

This is Claytee White. Today is Monday, September 28, 2003. I am sitting here talking with Mr. Darrell Luce. Good morning Mr. Luce. Would you give me your full name please?

Yes, I'm Darrell Dunkel Luce and I've lived here in Las Vegas since 1932 when my family came down from Reno. My mother and father both were graduates of UNR and my father graduated with a degree in electrical engineering and pursued this occupation for about 14 years and then came back to the Reno area looking for a job. He found out there was a small electrical appliance store here in Las Vegas that was for sale. He, my mother and my sister and I, we all came down to Las Vegas. He bought out this store in partnership with a man who was already working in the store by the name of Mr. Les Goodfellow. The store was named Luce and Goodfellow. The first location was on Fremont Street. Downtown Las Vegas between what today is called Las Vegas Blvd. and those days it was 5th Street between 5th and 6th Streets. and it was on the north side of the street. Beyond that, there was very little after you went past 6th Street. Very little in the way of business except down perhaps along about 10th Street. in that area, and 11th Street. there were a couple of small, in those days what you called auto courts, today's motels. Little tiny motels. The street continued but it wasn't paved and it went on out. If you followed that street, Fremont, it would become Boulder Highway and that would take you to Boulder City and of course to the Boulder Dam construction area.

Where did your family live?

When we first came to Las Vegas, we lived on S 4th Street. in the 500 block in some duplexes that were owned by a railroad worker. He had built them as rentals. He had them there and they were quite new. That area on 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets. was primarily

occupied by railroad workers. These duplexes were quite new and we lived there. I think an interesting thing was in 1932 that we did not have any air conditioning whatsoever and the water heating system was a solar system. It was very primitive. The man put a water tank on the roof of each duplex and put glass around, encased the water heater with glass, and depended strictly on the sun to heat the tank. That was our source of hot water.

In the morning, did you have hot water?

Not much. If you wanted some real good hot water, you had to heat it on the stove. My recollection was that we had propane gas stoves. The first cooling at all, my father being in that type of business, he was able to get one of the first primitive forms of air conditioning. It was no more than something that looked like a large bird cage. It had felt strips in it and a little propeller with a little pump and you set an electric fan behind it. The little pump would go around and squirt water up on the felt pads and then the fan would blow across the felt pads. That was the original type of evaporative cooling. Later on, in the late 30's [1930s] and up into the 40's [1940s], many of the homes were cooled by what are called.... There are several names for them, swamp coolers, desert coolers, evaporative coolers, much larger but worked on the same principle on a much larger scale. They would be mounted on the outside of the house, in a window or up on the roof and come down through duct work into the house. That didn't come in until the late 30's, early 40's.

Tell me about the heating system for water, did other places have that as well?

I don't really think so. As far as I know, I never saw another system. It was an idea that this owner had and it worked fairly well. Of course in the summertime when it's so hot, the water got very hot. In the middle of the day you'd have wonderful hot water.

Do you remember his name?

Yes his name, I don't remember his first name but his last name was Randall.

Earlier you said you had a sister, give me you sister's name.

Jean Luce, now here last name is Vetter. She went away to college in the 40's and after graduating from college, she went on and became a school teacher for a little while, and then got married, but she's never come back to live in Las Vegas since about 1948.

Where did she go to school?

She went to a college called Principia College, which is in Illinois which is right across the river from St. Louis.

I'd like to ask one more question about that house. Tell me about the bathroom facilities in the early 30's when you got here.

Well it had the normal facilities, of course they were small, but they had the normal facilities like we have now. Had a bathtub with a shower and a commode. It was as I said, these places were quite new when we moved in. I don't know that we were the first people but we might have been the first people to live in them.

What about the railroad cottages? Were you near those?

Yes, they were mostly up on 1st, 2nd and 3rd Streets. In those days they were restricted, you had to work for the railroad in order to live in them. Of course my dad didn't work for the railroad so we couldn't live in one of those.

When you told me about your sister's education, I find that really interesting. I want to go back and talk about the women in the family. If you would please, tell me about your mother and your grandmother and their schooling.

They both went to University of Nevada in Reno, but my grandmother went there before it was called UNR. I think it had some name including in the wording of a seminary. It was

tiny and I don't know the years. My mother went to UNR. It would have been along about WW1 time. She got a degree in education and she had a very interesting teaching experience because she taught the first year in the town of Tonopah, Nevada, which had been around the turn of the century, a fairly large town. Mining was very active. By the time she got there, the mining had tapered off dramatically. She taught in the school there and I think the most interesting thing is she had lived there as a young girl. She had lived there for several years while she was growing up. She went back to, I'd say her home town of Tonopah, as a school teacher. She taught the second year in Hawaii on the island of Maui. This is, of course Maui had very, very few people. I think they only had one high school on the whole island. She taught in that high school. She traveled while she was in Hawaii. She traveled which was unusual for a young lady. She traveled and went as far away as China. Then the third year she went back to Reno and taught in Reno High School. When she came back there is really when she met my father. He was actually a little bit older, but he was in WW1 and so his education had been put on hold while he was in the Army.

Tell me how the family felt about your mother doing all of that traveling. (Laughter)

She also went to Europe during one of her summers. I can't really tell you. Obviously they allowed her to do it. She would go with another young lady. She didn't do it totally alone. She'd get someone to go with her. She was very adventuresome for a young lady. She was probably 21, to travel. Of course in those days you traveled by ship, so it took you a long time to get there. Like if you're going to China, course she was about half way to China in Hawaii. But to go to Europe in those days, I think it would take about week to go from New York to Europe because the steam ships weren't that fast. She was very adventuresome.

Give me her name again, I don't think we put it on tape.

Her name is Gladys Dunkel Luce.

Her mother?

Her mother is Lola Thomas Dunkel.

Tell me about her education.

Well, she went, as I said, to the university in Reno. I don't know much other than that other than she, her family came to the Reno area in the 1870's. Her father's job, his business, he ran a stage coach that ran from Susanville, California, which is up in the mountains about 100 miles from Reno, he ran the stage coach back and forth. He had some experiences literally where they had robbers that would come and rob the stage coach. His most interesting experience was in one of these robberies, and I don't think they happened too often, but in one of the robberies he wounded one of the robbers and he put the robber in the stage coach and took him back to Reno for medical attention. That's one of our old family stories. My grandfather on that side, Dunkle, I don't know much about him except that his family again came to Nevada in the 1870's and his father was a state legislator in the very early days. I don't know his father's first name, but he himself as a young man, worked for Wells Fargo and he worked on a train. He was the guard for the gold that was being sent from the mines in Tonopah. It was sent to Reno to be shipped on somewhere else probably to San Francisco from there. He would ride the train as armed guard but he never had any robbers. [Laughter] Then later on, he and my grandmother moved to a very small mining town that was near Tonopah, it's not in existence at all any more. A place called Blair where they ran a very small hotel for the miners. Later on they moved back to Reno where

Grandpa Dunkel was a county treasure in Washoe County for about 30 years. He then retired from that job.

