

An Interview with Anna Bailey



An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White



Las Vegas Women's Oral History Project
Gaming and Entertainment Series
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1997

© Las Vegas Women's Oral History Project, UNLV, 1997

Produced by:

Las Vegas Women's Oral History Project
Department of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas 89154-5020
Director: Joanne L. Goodwin
Editor: Melisé L. Leech
Project Assistant and Text Processor: Dona Gearhart

Las Vegas Women in Gaming and Entertainment Oral History Project

Project Director, Joanne Goodwin, Department of History, UNLV, 895-1026

Agreement on Use

We, Anna L Bailey and Clayton D. White
(narrator) (interviewer)

do hereby give to the Las Vegas Women in Gaming and Entertainment Oral History Project for such scholarly and educational uses as shall be determined, the following tape-recorded interview(s) initiated on _____ as an unrestricted gift and transfer to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude, but rather retains the right of the interviewer to use the recordings and related materials for scholarly and educational uses.

Date

3-3-97

Signature of Narrator

Anna Bailey

Address of Narrator

3045 WATERSIDE Circle

Date

3/3/1997

Signature of Interviewer

Clayton D. White

This interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of the Foundation at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The History Department of the university provided a home for the project and a wide variety of in-kind services. The department, as well as the college and university administration, enabled students and faculty to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank the university for its support that gave an idea the chance to flourish.

The text has received minimal editing. These measures include 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 (housed separately) accompany the collection as slides or black and white photographs.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Las Vegas Women's Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Joanne Goodwin, Project Director
Associate Professor, Department of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Preface

Anna Bailey arrived in Las Vegas in 1955 to perform as a dancer for the opening of the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino. Six months later the Rouge closed, leaving both Anna and her husband, Bob, without work, since Bob had been the house singer and emcee at the Hotel. Nevertheless, Anna and Bob decided to make Las Vegas their home, convinced in the growth potential of the city. Anna, however, was not ready to give up dancing, and went on the road, dancing a starring role in a Larry Steele production, and later as lead dancer in Pearl Bailey's troupe. Tiring of the road after five years, Anna began applying for positions in the Las Vegas clubs. After many auditions, the Flamingo Hotel hired her as the first African American to dance in a "house" chorus line on the Strip. From the beginning, she enjoyed the work. The dancers and management were sincerely friendly, and she was able to live at home with her family in the Bonanza Village section of the Westside. When Anna decided to end her career as a dancer, she became one of the first black women in Nevada to hold a gambling license, owning and operating several small nightclubs.

Anna's career spanned from her pre-teen years in New York, to Los Angeles and the stages of Europe. While performing in smaller venues in the South, she and other troupe members had to knock on stranger's doors to find rooms for the night. It is fitting that she ended her career in Las Vegas, the entertainment capital of the world. She is truly a class act.



Anna and Bob Bailey, 1997

An Interview with Anna Bailey
An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

This is Claytee White and I'm with Anna Bailey this morning in her home in Las Vegas. How are you this morning?

Fine, Claytee, how are you?

Good. Could you give me the correct spelling of your first name? I've heard it pronounced several ways.

I know. They even call me A[ah]nna sometimes. But it's Anna.

Ok. So it's really Anna. Now where are you from originally?

I was born in Savannah, Georgia. But Mother moved to Hoboken, New Jersey when I was six months old. And then from there she went to Brooklyn and we lived in Brooklyn for quite some time. And we came out here in 1955.

Ok. How old were you when you moved to Brooklyn?

I would say maybe a year.

So you barely remember New Jersey?

Yeah. Right. Very little. I just remember taking baths in tubs. Bringing hot water and putting it in the tub. That's the only thing I remember from Hoboken.

I remember those days. Is your family still in Georgia?

I do have a cousin there and that's it. Most of all of my family is gone now.

What about brothers and sisters?

I have one sister and she's here.

In Las Vegas?

In Las Vegas. She's about to retire. She's been with the school district for twenty-five years. Her name is Antoinette Regan.

Is she a school teacher?

A teacher's aide. But she's very good at crafts so even though she's trying to retire they keep trying to get her to come back and do some art, and put it up on the wall, you know with the children. She has a way with the children.

What is your sister's name?

Antoinette. Antoinette Regan.

Would you spell that first name for me?

Antoinette.

You mentioned your mother earlier. What is your mother's name?

Beatrice, do you need her maiden name?

No.

Porter.

Tell me a little about your early education there in Brooklyn.

In Brooklyn? Well I went to P.S. 28, then I went to P.S. 35, then I went to the East New York Vocational High School on, let's see if I can remember, it's been so long ago. On Herkimer Street and Eastern Parkway.

Is that similar to the school that we used to see on Fame?

No, it wasn't performing arts. I wish, but they didn't have one like that when I was coming up.

How did you decide on a vocational high school?

Well, because I always liked the arts, and I don't know whether I was just taking the easy way out or what. I hate to say that but I always liked the lighter part of education, which I should have been serious and went to Brooklyn College or something. But I didn't because I had aspirations then to maybe being a dancer. Mother put me in dancing school with Ann Jones, when, maybe I was about five or six. But I wasn't serious, so when I was ten, she put me back in again because she noticed that I always like to imitate the people -- well I used to look at the TV. And when you see the movies, I loved to go to the movies and watch Fred Astaire and all of that. So that's how I got started. I was five [feet] six [inches] when I was thirteen. So at thirteen I was at the Apollo, because the regular line girls went on strike so they got the girls out of dancing school to fill in for that week. So that was an experience and almost all of the junior high school came to see me. I mean I was big when I went back to school.

So then did you catch the fever?

I had the fever. I had the fever. So I was lucky and I worked from then on. I really did. I worked at the Paramount Theater in Brooklyn and New York. I worked in almost all the clubs in Broadway. I didn't work too much in Harlem but I had a lot of friends that worked up there.

How did you persuade yourself to finish high school?

It was really very tough. It really was. Because remember I would get home about two or three o'clock but Mother would make me get up and go to school. So I was pretty

guilty at falling asleep. I'd do it behind my book, or fainting and going to the nurses. Just so I could get a half an hour, because I was just so intrigued with just being in the business and being around all the stars then.

So your mom put you back in dancing school at ten years of age.

At ten, yes.

So you didn't stop that time, you were really serious about the dancing?

Oh, I was serious then, yes, because we were on point then.

Now, what does that mean?

On your toes, you know, toe dancing. And I was really just fascinated by it. Just being with all the girls and I was getting more of an education from them than I was at school.

How long were you actually in school to learn to be a dancer?

Oh, up until I was about fifteen. Then I think I really went professional. And then we went on a lot of tours from coast to coast. These are all the memories I remember. At sixteen I was hired to go to California in the Bill Robinson show called *Born Happy*.

Is that the first show that you were in?

It was the first legitimate show, that I left town. And my mother didn't want me to go. She wanted me to stay in school but she came -- I had left with one little bag. You know, one bag and I didn't have too much in it.

You ran away?

I did. I ran away. So after about a month I was ready to come home. So I broke my

contract and during that time I think they fined me five hundred dollars before I could go back to work at the Savannah Club on Broadway. But I had to pay that. AGVA [Associated Guild of Variety Artists] would take so much out of my [pay].

Tell me just a little bit about that experience. Were you old enough to actually sign a contract.

Well, no not really but I was tall. I was five [feet] six [inches] and I think my weight was probably like it is now, about one hundred and fifty [pounds]. But I think it was all hard muscles and everything. I didn't have any problem. I remember Bill Robinson saying, "You are the biggest dancer I ever saw in my life." I never forgot that. So anyhow, I had to finally tell my mother I wanted to come home. And you know your contract was for at least three months. And in a month I was ready to come back home. That was the first time I was away from home.

So what happened, were you just homesick?

Just homesick. So she finally sent for me. And I remember I took the bus all the way back and that's a long [trip]. And I was so glad to get back home I didn't give her anymore trouble after that. I had to go back to school.

Tell me about that first time in Los Angeles. Where did you live, where did you stay?

Gee, I know I was in a hotel but you know I really don't remember the name of the hotel. I know it was a black hotel. I know Alice Key would remember. The Watkins. It just came back to me. Is it still there?

I'm not positive. Was it on Central [Avenue]?

No, I don't think it's on Central. Is it Adams? I mean, I'm really going back now. I

haven't thought about this in years.

I really don't know.

I think it's the Watkins Hotel and that's where we stayed and I had a chaperone. When the girls would go out -- the show didn't know it -- but [the girls] would chaperone me. So after the show I would go back and they would go out, but I had to stay in the room. So I remember that.

So you were the youngest girl?

Oh, yes, easy. Yeah, I think so.

Tell me about that show. What kind of costumes did you wear?

Oh, the costumes were beautiful. Never like what they wear now, where everything's all exposed. I mean we were really covered. So we might have some short ones with the little skirts and we had a lot of long ones with a lot of chiffon that flowed. It was a lovely show. And that's the one and only time I was ever in a legitimate show.

Were you in a line of girls?

Yeah, just in a line of girls.

At that time were you called a chorus girl?

Yeah, a chorus girl or chorine.

Oh, a chorine, I've never heard that.

Yes.

Because of your height, when I talked to D. D. Cotton the other day, she's very short.

Yes, she's very short. She was like the pony. We called them ponies.

Yes. That's what she told me. She called herself a pony. Is that a term that is used throughout the business?

I kind of think so. During our time it was. I don't know what they're doing now but any little bitty girls stayed right in the front all the time and the tall girls were usually in the back. Or if there's a long line, the tall girls would be in the middle and the short girls would be on the end. So that's how it was. I never did work with D.D. I remember when she came in town though. I think she went to the, oh I can't think of the name of the hotel, Rancho Nevada or something like that.

I think she was at the Town Tavern for some time.

Oh, she was there for some time?

And I'm not sure that she ever danced on the strip.¹

Oh, I thought she worked in one of the clubs out there, because I remember when that show came to town. I don't know whether it was Louie Jordan's show or something, but I guess that's on her tape.

