most of this stuff comes out of New York. That's where it comes from. We found out a difference between state and a city,

there's a difference between a city and a neighborhood, and a neighborhood and a community; they all have different meanings. When you pay your taxes, it goes to Washington, D.C., and then it goes out to states, and then it gets to the state and the state has municipalities that they maintain. We found out that the Westside is the only community in Las Vegas that doesn't have a name.

But isn't it just part of Las Vegas?

HJ: Yes.

RJC: Downtown Las Vegas, yes.

HJ: We found out that the Westside, which is what we are in now, they consider the boundaries are in the Las Vegas municipality. What was happening when the state sends money to the City of Las Vegas, they were leaving this part out. What it was, it came up to...they were directing funds to where they shouldn't have. At that time Oscar Goodman was the mayor.

We sat down for three months. It took us three months to do this stuff. Now we had all these drawings of all these communities and things like that and all the improvements that had been put into City of Las Vegas, but not in West Las Vegas, which is a part of the city. Then they had a meeting at the Doolittle, I think it was, and gave everybody three minutes to give their opinion, which we thought was ridiculous. "We'll give you three minutes to explain why that place should be open." I had all my paperwork out. They had this lawyer. I forget his name. It starts with a C.

On the side of the community or the side of the city?

HJ: The side of the community. I left my notes and then I gave my note to this girl. They thought I was her lawyer, and I'm like, really? When they said, "You have three minutes to talk," this is what we did. Joe says, "Okay, you've got three minutes. When you go in, you go to the

podium, and you read the charges that we are talking about.” Misappropriation of funds...it was on and on and on. I guess the City of Las Vegas, which included the mayor. “When you finish it, you get back out here and get in my car in the backseat, and you lay down.” I said, “Okay.” I read it and people were looking. I left it on the podium. I came outside and I got in the backseat with Joe. I laid down. Four or five guys come out just looking around. He said, “They’re looking for you, so you lay down.” He got in this car, and we drove.

About a month later they had a big meeting about it. I talked to...I forget the guy’s name now. I’m not good with names. He was a lawyer on the other side. He worked for the city, but he was an attorney. I found out a little bit about him, and I let him know that we were doing a lawsuit for about \$50 to \$60 million. He talked about it. A couple of weeks later it was passed where they could open up.

What about the Nevada Department of Transportation? Didn’t they have a part to play in this, also?

HJ: No.

NDOT was not sued along with—

HJ: It’s all just city. That’s where we threatened to sue for the \$50 million. Then they approved that they would open it up. They opened it up at a cost of \$30 million, which means they still have \$20 million dollars left over, so they were going to decorate with trees in the street and stuff like that. When you look out there, they’ve decorated that street in this area.

What do you mean “decorate?”

HJ: Those trees and stuff, the neighborhood.

Oh, they’ve planted some trees.

LCJ: That’s part of that 100 Plan.

Oh okay, they told me they planted some trees, okay.

HJ: Yes, yes, yes. Then they kind of stopped that. I got a notice on it about how to deal with the Westside community, and then they said they would need \$50,000 to do the study.

Who would need that?

HJ: The city. I let them know I'll pay the \$50,000. I'll pay that for the study. The next letter I got was from this guy sitting here. He gave me the letter where they're going to let the college, UNLV, do it. UNLV will do a study of the Westside, about what we need to move up.

LCR: That's the 100 Plan.

I know, I know.

HJ: You remember that?

LCJ: Oh yes, of course.

HJ: After I agreed to pay for it, now all of a sudden I can't pay for it. But this is what we're going to do, UNLV is going to be free. I'm just telling you a little bit of history here. You go down that underpass there. You see all those pictures and things up under there. They wanted to put my mother's picture up there, and my mother says she doesn't want her picture up there. She gave him the name of a relative of ours, Woodrow Wilson. Woodrow's picture is up there, but not my mom. I got a letter from them three or four years ago for an interview. I don't even know where it is. Those are some of the things that I'd seen in Las Vegas. Some of the people that I've worked with here, I don't remember their names and things like that. It's not that important to me. Every time I come here I wish there was a way that we could train some of these people to do something different.

What do you see as the future of the Westside?

HJ: I don't.

What do you think is going to come out of the 100 Plan?

Nothing. UNLV has done absolutely nothing here, and I let them know that UNLV's students don't know a damn thing about Black people. They don't have a clue of what we're talking about when we say we need jobs or how we're going to get them or whatever.

Did you see the plan that the students put together?

HJ: No. Did you?

Yes.

HJ: See, there you go. A few years ago I met a friend of his [Leon's] from The Ink Spots. Is it The Ink Spots?

LCJ: Mr. Ragland.

Okay. Lou.

LCJ: Lou.

HJ: The Ink Spots, when I was a kid, was probably one of the most dynamic groups of entertainers in the world. Here I am sitting talking to one of them. Our conversation was basically the same. We went and had lunch and stuff like that a couple of times. What he wanted to do was start a school here for children that wanted to advance into music. He was in music all his life, but they didn't really have much money. They didn't know the business side of it. But after a period of time, years, they learned the business side.

Lou and who else?

HJ: Is his name Lou?

Lou Ragland.

HJ: Oh, you know Lou?

Yes. Who was working with Lou?

HJ: Just me and Lou. We looked at a couple of properties. We talked and things like that. We found out the property down on...I forgot the name of that street. Over there where Doolittle is. It's so expensive it's unbelievable. We saw another property up here on Main Street, but then you've got to get accredited and all that kind of stuff. His plan that he was presenting to me, and when I found out he didn't really have any money, he just had some ideas, which was unbelievably good from my point of view. And as far as making phone calls here and there, there's not much credibility when you're dealing with somebody that has just ideas and no money. What I wanted to do is basically the same thing. I don't know anything about music. I'm a salesman, is what I do. I can take a person who's never sold anything, and in six months make them one of the best salesmen whatever they're selling. It doesn't matter what. It doesn't matter if you're selling insurance or bottled water.

Tell me the basic thing that you teach them.

HJ: Could, would, should, I can't.

Say that again.