In the 30's when you first arrived, you were a very small boy so I don't expect you to remember, but tell me of some of the stories you that you heard about The Hoover Dam, The Boulder Dam.

I can tell you some first hand things because by the time we got here, I was 5 and my father had this electrical appliance business here, but also he had a small auxiliary store in Boulder City. In those days there weren't too many families in Boulder City. So it was a tiny store, probably not too much bigger than this room.

This room is about what size?

Probably about 15 by 12 or something like that. But behind it were living quarters. He hired one of the guards for the construction site and his wife. They lived in this little tiny living quarters behind the store. They ran the store for him. What he was selling mostly because they're weren't many married people and they're weren't hardly any homes, a few homes in Boulder City, but mostly the men lived in barracks, like army barracks. He would sell mainly things like irons, irons to iron clothes with and radios were very popular. You had to have a very good radio because we did not have any radio stations in Southern Nevada whatsoever. The only radio station you could listen to would be like one in Salt Lake City, in Los Angeles or in Phoenix. He sold radios and irons and a few toasters. Because of this he would go out to the Boulder City store almost weekly and usually it would be on Sunday when the Las Vegas store was closed. He would usually take us two kids with him. In order to even into Boulder City in those days, you had to have some kind of reason to be there and you had to have identification. The guards would stop you on the

road and if you didn't pass their test, you didn't get in. He had the proper credentials to get in. Once you got in to Boulder City, then you were free to drive down the construction road to the dam site where they were actually doing the construction. Part of our Sunday treat to go to Boulder City to transact his business and take some more irons, toasters and radios in the car and then we would drive on down to the dam site to see what was going on down there. We were able to see. They worked 24 hours a day and 7 days week, except I think they didn't work on Christmas, the only day they didn't work. So there was always something going on. We would see the workers doing various things. I think the most impressive thing was the table weigh that they had constructed so they could pick things up off the road going down to the construction site. They could pick things up. Very large things, as big as a box car. They could pick it up off the railroad track with this cable weigh and take it out over the canyon and then lower it down to the level that they wanted to and that's the way they took the cement that was the main construction material of the dam was of course cement. They had these huge containers that they could take out on this table weigh and drop down to the men, and then the men had a way of opening up this big container and then they would use vibrators and things to make it solid. They had pipes running through the cement in order to cool it. It had to have a huge refrigeration plant, they had to have a huge cement plant, they had to have a huge gravel plant. They had a plant to construct a huge pipe that they used. It was big enough to drive a car through. These were all located near the dam site. The reason for the cold water was it made the cement cure faster. If they hadn't had that, it would have literally taken years for the cement to cure. They put the pipes and ran cold water through them from the refrigeration plant that was up above on the side of the mountain.

Did you get to know any of the workers?

Well other than the guard that ran my dad's little store, they were busy people. They had an observation point where you could park your car and you could watch pretty much the activity. My father I'm sure got to know some of them more as customers in the store.

They would still come into Las Vegas. They were allowed to come into Vegas. They were not allowed to drink on the job, alcoholic beverages at all, so there were not any available inside the fence. The closest place to get, in those days, maybe just beer, was Railroad Pass, which was outside the fence. Railroad Pass still exists today. Course it's been modernized.

In those days it was very tiny and it was a casino and a bar and a restaurant. But most of the people, they ran buses, if the workers really wanted to have a big holiday or a weekend, they would come into Las Vegas. I know for sure my dad knew some of the workers that way from the store. Before I leave the dam, I'd like to tell you again one of our family stories.

As they got fairly far along in construction, and they were getting fairly close to letting the water come in, they built coffer dams upstream to keep the water away from the dam. Then they built diversion tunnels so that the water from the Colorado was diverted around the construction area through the walls of the canyon. That was what was going on during construction. As the construction got pretty close to being finished, they were going to destroy the coffer dams and let the water actually come up against the dam for the first time.

We were able to drive down into the area on the upstream side of the dam and get out of the car and walk over and touch the dam at a point that is now approximately 300 feet under water. We thought that was pretty thrilling.

Tell me about the women that you saw in that area. The person that worked for you father was a married man. Were there a lot of women around?

No, the great majority of the workers either were bachelors or didn't have their wives. As I say there were very few women in Boulder City. Most of them were wives of like a foreman or superintendent or some sort of an executive. The great majority of them did not have wives. They lived in barracks, like army barracks. And as time went by, they began to later on, build schools and hospitals and things like that.

Do you remember meeting any of the children?

No I don't.

Do you remember any people working there other than white Americans?

They had very few African Americans. In fact, the early days of construction, there weren't any at all and then someone brought that up as a problem and they did hire, I think, less than 100. [Forty blacks over the entire dam construction period.] I don't remember the exact work force but it was several thousand workers. They did hire a few maybe after the first year or two.

I also read the other day that some of the people working on the dam were Indians and they did some of the high work.

What they maybe called the high scalers.

High scalers, that's correct.

I've ever only known one man that actually did that work and I met him many years afterwards and he wasn't Indian, if you're speaking about American Indians. That work was pretty well finished by the time, that was very, some of the early work when they were doing that and we didn't actually see any of that going on. This man went on to become a very rich man. He wound up owning a very large percentage of the Golden Nugget Casino downtown.

What was his name?

His name was Buck Blaine.

Tell me the type of I.D. they expected you to have to get into Boulder City.

I don't recall except my dad had to show something and it wasn't any problem once he showed them the I.D. I don't really know what it was. I don't recall.

Other than your father's store, were there others?

Yes, a few. There were a few. The building that he was in, that his store was in, he just rented it. There were a few other stores. The only one I can recall, and it was much larger than my dad's store, there was a grocery store there. I don't remember what other stores were there.

Since men lived in dormitories, do you remember how they were fed?

They had mess halls just like the army.

Some of the men went into Las Vegas for recreation. Do you remember any talk of Block 16?

Sure, of course I was not allowed to go near that. Block 16 was where they had houses of prostitution and some of them were pretty fancy. The fanciest one I've seen pictures of it. I didn't go over there. It's called The Arizona Club. They had very fancy mahogany and crystal. It was, for Las Vegas in those days, a fancy building. During the prohibition era, Block 15 was where a lot of the speakeasies were, which was adjacent to 16. They didn't enforce the prohibition laws very stringently in Las Vegas I can assure you that. There is a story though, I don't know if you want me to go into this.....

Yes please.