Yes. Tell me a little about the business part of going to Los Angeles. Because you were so young, they allowed you though to sign your own contract.

Yes. Yes. I signed it and then you had to pay dues to the union.

Do you remember how much money you earned?

I think, it wasn't much. I doubt whether it was over fifty dollars.

¹Interviewer error: D. D. Cotton danced at the Royal Nevada Hotel in 1957 in *The Cotton Club* show starring Cab Calloway.

For a week?

A week, yes. And that's another thing I like about show business because when I came back, even though I did go back to high school, I was lucky enough to always be hired to work and we were making seventy-five to a hundred and fifty dollars a week. That wasn't bad money during that time.

What years are we talking about?

Let me get this straight. I have some pictures and I should have brought all that out. It must have been about 1945, so that's really going back. Then after that I know we were booked in London, and then I went off to London and worked at the Palladium for six months.

Did you get homesick in London?

No, because I loved it there. We were there for almost six months and that was a wonderful experience.

I'll ask you about that in a second. In Los Angeles, where was the show?

It was at the Biltmore downtown. The Biltmore Theater, downtown.

You were there for that entire month?

Yes.

How did you get back and forth from the place you lived on Adams to the theater?

I really just won't remember that. I don't know whether we were taking -- I have no idea. I don't remember how we were getting back and forth.

How many girls were in the show?

Easily, about thirty.

And all of you were African-American?

Yes. It was a great show and the star was Bill Robinson.

Were there any integrated shows at that time, that you knew about?

No, I don't think so because you just couldn't get hired. You would try and I'll tell you about some of the auditions I went to and [we] just couldn't make it.

Yes, I'd like to hear about some of those later. Are there any highlights about that Los Angeles trip that you still remember today?

Well just the experience of working with Bill Robinson and being away from home for the first time. I fell in love with California. I thought it was so beautiful there. I would go and see the oranges on the trees, for miles and miles, and I just couldn't get over that. Because in New York you could just see the oranges in the market. So go there and see the orange groves and the palm trees -- I thought I'd died and gone to heaven it was so beautiful. But still, I think I was just too young and I just wanted to get back home.

When you went back home, you had to go back to high school?

I had to go back.

How long were you away before your mom found out where you were?

Really a good month and that was cruel to her. That was really cruel to her. I don't think I let her know until -- I think she had an idea where I was because she knew and she just wouldn't let me go. She had an idea but she didn't know how to get in touch with me.

That was a terrible thing to do. When I finally got home, Mother just opened up the door and walked in and she didn't say, "Hi. How are you doing?" I'll never forget that. You talk about being hurt. And I just wanted to hug her and kiss the ground, I was so glad to be back because it was everything I was familiar with. So that was really an experience.

I didn't ask you about your father before.

No.

Is that something that you can tell me about?

Yes. I don't think she married him until she came to Hoboken, which was William Porter. So I assume he was my stepfather.

What kind of work did your stepfather do?

He was like a tree surgeon. He would work on trees when they got sick. Put the sap on them or whatever he had to do. Growing up, I always remembered him up in the trees. But they didn't stay married too long.

What kind of work did your mom do?

Mother was always Mom, at home. And these things I've thought of for years -- I've noticed that during the time I was coming up there was a lot of house-rent parties. And I kind of think Mama would always have the pots on and the fried chicken and I think she would serve food and stuff like that. But it must have been enough for her because we had a big house in Brooklyn. We had a fourteen-room house. When I look at the *Cosby Show* it reminds of Mama's house. You know, with the stoop and everything. She had roomers. So I think between the roomers and cooking on the weekend, I think it was enough that she never had to go on welfare or anything.

Before we get into your career, tell me what your sister did. What was her interest back in New York?

Well you know, she's four years younger than I am. She always used to admire me because I was on the stage. She was cute as a little button and I wanted her to -- but she never was interested in that. So sometimes when I was booked in Atlantic City or Philadelphia for the summer, I would take her with me. She would help us zip-up and she would loan us money. [laughter] Yeah, and sometimes we would run out. But what she's never forgotten -- well she could go to the restaurants and to anywhere in Atlantic City and get whatever she wanted for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. If I was rehearsing or sleeping or busy and I would pay them the end of the week. She never got over that, how she could just walk in and order anything and just sign for it. But she got married early, she got married at seventeen, and she was just sort of a homebody. She had five kids and now she has great-grandchildren also.

Did you have any children?

Me. Yes I have two. I have a son Johnny, he's an attorney. And my daughter Kimberly that I just spoke to -- he's thirty-six and she's thirty-four.

Is he here as well, in Las Vegas?

Yes. He's with Lionel, Sawyer, and Collins. He's the youngest partner in the largest law firm in Las Vegas. I'm just so proud of him.

You should be.

My daughter went to Spellman and that was a wonderful experience for her. She says [they were] four of her happiest years. You're so happy when your children can take care of themselves and that's what they're doing. They're both working and taking care of

themselves and -- my mind jumped to my son. His wife just had another baby two days ago. So now he has three children and I have three grandchildren from him. And Kim just has the one boy that I babysat a lot. He's seven. So I have four grandchildren.

That's wonderful. Now we can just devote all our time to you. When you returned to New York, you had to go back to high school.

Had to go back, yes.

Tell me when your next experience on the stage was.

It might have been working -- if I can just think of the club. I know I went right on Broadway. I was so lucky to have just always worked on Broadway. They had a lot of black shows on Broadway. When one closed another one would open up. Now I never did work during the era of the Cotton Club. There's some girls living in town that did work up in Harlem, so sometimes we would go in our big hats and go up to Harlem to see them.

What do you mean, big hats?

Oh we used to wear the wide hats and gloves during that time. I think we were considered kind of glamorous. We'd go up to Harlem, or sometimes we'd go down to Atlantic City, and catch their breakfast shows. I wish I could think of the name of the club that we worked with. I went from there then to the Zanzibar and that was an A-1 club, five star club. It was beautiful. We worked there with Cab Calloway and the Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers and all the stars of that era.

As the line, were you behind the singers?

No, no. We were the line so we would open up the show and then an act would come on,

and then maybe another act, then we would come out for our middle number, which was usually the production number. Then the star would close and then we would come on for the finale. Now I did work with Cab a lot because we did make the *Downbeat* magazine. I had that magazine around here someplace and I don't know what in the world could have happened. During that time our costumes were like three hundred and fifty, four-hundred and fifty dollars a piece. We had exquisite costumes.

Describe one to me.

Well one of them I remember was velvet. It was green velvet and it looked like the Robin Hood days -- that type -- with the big sleeves and the train behind it. It was just absolutely gorgeous. We were there for a long time, at least about a year and a half, and that's a pretty good job when you're in show business -- in one club that long.

When you were in one club for a year and a half, how much money were you earning?

During that time we were making about seventy-five dollars.

A week?

Yeah, and that was considered pretty good. Because like I say in California it was fifty [dollars a week] and then we went up to about seventy-five [dollars] there.

We're still in the late 1940s?

Yes. This is the late 1940s, like around 1945, 1946, 1947, somewhere around there.

Tell me about your first experience going to Europe.

I think we worked with Louie Jordan there. That's Martha Jordan's husband. She's in town here now also. He wanted to take four girls out of the line to travel with him. So I

went with him.

How were you lucky enough to be one of those four?

I don't know why. They said that I was really a pretty good dancer. So we would dance and they we would sing to back him up. Then we had a little time when he wasn't working that much so he put us in Henry Letang's dancing school and Henry Letang just moved here, too. He's the one that produced *Black and Blue*, and *Taps*, and a lot of shows that were on Broadway. So he rehearsed us for one year and he's the one that sent us to Europe, Henry Letang.

This rehearsing for a year, where did that take place?

That was at his studio. He had a four-story studio in Manhattan. We rehearsed, we did everything -- singing, acrobatics, jumping up and touching our toes, and heavy, heavy tap dancing. We really had a great act, the four of us girls. We did that and then we were booked over there and we were integrated into the show there. This was a white-English show.

So this is the first experience in an integrated setting?

Yes.

Tell me a little about that. Was there a difference in pay?

Yes, I think we did go up to about a hundred dollars then. But that went a long way because our money was worth more than their pounds and shillings and stuff. It was a wonderful experience because people could tell that we were Americans and I could see why Josephine Baker and all them loved it over in Paris. They would actually stop us on the street and invite us -- husband and wife -- to their homes for dinner or tea. I

remember that backstage we had our own maids and wardrobe mistresses. They really treated us like we were stars.

Did you have that in New York?

Never had that in New York. Another point I really wanted to tell you, coming from New York we had all the Maidenform brassieres and the nylon and silk stockings, so when we were getting ready to leave we sold all of that stuff. They wanted to buy our underwear and stuff like that because they didn't have the support in their bras that we had. I'll never forget that. So we sold all of our stockings and bras and everything.

[laughter]

Was this extra money for your?

That was extra money. That was really, really something. They gave us a wonderful going away party and it was wonderful.

How long were you in London for that first show?

We were there for six months. We rehearsed about a month before the show, and that was a legitimate show.

What was the name of that show, do you remember?

Let me think, *Here, There, and Everywhere*. Oh, I remembered.

Did the African-American dancers earn the same as the white dancers in this show?

Now that, I really wouldn't know because everything was under contract. I have the feeling we might have made more.

Oh, really?

Yes, because we came in from the [United] States. So I believe that we were making more. I doubt that they were making over, say fifty dollars in American money. I don't think they were making that amount. And then we were paid for rehearsals, too. I doubt whether they were paid for rehearsals.

When you were backstage, and you were used to being backstage with all African-American dancers, what was the difference in being backstage with dancers of other races?