HJ: Could, would, should, I can't. If I can make this affordable for you, is this something you would like to do? Then you should do it. Well, how about tomorrow? I can't do that. That's just one. You have certain things you go through. The number one thing is trust. You have to establish trust. I can teach you how to establish trust. I can give you things to ask and things not to ask. After you establish trust then you must establish a need. Need. I've got to convince you that you need this through our conversation. The next thing I've got to do is help. You like this? Let me show you how I can help you to do it.

What do you see as the future—

HJ: I don't.

—of this area?

HJ: I don't.

What is going to happen to it?

HJ: I don't know.

You don't think it's going to become gentrified, and all of this will be White?

HJ: Oh no.

What do you think?

HJ: But I'll tell you, you'd be surprised at how much property on this side is owned by White people. You would be shocked. They hold onto it for whatever reason. I don't really know. I was over here a few months ago and they told me, Lou Ragland and Pastor Ray or something like that. It blew me away because to sit with this guy and get the idea that he wanted to do, if you could run into a real investor that would be willing to take a chance on the Westside, it would work. They convinced Magic Johnson to come in. He came in and opened up a little place over there, a shopping center. They convinced the boxer to come in over here and had a boxing club.

Which boxer?

HJ: Sugar Ray Leonard.

Sugar Ray has a place over here someplace?

HJ: Yes, a school.

Sugar Ray has a school?

HJ: Yes, boxing. They convinced this other guy, he lives over in [indecipherable] and plays golf. He got the business up here, school and stuff like that. But you can't get people that have money to invest in this community.

Why do you think that is?

HJ: There's nobody asking for it.

You don't think anybody wants this property?

HJ: If they're presented an offer. We didn't know Magic Johnson would come here and do what he did. We didn't know Leonard. We didn't know—

Magic just had a supermarket, right?

HJ: Right. Yes. The Golden West Shopping Center, we had a chance to buy that. I'm sitting up on a meeting with it. I'm thinking, oh man. I think it was Edmond that bought that. He might still own it, I don't know. But we used to have some businesses in there, Black businesses. That's where we had the CETA program.

Ruth, how old were you in 1958?

RJC: I was four.

You were only four. What memories do you have of the family coming here? You don't have memories until about, what, '62-'63?

RJC: Probably, yes. I don't remember leaving Arkansas. I just remember being in a truck. Herman and Larry were in the back. I remember Jackson Street. I don't remember the name, of course, but I remember living in the apartment that we lived in. I just remembered it was dark. I don't remember what it looked like or anything. The next place we lived in was on A Street. We lived there for quite a while because I remember I was going to Westside School from there.

LCJ: A and Washington.

RJC: One hundred and a half A Street. I remember when Herman was in high school and when he went—

Do you remember any people from the Westside School?

RJC: No. I remember people from my neighborhood. Ruby McKenzie, her mother used to be our babysitter, and there was a lady right in their property. She had a small trailer. That was our babysitter. I don't remember her name. Herman was probably in the Marines by then, probably, because I don't remember him being around.

Did you and your mom ever get your hair done?

RJC: My mom did my hair. She went to beauty shops.

Which beauty shops did she go to?

RJC: I don't remember.

Were they on Jackson?

RJC: I don't remember.

HJ: There was only one beauty shop on Jackson.

RJC: I don't remember.

When you would go out as a young girl, seventeen, eighteen, where would you go?

RJC: My mother didn't let me go past Washington Street. I didn't go nowhere. I remember going downtown to the movies, but I had to be with my other brother Larry.

Which movie theater?

RJC: I don't remember.

LCJ: Fremont or El Cortez. There was only two.

RJC: Yes, those were the only two.

LCJ: We didn't make it down to the Huntridge. It was too far.

RJC: Yes, we never went to the Huntridge. I know that.

Why not?

RJC: We just [undecipherable].

HJ: It was way on the other side of town.

It was just too far away?

RJC: Yes. Because we could walk downtown from here.

Exactly. Easily.

HJ: They had basically shut it down. It went to a different format.

RJC: Yes, it went down. It never did come back up.

You went to high school where?

RJC: Valley.

And you went to high school at?

HJ: Las Vegas.

You started at Rancho.

HJ: Right.

And then you went to Las Vegas High School.

RJC: Right.

Rancho?

RJC: No. I went to K.O. Knudson and Valley High School. I went to Westside School and then I went to...Now it's called Pearson, right? But before, it was Madison.

LCJ: Yes. Wendell P. Williams.

Do any of you remember when any of the high school riots took place?

RJC: I remember the Rancho riot, but that's all I remember. From hearsay. All I know is from hearsay.

Valley did not have any while you were there?

RJC: No.

Leon, you were getting ready to say that you remember?

LCJ: I actually remember the Rancho riot, but I know we had a little thing that happened at Las Vegas High School, but not as intense as Rancho.

What happened at Las Vegas High School, and which year are we talking about?

RJC: I think that was '71. '70-'71, right in there.

When did you graduate from high school?

RJC: Seventy-one. Actually, during the time that the riot occurred, I was here on the Westside.

That was 1969.

LCJ: That was '69, okay.

HJ: Are you having a good time?

Yes.

LCJ: Right in there somewhere. I actually didn't see the Rancho riot.

RJC: He just heard of it.

LCJ: But I know when it occurred up in here and the person—if I'm accurate on this, you're going to say—his name is Gerald Davis. He is on the list to tell his story how that started because he was stopped by the police, and they had him go in the police car. He's on the list. He has yet to be. Then I have a young man that lives by G and Jackson, the house on that corner with the palm trees. The house looks kind of like this, well, they just got the roof on that. He grew up in that house, G and Jackson. He's onboard and he wants to tell his story.

Fantastic. What do you remember the community, the two of you, looking like?

RJC: This community? People had green grass. They had trees. It definitely looked like life lived here. It was lively.

HJ: Vibrant.

RJC: Everybody knew their neighbors. When we first moved here—because this wasn't here. My dad built this in '62. It was just that end of the house and he added on a bedroom, I guess you would call it, in the back. Now it's a storage room. My other brother Larry and I used to sleep back there. We used to sleep with the door wide open. Never worried about anybody breaking in. We didn't have these bars on the windows.

HJ: Tell her when we had the Black cops.