There was a story that they called them the Probies which were the officers or prohibition officers and they didn't live in Las Vegas but they occasionally come to Las Vegas. They came on the train which of course was the only way they could get here. Most of the time when they would be coming someone would telegraph ahead and tell the speakeasy guys to hide all their stuff and close the doors. One time they set up a scam. They sent an agent up here and he set up a speakeasy of his own. Then he invited the people who were actually making the stuff and some of it was coming from as far away as Montana and Wyoming. They were bringing it in. He invited these people to come to his speakeasy and he'd buy it. He then had direct evidence of where it was coming from. So they arrested a bunch of people. That was in the early 30's I guess.

You talked about Block 15 and Block 16. Did you ever hear about Block 17?

Well I think you're probably referring to the block where the first blacks lived. They lived in that area. Up until about 1940 I would say there were less than 100 black people that lived in Las Vegas. Then when Henderson was built and the Basic Magnesium Plant was built, they brought in quite a few black workers from the South because during WWII workers were short plus the jobs out there were very, well somewhat hazardous. They worked hard under very hazardous and hot conditions. When that happened, then they built one little area out around the plant where blacks could live but it wasn't near big enough. I can't remember the name of it but.....

Was it Carver Park?

That sounds right. They built some other homes for white people. At that point what was called originally The McWilliams subdivision, became called the Westside. That became, in the 40's, predominantly black. It wasn't totally. This is when I was in high school. I had a

few white friends that still lived on the Westside in the 40's but it was predominantly black. As years went on, I think it became almost totally black. That's the area where the streets are named after the presidents like Wilson, Washington and Jefferson.

Did you ever go to the Westside before blacks became the major population over there?

Both before and after because we had a lot of customers over there from our store. I worked in the store with my father after I got back from the Army. I went to the Westside almost everyday.

Tell me what it looked like before BMI and then after.

Well before BMI it was very tiny. There weren't many people over there. The homes were very humble. They did have a small school that was put in over there. I really don't have a good handle on when it when in but it was on about D I'd say before the 40's there probably would have been like maybe between 20 and 50 homes over there. It was pretty small. And in the 40's it began to grow and continued to grow. I remember the school being over there. [Westside School] Small school with I think just three grades. There wasn't much over there in the way of business. There was one little tiny store right as you go down Bonanza there as you come up out of the underpass. In fact there were two stores. One was a liquor store and the other was a small grocery store. One was called Gilbert's Liquor Store and the other was a grocery store called Snyder's I think. So there were two little tiny stores. I think there was one little tiny café somewhere over there. I'm pretty sure it was over there before the 40's. I know it was there after the 40's.

The underpass, can you tell me a little bit about the underpass?

Well it was the only underpass in town. I'm not sure when it was built but I have no recollection of it never being there so I suspect it was built maybe in the early 30's and all

the other crossings to cross the railroad track would be, I think they call them grade crossings where there's no underpass. If there was a train coming of course you would have to stop. In the old days I think there was only 2 places to cross the tracks. One was Bonanza and the other was Charleston. Those were the only two places you could cross the tracks, I'm sure of that. Later on there was one at Sahara but that came later. In those days Sahara was called San Francisco Street. That would have been up to and maybe in about the 40's or maybe even early 50's before it was cut through. About the same time I think they renamed it and it was cut through so you could go out to what would have been West Sahara.

When we started we talked about your family's education. Tell me about your education.

I started to school right down the street from where we lived. All the schools except the high school are located in a 2 block area between 4th and 5th. It was called the 5th Street Grammer School. They did have separate buildings; I'd say probably about 4 buildings for the different grades. They had along about maybe '34, '35, they had a severe fire in the school. About half of the school burned down. The older students, like 7th and 8th graders, went over to the high school and that did away with the junior high school concept for a long, long time. We didn't have any junior high schools in Las Vegas. Of the rest of the kids that stayed there in the buildings that didn't burn, about half of them had to go to school in tents. They built large tents with wooden floors and wooden sides but canvas tops until they could build some new school buildings. I'm sure it was about '35, '35 that that happened. Then after going to school at 5th Street Grammer School, my first year in high school, my parents sent me to a military academy in California. I went to school there one year. This was early WWII times and it was near San Diego and so there was a beehive of

military activity. They had black outs every night. You couldn't show any lights at night. They had barrage balloons over in the factories in San Diego. All the factories were camouflaged in that they had like fake houses built on top of the factory buildings so if a bomber came over they couldn't spot the factories. They looked like houses. There were servicemen all over the place in San Diego. It was Army, Navy, Marines. During the daytime they would practice firing out over the ocean. This school was quite close to the ocean. It was only about a mile from the ocean. They would practice firing at targets out over the ocean during the daytime so you very much felt that there was a war going on. Then I came back from there after my 9th grade and went to Las Vegas High School for the next 3 years and graduated in 1946. Then went up to UNR in Reno. To put it bluntly, I was not a good student. I was lazy. My college career was not real successful. I went to college for about 2 1/2 years and wasn't doing very well and I was wasting my time and my father's money so I came back to work for my father in his store. By this time the store had grown. It was no longer on Fremont Street. It was on what's today called Casino Center. The store would be today in the lobby of The Golden Nugget Hotel. I came back to work for him then the Korean War came along. I was drafted into the Army and I was, because of the military school and because I'd taken ROTC in high school, I was very interested in the military. I wasn't at all sad. I really wanted to go into the Army. I went in the Army and I spent 3 years in the Army in the Korean War days. I was able to go to officers candidates school. I graduated number one in my class and went on to be an artillery officer. Probably the most outstanding thing about that experience was that I was selected with about 100 other men to test a new weapon the Army had. For the first time the Army was going to get something that would deliver an atomic round, or atomic bomb. I was a radar officer. We were able

with radar sets that were quite portable. We were able to track projectiles that came out a cannon and tell pretty much where they were. We had a very, very crude computer that would actually printout the trajectory of these artillery rounds. That was my job. We had a crew and we operated the radar set, but we were sent out here to the Nevada Test Site. That was the only place that they could fire with atomic ammunition. We practiced with regular high explosive ammunition down in Oklahoma for about 3 or 4 months before we came out here. Then the 100 of us came out here. They had this huge cannon that would fire projectile up to about 20 miles. I was sent home which was pretty neat. I was able to, most of the time; sleep in the bed that I grew up in. Then I'd have to get up real early in the morning and drive to the Test Site just like the workers out there had to do. This would have been in 1953.

Tell me about the Test Site at that time.