Well you know what, in show business you don't think too much about race -- really too much. It's your talent. You might get a little jealousy if you could dance better than the other person, but we really didn't feel it. You really get to be a family when you're in a show and you really cry when you're getting ready to leave. Even when you're traveling, because I have traveled with interracial shows, you're eating together and you're sleeping on each other's shoulder and you really don't feel it. It's when you come out into the outside world is when it really hits you. But you really don't feel that in show business too much.

Tell me about the management. Did you find any difference in the way you were treated by management in New York and the way you were treated in London?

No I didn't notice much difference. We were really treated very well over there. Once you're hired, you're in. So if you just go by the rules and be on time and work as hard as you can, there really isn't any problem. Naturally they don't want you to -- they want you to always be a lady.

Tell me about the work and about being a lady. Give me an idea about a day in the life of a dancer once the show started in London.

Let me see. In the morning we would sleep till about ten or eleven or twelve. Sometimes there is a rehearsal, it's very hard work, two to about four. Then to get ready for the show about eight o'clock. It really isn't easy. The work is very, very hard but you're so young and you have so much wind and you just enjoy it. A lot of times after work, we would still improvise, maybe for two or three hours.

What do you mean, improvise?

You know what adlibbing is?

Yes.

Well we would dance, we would improvise and just make up steps. And you'll dance around the table and -- all your movement is dance.

So you were in the club now as a customer. Is that what you're saying?

No, not in the club. Most of the time you would be in the hotel room or flat. We all had flats.

I see what you're saying.

Or if not my flat, it would be somebody else's.

So you were just having a good time.

Just having a good time because we were all just so young. But we used to go to a lot of the clubs and we had no problem going to any of the clubs. I remember we went to a club called the White House and there's another club -- and I just can't think of the name of that either -- that had a name like Insane, or something. We were trying to get the telephone number and they really did connect us to a mental hospital. This really

happened. There was a lot of West Indians in London and they heard that we were going to other clubs, and we never did go over to their's. So after a show we all went over to their club one night, and we really did have a good time. It was so different. The paint was all sort of chipped and everything. But they really showed us a great time so after that we would go back there periodically. That was really our experience in London. We did go to Stratford-on-Avon, we went to Oxford and it was wonderful. I haven't been back there since. I hope I'll get a chance to go back this year.

That would be great. Tell me who some of the people who influenced you early in life, some of the people you admired, some of the dancers.

Well, Katherine Dunham. Even though I went to her school for awhile, I couldn't get her style of dancing. I didn't like the squatting so much. She did a lot of squatting and head movements but I was really impressed with what she was trying to do. Mary Bruce was a great teacher. She was from Chicago and then she came to Harlem. I remember we paid seventy-five cents to take our class. Each class was seventy-five cents. You should have seen us scraping up that seventy-five cents. But you know all of our black stars, you just wanted to be just like them. Try to the best you can, just go out there and work. I remember Pearl Bailey used to tell me, it takes you twenty years to get on the stage and another twenty years to learn how to get off the stage. So you just watch people like that and you wanted to aim to be like them.

How did it feel, the first time in London?

I just loved it. I was a little nervous because this was my second time away from home. So I was a little nervous. I hated the food over there. I thought the food was terrible. They use a lot of potatoes in everything and everything is in pastry. So we ate a lot of Chinese food over there.

Other than the food, was there anything else that you didn't like about being in London?

Oh, the rain. It just rained everyday. I can see why they drink so much tea, because when we went to the theater we were drinking tea all during the theater. They were actually serving us tea down the aisles, it was just so cold there. I remember we had to put a shilling in our meter, cause they had one in each bedroom, to turn the heat back on. I'd wake up in the middle of the night and put my shilling in there. I just stayed cold there and it's just very damp. But I loved the greenery of the countryside and I thought the people were very, very nice to us. They were talking a lot about the "ugly Americans" while we were there and they thought they were very rude. They could tell an American right away, not by their speech but just their attitude -- the way they would break things and how they would demand. So we got a lot of that when we were over there. And they just loved us for our friendliness. I think they loved all African Americans from what I got when I was there because they said that our temperament was so different.²

When you left London, what was your next engagement?

I think I went to work in the Bronx. And we still did our same act at the Bronx, the four of us. They had a line of girls and we were principles then at the Bronx. That was called the 845 Club.

Tell me the difference in when you call yourself a principle. What does that mean?

That means that you're one of the feature acts. You're not the star but you're a feature act. I think we went over very good because we got into the newspapers and a lot of people came up. One thing I've got to tell you about Alice Key, one time at that same

²End side 1, tape 1.

club, everybody was saying, "Alice Key is coming to town. Alice Key was coming to town." I'd heard so much about her but I had never met her. So they closed up the club that night. They closed it up and we had a party. Did she tell you about that? And we had a party in there, and it was just lovely. They used to call her Red. She was just so beautiful. I remember, my husband was outside and I didn't know that he was out there, and they wouldn't let him in. So he's still talking about that.

Yes, she mentioned that. When did you meet Bob?

I met Bob in Cincinnati. I was at the Latin Quarter and he was passing through with Count Basie. He was a vocalist for Count Basie. He took Joe Williams's place.

What year was that?

No, I think Joe Williams came in after him. So I think he took -- the heavy set guy. I can't think of his name right now. I should have all of these little notes written down. I think he liked me right away because he gave a party that night and then some of us girls went over to his room. He had a little party and he took my telephone number in Brooklyn and inside of two months he called me. He walked seven blocks from the subway in snow with his stereo to visit me. My mother was there and he stayed for the weekend because she had rooms upstairs. Then we started dating from then on.

Did you live with your mom during all these years?

All these years I always lived with Mother. I never lived anyplace else until I came to [Las] Vegas and got my own place. Even after I got married we took over the basement, her basement. Bob made a nice little apartment out of it. So I always lived with Mother. I used to give her all my salary and she would give me an allowance. I did that until I got married. She always had the food on the stove and so I enjoyed doing that. That went on

for a long time.

What year did you get married?

1951.

So 1951 you're back in New York and you're still living in the same building as your mom. What are you doing career-wise in 1951?

I think that I was doing a lot of traveling then. And I think I was on the road with Clarence Robinson. He was one of our top African producers and I always enjoyed working with him. There was another top producer called Larry Steele. But I never did work with him too much because he would have the breakfast shows in Atlantic City and I would hate to do a four-o'clock-show in the morning.

So a breakfast show starts at four o'clock in the morning?

Yes it starts around four o'clock so it was over around six [o'clock].

If you were with a production that has a breakfast show, how many shows are you doing in a twenty-four-hour-period?

You were doing three shows at night. You do a regular eight-o'clock-show, a twelve or one-o'clock-show, and then that four-o'clock-show. So even though he had the Atlantic City show, which was very popular during that era, I would try to run away from that breakfast show. So I always would work with Clarence Robinson. So we stayed on the road. Now when I worked with him in Atlantic City, we'd work at the Paradise and they didn't have a breakfast show. So I would always work with Clarence.

Without a breakfast show, you were doing two shows a night?

Yes. Usually like at eight and then may eleven or twelve.

Beginning in 1951, now that you're married, is it difficult to be on the road?

Well Clarence would always hire both of us. Bob was always the singer and the emcee and I was always kind of like the main dancer, then. So we were lucky. We worked everywhere from coast to coast then. We worked all the way up to Buffalo, Boston, and we went the whole circuit. Pearl Bailey told us, "Try to go to Las Vegas. You'll love Las Vegas." So when Clarence was booked out to Las Vegas, we were just thrilled about it. And that was in 1955. We came here, I believe, around March of 1955 and we probably opened up around May or June.

Before we get to Las Vegas, I'd like to know some of the memorable cities that you entertained in. I'd like to know about race relations because we haven't even got to 1955 yet. I want to know about race relations in the various American cities when you were traveling. Did you travel by bus?

Oh, everything, plane, bus, train, just everything. You heard about the "chittling circuit?"

Tell me what you mean by that.

Well, that's all the black theaters and all the black nightclubs. But it really was a lot of fun because you really travel together as a family. The circuit was, in Philadelphia -- you know, the Apollo -- Chicago, Baltimore, St. Louis and maybe Detroit. Because we used to work the theater there or the Flame Bar there.

Do you remember entertaining in any of the southern cities?

The only time I entertained down there was when I was with Louie Jordan and we went to quite a few of the southern cities. And it was really pretty bad. That's the first time I

saw the white and colored faucets. I remember that we were coming to town and they would send Elaine and I in to get the food. We were the lightest, I don't know what it was. But we'd go in and -- at the back window, you couldn't go inside -- the back window and get the food and then we'd bring it out to the bus. And that's how we ate many-a-times. But we didn't stay in the town long. That was really very hard work. You can only do that when you're young. We would get into town and do the show and then we'd leave right after the show for the next town. And then the next town -- that's when we would get the hotel and rest until the show and then leave after that show. So it was continuous.

Did you have any problems with hotels in the South?

I think we stayed mostly in black hotels.

So most of the cities did have black hotels.

They did have black hotels and we stayed there. And there was a lot of rooming houses that we would go to eat. It was really family-style. Every city had a place where we could go to eat. You had the black restaurants but we would prefer to go into the private homes. They would have a long table and food for days. Because one thing about show people, they were always hungry. They missed their home, their soul food. So we would do that. Then a lot of -- getting back to the South -- [I'm getting a little hoarse], we would actually knock on doors. I saw a picture not too long ago -- I'm sorry I have to clear my throat.

You were telling me about knocking on doors.

Yes. We would land into towns that we really couldn't go into some of the hotels and some of the African-American families would take us in. So we would go down the

street and knock on one door and if they didn't have any room we would knock on another door until somebody would let us stay at their house that night, so we could do the show. We would pay them. And I was thinking how things were so different then, now we wouldn't dare do anything like that. But we used to do that and we did that in many-a-city and stay in private homes. They were so glad to have us and they would give us their best room and sometimes they would cook for us. And the picture came out just recently where they depicted this and this brought back so many memories. That really did happen to us in the South. But when we get to the big cities then we always had our hotels.

I've never heard of that kind of incident.