RJC: Yes. Well yes, exactly yes. I didn't know the Black cops because, like I said, I couldn't go past Washington.

HJ: Yes. I knew them by name. "June bug."

RJC: June bug. My sister and her husband, he was a minister, one of the preachers up here at PT, Pentecostal Temple, so we used to go to church there and Second Baptist. I was in the choir a little bit at Second Baptist.

Were you in the choir that sang during the holidays? The Community Youth Choir?

RJC: I don't remember singing during holidays. I just remember singing. I don't even know if it was the holidays, but I just remember—I was just going there because of my friends, and my momma every Sunday, "Get up, you're going to church." We just did that because momma said, "Go to church." So I joined the choir.

That's why all of us went.

RJC: Yes, yes. And I'm glad she did. I'm glad she did.

Me too.

I remember going to Disneyland one time with the church. I don't remember being at Disneyland, I just remember going. I don't know if I had fun or what. I just know that I went to

Disneyland, the very first time in my life, with Second Baptist. I don't know, I must have been ten, eleven, maybe. It was nice, a nice neighborhood.

HJ: See this lady right there? I sold her some land in Colorado.

RJC: Whoopi?

HJ: Whoopi Goldberg, yes.

LCJ: Wow. Okay then.

After high school what did you do?

RJC: After high school I got married to my first husband, in '72. With that we had three children, and I had a stepson, also, because he had a son before we got married. I lived over in Bonanza Village.

Where in Bonanza Village did you live?

RJC: On—not Bonanza Village. But the neighborhood that's on the other side of Bonanza Village. I can't remember the name of the street. Where?

LCJ: Where the school is. Hoggard.

Mabel Hoggard School?

RJC: Mabel Hoggard, yes. Those homes, yes. The kids all went to Mabel Hoggard. Then we lived out in Summerlin for a minute. I went through a divorce in 2005 and now I'm here.

Where did you work?

RJC: I worked at the—all the places I worked? I worked at Valley Bank for ten years.

Now, Valley, was that at the—

RJC: Computer center. That was on East Charleston.

Valley Bank is where your sister worked? Barbara?

LCJ: I think they said Valley Bank.

RJC: Yes, she was at the bank-bank downtown, and I was at the computer center.

And you were there for ten years.

RJC: Yes.

Did you learn computers at the beginning?

RJC: No. I worked in the insurance department. When your insurance cancelled, I put the bank insurance on it. They call it VSI, which is very expensive. Oh, I made sure that that would never, ever happen to me. That's some expensive insurance that the banks slap on you. Then after that I went to dealing. I started dealing. I dealt downtown for about two years.

Where did you learn to deal?

RJC: At the Las Vegas Dealing School.

Was that at the same time—do you remember a dealing school being over here as part of EOB?

RJC: No.

LCJ: I think I've seen some pictures of that myself.

RJC: They had quite a few dealing schools, but the only reason I went to that one is because my ex-husband worked at the El Cortez, and they had a lot of employees that worked there.

HJ: Let me ask you this: What have you learned about this family?

I talked to his father, so I've learned a lot about baseball, so that was good. I knew early on, back in the very, very early days, in the 1940s and before that there was a community baseball team called the Giants. It was good to know that they still had community baseball teams that—

HJ: If you talk to his father—and he built homes, right? This was not as depressed as it's presented because there were a lot of professional people here—

Oh yes. My first interview was with Jimmy Gay.

HJ: Jimmy Gay used to be my taxicab driver in Arkansas.

LCJ: Huh? Really?

HJ: Yes. Jimmy Gay. Then he came out here and I think he worked with a funeral home or somewhere. I don't know. He started it, huh?

No. Because he had been to embalming school before he came here. The Bentons in Arkansas—

HJ: You know the Bentons?

The Bentons that sent him to embalming school?

HJ: I know the Bentons. I can see their house right now. It had a big pond out in front of it.

And Jimmy Gay learned to play golf because of the Bentons.

HJ: Jimmy Gay...

Yes, my first impression of the Black community was Jimmy Gay's home over on Goldring.

What was the name of the street? Over in Bonanza Village.

LCJ: I never knew where he lived.

He lived first on B Street or someplace.

HJ: When I went to the Union Plaza to meet with this guy Frank Scott, I first talked to Jimmy Gay. He had some kind of arrangement with him. He found out who I was. *Oh, really?* It was no big reunion or anything like that. But he got me to Frank Scott. Then I found out that he was with Palms Mortuary or somebody. I don't know if he started it.

No, no, he didn't start it. It was already in operation when Jimmy Gay got here.

HJ: Oh. Well, as far as the Black people are concerned, who was working here and who was working there, we knew who was where. It was a community where, like she said, everybody knew everybody, knew what everybody was doing and things like that.

When I come back to Las Vegas in 1975, I was shocked at the Westside because the property began to deteriorate. All White cops were patrolling the area, and instead of one cop, there would be two cops, two White guys in a car. The community had been deteriorating they'd stop you and shake you and things like that for walking across the street wrong. It was horrible when I came back.

Had drugs come into the community by that time?

HJ: I'm not familiar with that.

You don't know when the drug epidemic started—

HJ: No.

—in cities all across the country—

HJ: No.

—and here was not—okay.

LCJ: What year are you speaking of, somewhat?

Late '70s and '80s.

LCJ: The '80s...I left here in '76. It was just getting its momentum around '76. Oh no, no, no. I left in '76, so it would be just beginning. I come back...The late '70s; that's when the momentum was starting up and it was proper. I'm talking about the crack, the angel dust, the sherm, yes, all that was just moving in. The cocaine, the crack, as they call it, it was like housesitting; people got together, very etiquette, very etiquette atmosphere until it got scandalous. Antennas, cans, I think some people used an apple. At that particular time. Been

there, I can speak. A lot of people now, they're doing what they're doing. I would say over 90 percent of them have not ever seen pot or cocaine, have not seen it.

That was usually in the White community.

LCJ: Well, no. If you just knew somebody that was selling. Like now, they probably can't even get to that level, most of the people.

HJ: Yes. They make more money selling crack.

LCJ: To get to the level of knowing someone. You buy your nice little quantity and go and mix it up yourself. I've been there. I had my tour of duty, as I call it.