It was very, very active. They were testing above ground. It was all atmospheric testing. Prior to my going there, they had the first test with troops. They actually, I don't know the exact number, brought troops in there and put them in open trenches within about 12 miles of what is called ground zero. Then they set off an atomic device and in those days also they had all sorts of equipment, what I mean by that, that airplanes, trains, boats, buses, houses, that they would put closer than the 12 miles to the target area or ground zero to check the effect that these weapons would have on these different items. Anyway, prior to my going there, they had troops out there and when we got there, I was only there about 45 days. During that 45 days we had 3 tests. We had the one including the cannon which is the one I was really sent out to do. We had one that was dropped out of an airplane. The third one was what they called a tower shot which is where they build a tall tower that would be

about 200 feet off the ground and they would put the atomic device up on top of the tower and then trigger it. I observed, of course the shot that I was working on and the two other shots while I was there. Security was very tight. When they were gonna have a shot, they would completely close the place up. No one could come out or come in.

The workers?

That's correct.

They had to stay at home?

Either stay at home or if they were out there, they had to stay in the Test Site. And they had of course barracks again for them and they weren't sleeping in the desert.

So men slept at the Test Site?

Oh yes.

Explain to me why they had those troops in the trenches. I don't understand.

They wanted to see if they were going to survive. That's putting it bluntly. Of course by that time, they were pretty smart. Smart in that they had learned quite a few things about atomic weapons. They were constantly trying to reduce the radiation level. Because if you're going to use it as a weapon, and you say dropped it on an enemy or shot one like in the case we were shooting things out of a cannon, you didn't want the radiation to be so high that you couldn't go in and occupy that area with your own friendly troops. They were trying to reduce the radiation level. Course, there's heat and blasts and fire in addition to radiation. There is a tremendous amount of energy that is expended when one of these devices would go off. That's why they put the men out there, they just wanted to see what was going to happen to them, but they were pretty sure before they put them there that nothing was going to happen to them, but they wanted to prove it. It was also, in those days

we were involved in a Cold War with Russia and they wanted to impress Russia. They didn't want Russia to know any of the details whatsoever, how they were doing it but they wanted Russia to know we were testing atomic weapons. They wanted them to know that.

Did the troops know why they were there?

Oh yeah. Sure. (chuckle)

Are there any other interesting things that you can tell me about the Test Site?

Later on of course they signed a treaty, probably sometime in the 80's, with Russia to stop atmospheric testing. Of course Russia stopped doing it and we stopped doing it, because they were experiencing fallout, both in the United States and in Russia. Some of the fallout even drifted clear from Russia up into Alaska.

Did you ever hear about the fallout from here going into Utah?

Yes, but it was after the fact. Of course all of the tests were conducted the safety requirements of the Atomic Energy Commission. They took as many steps as possible to cut down on the fallout and they would not kick off a test if the winds were real strong going to the east. Of course the winds are prevalent in the United States going from west to east. They had to have certain conditions. If they had a test, and they got up in the morning, the tests were always very early in the morning, around dawn or shortly thereafter dawn, if the wind conditions were not right, they would cancel the test.

Two other questions; I want to know how you felt about that, especially someone your military background.

Well I felt I was doing a job that needed to be done and it was a very interesting job because we were doing something that had never been done before. We were plowing new fields. I felt interested. The work was interesting. I felt I was of course doing my duty, but the long

overall reason for it was to keep the Russians in check. This weapon that I spoke about was deployed approximately a year later in Europe. They had more than one that was deployed in Europe. They let the Russians know that they had these weapons in Europe because at that time the Russians outnumbered the allied troops tremendously in Europe, more tanks, more men. They could have overrun our men, but with these atomic cannons over there, they would have second thoughts about doing anything.

The other question relating to the bombs; Las Vegas exploited these testings. They advertised, they invited the tourists in. How did you feel about all of that?

There was only one test here in Vegas before I went in the Army. That was in early January of '51. I was gone during the early part of it and came back and got directly involved in it. My recollection of the initial reaction to that first test was that everyone was just kind of in awe of it. I don't think anyone was concerned that they were going to get hurt. I never heard anyone express that, and like you say, they began to advertise it and some of the people would even go up to Mt Charleston cause they would announce the tests. It would come out in the paper that they're gonna have a test unless the wind conditions canceled it, then you'd know what day. So they would get up and go up to Mt Charleston and sit out up there. You could look down then on the test area. You could actually see the fireball which you never could see from Las Vegas. The only thing you could see from Las Vegas would be the mushroom cloud, which was way up in the sky. You'd feel it in Las Vegas. It would be like a minor earthquake.

Do you think it was smart for people to go to Mt Charleston?

I was a lot closer than Mt Charleston in three atomic explosions. I was about 18 miles. Up at Mt Charleston they would be more like 25 or 30 miles away.

With your military knowledge of what was happening, how close would you have had to have been to the bomb to get the fallout?

The fallout drifted away from the immediate area. It would go up into the sky, I don't know how many thousand feet, thousands of feet into the sky and then it wouldn't release until it was kind of like a cloud that holds rain. It would become part of a cloud and the cloud would begin to drift. At some point, it would be just like rain. The fallout would come down, you couldn't see it of course, but it would come down more like rain. The immediate area, as far as I know, didn't have any problems. Let me tell you this. This might help answer your question. On one of these tests I'm speaking about, of course they had what they called radiation safety people checking radiation all over the place out there. The one's that went down near ground zero, they were dressed in what would be like a moon suit. They had their own respiratory systems. They were completely enclosed in the suit. They would have instruments that they could carry with them that would measure the radiation. So on one of these tests, two days after the test, the radiation people went down within two miles and found that the radiation level was pretty darn low. They said, "We got a bus here, you guys want to go down?" (chuckle) "Sure, we'll go down"

To ground zero?

Well two miles, within two miles of ground zero. They loaded about 50 or 60 of us in the bus. We went down there, got out of the bus, looked around and saw some of this equipment. Surprisingly most of the equipment that was there was not heavily damaged. This surprised me, I'm not sure why. They were that confident and I had enough confidence in the radiation safety people to take their judgment so I went down there.

Did you have on the suit?

No, no nothing. We went down there with just fatigue uniforms on.

Those boats and houses and buildings that they would erect for the bomb testing, how close were those to ground zero?

They put them in various stages. They had some of them, the closest ones, we didn't go there cause the radiation level was too high, but the closest ones would have maybe been a couple of thousand feet, like a half of a mile. They went out as many as maybe two or three miles. Of course they also had lots of instruments in these areas to measure the heat, the blast and the radiation. They had all kinds of instruments. That was part of the atomic scientist part of the project. I had nothing to do with that.

So this was much more sophisticated than the average person even knew about.

Absolutely. They had a lot of high paid engineers, scientist, that were really the brains out there. What they learned from one test, they would apply to the next test and maybe do something a little differently or may be they would devise, like I said they would start devising weapons that had lower radiation levels.

Do you know any of the scientists who worked with this kind of equipment? The reason I'm asking, right now we have a project here at UNLV, we've gotten a grant and we actually person hired who's doing special interviewing about the Test Site. Do you know anyone that you could recommend to this person?