That is really the truth. And when I saw that I was so excited I said, "Knock on doors." And to think that people were bringing strangers in their homes and we would stay in a stranger's home. And never once did anyone in the shows, all those years, have any problem. I know that probably happened with a lot of stars because that happened here in [Las] Vegas when our stars had to come over here [Westside] to live.

That's interesting. Thank you for that story. I'm trying to make sure that I've got everything before we get to Las Vegas. It's 1955, had you performed in Las Vegas on any of your tours?

No, but I think my husband came through here with [Count] Basie's band. But this was my first time and we were just excited about coming to Las Vegas -- entertainment capital of the world. But it was also the "Mississippi of the West" then. So that's another story.

When you first arrived, were you coming here for the Moulin Rouge opening or was there another purpose?

No, we were coming here just to work there. They had twenty-seven girls from different cities across the United States.

Who was putting that show together?

That was Clarence Robinson. He brought us here. Pearl Bailey had always told us, "Go to Vegas." And when we finally got here and settled, she was the first one who said, "Didn't I tell you to go to Vegas?"

Before I talk about that show at the Moulin Rouge, I have heard a rumor about Pearl Bailey. Is it true that she tried to have a black line of dancers behind her whenever possible?

Yes, and I worked with her a lot at the Flamingo. Off and on I worked there for five years. But I must have worked with Pearl there at least a half a dozen times. She had us black girls integrated into the white line. That was their main line there but she would always bring us in and put us right there in the middle of them.

There was another rumor, and I don't know how true this is, but you'll know. Did she have the white dancers put on dark make-up?

No, she had the light girls put on dark make-up. It was us and she made us put on dark -- we had to wear "31" from head to toe.

So she wanted you to be darker?

Yes, she wanted us to look darker on the stage. So yes, even in Atlantic City, we had to wear that "31." She kept us in "31." And it would just mess up the costume and you would have to completely shower after the show before you could even get dressed.

What is "31."

It's a very, very dark pancake makeup. Usually we would wear "26" or "27" which was pretty brown. But we had to wear "31" which was really the darkest.

Did she explain why she did that to you?

She just wanted us to look darker, like real African-Americans. Because sometimes the lights would hit you and maybe you did look a little lighter. I fooled her one time. I was in Atlantic City and I went out there and I had really got a tan. I mean I got a tan from head to toe. And then she called me into her room and said, "Now I didn't tell you to get that dark." She was strict to work for, very strict.

So now you're in Las Vegas. What have you heard about the Moulin Rouge?

We thought it was on the Strip. So when they met us at the airport with cameras and television, we were just so thrilled. Then they put us in limousines and busses and we started riding and riding and riding. We passed the Strip, we went past the railroad tracks and we just look at each, "Well here we are again." But when we saw the Moulin Rouge, it was so beautiful. It doesn't look nothing like it did then. We were thrilled once we got in there. But we were really concerned where the club was. But once we got there we were just really happy.

Tell me the feeling in the community, knowing that this new nightclub was being built on the Westside.

They were just excited about it. They were just thrilled because you're putting something that they could be proud of to build up their neighborhood. And everything was springing up then, more hotels and more businesses and everything. There was so much hope. Everybody was so optimistic. It was employment. I think they employed over three hundred people and maybe more.

Were most of those black people that they were going to employ?

Yes, they were all blacks. The uniforms were beautiful, the service was the best in town. And we were the only ones that were doing -- I think that show was three o'clock in the morning, so it was a late show. We were the only ones in town that were doing it. So all of the Strip would empty out and they would all come over to the Moulin Rouge. You've never seen so many stars. Tallulah Bankhead and Belafonte and Sammy [Davis], just all of the stars would hang out there. I really in my heart believe that's why it was closed, because we closed to standing-room-only. Because we had really just cleaned out the Strip and they started doing the early shows. They still didn't have the flavor of what we had over there.

Tell me about opening night.

Opening night was exciting. Edward G. Robinson was there and I remember so many stars and we would just look out there and we couldn't believe it. All the flowers that were sent to us backstage, it was really --

By whom?

Oh, just by everybody. All the stars would send them back there to us. Everybody was just so glad that we were there. I think we opened up with Benny Carter's band and I was trying to think who the stars were then. We did have menus but I gave it all to the Moulin Rouge for them to put in their memorabilia. I wish I had kept some of that stuff. They opened up with a lot of stars and almost all of Hollywood came right down there. It was really an exciting opening night. And then they had the party afterward and everybody was backstage with plenty of champagne and food. They were toasting. We made the cover of *Life Magazine*. That was a thrill.

I have to find that cover.

Yeah. I gave that magazine to Sarann [Knight-Preddy]. I think she has all of that stuff. I thought she needed it because she was the one that has the Moulin Rouge now. But I really should have made copies and kept some of the things because you see me in some of the pictures.

If I find that copy in the Library and they probably have the hard copy, --

We're doing the "can-can" on the cover.

If I do find it, I'll give you copies of the pictures.

I certainly would appreciate that.

Tell me about that opening line, that night. Were you one of the chorus lines or were you a principle dancer?

No, I was in the line but I had a choice spot. I was right smack-dab in the center, in the front. So I had a good spot and in some of the pictures you'll see that. Some of the pictures they took from the side so you'll have the girls on the side. So I really had a choice spot. By that time, Clarence [Robinson] and I were good partners and whenever he got a job I was always there and I think he felt like he could always depend upon me.

Describe the costumes for that first show.

The first show I said was the "can-can" and those costumes were just beautiful. We did a watusi number and that was a very exciting and dynamic number where we had to jump up, hit the floor, spin around, jump back up, hit the floor. We'd have to do that at least six times.

Can you do it now?

Heck no, [laughter] I wish. Some girls would go halfway down but it really showed when you go all the way down and then you jump back up again. We would do that at least six times with the tempo right up here [pounding on table]. So it was very exciting and that costume was very pretty [with] a lot of feathers. I remember it looked like it was nude but it was a net here and you had all the sequins down here and the feathers. I'm trying to think about the finale. I know we did a Gabriel number that was really very nice. We had to come down the stairs and that was all white satin. We were all angels, so that was very pretty.

How many different shows did you do at the Moulin Rouge, how many different scenes?

We must have done, in six months, we must have done at least twenty different scenes. Remember there is three to four different numbers. I know we did a Caribbean number, the *Ladies in the Shade of the Banana Tree*. We had to come out with umbrellas. It was very, very pretty. And you had very attractive ladies from near white to jet-black, just a rainbow of colors.

I would love to see that line. Are there any video tapes of those lines?

They didn't have videos in 1955. That's the only sad thing. We might have some snapshots. Now a lot of the girls are moving here. Carrie just moved here and she was quite fair. Peaches is having her house built here out in Summerlin. She'll be here in September. She was inky-black but gorgeous.

Are you saying that all of you still stay in touch?

Oh, we still stay in touch.

From the Moulin Rouge?

From the Moulin Rouge, yes.

How many of those dancers are here in Las Vegas now?

Let me see, there's Carrie here, Peaches will be here in September, there's Dee Dee Jasmine. Who else is here? Now Martha Jordan wasn't at the Moulin Rouge. I worked with some girls at the Dunes, then I worked with another group at the Flamingo.

You stay in touch with most of them?

Yes, because I never did leave. I stayed here, so they all know that I'm here. So whenever they're coming through town or something -- it seems like they are all retiring here now. But one thing that I admire about ex-showgirls, they still try to keep their weight up, they still trying to keep their little make-up on. There is still a little glamour about them. And they all went off to do something with their career when they got older. They all went back to school. Oh yeah, Jap is here. She was at the Moulin Rouge.

What was her name?

Her name is Mary Louise Gray. She married Al Gray, so you should maybe get in touch with her. She wound up being a school teacher. So the girls went off and did wonderful jobs and that's what made me so proud. I went into business where I opened up a cocktail lounge and then my last one was on Paradise and Sahara called The Baby Grand. I sold it to Patricia and now it's the Go West. I'm just hoping that I don't get it back. I want to stay retired now. I had a lot of performers that would come and work for me. A lot of the girls I used to dance with would come and work with me there. We either went into business or we went into management. We all did something with our lives that made me so proud. I think it was the background of being able to travel so far and meet

so many different people in so many different walks of life.

I think it's also the discipline.

The discipline, yeah, because we have to be disciplined. They all wind up doing something with their lives. There might have been one or two that probably succumbed to the nightlife or to drugs or alcohol or something like that, but that's a few. Let's say the majority went on to do things with their lives.

Yes, because when I talked to Alice Key I get the same impression.

Yes, I'm glad. So we're in tune.

When the Moulin Rouge closed, what was the feeling like in the black community among the entertainers?

It was very, very sad because they just didn't understand why. And I think the Mafia might have been here then and I kind of think it was closed -- they say they didn't pay any of their taxes or any of their bills, but these were all businessmen. The one guy owned the Ready Whip Cream. I mean these are business people and you know they would pay their taxes. They say they just took all the money and ran. So a real sadness, a gloom fell over the Westside. That was really sad. All the building that was going up stopped. The Mardi Gras, there was going to be a mall -- just stopped. And that building stayed up for years, half-completed.

Where was this?

On the Westside and I think that was on, probably on D Street. Building stopped, everything just stopped and the Westside turned into a complete ghost town. All the aspirations -- we came here, all the clubs. They had private key clubs, they had clubs up

and down Jackson Avenue and they had girls in there, too -- beautiful, beautiful clubs and beautiful, great restaurants. Everything stopped when the Moulin Rouge closed and that's what's so sad about it. It's just like the Westside was just killed.

The Moulin Rouge, then, was helping to bring business to the Westside.

Everything to the Westside. That's correct. And when that closed everything stopped. I've never seen anything like it, coming from a city. So then I was ready to leave but my husband just wouldn't leave. He just fell in love with it and he said that he could see the potential here. And he was absolutely right.

Tell me what your husband did at the Moulin Rouge. What was his job?