Tell me about your early life.

LCJ: I was born in Los Angeles.

This is Leon Carter, Jr.

LCJ: Yes. Los Angeles General Hospital. We lived, as Barbara was saying, in Compton. Grew up there. I remember it somewhat that location. We moved here...I was born in '52. I can't recall when we moved here, and where we were living. We were living with my dad's parents, 211 Jefferson, in a studio apartment. Because there was two bedrooms in the main part of the house, and then there was two sets of studios, and there was five of us.

Why do you call it a studio?

LCJ: There was no bedroom. It was just a room. You know, a studio. And there was five of us. We lived in there. The grandparents...what happened? Oh. They moved out and we moved into the house. I'm trying to think, when was he building the house on Jefferson? The big house. We lived in the main house after our grandparents had moved out of there, and then we lived there. But we moved there and then Dad was building a house. They had moved away. We had for the time a semi-middle class. Talking about the house: intercom system, double-stack oven,

fireplace, marble right in front along the fireplace, black marble, white leather furniture, great patio in the back and a family room. The house was three bedrooms and a family room. And the thing my sister said, the sisters were dancing, tap dancing.

What were you doing those years?

LCJ: I was still a kid.

Did you ever have a part-time job as a young boy?

LCJ: No. No, no. That was out.

That was not allowed?

LCJ: No.

Why not?

LCJ: It was just the way that Leon was, yes. No, I didn't have a job until, ooh, golly, junior high school or something.

What was your first job?

LCJ: I believe my first job was when I went to visit my cousins in L.A., and we were part of a summer program. It was various jobs. The only way I can base the year of when that was, to look up when Locke High School in Los Angeles was built, because I remember us working in the school doing something, cleaning up or what have you for a summer program. I think that was my first job, was there for the summer.

What are your first memories of Las Vegas?

LCJ: Well, my mom was working at the Fremont Hotel, and we were living in the house off Jefferson and J, Pastor Sanders' house that they live in today; that was our home for a short period of time because we had to move. We moved to Revere and Miller, I think the third house in. We lived there for a little while and then we moved. I think we moved into Vegas Heights, I

think, Paso and J. We moved over there, I believe. I'm not sure of the sequence of the times because we have lived on Jefferson Street. We lived on Jefferson Street between A and B, back over that way. We lived on Jefferson, back into the grandparents' house; that was 1969, somewhere up in there we were up in there. We just had to move, move, move. We lived by Comstock and Hassell; we lived there. We lived in the Biloxi Apartments right behind the post. We lived in Sherman Garden. We lived, 1969-70, over in Marble Manor; we lived over there. I think I covered it all. We moved. We moved in every area except for down by Kit Carson.

Come and get me. I'm ready. What's the next question? I've been waiting for hours. I heard everybody else. I was thinking of the words and now I'm ready to roll. But, yes, at that time we were living on Jefferson, Anna—okay, you haven't met Anna. That's the older sister. That's when they were dancing. They'd be doing the dancing. I know the first steps of tap: Heel, toe, bop bop bop, heel, toe, stop stop stop. My daddy used to dance a lot. Right across the street from us was where Shirley Barber lived, right across the street. Mr. Barber, her husband's dad's home was between A and B, and I believe the house that Mr. Barber lives in now, I'm not sure if it's a duplicate house, but it's the same color. You're going to have to ask my father, did they rebuild it the same way?

As the house that was on...?

LCJ: Between A and B.

On which street?

LCJ: Jefferson. The big house, the big two-story home behind Wendell P, on Adams? That's a duplicate house. That house was on B and Adams.

When you say "duplicate house"—

LCJ: It was rebuilt.

—the same builder built a...

LCJ: I'm not sure who rebuilt it, but it's the same look as it was from B and Adams, and then they rebuilt the house over here. Then my dad built, building-wise, lawyer Kellar. We had seen all this stuff. I can only take a look at my dad's shoes, but I can tell you something. I have called up my own...

Yes, that's what we're all supposed to do.

LCJ: Like Mr. Ragland, Marcia, now you, Brenda Williams. Oh gosh, all the things that I have got involved in somewhat and be in control of my time. Like tomorrow, Ink Spots, there is that rehearsal. Then when I go places. People don't know who I am, but some of them do.

HJ: Is that important to you?

LCJ: Yes.

Tell me about the work—

LCJ: Excuse me. They do know who I am, but they don't know all that I'm all about.

Tell me more about that. Tell me the work that you've done when you talk about Lou, you talk about Marcia. Tell me about the work.

LCJ: With Lou? Oh, the work that I've done. I'm a "meeter," a meet-and-greet person. I've been a driver. I've been an emcee, unrehearsed, spontaneous Leon. Remember the Christmas program?

RJC: Yes.

LCJ: "Leon, here's what I want you to do. I want you to take this paper and announce that I got a new song coming out." *Okay.* Just ran out there, then came back and did whatever. When there were all the shows, I make a lot of the contacts with the various people.

RJC: You were a light man, a sound guy.

How did all this begin? Tell me from the beginning.

LCJ: The very beginning? It all started with Lou.

Tell me.

LCJ: It was at Doolittle with Trish's book, Trish Geran's book.

RJC: There was a meeting over there.

LCJ: Was that the meeting?

RJC: Yes, and it was Lou—

LCJ: Oh yes, yes, yes. Oh no. It was the book signing, and Lou was just here; he was playing music, he and one of the other members of The Ink Spots and Mel Green, the architect; he's a guitar player, so it was just the three of them. Lou was packing up and I offered to assist him. I was just back home visiting, and the rest is now...

Well, tell me. Tell me all of the in-between.

LCJ: We stayed in contact with one another. I had come back. At the Art Center I was exposed to the electronics of what he does: Setting up cameras and meeting various people of high standards and personality—Antonio Vargas, nice man; Bubba Knight, nice man; Bobby Massey of the O'Jays because Lou was their manager back in the day. He has exposed me to, gosh, more than I ever thought I am. But entertainment-wise I've always seen it because of my sisters and my aunt that I told you that was deaf, deaf dancing, and the things that my dad does. Personality means a lot.

Do you remember Larry Mason?