We really didn't come in contact with them at all. We were like an army unit that was sent out there to do a certain job and we did our job. All the people we dealt with were Army people. Some of them from Washington, D.C. came out there from the Pentagon. We weren't dealing with the atomic energy people.

When I tell her about this interview, it's possible that she might want to talk to you as well. I'd like to get back to your personal life. We haven't talked about your wife at all.

Tell me when you got married and who you married.

During my Army career early on, before I was an officer, I was sent to a place called Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania. That's near Harrisburg, which is the capital. It's out in the forest; a beautiful place in the summer but pretty cold in the winter.

What was that first part of the name?

Indian Town Gap. It's a very, very old military post. Not as old as Valley Forge, but Valley Forge isn't too far away. Being stationed there, being a good Christian I went to church and I met my wife at the church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We had a very whirlwind courtship. I had to leave and go to officer's candidate school. She stayed there and I went to officer's candidate school in Oklahoma, the artillery school. When I graduated I came back and we married two days later. Then I had to go back to Oklahoma. I was assigned there. We were married in Harrisburg, we honeymooned in Lake Tahoe and then went back to Fort Sill to be a young married couple. Not too long after that I got involved in this unit that I'm speaking about that was sent out to the Test Site.

Give me your wife's name and a little bit about her background.

Her name is Jayne. She was born in Harrisburg and grew up there. She went one year in high school to a private school. The same place where I think I mentioned my sister went to, across the river in Principia. They also have a high school there. It's a church school. My wife went to this Principia High School near St. Louis for one year and then she came back her sophomore year. We were married and then the Korean War got over. I was really supposed to stay in the Army longer but the Korean War got over and in '53, August of '53

the war was over, they started looking around and they had too many people in the Army without a war going on. They sent out orders from the Pentagon that if anyone wanted to go home early, they can. That's what they call an early out. So I put in for an early out. I came home in November of '53. I got out of the Army as a second lieutenant however I stayed in the reserves and became a first lieutenant. I came back to Las Vegas of November of '53. We had a 2 month old baby coming with us. My wife flew home with the baby and I drove. We had another daughter. We have two daughters. Another daughter, one was born in Oklahoma near an Indian reservation, the Army post was right next to an Indian reservation. The other one was born in Flagstaff, Arizona. We were going on a trip and my wife was pretty pregnant but we figured she had about a month to go. So we headed out on a trip. We didn't get very far. We got as far as Flagstaff and the baby arrived in Flagstaff.

How did your wife feel about Las Vegas after living in a prim and proper place like Harrisburg?

I gave her an opportunity to back out. About half way through my officer's candidate school, I made arrangements for her to come to Oklahoma. My parents came from Las Vegas and they met there, and of course met each other for the first time. They brought her to Las Vegas so she could look around. She had an opportunity to back out, but she didn't. (laugh) It was very different. She missed the green and the trees. So we have a home now with lots of trees.

Describe Las Vegas to me at the time you moved back with your young bride and your baby.

This would have been late '53 okay. By that time, they had started to build some of the larger hotels. The first hotel was built in about '42 or '43. The El Rancho. Very small.

Nothing really more than a big motel. The next one was The Frontier which was a little bit bigger, but still nothing more than a big motel. They hadn't built any big places at all. By the time I got back, there was the Desert Inn, The Thunderbird was up, the Stardust which I think was called, no it was the Stardust and next to it the place was The Royal Nevada. The Sands, the Flamingo was built about '46. Still it wasn't huge though. The original Flamingo was really not too big. It was bigger than the El Rancho or The Frontier. Everybody thought it was way out of town. I'm sure you know all the stories about The Flamingo. It's been in the movies and everything.

Were there any local stories that we don't know about that you heard when you returned?

I can tell you some stories about before I went away about the mob moving into Las Vegas.

Yes please, I'd like to hear that from a person that lives here.

I can't think now exactly where they came from but the group that had Siegel and Moe Sedway and Gus Greenbaum, that was the group. There are a couple of names I didn't put in there that just came to me. These are all the same group of gentlemen, if you want to call them gentlemen. Berman and Alderman, Willie "The Ice Pick" Alderman. They originally started downtown. I can't think of the names of the casinos but they were downtown on Fremont St. in the 100 block and the 200 block. They had two casinos, quite modest compared to what's down there now. That's where they started and then they started The Flamingo I think in '46. Seigal was more or less put in charge of that project. The little side note that I know is, I was on the football team in high school and one of the fellows that came out, he was not one of the main bosses, but he was one of their friends that came with him. He was a fella who had been like an assistant trainer, a physical trainer I'm speaking about now for one of the major league baseball teams. He came with them and he became

the trainer for our football team. We had never had a trainer before so he became our trainer. We got acquainted with him. His name was Lenny Schafer and later on quite a few years later, he was part owner of The Dunes Hotel. That was our first contact. The other contact we had, Sedway, Moe Sedway had two sons and they were both high school aged. They went to high school with us. Frankly we didn't really have any concept of the background of these individuals. We just knew their father was in gambling and that's all we knew. We didn't know they had basically been crooks and had come to Las Vegas because the law enforcement had forced them out from where they came. They were coming where gambling was legal, where they were before it was illegal. We didn't look down on them whatsoever and really didn't know anything about their backgrounds. I can recall my father's business was right next to Fremont Street and he had electricians working for him. They would call us and the only thing unusual about them was that they always paid cash. They never wrote a check. If we went over and did some work, at the end of the day they would actually turn around to the electrician and say how much do we owe you for today's work? And they'd pay him for what he had done that day. He would go back the next day and they'd pay him again. They operated strictly in cash. They didn't want too many records of what was going on. One other thing about The Flamingo, this would have been shortly after I graduated from high school, I had a friend that worked for Lenny Schafer. He had a health club at The Flamingo, like steam baths and massages and things like that. My friend was able to get us in at the swimming pool. We could go out to The Flamingo and he would tell the lifeguard that we were okay and not to kick us out. One of the days we were out there, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were out at the pool. Of course we

thought that was a big thrill to be sitting there by the pool with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. They were already pretty famous. That happened about 1947.

You weren't aware of the other enterprises of these men, but did Las Vegas begin to suspect anything, how did they feel about these men coming in?

I don't think many people, even the adults, I mean not only the kids I don't think the adults knew their backgrounds. It didn't become known I don't think until Bugsy Siegel was assassinated. Then it began to come out. That was the first time, which is probably 1949. Still though I don't think people were frightened of them. As I look back on it, I didn't know much about it, but I think the consensus would have been that they came to Las Vegas to start over anew, maybe they turned over a new leaf.

Do you think that's the attitude a lot of people have about Las Vegas that this is the place you can start anew?

I think so. Of course over the years Las Vegas has grown so much that there's lots of people have come here and started anew and many of them have made millions of dollars.