He was the singer and the emcee.

He was the singer for that show you were with.

Yes, for the production numbers.

He was also the emcee for the entire thing?

For the entire show, that's right. So he had a nice position. Our salary then -- see I think I was probably making about one hundred and seventy five [dollars] then and he might have been making about three hundred and fifty or four hundred [dollars].

Both of you are in the same show and all of a sudden this show ends.

Yes, and it had just opened. It was just really sad. I was lucky. I think I went into the Joseph Magnin work. I was the first black to work in there. I was a cashier. So I did that for awhile and then I think Larry Steele called me, that he was going into the Dunes and that's when I worked with him. The only thing, I had to go on the road with him. So I

had to leave Bob and I went on the road with them because I knew they were going to come back to the Dunes. He had a contract, about a two or three year contract. So I might be working at home. But then our salary went up to about two hundred and fifty, then.

How long were you on the road before the show came back?

Almost a year, and then my husband went into television.

Tell me about that part.

He had the show with Alice [Key] and then with this girl and her husband, he had like a news show.

Now when you said, "this girl."

Yeah, the girl called Millie, Millie Davreaux. And this Ken Davreaux, he had a news show with him, and he's white. And so that was kind of integrated news shows, so that was different.

Tell me about the news show. I've never heard about that.

News, they did the daily news, whatever was happening then.

On which TV show was that?

I think that was [channel] thirteen. And then he went on [channel] eight where he had a variety show. And he has some great tapes on that.

Was that the variety show Talk of the Town?

No, no, the *Talk of the Town* was the first show and that was a variety show, a very good

show. And that one had never been seen, blacks that could articulate. So that made it a first, a successful show. I don't know how long it ran, maybe a year or two. Then Bob got with Ken Davreaux and then he went single and had his own TV show after that. I don't know whether Alice went back to Riverside then, or maybe she was writing for the *Voice* newspaper during that time. I haven't thought about these things in years.

Tell me about Bob's third show.

This is third show. I think it was called the *Rounders* and that would come on like one a.m. in the morning. And after all the stars would get off they would just come to his TV show.

It was an interview show?

Interview and talent. One of the sponsors was Lancer's wine, so at one a.m. he actually served wine on TV. [laughter] That really was jumping and I think it ran for a few years, the tapes of everybody that was on it at that time -- young Gladys Knight, Duke Ellington, the Treniers. So that was a good time during that time. He went to television school in New York but he could never get in TV until he came right out here to the Mississippi of the West and they were on television. So he was very happy. He says, "This is it." So he was doing that and then I'm traveling back and forth to work at the Dunes. And then after I worked there for about two or three years --

Now tell me, the show that you were with and you traveled, how often did you get to come back to do the Dunes show?

We would come back once a year, but we would come and stay three months.

The first time you were in the Dunes show, does that mean that you were the first African-American dancer on the Strip?

Well that was a whole show. The whole show was African-American.

So this was the first show on the Strip that was African-American?

Yes, and it was a sell-out. It was really fantastic.

Tell me about that show. What were some of the themes that you danced to in that show?

Well, in that show, I did have like a little starring role with Lionel Beckles. He was all in gold from head to toe and I was like the exotic dancer. So I did have a spot in that show. But one theme, we had another girl that had a spot but she was the country girl. And then she would come to the big city and she's in horror about the big city and in the back was all the big city. Then we would do like a city-type jazz number. We did a lot of great numbers there. We did two or three numbers per show and each one was different. Every time we came back we had another show, a different show completely for three months. So it was really, really nice.

This was a two-year running of these shows.

Yes. He had the contract for two years and we'd come back with a brand new show.

In that show, on that circuit, where did you go?

Mostly to Atlantic City and for some reason we weren't doing the breakfast show then so I was happy. We would go to Chicago. We went to Detroit, all the big theaters, not the clubs. It was all downtown theaters. We would go to the Apollo in Philadelphia, so all the main cities, but never [the] South. After that then Pearl Bailey got in touch with me, and so I would work off-and-on with her at the Flamingo and then I would go on the road with her. But Bob stayed right here. So after about almost three or four years of doing

that, I was getting so tired of the road and I was ready to stay -- we were working the same circuit only her theaters were even upper-crust a little bit more. So then she hired Bob to be her personal manager, so then I was stuck on the road for another year.

At least you were with Bob.

But I was with Bob so we actually traveled with Pearl.

Approximately how much money are you earning with Pearl Bailey?

I'm going up now. I'm up to about three [hundred] and fifty [dollars]. So it was not bad. Bob was making maybe five or six [hundred dollars]. We weren't doing too bad. We tried to live off my salary and save his. He's always been very thrifty.

Did you have a home in Las Vegas at that time?

Yes we did. We had a home in, it's called Bonanza Village. It's a nice little area, still one of the old areas here. It's on the Westside. But you do have an acre of land with your home.

Is that the same area where Jimmy Gay --

Yes, the same area. Jimmy Gay's there and I think D. D. is there. D. D. Cotton, is she still there?

Yes, that's where I interviewed her the other day.³

You were just talking about that you had a home in Las Vegas as you had begun to travel. Tell me about the Pearl Bailey show and how she worked dancers into her show.

³End side 2, tape 1.

It was really, really great. She'd have us come out and do a number and then at the end, she had us each do a number by ourselves, each one of the girls. That was kind of unheard of. She gave us each a shot to go out there and really perform. She used to tease us sometimes, because I was kind of getting a little older then. She'd tease us about our age sometimes even though we hated that. I think we were still kind of hanging in there looking pretty good, you know nice and slim. But she would kind of do that to us. She did give us an opportunity to really get out there and do a single by ourselves.

How many girls were in her show?

Let me see how many were there. I think she had eight, she had about eight. But like I said, she was a little tough.

What do you mean by being tough?

A little tough. She'd watch you constantly and make sure that your seam in your stocking is straight. Which was good for us, that you never deviate on your routine. That you never danced faster than the music or slower than the music. She would just watch everything. She'd watch your makeup. You know we talked about that earlier. She'd watch how you fixed your hair. She loved to have our hair pulled straight back into a ponytail. So you could never change your hairstyle. But she was very, very generous and when she felt like she might have been a little cruel to you she would have a gift for you the next day even though we didn't want it, because by that time we were furious. But she'd really bring you a diamond.

A diamond?

A diamond, or she'd bring you a piece of gold. She was extremely generous. Or she'll bring you a designer pocketbook. And some of that stuff I still have. And another thing I

remembered, she would come by and get me sometimes -- that's when she had her home in Apple Valley -- and come say, "You're going to come and spend the weekend at Apple Valley." And sometimes I didn't want to go but sometimes you would enjoy it because she had a great cook that could really cook all the greens and stuff when we'd go up there.

Apple Valley must have been the real country at that time.

It was really, really country at that time. She would have the horses, she had an olympic size swimming pool. So it really was like a nice little vacation. The kitchen didn't open up sometimes until she woke around eleven or twelve o'clock. That was kind of sad.

It sounded like, while you were dancing, that dancers could eat a lot of food.

They'd eat a lot of food and you'd burn it right off.

What about when you stopped dancing?

Well, you know you still would go for classes so your weight stayed pretty good. Because you couldn't get a job if you had any kind of weight on you. So you stayed pretty slim. You stayed active. You'd go out dancing and you'd always run by Henry Letang's class and take classes to keep yourself limber where you could make those -- six o'clock they call it -- those high kicks. You stayed pretty slim. You didn't have to worry too much about it as long as you were working. But yeah, we ate an enormous amount of food. I think that's what gave you the push, the energy because sometimes [for] some of our black producers, you might dance for ten or fifteen minutes straight without stopping. And they'd have this tempo [pounds on the table], very fast tempo. Where now I look at the dancing and the tempos are so easy. It's just like they're walking. When you have to kick and spin, it was really something.

When you decided to come to Las Vegas, you told me about that first bus ride coming into the city. When did you decide that that had been a good decision to come here?

Because it was work. Anytime you had work it was really good. You're in the entertainment capital of the world so this is where you wanted to be. The agents would come and see you and so there was the possibility. Some of the girls did go off, maybe, and do movies or something after that. It was kind of hard by the time you were having children, but the town was very, very prejudice then. Like I said, we would go downtown and if you tried on a hat, you would have to buy that hat. Like Chic Hecht said -- he was our senator -- his store, you couldn't try on the clothes. You'd have to take them home and try them on.

And if you didn't want them could you take them back?

No you could not take them back. So I really remember all that and it was very, very bad. But they could tell by our dress that those must be the girls from the [Moulin] Rouge. They could tell. So sometimes you could come in there and even purchase the dresses. Because a lot of the African-Americans that was here then, I don't think they went into those stores at all. I don't know where they were buying their clothes but I don't think they went in those stores. At least we could even get into the stores to get the clothes. Because you had Fanny's then which was all the high designer clothes. And coming from the East, we did like to dress well. So it was pretty tough. And none of the restaurants -- coming from the East, we were up at the Sands almost every night. Even though at the Moulin Rouge they told us not to go and then the Sands would write back, "We can't have that here." You know, us coming out there. But we knew Nick Kelly and we knew Jack Entrata, Bob and I, because Bob was at the La Bien Rose and so we could get reservations to go there to the Sands Hotel. We knew some of the stars, so we could get comps to come. And then by Bob getting on TV, after awhile we would get

comps to go. But all the while we were sitting in there, they would stare at us the whole time we were in there. The customers would stare at us, the waiters would look, and the security guards would watch us constantly. And here's something that really happened. A bunch of us, I don't know if Alice was with us, but I know Dottie West was with us, Avonella -- these girls have left -- we were going to the Sands and they stopped us at the door, the security guard. And Frank Sinatra came and got us at the door and brought us out and sat us down in the lounge where he was sitting. And Sammy Davis, I'll never forget, had his head all down. He was just so embarrassed by what happened to us. But he was instrumental in inviting a lot of blacks out there too.