LCJ: Mr. Mason? Yes. Nice man, nice man. I can't recall all that he was all about. Poetry, theater, acting, more even now. I remember him. Yes, I remember him. And then Trish's book, Marcia's book—I mean that...then a part of—you've seen it, right?

Tell me about that.

LCJ: This was a summer camp.

Which year was this summer camp?

LCJ: This was 2016. Within here...Unity circle monitors. There's my name.

I want you to tell Marcia that I want my copy.

LCJ: I may be able to give you a copy. Hopefully we can get the cover stuff.

RJC: I thought they were going to redo it in color.

LCJ: Here we are.

They'd be great programs.

LCJ: My brother. He was here earlier. Then myself. She gave me this as she was putting this together. Being part of the Art Center was...Then the granddaughters, they had one little stint of dancing. It was on one of the little...

Was it African dance?

LCJ: I think it was African dance, yes. And I met a cousin from out of nowhere that was a member of the dance group at the Art Center, Isaiah Lucas. He made a video, "cammy cam." He told me his last name. He said, "We may be cousins." He gave me his number to his grandmother, and I called her, and she knew my aunt. She knew my aunt. I said, "Man, we're cousins." Then I met—Brenda Williams gave me Isaiah's dad's phone number, and I talked to him. We hadn't been in touch with one another, but, hey, he's in the video, and I was there. I was part of the crew. All because of Lou, all because of him.

What happens now, now that Lou is gone?

LCJ: The group goes on. There is one young man that's been auditioning. The fourth person, they haven't gotten him yet. The young man—well, young man, he looks younger than me. He

said he's retired, so that's what I'm telling you. He wants to become the engineer, wants to take Lou's place inside of the Art Center, and he has his own equipment. He's talking to Marcia about that. He's all right. I really don't know him, and he doesn't know me, and we're just beginning to talk. I'm not sure where he's from, but once we settle a little bit of the dust. And then there may be another replacement for another gentleman. He's kind of ill, so I don't know how long that's going to go.

What do you see as the future of the Westside?

LCJ: Well, as we were speaking of the improvements, it can be. It's the people. It's all about the people. If we had helped the people—

RJC: To want something better.

LCJ: Yes, to want better. You are actually in ground zero for drugs. But nobody is going to mess with this house. We got, I call them, entrepreneurs across the street. The city did what they did out here, how they phased the trees. There were three big trees out here. And he told Ruth there'd never be any sidewalks.

RJC: When I first moved they said, "They'll never have sidewalks over here because this area will never be developed."

Who said that?

When I called the city. They transferred me so many times. But I think I had ended up with City Development or something, I don't know. Because my mother was in a wheelchair, and I said, "It's pretty hard getting her across these rocks, getting her to the doctor's office and stuff." And I said, "What can I do to get sidewalks over here." He said, "There will never be sidewalks over there because it's not being developed." And I said, "Oh okay, we'll see about that."

LCJ: Along with that, when they were having the meetings of the 100 Plan, I was there, Lou was there, Mr. Hamburg was there, and I have my copy of that book. When I had gotten the book, it was like...just thumbing through it. Next three pages. And I open the page that has all the dots and the ideas. There I am in the middle.

RJC: From the pictures that I saw, it seems like a dream because the pictures seem like something that's in Summerlin because to me, in order for them to reach that in this area, they need more than a sign that says, "Welcome to the Historic Westside." I just don't see that happening over here, I really don't. I really don't. Twenty years from now, maybe, but I don't see that happening.

LCJ: The same with the Pioneer Park.

Pioneer Trail?

LCJ: Trail. They couldn't even open up Mr. Gay's Park. They couldn't do that.

RJC: Yes, really. Look at how many years it's been closed.

LCJ: And I found out, like I said, a lot of this property is owned by foreigners. I met a gentleman from Morocco that was out here, and he was pointing out stuff. From Morocco looking at matters over here.

RJC: Apparently what the Moulin Rouge was, apparently the person that owns that now is from Alaska. There were three other Black well-to-do men that wanted the same property; they didn't sell it to them. I'm sure maybe he had a—

Who were the three wealthy Black men who wanted the—

RJC: I'm not sure, but Greg knows their names, right? Greg is the one that was telling us the story.

LCJ: If you go onto Facebook and you're looking through and you got Greg Freeman—

RJC: But he said he wants to talk to you, though.

LCJ: Oh yes, he's on the list, too.

RJC: He's on the list, yes, Greg Freeman. Ask him about that.

LCJ: Oh yes, I got some good ones and he's an advocate.

RJC: Yes, neighborhood advocate, yes, and his wife. They both are. She's redoing those apartments over there by Pentecostal Temple.

LCJ: They're two stories.

RJC: They're two-story? That's his wife doing that.

Great. I am going to get out of your way.

LCJ: Why? Why? You can have a snack if you like.

RJC: I hope we gave you enough information that you can work with.

This has been amazing day, simply amazing, just wonderful.

HJ: Do we have a guy here named Fitzgerald that worked with the NAACP?

Are you talking about Roosevelt or H.P.?

HJ: H.P.

H.P. is dead now. He was the principal of one of the schools.

He was the guy that if you had a problem, he would go right downtown and fight for you.

LCJ: Hopefully... What was that, the Pioneer? Okay, you've seen all these, right? But you didn't know this guy, huh?

Know which guy?

LCJ: The one in the middle.

Is that you?

That's right.

HJ: You know a lot of people.

I was in the room.

RJC: Oh, you were?

LCJ: Okay.

HJ: You know a lot of people that I have heard of, but yet I've never met you. And you know about the report that UNLV did on the Westside? Have you read it?

This is the report right here.

LCJ: This is it.

HJ: Oh, from UNLV?

LCJ: This is it.

HJ: This is it. Let me see. This is what they are suggesting.

Now, UNLV did not do that. They actually came into the community, and they had a three-day charrette, and this is what the people from the community who attended the charrette came up with.

RJC: What's a charrette?

It's one of those things when people get together and they talk about, "Okay, this is what we have now. What do you want to see? What is the ideal?" There was a three-day thing like that put on right there at Doolittle.

RJC: I wonder how many people knew about that.