I realize that Las Vegas is very small at this point, you were finishing high school and it's a tiny town. Tell me about the crime here.

Practically non existent other than people getting drunk. If you want to call that a crime, I guess it is. You didn't bring it out but prostitution didn't become a crime until the Air Force came in. They asked the city to kick out prostitution, which they did. This would have been about 1942. It was still here but it had to go underground. To answer your question more specifically, for about 25,000 people, all of Clark County, everybody pretty much knew everybody and if the kids got in trouble they did have a truant officer. The kind of trouble I'm talking about would be if you would maybe steal some fruit off somebody's fruit trees

or maybe ditch school a lot, that's about as bad as it got. The jail was tiny. The jail I think only had 8 or 10 cells. The police department was very small.

Did you ever hear anything about the divorces?

Divorces were better known in Reno. Reno for some reason took the lead in that, but Las Vegas tried to catch up to them. They did catch up to them. The divorce business here didn't get into high volume until the 50's. There were a couple of what we called divorce ranches or dude ranches around. The ladies would come, mainly ladies, and establish their six weeks residency. There are a couple of them out around Warm Springs and Eastern. There was one down in North Las Vegas called the Boldorado Ranch. We were aware but it wasn't a big item until in the 50's and then it started to grow. By that time they had big fancy hotels where a lot of them would spend their six weeks in a hotel.

What did the dude ranchers do all day?

Weather permitting, they would swim. They all had swimming pools. They had horses if they wanted to ride horseback, other than that I don't know.

Growing up here, do you remember the Helderado Parades?

Sure.

Tell me about those.

The first Helderado was held in 1935. It was very small. I'm not sure they even had a parade in 1935, they might have, I don't remember. It was held on Fremont St. between 6th and 7th Streets. From the beginning, it was sponsored by the local Elks Club. It grew. As it developed, I can remember they had three parades. Not on the same day, they had three consecutive days like Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The first day would be the Kiddies Parade. All the youngsters would dress up and they would parade down the street with their

cowboy outfits on. Sometimes we made up things. One time I went down and I had a wagon. A kids' wagon fixed up and it had a sign on it that I was the patent medicine man. I even had my dad get a hold of a top hat. I was the patent medicine man walking down Fremont Street. Second day was the Old Timer's Parade. They had the horses and the wagons and stage coaches and things like that. Lots of people on horseback. The third day was the Beauty Parade. They had floats. They would build floats and they would have young ladies in bathing suits. As the hotels were built, they would participate and have quite elaborate floats. In those days, all the hotels had chorus lines and they would send their float full of chorus girls. (chuckle)

Which then was the most popular?

(big laugh) No comment.

Your costume of the medicine man, where did you get that?

My dad was president of The Chamber of Commerce and for some event they were having, he got a real top hat. I don't know where it came from. And my mother I'm sure made my costume.

Did you get the idea from real medicine men?

I suppose seeing movies.

We didn't have real medicine men?

No I never saw a real medicine man.

Did the parades have bands?

Yes they would have school bands. As years went by and they got bigger and bigger and bigger, many schools would come in here from out of state, different parts of Nevada and four or five bands from California to be in the parade.

What was the purpose of the parade?

It was part of the total celebration. The main event was the rodeo. They had a rodeo except the very first one. They didn't have room for a rodeo. They also had what's called The Helldorado Village, which was like a carnival. The first Helldorado Village was built at the corner of Main and Bonanza. The Elks built the Helldorado Village there with a fence built out of split logs so it looked rustic. The concession stands were built out of split logs and it was kinda neat. That one got to where it was too close to downtown and people wanted the property so they moved down to the area where Cashman Field is today.

It was a permanent structure?

Yes it was there year round. First at Main and Bonanza then they moved down to Las Vegas Boulevard North and Washington. They would have the rodeo down at Cashman Field which is not at all like it is today. It was just a big dirt area. They did have the chutes and the bleachers. The chutes are where they put the animals when they let them out like the bucking broncos and the steers and so forth. Then they had bleachers there for the people to sit in. They left those up year round. The carnival area, what they called the village, it was there, empty.

Tell me your memories about some of the first movie theaters here.

The first movie theater was The on Fremont Street between 3rd and 4th. It was also one of the first places that any form of real air conditioning in Las Vegas, so in the summertime it was very popular. Not only for the kids, but for the adults. You could go in there and get nice and cool.

How much did it cost?

I really don't know. I'd say this, it was probably in the order of twenty five cents.

Somewhere there, it might have only been fifteen cents for kids. The next theater I'm sure was called The Palace Theater. It was near the corner of Casino Center and Carson. Not on the corner but near the corner. My dad's store, being on Casino Center, probably late 30's, he would give me a dollar. For a dollar I could go, in those days they didn't serve refreshments in the theaters, maybe popcorn but I'm not sure. Anyway, I could go get a hot dog, a big root beer and go to the show and still have a little bit of money left over from the dollar. Maybe fifteen cents I'd have left over. [laugh]

Do you remember a theater where the people sat outside?

That was before my time. That was in the general area where the El Portal was built, but that's before, I think even before we moved here.

There was a club that your father was probably a member of. It was called The Exchange Club. Do you remember anything about that where businessmen would meet and network?

The Elks' Club was one of the old clubs. The club my dad joined which was quite old, started here in Las Vegas in '26. It was The Rotary Club. It's an international organization, probably The Exchange Club is too. He belonged to it for over 50 years. I joined and was a member for 20 years myself.

Are you still a member?

No.

Earlier you talked about in the early 40's, you talked about BMI. You told me that's when African-Americans really started to pour into the city. Tell me your memories of how the city changed at that point, how it was changing.

Of course there was nothing, absolutely nothing at the location of BMI before they started. It was strictly desert. They built the plant which was quite a large plant, some homes and the Carver Park area was for the black people. [There was also a special housing area constructed for white BMI workers, Victory Village.] They had around 5,000 workers out there at it's peak. They made a town there. There was nothing. They built businesses, stores, schools, hospital and the plant and of course all the houses, pretty modest houses. They had to put in all the utilities and so forth. They put in a huge water line from Lake Mead. That was the first time any water was drawn out of Lake Mead to come into Nevada. They did that because they needed a lot of water in the plant. Also, that was the first time that they had brought in electricity from Hoover Dam. We had the ability, I mean the allocation for electricity, but we didn't have any need for it. They had more electricity allocated for Nevada than they could use so they really didn't start bringing it in, this would have been the early 40's before they started bringing in electricity. Then of course when they brought it into Henderson, they continued and brought electricity into Vegas. But they didn't bring water into Vegas until the 50's. That was the reason they picked the location [location for the BMI plant]. They needed lots of water and a lot of electricity. The ore they made the magnesium from, they got from a place called Gabbs, Nevada, which I think is about 100 miles up the road or so, maybe even 150 miles up around Beatty.