Do you remember which year that happened?

Let me think, because this was after the [Moulin] Rouge. This was when the Rat Pack was there.

Are we still in the 1950s?

Yeah, we're still in the latter part of the 1950s. Yeah, 1957, 1958, 1959, somewhere in there.

You know Frank Sinatra did have a lot to do with integrating this town?

He came and got us at the door. I've never forgot that. He really did, because we were just standing there. We were all looking nice and they stopped us. They take it on themselves sometimes. It's not the owners so much, it's the people that work for them. And I never forget I was just so proud walking behind Frank Sinatra and sitting down to his table and Sammy was just hitting on the table. He was just so unhappy for us. But Sammy did a lot of good work there too. And you know Josephine Baker wouldn't even perform unless they had blacks in the audience. So they would try to get all the waiters

and everybody to come.

Do you remember when Josephine Baker entertained in this city?

I remember, but I didn't go see the show. Bob went to see the show.

Was that in the 1950s or 1960s?

I think it was in the latter part of the 1950s.

And you do remember if that story is true that she did have --

Oh, she had to have blacks in there or she would not perform. That was definitely a fact.

Do you remember how they went about getting those blacks to sit in the audience?

I think they got the waiters or the maids to get some of their friends. They started making some phone calls to get some people into the audience. And I think Bob was in that audience too. I believe he was there.

At that time you had a home on the Westside. Do you remember the feeling in the community when things like that happened? When the story would get back that Frank Sinatra got a group of blacks into the Sands. What was the feeling like in the community?

It was terrible. Bob was appointed to the Equal Rights Commission at that time, so they had a march on the Strip. They just resented not being able to go out to get jobs out there, not to go and see the shows. So Bob got the first cocktail waitresses into Caesar's Palace. I think he was in a van in front of there for about three months while they were doing the hiring thing, to get black cocktail waitresses into Caesar's Palace.

Tell me more about being in the van for three months.

While Caesar's Palace was being built, he was out there in that van for three months. He subpoenaed the owners of the Caesar's Palace to go to court for not hiring blacks. So the first girls that went out there -- did D.D. work as a --

D.D. Cotton was one of the first.

And Peggy Walker. So he was out there. I just hope D.D. remembers Bob being out there.

Now tell me, he would just get up in the morning and drive to Caesar's Palace and just sit there all day?

In a van that was just parked there out front. And he'd try to get these people to hire blacks.

He would sit there and talk to people --

He would talk to people. I think they had all kinds of signs and they were picketing and everything like that, and taking the owners to court. He used to get some pretty bad phone calls.

I can imagine.

It was pretty tough during that time. I feel so sad. It's almost as if we're going backwards now again. For awhile we were really on a roll but now it's almost back. When I go to the hotels, you don't see as much anymore.

That's something that I am trying to figure out. I've only been in Las Vegas for a little over four years and I am getting the impression, because I do go into hotels whenever I have visitors in town. I am getting the impression that there are not that many blacks in visible positions anymore. Even though I know --

It's a law now.

That's right. You were here all these years. Tell me what happened. Tell me why this happened.

I don't know whether the leaders just got older or what, but the young people that's coming up, either they're leaving town or not that interested in fighting the struggle. Because there was really a struggle fight during that time to change the mode of thinking around. I think people just don't care anymore. And they just don't fight it and push it any more. I think that a lot of our organizations -- we had so many. The NAACP was really working, and you had the Urban League and you had so many organizations that kept pushing but now I don't see the work anymore.

Is it possible that we thought the fight was over and that everything was going to be ok?

I think so. But you know, you can never stop. Because once you slack up then they do too. We really had blacks just everywhere. Just working everywhere for awhile but all of a sudden now, you just don't see it. And it's a law now. You're supposed to have some African-Americans in the managing positions there. I don't think much of that is happening now. They're just pencils-pushers or things like that. Most of our blacks seem to be going into banks and into businesses like that. They're not interested in the service work out there, too much.

But Las Vegas is built on gaming.

We don't seem to be going into that field too much. You ask great questions. I wish I was a little better on the answers.

No, this is great. I just love it. I want you to tell me a little bit about when you came back to the Dunes and the Flamingo and some of the other places on the Strip. At

what point do you get into an integrated line?

Well, I was hired and I went into a complete all-white line at the Flamingo. I worked in the lounge and I think I worked there about a year and a half.

Do you remember which year that started?

That might have been 1960 or 1961. I might have been one of the oldest girls there but for some reason I still looked pretty youthful at that time. I was hired just by my reputation of working there and I didn't have to do an audition or anything. I just went in and started working. I was making about four [hundred] and fifty [dollars] then. That was in the lounge and the show was completely white. I was the only one of color and I made sure that I stayed a little tan and everything. And Bob would be right out there. One of the good things I can say about working, being black and working in the clubs, all the white dancers had to stay out in the lounge after the show until two or three o'clock in the morning. But by being black I never had to. I could leave because they didn't want me sitting around out there.

What did they do?

They would get their first drink free. I'm really positive that they weren't prostitutes or anything. But what they would do, they would get their first drink and then somebody else would buy them some drinks, some of the other customers. I think then they would go to the gambling tables and they would play with the customers money. And I think that's what they did. But I don't believe they ever went out. Maybe some individuals might have gone out but that wasn't the purpose of the hotels, and I really will say that. They wanted to get the people to buy drinks and to keep the gambling tables going.

They had to stay until what time in the morning?

I think they had to stay until four o'clock in the morning. And remember the show is over maybe about one [a.m.]. So they had to get dressed with all their makeup on. So I'd be just laughing and taking off my makeup.

What did they think of you, not having to do that?

They never did say anything, but they probably knew. Well I knew why I wasn't out on the gambling tables because some of the whites thought that we might be bad luck. But I didn't have to do that and I was very, very happy about that.

How did these other girls treat you in these all-white lines?

Oh, they all treated me fine. There was never any problem. Just treat me fine. If you go out there and do your job -- I have pictures of them coming to my house, like on my birthday, some of the kids from the show. Or somebody else's house on their birthday. So you know, show folks is really a family. I never really felt any prejudice with anyone that [I] worked with. The most thing is talent. If you got talent that's the only thing you might get a little jealousy there. Or somebody would want your spot. I had problems with people wanting the spot that I had at the Dunes. So there was a little friction there where I never could get anyone to help me with the choreography or something because they wanted somebody else to have that job. So there might have been a little friction like that. Otherwise we were all just family. We would all get together and just laugh and have a good time.

What about management? Did you see any difference the way management at the Flamingo treated you versus how they treated the other girls?

No. I never really did get any of that. You kind of knew what you could do and what you couldn't do. I always could go out into the lunchroom or the dining room and eat. I

never had any problem. We just didn't fraternize too much with the customers, which we were overjoyed about that. And I worked with a lot of girls from Europe at the Flamingo and they couldn't get over -- they didn't like the prejudice -- but they couldn't get over the food that we would throw away. And that stood out in my mind. The food that we would leave on our plates, they thought that was so strange. So that's the only thing I noticed with them but they were great to work with and they were glad to be in this country.

Was there any difference in working with white American dancers and European dancers?

I think the European were a little bit more relaxed. A little bit more relaxed. Like they would hug you and kiss you and hold hands, walk down the street. The white dancers might stand back a little bit. They were friendly and everything and we would mix on parties but most of the time when you got off work, you went your separate ways. Because we basically went back to the Westside and they wouldn't come over here too much. But they would come over to your home but not in your clubs or anything.

The clubs on the Westside at that time -- the Town Tavern, the Brown Derby, some of those other clubs -- were these still fully operational?

And they were all owned by blacks. Yes. That's why sometimes integration is not good. We were really doing very well and making a lot of money during that time. There were private key clubs.

Tell me about the private key clubs, because no one else has spoken about those.

They had them where, I think you paid a fee -- I don't know how much it was, maybe a hundred dollars -- and you go there and anybody that didn't belong to the club they

couldn't come in. You had your own key and you come in to eat and to drink. I don't know about shows. They might have had a little trio there or something like that. But you had your own private club.

Were those on Jackson Street?

Jackson Avenue, that's right, right there.

Were those owned by black people?

Everything was owned by blacks. The Cotton Club was owned by blacks, the El Morocco. All your liquor stores and all your restaurants were owned by blacks. And Jackson Avenue was like -- I was thinking about the street in New Orleans, what's the name of that street? Bourbon Street. It was just like Bourbon Street, you know, the excitement. People walking down the street, holding their drinks, going from one club to the next club to the next club. And remember, all your black stars were there. Lena Horne and all them had to leave the club and come over there. I've visited many of them in their trailers in the back. They couldn't even go in the dressing room in the hotels. So we were in trailers with Nat [King Cole] and with Lena Horne, Dinah Washington. We'd be back there having a ball, playing cards and drinking champagne, having a ball. But we're in the trailer in the back of the hotel.

When you were at the Flamingo in this integrated line, was your dressing room with the other girl's?

Oh, no. You're right next to them. We were all in a row.

The other thing that you were telling me about, the African-American stars being out back in trailers, how long did that go on?

That went on quite a [long] time. I think the first ones that really rebelled was Lena Horne and Nat King Cole. They started having their dressing rooms and then eventually Sammy Davis and all them started staying in the hotels. It took a little while and we were in the 1960s when all this was happening. But we used to have a ball in those trailers though, and we had some high stakes there. We lost a lot of money back there. We were gambling back there.

I'm sure you and Bob weren't gambling though.

Not much because Bob's too thrifty to gamble.

When you were at the Flamingo in an integrated line, were the salaries the same at this point?

You know, I just hope so because everybody kind of kept their contract to themselves. But let me tell you something, with Larry Steele's show the salaries were all different. The best dancers got a little bit more than the new dancers. But those contracts were all hid a little bit. For some reason we didn't make a big to-do about it. Some girls would be making a hundred and fifty [dollars] and some girls would be making two [hundred] and fifty [dollars]. The ones they thought were the key dancers would get the -- but I don't think Clarence [Robinson] did that too much. I think all the girls made the same with Clarence. That's what I really believe. Now the white dancers, I really have no idea. Now when we came into the integrated shows we were with Pearl [Bailey] and I know we all made the same salary. Now if you were a captain you would make an extra hundred dollars, a captain of the girls.