LCJ: I'm not sure how I'd become aware of this. I don't know. I was there.

That first morning there were probably, what, thirty-five people in the room?

LCJ: It wasn't very many.

About forty people.

LCJ: It wasn't very many.

The next day they did a bus tour during the lunch hour, and more people came that day. It was...yes. I will be back tomorrow at ten thirty. [Colloquy not transcribed]

LCJ: All that we're talking about, the Westside, okay, the lady today, Ethel. Within my mind I thought their home was right here, but she said it was over there. It's always been...Remember I kept telling you that the house was right across over here, but it was down the way.

Did you think it was across the street?

LCJ: Well, within this lot here, somewhere real—

Right here on this side?

LCJ: No, on that other side.

Across the street?

LCJ: Across the street, right up in there. But she said it was on the next lot over.

RJC: The next block.

LCJ: It was like, wow. And we lived in Marble Manor. I'm telling you, we had a very diverse lifestyle.

When you thought about living in Marble Manor, did you think of it as a project?

LCJ: No. I was just thinking the other day that it was someplace we had to go and live. The folks said, "We're going over here." We had moved from—

RJC: So many places.

LCJ: —211 Jefferson and we moved over there. We were in a two-bedroom, and then in the same sector there was a three-bedroom, on the same street, which we were in the same location.

LCJ: Yes, it's been...This show and tell—

HJ: What have you accomplished here with the Jimerson family?

I don't just look to accomplish...Because I have done so many interviews, a researcher will look at the whole body of interviews.

HJ: But in your opinion what do you think is the future of the Westside?

See, I have these glorious...I think that there is going to be a location of the community college over here.

RJC: Oh really?

Yes. I think that there is going to be an African American Museum one day. I just have all kinds of good ideas, what I think is going to happen. I could be completely wrong.

HJ: Well, let me ask you this: What do you think of the difference between the first fifty years in the growth of Las Vegas and the last fifty years?

The first fifty would be until the 1950s. I see more opportunities.

HJ: You do?

When you look at from 1905 to 1955, you don't see that many opportunities in the Black community. Black men worked at Basic Magnesium Incorporated during World War II and then Nevada Test Site in the '50s and '60s.

HJ: I think the first fifty was probably the most that I can see with it, and I believe it comes from most of the Black people actually that came here in those early years, came from places where you had to work.

And so you're saying—

HJ: We come from a place where you're in the fields by sunup. Luckily if you get back by sundown.

Oh yes. That's the way I grew up, too.

HJ: Where did you grow up at?

Ahoskie, North Carolina.

HJ: That's where my mother's family comes from.

Where?

HJ: I don't remember the name of it.

RJC: Somewhere in North Carolina, yes.

You mean they came from North Carolina?

HJ: My mother's mother.

RJC: What was their last name? Galloway.

HJ: The Galloways, yes.

RJC: They came from that island and then to North Carolina and then to Arkansas.

LCJ: One of the older family members was telling the family history.

RJC: Corrine. She's gone now, but...

LCJ: She spoke of—

RJC: This island.

—the Blacks that lived off the coast of the Carolinas were the ones that received the forty acres.

They took it back.

LCJ: Well, yes. We didn't know that part.

HJ: Then in North Carolina, all of the plantations and things like that, when they freed their people, there was another community that they could go to, to go to other places. It started with an H. From there they could go other places. That's how they walked, from there to Arkansas.

RJC: And Corrine said that Canaan, wherever Canaan was—

HJ: Canaan is in the Bible.

RJC: No, no, no. She said that our family had some property and they named it Canaan, and that's where they got it from, the name in the Bible, right?

HJ: Right. When Moses freed the people and they stayed in one place for forty years wondering, some of them left to a place called Canaan; they called Canaanites. When they decided to name the church, it's named Dixon Canaan Church. We also have a cemetery.

RJC: We still have a cemetery.

HJ: We still have a cemetery. If you're in Dixon, we can all be buried there.

RJC: I pulled it up on the computer. It's still there. They've got pictures of it and everything.

HJ: I've been there. Most people don't know about it.

[Leon and Herman exit interview]

Interview continues with Ruth Jimerson-Carter

RJC: When we first came here from Arkansas, I was only four years old, so all I remember is my sister had a house on Jackson Street. They owned the Jackson Malt Shop, which was a little small hamburger, malt shop joint. Behind her house she had two or three apartments. I don't remember any more than two or three. If it was more than that I don't remember. All I remember was when we walked into that apartment, because when we left Arkansas we had, they call it, a shotgun house. You walk in the front door, here's a living room, a bedroom, the dining room, a bedroom, the kitchen, a bedroom, and my brother that was sitting here, he had the very last room in the back, and it was a small room. I remember the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, and I remember my mother's...that stove that they used to cook on. It looked like a big trunk. I remember her putting wood in it and the fire. I remember her putting ice in some kind of...it looked like a refrigerator, but not like today, of course.

They called it an icebox.

RJC: An icebox. I remember the table in there. She used to keep butter on the table because I remember her churning, making butter. She made everything. They didn't go to the store for hardly—like he said, just to feed the animals. She made everything. I remember the pecan tree in the front yard. It was huge. But I was just a kid, so it was probably...but I thought it was as big as the world. My swing was on that. I remember my baby bed was blue. When I got older I said, "Momma, why didn't I have a pink baby bed?" She said, "Because it was handed down from your brother and from your brother and brother." I didn't get anything new. I remember wearing my brother's pants when we had a picture one time. I go, "I had on boy's pants." They go, "Yes, those were Larry's pants." I don't remember things on Jackson Street. I just remember that apartment when I was four.

When we moved from there—I don't know how long we lived there. But when we were down on A Street, I remember going to Westside School. I'm assuming that I was probably started there in the third or fourth grade. I skipped a grade; that's what it was. They said I was beyond my years in the fifth grade, so I went to Madison in the sixth grade. To this day I wish they wouldn't have done that to me, but...They said I was too smart for the fifth grade. Well, it caught up with me. I'm not there anymore. Then after that I went to K.O. Knudson and then to Valley.

I got married in '72. I had three kids. I went to dealer school when I was twenty-seven. I dealt for ten...I dealt for twenty years [a total of 41 years at various casinos].