So it was easier to get the ore here than to get the water there?

Yes.

Did you ever see that area as it was growing, as the houses were being put in?

Not during the construction days. We went out there because they built a high school. I was involved in football so we went out there to play football. They had a high school and a

football team. At one point, one summer, after the war was over, they shut the plant down in '44 cause they had enough magnesium. They didn't need anymore. I went out there one summer, I think it would have been probably '46 or '47 and actually worked in the plant. At that time they were not making magnesium at all. What they were doing when I went there was converting some of the magnesium plant to some sort of chemical company. I don't really know what chemical company because we were working for a contractor. A big contractor, one of the biggest in the whole United States called Bechtel. They had a contract to convert this factory over to a different use. I was just a little lowly electrician's helper.
(laugh)

I think you told me that your mother didn't work outside the house but that she was involved socially, different clubs.

She was always so involved with church. She was one of the leaders of the Christian Science Church here. It was small in those days and everyone had to do lots of things. She spent an awful lot of time working for the church. She wasn't a member of one of the pioneer clubs, women's club, The Mesquite Club. My dad belonged to The American Legion and belonged to Rotary Club. I don't think my mother ever belonged to a women's club.

What was your mom's life like?

Other than her church work, she loved flowers. She always had lots of flowers. She would do the gardening. We had flowers and fruit trees and grapes everywhere we lived. The house that we moved into after we moved off of 4th Street., my parents built a house on S 7th Street., just two blocks down from the high school. It was rather modest, but in those days, people didn't build big houses. They couldn't afford them and didn't think they needed

them. That's where I really spent most of my growing up days until I went into the Army. I lived on S 7th Street., on the corner of 7th and Bonneville. It was real easy to go to high school because I could just walk out the door in the morning and hear the first bell ring. If I ran all the way to school, I could get into my seat before the second bell rang. (shared laugh)

So your mom was considered a homemaker?

Yes, absolutely.

Your mom also had a college education, is that correct?

Yes, correct. Taught school for three years.

She did teach school? Where did she teach?

She taught school in Tonopah, in the Hawaiian Islands of Maui and in Reno. That was before she got married.

Could she have continued to teach school after she got married?

I don't know the answer to that for sure but I've kind of somehow gotten the impression that married school teachers were rare. I think back about my school teachers and I don't think any of them were married.

We've gotten to the point that we have casinos here already, the strip is building up, what kind of entertainment did the locals engage in?

Well as far as the teenagers were concerned, we had a, what I thought was a wonderful facility and was well used. During the war they built a USO Club here in Las Vegas. It was downtown on Stewart Street. near City Hall. At the end of the war, they gave that club, the Club, to the City of Las Vegas. So the city of Las Vegas turned it into a teenage club. It was very well run. They had paid employees, just one or two that ran it. They had a dance

floor, they had a small stage. They had pool tables, they had ping pong tables. I don't think they served any food. I'm sure we had lots of soda pop, but it was a gathering place for the teenagers. They would have activities every Friday and Saturday night. For a few hours it was open during the week; maybe not in the evening, but in the late afternoon, maybe from 4 to 6 or something like that. That was a real good place. Kids today love cars, although during the war, very few people had cars. A few of the kids had cars but they were usually old, old clunkers. Occasionally if someone had enough money to fix one up, then it would become a hot rod. We walked a lot. When we went on dates, we would almost always borrow a car from one of our parents and then we would load the car up with people. We would go around to different houses and pick up the people. When the date was over, we'd reverse the process, but you'd very rarely go out on a date with less than six people in the car, sometimes as many as eight people in one car.

How did you fit?

Well the girls would sit on the boy's laps. It wasn't all bad. (big laugh), except for the driver of course. We had a couple of small drive in restaurants. When you went on a date, you'd probably go to a movie and then you would, what we called, cruise Fremont Street and you'd just kind of drive up and down Fremont Street for a while and see who was out. Then you would go to a drive-in and have a hamburger or a milkshake or something.

How much did the date cost?

I've forgotten but one thing I can say, this was a little bit after the period I'm speaking about, but along the same train of thought. When I came back out of the Army and we now had four or five hotels that had shows. You could go to a second show, they had the first show which was the dinner show. You would have dinner and then see a show. Quite a few

of them you could dance between eating dinner and before the show started, the orchestra would play for a little while and you could dance on the stage. The stages were very low, not much higher than the tables. The first show was a dinner show which was a little expensive for us unless my parents were taking us. We would go sometimes to the dinner show. You could go to the second show and all you had to do was pay for drinks. As a teenager you weren't allowed to drink alcohol but you could order a Coke and it was fifty cents, which was an awful lot of money for a Coke. You could order a Coke for yourself and a Coke for your date, for a dollar you could sit there and see a wonderful show. You'd maybe give your waitress a quarter tip. In the summertime we quite often went to a place called Twin Lakes, or Lorenzi Park. It has two names. It had a huge swimming pool there. We would go there on dates. Occasionally we would go to Lake Mead if we had a car, like which I said in high school we didn't often have a car.

Did you ever to Mt Charleston for dates or for recreation?

A fair amount. I'll tell you a story. It's not a personal story but it shows you what people did in order to try to get cool in the early days in Las Vegas. Mt Charleston was developed during the 30's [1930s]. They had a CCC [Civilian conservation Corps] Camp, it's like a paramilitary organization for young men during the depression years to give them jobs and they built things all over the United States. They built roads, they built camp sites with picnic tables and things. They also built a childrens' summer camp up at Mt Charleston. All this was built in the 30's. There were very few homes at Mt Charleston initially. There was one little tiny lodge, like a little tiny place to eat. I'm sure they served some kind of drinks, but no gambling, I know that. There was a small lodge and a few cabins and the campsites. Even before these places were built, before they had established campgrounds,

people would take camping equipment like cots, blankets, little tiny stoves and go up there and spend the weekend. They would pull off to the side of the road and establish themselves a little campground. They would have to take their own water. If you had to go the bathroom, you have to go find a clump of trees. After the CCC's began to develop the area, they had running water to the campsites. They had outhouse type bathrooms and the campsites had picnic tables and little stoves. That came not too many years later, like maybe '33, '34, '35. The family, we went quite a few weekends. We'd go up there just to cool off. Even if you didn't camp out, you'd go up on Sunday just to cool off and spend Sunday with a light picnic lunch and spend an afternoon in the cool air.

How much cooler was it?

About twenty degrees, if it was 100 down there, it'd be 80, also it was probably more than 20 degrees less at night. It would really cool off at night up there.

In 1955 a casino opened called The Moulin Rouge. Do you remember that, were you back by that time?

Yes I was back.

What do you remember about that period, about that opening?