Tell me what a captain does.

You have to call the rehearsals and make sure that the girls are dancing up to par. I was

captain for awhile with Pearl. The white girls, what they were making, we had no idea what they were making because they were *in* the hotels. [phone rings]

I was supposed to take her today, but I won't be able to make it, to the diet place -- Jenny Craig -- today. We were both supposed to go to a diet today.

Why?

Yes, that's what she wants to know. She's going to go to Earl Graves's Black Enterprise Conference in May in Orlando. So she called me earlier and wanted to know if I wanted to go so she could register me. But I said, "We have to get slim before we go."

But you look so nice now.

I do. My hips are slim but I'm getting a little bit up here and I'm trying to get this down.

That sounds great, going to Earl Graves'.

Yes, yes.

Now when is it going to be?

In Orlando. I think it's May the seventh.

Did you see any difference in -- I'm going to say this as delicately as I can -- when the hotels were "family" owned versus when Las Vegas became more corporate owned?

Did you see any difference in this town at that time since you lived here throughout?

I really did. I think there was much more money in circulation when the family was here than now. With corporate, things just stopped. Everything was black and white. But then [earlier] we would go out and we would just have so many comps, and we would have steak and champagne. One time they even called us and said, "How many was in

your party?" Bob said, "Just the two of us." Money really flowed and we went to all the openings during that time and there was not many of us that was doing it. There was me and Bob and Dr. West and his wife and I think Alice. Dr. McMillan and maybe Jimmie Gay, I believe. There was always a handful of blacks that really had that and I think what really helped us were the people that we knew from New York and Bob's TV show. But we went to all the openings and they would give us bags of silver dollars. Bags of silver dollars, that's right. I never could get over that. They would give us crystal, they would give us jewelry. They need to because you're a guest for the opening night. Maybe Frank Sinatra was opening up with *One Hundred Violins*. You get gifts plus your comps and everything. That only happened when they [the mob] were here.

Tell me about the bags of silver dollars.

Bags of silver dollars. A big old bag of silver dollars, because they want you to come out and gamble. So we're getting back a little bit. Now we're going back maybe into the middle 1960s.

This is good though.

And I mean ninety-nine percent silver, too. Not the stuff that came out afterwards. That was silver-plated.

Tell me about the jewelry. Sometimes for the opening show they would give you jewelry?

They'll give you a stone or they'll give you a coin. They'll give you a gold coin. Or they'll give you crystal. I wish I could think of some of the things that we just took for granted because we were all just having such a good time and we were so young then. They would just give you more. And plus you'd get the invitations and you'll have your

flowers. You would have plates that you were invited, you know, inscribed in gold to the opening of this. And some of those I kept and some I don't even know where they are. I'm terrible about keeping things. Like Bob said, I'm not a pack rat. I throw things out.

It seems as though there are about five or six African-American couples who were in on these things.

I guess so, by us knowing Nat [King Cole]. Bob would do the introduction for all of his recordings when he was at the Sands. So Bob would do the introductions for him. So we weren't invited out by the hotel, we were invited out by the star. That was a very good, happy period. And there was no other blacks there.

How did you feel being allowed to go in and knowing that there are four or five other couples but nobody else? How did that make you feel?

We did think about it. We really did. There wasn't many blacks here then either, see. And most of the blacks that were here were from the rural parts of the South. So they really didn't know or had the connection that we did. They wasn't happy about going out there anyhow. But I've met many blacks since then that say that they used to look at the show from the wings or from the doorway and things like that. I guess we were having such a good time ourselves during that period.

The ones that you've talked to that say, "I saw it from the back of the curtain." Did you pick up a feeling from them, how they felt about it?

No, I didn't feel any animosity or anything. They seemed to be just thrilled to be able to see it. No I didn't. But what they talk about later, I don't know. They always treated us nice and we always made sure that we left good tips because everything else was "comped." During that time you didn't have any blacks that was waiting on you either.

They were mostly maids and porters. That's really the way it was. So those that was serving us was white.

After interviewing lots of women who worked in the back of the house, I've never gotten a feeling of animosity.

I never did get it either. They were just happy to see us out there. They thought, maybe that's the start of the beginning. I think we kind of made them proud because we tried to really act -- I never can forget the stares of the whites that were staring at us the whole time that we were there, though. We walked in, you can imagine, and we were always lucky to be seated down front. Did Alice tell you that? We were always seated right down front. The Sands was a pretty liberal hotel.

Tell me about the last show that you danced in. When was that?

Let me see now. It was the lounge show at the Flamingo Hotel. That was the lounge show and that was completely integrated. I was the only black in that show but some of the people were from Istanbul. I guess we kind of fit in because they were kind of olive complexioned. So that was the last show and by that time I had opened up my business, Bob and I.

Tell me about that first business.

That was called "Sugar Hill" and that was on Miller [Street]. We opened that up and it was a swingin' place. We had a garden in the back where we performed weddings. Alice's daughter got married in our garden.

Where was it located?

That's on Miller and Lexington, that's North Las Vegas. It's Martin Luther King and

Lexington on Miller. So you know the area, it's north. We were there about twenty-one years. We were there a long time.

This last show that you danced in, how did it feel to be quitting this glamorous career?

I know, but by that time I'm getting a little older. I had babies.

How many children do you have by this time?

Just two.

So you had your children while you were still dancing.

I was still dancing. I would take them to rehearsals with me at the Flamingo and the choreographers had to take them around with them. They had to go with me. I was just thinking the other day, I had to work terrible hours, twelve to six. So I guess Bob must have been staying home with kids. I was trying to think of how we did that. He must have been every night with the kids. So that was a very popular place [Sugar Hill] and I ran into a lot young adults now and they said they met their wife or their husband at that place. I remember Johnny Carson got in his cab one time and came over there to our place because we had great groups. A lot of the entertainers would come over there. A lot of our fighters like Sonny Liston and all them would come over there, Muhammad [Ali] came over there.

Tell me about the place. How big was it?

It was pretty large. I wish I could remember the square footage. Maybe twice the size of this house, maybe -- this ground level. This house is twenty-five hundred square feet.

Was your club about that size?

Yes. I would say about twenty-five hundred [square feet].

Was this all in one room?

All in one room. They had the bar and then they had the club here then next door I had a liquor store. It really sent my kids through college. It was very good. But what really ran us away is when, I don't know if you want to know about this, but when crack [cocaine] came into town.⁴

You were beginning to tell me about some of the businesses that you owned after your dancing career ended. Were these twenty-four-hour clubs?

Twenty-four hours, seven days a week.

Did you have any gambling at all?

Yes. We had fifteen slot machines. Yes we had gambling. And it was great, too. We did very well off the gambling. Now at the Pan-Afro we had live gambling.

Now the name of that first club was Sugar Hill.

Yes, you know -- going back to New York.

You had slot machines at Sugar Hill.

Yeah, we had slot machines and we had dancers there.

Tell me about the dancers.

Well, we had dancers. That was the go-go era so we had beautiful girls. Bob would go to California and bring them back here and some of those girls, Bob got them jobs with

⁴End side 1, tape 2.

Sammy Davis out on the Strip, after they left us.

You had a live show?

Yes, we had dancers. On the weekends, I don't think we had it every day. but on the weekends we had live music. And our gardens, we had movies and it was really a very popular place and people still remember it. Now it's a church. So from one extreme to the other. It was very, very popular and a lot of stars would come over there. Barbara McNair would come over and they would come over there and perform. Not working for us but just coming and --

Impromptu.

Impromptu, that's correct. Then we opened the other place, the Pan-Afro Lounge and that had me running from one place to the other.

Wait a minute. You owned the Pan-Afro before you closed Sugar Hill.

Oh, yes. We had both of them going. And that was a very pretty place. Bob had all the flags of all the African nations flying on top and we had everything like in leopard inside. It was a very pretty place. Sugar Hill, it wasn't that pretty but it was nice and people really enjoyed it. But the shopping center was really very nice and we had the NAACP and all those offices in there, so we wound up selling that.

Before you sold it, you said you had live gaming. Tell me about that.

We had "21" and we had about four tables. And slot machines, many more than fifteen. We must have had about twenty-five or thirty. You know the length, it was a very large place. So it was really very nice.

That means that you and Bob had a gambling license?

Oh, yes. We had gambling license and liquor license.

Were you the first African-American --

I always felt like I was the first but I noticed that Sarann [Knight-Preddy] always says that she's the first. So I usually stay in the background and I never say anything. I know that she opened up a place right in front of the Pan-Afro. I think it was called Peoples' Choice or something like that. It seems to me that she got the gambling license then and I'd already had it. But I don't want to make a big to-do about it. Because I notice in all her interviews, she says she has the first.

Maybe she was talking about when she was back in Hawthorne.

Maybe that's what she's talking about. That's probably it.

I think she was talking about then because that was way back.

She owned a bar then?

She owned a bar in Hawthorne. So maybe that's the gambling license she's talking about.

That's probably what she's talking about. That's why I really didn't want to say. And I kind of do remember that.

But in Las Vegas

[In] Las Vegas, I think I might have been the first.

I have a feeling that you might have been the first. I think that's very, very impressive.

Yes, and we went through a lot to get that, too. We were investigated for twenty-seven

days. They went all the way back to New York and we were paying for it, a hundred dollars a day. That's a lot of money then. So we were investigated before they would even give us the license. So when we finally got it we were really happy and so I think we never really had any problems with them ever since. Then when I sold Sugar Hill we still had the license and I wanted to move out and to get closer to the Strip. So my son's an attorney by that time and he did all the business negotiations for us and we acquired the place on Sahara and Paradise. It's right next to the gas station. We owned that and we still own it.