What were your favorite games?

RJC: I dealt baccarat and blackjack.

Your favorite game was baccarat?

RJC: Yes, I liked dealing baccarat. It makes you think because when people bet on the ties, the ties pay eight to one. You have to think what it is quick. Whereas in blackjack, you know what the payoff is going to be in a blackjack. You already know because you practice so much the payoffs. Whereas the payoffs in baccarat might be different every time, so it makes you think. The customers are different; they're calmer and they don't argue—well, they do get in arguments. Chinese people can really argue about their money. But it's not like blackjack where they're all drunk and *yea yea yea*. In baccarat, everybody is sitting, they're calm, and they put their money out there. The biggest bettor, they follow the one that bets the most money. If they don't feel good about it, then they don't bet at all. But if you have two people that are betting ten thousand dollars and they bet against each other, then they'll get mad if you follow the youngest person. They're very...what do you call it?

Generational?

RJC: Yes, they respect elders. If the elder bets on the bank and the youngest person bets on the player, they get mad if you follow the player. They go, "No, no, no, no. No, no. Follow him." Even if they lose, they don't care. They respect that older person. That's how they respect the older person. Now, if they start losing then they'll either get up from the table, or they just won't play anymore. But they will not go against that older bettor.

How does a baccarat dealer dress when it's a female?

RJC: In the big baccarat, most all casinos, they have tuxedos, and they all wear tuxedos, male or female.

Oh, the women wore tuxedos, also, okay.

RJC: Yes.

Where did you work dealing?

RJC: I started off downtown at the El Cortez. I worked there for two weeks because some old man shot another old man in a dice pit. I wasn't even close to the dice pit. I told them, "I'm not going back in there. People are dying in there." Then I went to the Holiday International, which is now the Main Street Station. I worked there for about three or four years. Then I went to the Barbary Coast for twenty years.

Wow. Why so long at the Barbary Coast?

RJC: I don't know. Toward the end is when I really didn't like it because you could see a little bit of racism, and it wasn't necessarily because I was Black, it was because I was a female because at that time there weren't that many female dealers. The first Black female dealer, her name was Debora. I can't remember her last name. She was the first one and I dealt with her at the Golden Nugget. But I didn't find out it was like that until I met her at the Golden Nugget. I was still at the Barbary Coast on the Strip. They didn't want female roulette dealers; they said we were unlucky. They didn't want female dice dealers. Most of the females at the Barbary Coast dealt blackjack or pai gow poker; those games like that, and mini baccarat, which is a smaller version of baccarat. But right before I left, maybe two years before I left, if that, maybe a year and a half, they started training women for the floor. They didn't even have many female floor supervisors except for one because her boyfriend was...But anyway, I wanted to go on the floor, so I trained for the floor for about six months.

What does it mean, going on the floor?

RJC: A floor supervisor where you watch floor games. You have a pit manager and a floor supervisor and then a casino manager and stuff like that. But they kept promoting all these other women that I was training over me. Finally I said, "I've been training for a floor supervisor now for six months, and you're promoting everybody else." You know what he said to me? "Oh,

Ruth, I thought you wanted to be a housewife.” I said, “If I wanted to be a housewife, I would be at my house being a housewife.” But that’s okay. The next day I went looking for a job. My ex-husband knew Don Johansson at the Golden Nugget. I went in and put my—not Don Johansson, another guy, and Don Johansson. But anyway, the next day or two after that they called me and asked me, did I want a job at the Golden Nugget, and I said, “Yes.” I was there for ten years, and then I went to the Bellagio. I retired at the Bellagio last year, July first, 2020.

How long were you at the Bellagio?

RJC: Twenty-four years—twenty-three years.

How many years did you deal?

RJC: I started dealing...My daughter was born in 1981. I was pregnant with her when I was at the Barbary Coast, so I started dealing in '78. Back then you couldn't go out on the Strip until you had a year experience, so '78, '79. Charmaine was born in '81. From 1979 till last year, 2020.

Wow. Tell me about the Bellagio, my favorite hotel in the city.

RJC: It was the best job. I liked the Golden Nugget. I would have to say Golden Nugget was my best job I ever had. But the Bellagio was the absolute best job I have ever had in my life. When Steve Wynn owned it, we were spoiled. We were spoiled.

Tell me why.

RJC: We had good food down in the employee lounge. When I worked at the Barbary Coast, the floor supervisors, as a dealer, when I worked at the Barbary Coast, the floor supervisors verbally abused dealers. That was the norm. They call that old school. Not just the Barbary Coast, a lot of casinos, they would call you names. They would kick you on the back of your heel; that means shuffle. If somebody is winning a lot of money, they come up and kick you on the back of your

heel. I didn't know what it meant. The first time somebody kicked me on my heel, I said, "What are you kicking me for?" He says, "Turn around and deal." "I just want to know why you're kicking me." I get off the game, and he said, "Well, that means shuffle." "Well, I speak English, just tell me." I couldn't believe they...But they said, "That's the norm. Everybody knows that." But they call that old school, and they would take you off of a game and curse. "Can't you win an f-ing hand?" All that kind of stuff. It would traumatize a lot of dealers.

When I was at the Barbary Coast, because I dealt double deck, my ex-husband taught me how to deal, so I knew how to deal; I knew how to change the run of the cards. You can deal out two or three hands, and if everybody is winning and not tipping you, you just shuffle the cards, and it changes the run of the cards. There's a way that you can shuffle; you can shuffle really smooth, or you can shuffle hard, and sometimes it'll change the run of the cards, and everybody starts losing and they leave. Then you wait for the next people that are going to be tipping you. But I really didn't like blackjack because, I don't know, I just never cared for blackjack. Then I learned baccarat and I knew I liked this game. People are calm. They don't yell at you when they lose and blame you when they lose. In baccarat they do not blame you because they make the decision to bet on the bank or the player. Whereas in blackjack, you might be winning, but that person that's sitting here might want to split tens or hit a hand that you're not supposed to hit and make the whole table lose. They don't blame that person. They blame you. I really wasn't crazy about blackjack at all.

Go back to the Bellagio.

RJC: The Bellagio. The floor supervisors were nice to the dealers. They didn't care if they won or lost. It was like that at the Nugget. Steve Wynn did not care if you won or lost. They want you to give customers a hundred percent of you. They want them to enjoy the Golden Nugget and the

Bellagio, and that's why I liked the Golden Nugget and the Bellagio because when I went on the floor, my thing was I'm not going to abuse anybody because I don't want anybody to abuse me. I treated them like I wanted to be treated. I was nice to everybody. I was nice to the dealers. You try to be nice to the customers, and when you can't calm them down or solve their problem, then you call the pit manager because that's what they pay them for. I just said, "Well, this happened and that happened, and they don't want me to deal anymore." I got that a lot: I need to talk to somebody over you. I just said, "No problem." I didn't care. That's what they pay them for. I got a couple of calls to the pit manager, and they would solve it. Maybe once out of all the times that I even called a pit manager to solve a problem, they sided with the customer, but most of the time they sided with me because I always said, "Well, this is just a rule. It's not my rule. It's the house rule." If I do that there's no way they can go against me because that's the rule. One pit manager did, but that's okay. I didn't mind. The customer looked at me. I thought, hey, I will wake up tomorrow alive and still in good health and I don't care.

But I liked the Bellagio. I still do like it. But when COVID came and my friend got sick, I said, "It's time for me to go." I had prayed because when I was sixty-four, I had planned on retiring at sixty-five, but it moved up to sixty-six by that time. I had prayed. I said, "God, when you want me to quit, just let me know." Because I knew I wasn't going to be there past 2021. I was going to stay until the end of '20 because I turned sixty-six in February of 2020. I said, "Okay, Lord, I'll work until the end of the year." When she got COVID, I said, "That's my sign. I'm out of here." Because that, it just did something to me. It's like, but she's my friend; we pray together; we eat together; we walk in together. I said, "If she could get it..." Then she called me a little bit after and she said, "Ruth, I'm pretty sure that you don't have it." I said, "No, I feel fine. I refuse to accept that. I'm not going to get it. But I'm not going to stay there where it is

either.” I said, “I quit,” July first. She got COVID two days before that, the end of June. I said, “No, I won’t be back.” But they kept me up on my insurance because my insurance is August the thirty-first, the end of August, and that was my last day officially.

But I like the Bellagio. My friend, she called me—well, texted me, and said that they’re starting to call people back because some people haven’t worked since March. Those that haven’t worked since March, they’re starting to call them back. She said, “Ruth, are you sure you don’t want to come back?” I said, “No way, Jose. I’m finished. I’m done with it.” Let some young people work that really need to work.

Do they have a retirement plan for dealers?

RJC: No. They have a 401(k) plan.

That’s what I mean.

Yes, they have a 401(k) plan, but it’s up to them to put into it; they don’t have to. I’m sure a hundred percent of them do, especially there because they make—well, at the time; I don’t know what they’re making now—they make good money. The dealers make good money. The dealers make good money, they really do.

That’s wonderful. You started dealing...How did the tips change over the years?

RJC: Oh wow. Downtown? Downtown when I was a dealer, my biggest envelope was probably under \$100.

That’s for a week?

RJC: For one day. Yes, one day. Average \$80, \$90 a day at the Golden Nugget. When I was at the—

Barbary Coast?

RJC: I don't even remember that. It was probably \$5. I was only there for two weeks at El Cortez. That shot made me scared. When I was at the Holiday International, is what they called it, I brought home \$9 tips and I told my ex-husband, "I don't think I want to do this." He says, "You've got to go out on the Strip. You've got to get your experience downtown and you've got to do that for a year." I said, "I'll give it another year, but I'm not going to be staying and taking all this abuse for \$9." Then I went to the Barbary Coast. You didn't make a \$100 a day, but every once in a while you would. Every once in a while you would. Then during the holidays they work you like a dog, they really did. I worked swing shift. I worked six to two, seven to three, different days, or eight to four. But during the holidays, especially New Year's, I remember one time I worked until six o'clock in the morning. I finally said, "When are you going to let me go home?" They said, "Well, we let you go home." I don't know. That just really irritated me because you've got kids and stuff, but that's the way they do you; they work you like a dog.

How long were you at the Barbary Coast?

RJC: I worked at the Barbary Coast for ten years, and then I went to the Golden Nugget for twenty years—no, no. Was that twenty years or ten years? The Barbary Coast...twenty...I think it was ten years at the Barbary Coast. I think it was ten years because Charmaine was graduating from high school a little bit after I—no, wait a minute.

But still. You can look back. The Bellagio, you were how long?

RJC: Twenty-three years. And that was my favorite job. When they opened Aria, my favorite pit manager, Cheryl. She's married to Ricki Barlow—no, not Ricki Barlow. Cheryl...I can't think of her name. But anyway, she went to Aria, and everybody thought, "Are you going to go to Aria with Cheryl?" I said, "I like where I am. I like Cheryl. I love Cheryl. But I like it here and I'm

going to retire here. If I go there, I've got to start all over trying to get the best shift. They might put me on swing shift. I'll stay here where I've got my best shift." I was off Sunday, Monday.

That was the best days off. I said, "No, I'll stay here."

I love the conservatory.

RJC: Yes, it's beautiful.

Oh, I love that.

RJC: Yes, it is absolutely beautiful. Every flower is grown on the property. Some of the trees come from other places, but the flowers are all grown in their nursery. It is absolutely amazing how...the floor in the conservatory, it goes down to the very bottom, I think one story down.

Then they decorate it and bring it back up. The roof opens. During Christmas, they lower the tree down that way.

Oh really?

RJC: Yes. That's how they get the tree in there, the roof opens.

Oh, that's beautiful. I just love that. When I have visitors coming to town that's where I take them.

RJC: Yes. When my family comes, they go, "Take us out to the Bellagio." I go, "No, I don't want to go out there." Especially at night. It's so busy. I've been in there twice during that time I worked there in my whole life when it was busy on swing shift, and I said, "Oh, I'm so glad I don't work swing shift." It is crazy busy in there.

I appreciate this so much.

[Colloquy not transcribed (discussing interviewees and phone numbers).

Thank you so much. This is so good.

[End of recorded interview]