What is the name of that place?

Now it's called Go West but when we had it, it was called the Baby Grand. Do you remember the Baby Grand on Twenty-fifth Street? You might not remember.

Oh, in New York.

Yeah, in New York. So we called that the Baby Grand and I did have my baby grand piano in there. We had music every night and I had gambling in there. All my slot machines were built into the bar. It was very, very pretty. Bob was in Washington at that time so I was really doing that alone.

Doing what in Washington?

He was director of the Department of Commerce. He was there for the whole Bush Administration. That was a good experience for him, from singer to doing something like that.

Bob has to be interviewed again because --

Well, he has a wealth of things that he's done.

Well, the interviews that we have in the library aren't that recent. So we don't know anything about those years in Washington.

Yes, well it should be. Because he went to Kuwait, you know. He had a wonderful experience. He did the same thing that Ron Brown was doing.⁵ That was his job because he was director, executive director.

Do you think he would mind, one of these days if he had an hour, if I could sit down and talk to him?

Well, he's doing the Extravaganza now and I've got to tell you about that.

What is the Extravaganza?

He's bringing twenty choirs from our black colleges in the South. And they'll be here March twenty-fourth to the twenty-sixth. Let me get you a little brochure on it.

Yes, I'm going to put it in my book as soon as we finish. Now these five hundred students that he's bringing, what kind of singing?

They're going to be doing gospel. They're going to be doing opera. They're going to be doing pop. It's going to be fabulous. It's going to be three days.

Where? When?

[At] UNLV, Thomas and Mack, and it will be March the twenty-fourth till the twenty-sixth. So I think it's going to be a first and they're backed by the Convention Center. So we got a grant from the Convention Center and it's going to be a tremendous three days.

I'll be there.

⁵Ron Brown was the Secretary of Commerce during the first Clinton Administration. Secretary Brown was killed in an airplane crash in 1996.

Okay, and Nicole's telephone number is on there. Give her a call and maybe if you'd like to come in and be a hostess or something. They need people to get people back and forth to the stage, or the choirs from the hotels to where it's going to be appearing.

I love showing this city off, so I can do that.

Yes, please call Nicole.

Yes, I will. Do you remember -- now your husband probably had a lot to do with this -- do you remember back in the early 1970s when a Consent Decree was passed in an attempt to get more African-Americans in better positions in the hotels? We talked about this just a little bit before.

Yes, a little bit. I remember a lot about that. Bob would really be a little bit more informed because he was really dealing with it. They subpoenaed all the hotels and they had meetings where they had to sign things. And there was more blacks in the hotels at that time, and in executive positions. Now, like we talked about before, no one's pushing it so it doesn't seem to be --

When I was in Los Angeles, I was really involved with the NAACP, and the reason I know that I cannot complain here is because I have spent all my time going to school. I have not been active. I know it's an all volunteer organization so I can only blame myself and others like me who are not -- but after talking to you, after talking to Alice Key, I want to get more community active.

Oh, that's wonderful because it's really, really needed. Alice and Bob, Dr. McMillan and Dr. West, they're all involved with the fair housing. I think that didn't happen until 1963. But you had fair housing and you could live all over town. We need someone to pick up the ball and really run with it now. Because most of the people that was in the struggle

and marching and subpoenaing people, they're just a little older now. It's for the new, young people coming into town to get involved.

There is still so many things that we can do.

I think so, to make things a little bit better here.

Do you think racism played any part in either advancing or limiting your career here in Las Vegas?

I have to admit that could be true. Yes, I think so because when I did go out for auditions, and I was really going to go out and try to get in other hotels now, they'd show me the step and I'd go out to do it and they'd stop me before I'm finished. So in a way I think that maybe if I did have a different color that maybe I could have gotten a job. I tried out at the *Follies Bergere Show*. I tried at the *Lido Show*. And I never could get through an audition. I think that I was really pretty good, then. Because they always said that I was one of the top dancers and my memory was good. I could always remember the routine. I never could get passed the choreographer. I really believe that could be true. I think that maybe if Bob wasn't black, he might have been on TV because when different commissioners come home and take over then you're voted out of a lot of positions. But all the work that Bob has done here, he has never been offered any kind of key job in any of the hotels. He could be a perfect host in any one of the hotels, I believe [because of] the people that he knows and his experience, his expertise.

And after a Federal appointment.

A Federal appointment and a government appointment, never one. Now he's involved with the Chamber of Commerce and he's involved with a lot of good white organizations but he never gets anything unless he creates it himself. [Racism] is alive and kicking,

still, right now. Only it's different. Then it was blatant. They'd tell you to your face. But here, it's all pat-on-the-back and it's all behind closed doors now. Oh, yes. I believe it really stops your growth here.

I just appreciate this interview so much.

And thank you for my first interview. I just hope that I gave you any kind of information.

I'm going to leave my card with you today and if you run across any pictures -- I want to come back to talk to Bob one of these days.

What kind of pictures would you like?

I want to see you with some of the shows that you were in.

I think I've got some of me with Pearl. And that was integrated. I think there are some white girls on there with me.

If you have any of those pictures with the big hats, back in New York, I'd love to see some of them.

I don't know why I didn't think to get some of these pictures.

This is the end of our interview. Ann has now gone out to find some pictures for me.⁶

⁶End side 2, tape 2.

A

African-Americans
 accomodations in the South, 23
 racisim, 60
AGVA, 5
Apollo, 3, 22, 35
Apple Valley, 38

B

Baby Grand Club, 30, 57
Bailey, Pearl, 18, 22, 25, 35, 36, 48, 49,
 61
Baker, Josephine, 14, 40, 41
Bankhead, Tallulah, 27
Basie, Count, 20, 24
Beckles, Lionel, 35
Belafonte, Harry, 27
Biltmore Theatre, 8
Black and Blue, 14
Black Enterprise Conference, 49
Bonanza Village, 36
Born Happy, 4
breakfast shows, 12, 21
Broadway, 3, 5, 12, 14
Brown Derby, 46
Bruce, Mary, 18

C

Caesar's Palace Hotel & Casino, 41, 42
Calloway, Cab, 7, 12
Carson, Johnny, 53
Carter, Benny, 27
Childhood, 1
chittling circuit, 22
Cole, Nat King, 48
Consent Decree, 59
Corporate gaming, 49
Cosby Show, 10
costumes, 6, 13, 28
Cotton Club, Las Vegas, 47
Cotton Club, New York, 12

D

D. D. Cotton, 6, 7, 36
Davis Jr., Sammy, 40, 48, 55
Davreaux's, Ken & Millie, 33
Downbeat Magazine, 13
Dunes Hotel & Casino, 30, 32, 33, 34,
 43, 45
Dunham, Katherine, 18

E

Early influences, 18
Education, 2, 3, 4
El Morocco Club, 47
Ellington, Duke, 34
Entrata, Jack, 39
Equal Rights Commission, 41
European dancers, 46
Extravaganza, 58

F

Family
 daughter, 11
 grandchildren, 12
 husband, 20, 24, 32, 33
 mother, 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 20
 sister, 1
 son, 11, 57
 stepfather, 10
Fanny's, 39
First arrival in Las Vegas, 24
Flamingo Hotel & Casino, 25, 30, 35,
 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 52, 53
Follies Bergere, 60

G

gambling license, 55, 56
Gay, James, 36
Go West Club, 30, 57
Graves, Earl, 49
Gray, Mary Louise, 30

H

Harlem, 3, 12, 18
Hecht, Chic, 39
Here, There, and Everywhere, 15
Horne, Lena, 47, 48

I

Ink Spots, 12

J

Jackson Avenue, 32, 47
Jasmine, Dee Dee, 30
Jordan, Louie, 7, 13, 22
Jordan, Martha, 13, 30

K

Kelly, Nick, 39
key clubs, 31, 46
Key, Alice, 5, 19, 20, 31, 59
Knight, Gladys, 34

L

Latin Quarter, 20
Letang, Henry, 14, 38
Lido Show, 60
Life Magazine, 27
Liston, Sonny, 53

M

McMillan, James, 50, 59
McNair, Barbara, 55
Mills Brothers, 12
Mississippi of the West, 24, 34
mob era of gambling, 49
Moulin Rouge, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,
30, 31, 32, 39
Muhammad Ali, 53

N

NAACP, 43, 55, 59

P

Palladium, 8
Pan-Afro Club, 54, 55, 56

Paramount Theatre, 3
Peoples' Choice Club, 56
Porter, Beatrice. *See* mother
Porter, William. *See* stepfather
Preddy, Sarann, 28, 56
principle dancer, 28

R

Race relations
integrated shows, 9, 14, 47, 48, 52
on opening night, 27
travel, 22
Rat Pack, 40
Regan, Antoinette. *See* sister
Retirement
dancers, 30
self, 30
Robinson, Bill, 4, 5, 9
Robinson, Clarence, 21, 25
Robinson, Edward G., 27

S

Sands Hotel & Casino, 39, 40, 41, 51, 52
Savannah
Club, 5
Georgia, 1
Sinatra, Frank, 40, 41, 50
Steele, Larry, 21, 32, 48
Sugar Hill Club, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57

T

Talk of the Town, 33
Taps, 14
The 845 Club, 19
The Treniers, 34
Town Tavern, 7, 46

U

Urban League, 43

V

Voice, 34

W

Walker, Peggy, 42
Washington, Dinah, 47
Watkins Hotel, 6
West, Dottie, 40
Westside, 24, 26, 31, 32, 36, 41, 46
White House Club, 17
Williams, Joe, 20
Work
 business owner, 30, 52

in Atlantic City, 11, 12, 21, 25, 26, 35
in London, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19
in Los Angeles, 5, 7, 8, 9, 59
in New York, 2, 3, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16,
 21, 34, 50, 54, 57, 61
on tour, 4
wages, 7, 13, 14, 16, 36
weight control, 30

Z

Zanzibar Club, 12