I remember that it was built. I know it was built for black people. [It was integrated] I assume it was built by black people. [The owners were not black, except for maybe a 2% interest by Joe Louis.] The owners, I'm not sure about that. It was the first time a black person could go into a nice show and a nice restaurant. Before that, they were not allowed to go into the strip hotels. The entertainers that worked on the strip couldn't even stay there. They had to go over to the Westside to stay. I think that was the major thing and I don't think I was ever inside of it, not that I was told not to go but it was a mixed clientele. It

wasn't totally black. A lot of the entertainers then that were appearing on the Strip, they would either stay at The Moulin Rouge or at least frequent The Moulin Rouge as part of the audience. I don't know if they could afford to have real stars. It didn't last too long. I don't remember what happened but it didn't stay open too long. I know recently it burned.

Over the years, how have you felt about living in a tourist town?

First of all, it didn't really become a tourist town as far as I'm concerned, until about the mid 50's. Of course since then it has just gone up and up and up. The tourism has gone, I don't know the figures, but tourism has gone crazy. In my growing up years, even when I first came back to Vegas, it was just beginning to be a tourist town, in the mid 50's. People, especially people that you meet outside of Las Vegas and have never been to Las Vegas, they've seen it only on television or in a movie, they want to know, "how do you live there?", "do you spend all of your time in the casinos?" I assure them outside of the strip area, even today, as it's always been, there is a community and the community is not too much unlike other communities. We have doctors, lawyers, gas stations, places to eat, we have schools and churches. I assure them of that.

Do you remember when we had the Joe W Brown racetrack?

Sure.

What do you remember about it?

I remember where it was. The location is basically where the convention center is today. There's a street out there named after Joe Brown. He was a promoter. I don't know if he had a racetrack before. He came to town and sold shares in the racetrack. In other words it was a venture, I guess you'd call it a capital venture. Quite a few local people invested in it. He had to build a racetrack and grandstand and so forth. It didn't last long at all. Seems to

me he only had maybe what they call two racing seasons. He didn't attract very big crowds. Most places in those days, if you went to California, basically the only place you could bet a lot of money was at the racetrack. I'm talking now, he was out there in the very early 50's with his racetrack. If you go to Santa Anita, it's huge, if you wanted to bet money, that's about the only place you could legally bet money. They thought they'd get those people that went to the racetracks in California to come here. Evidently not too many of them came. I think it was two seasons it raced and then it just stood there empty for a while. Then the convention center came along and bought the property.

Do you remember the lunch counter at White Cross Drug Store?

Absolutely.

Tell me about the food.

It was right across the street from my dad's store. His store was in the middle of the block. It was on the corner of Casino Center and Fremont. My dad's store was on Casino Center just down a half of a block. It was a little bit of a treat for us to go there, not that it was so fancy, but it was very popular. People would stand behind, I don't think they had any booths; it was all counter. I think they only had 12 to 14 seats at the counter. During the middle of the day it was always busy. You would stand behind somebody that was seated and when they finished of course you got their seat. It was a limited menu, but very good food and of course we kids always liked ice cream sodas and root beer floats. We'd usually have a sandwich. I'm sure they had at least one or two hot meals. It was famous in the town, of course again, the town was very small. There were other places to eat but the White Cross was also a meeting place, more for the businessman. They'd go down there

and sit on the stool and eat lunch and talk to the guy next to him and they'd talk business.

Very well known.

Do you remember The Blue Onion?

There was a Blue Onion drive-in restaurant. Later there was a Blue Onion Motel, same location.

Oh really?

Yes. The drive-in closed and then they more or less went, originally it was just a drive-in restaurant.

Did the waitresses were on roller skates?

I've forgotten, maybe. (shared laugh)

I want to ask about transportation. You said something earlier about people going back and forth to the dam, they had buses to do that. What about people as the city got larger?

What kind of transportation did we have here?

I know the bus system came in quite a long time, trying to think if there were busses when I came back from the Army, I'm not sure. If there were buses when I came back out of the Army, it was on a very limited schedule and possibly up and down the Strip. I know when I was in high school, course that was war years, there were not any buses other than a bus that would go out to Boulder City, a bus to go to Henderson. There were plenty of buses. They did have a little tiny, like a station wagon, car that occasionally went to Mt Charleston when I was in high school. There was also a bus line that ran all the way from Vegas to Reno. It stopped in all the intermediate places.

For the Test Site in the 50's, was there a bus service for the people working there?

A lot of people drove, but as the time went on, there were a lot of accidents. People would go to sleep. They went out there very early in the morning and then came back after being up all day, so the buses became pretty popular. They ran lots of buses to the Test Site.

The last portion I'd like to ask you about are the 1960's. What do you remember about Las Vegas in the 60's?

I would have been working in my father's business. We would have been located on Charleston at this time, East Charleston Boulevard.

Before we talk about that, did you work in the business for all of your career?

After I got out of the Army, yes.

Do you take the business over at that point?

Not at that point. My father was old fashioned and he felt like I had to start at the bottom and work my way up. So I did. It only took me about 20 years to become the boss. I enjoyed it. It was a fairly small business. It never got really big.

In the 60's, my kids were in school. They would have been in 5th grade or something like that.

Were the schools integrated at that point?

Schools were at that point, high school was integrated from the very beginning, although the blacks were, well they had a school on the Westside which was of course totally black but it only went up to the 3rd grade. We were integrated from the 3rd grade on up. There was another small school in North Las Vegas back in the 30's. But it again I think only went up to the 3rd grade. In those days I don't think there were any black people living in North Las Vegas.

On your football team, did you have black players?

Two, but there weren't many in the whole school. I'd say when I was a senior there were about 1,000 kids in the school and probably 200 black kids, maybe.

That probably makes sense. We're talking about 1946 and BMI opened in the early 40's.

Those families had just started to come in.

Yes, families had been here for three or four years.

Anything about business in the 60's or war protests, integration, any of those events you remember?

Well, I don't remember when this happened, maybe you do. I think it's more recent than the 60's. Going back, I'm not sure when the hotels opened up to the black people, I'm not sure when that happened, but there was.....I think in the 70's that they actually had riots on the Westside. It was about the same time they were having riots in California in the Watts area. I think that was probably about the 70's. They actually had riots where they burned buildings on the Westside. They had to send a large number of policemen over there. I think even some National Guard troops.

Do you remember the reason that was given for those riots here?

Not really except I think it was probably somewhat, and this is only speculation, had something to do with the riots in California. It had happened there I think first before it happened here.

Have you seen over the years the business climate changing, or how did it change for a private business owner?

On that same point, I'm not sure I said it before you turned your machine on, but we had a lot of black customers. I went on to the Westside, not that I'm saying I'm a hero or anything, but I'm saying my father started it very early on when there were just a few black

people that lived downtown in Las Vegas. He granted credit to black people, which was almost unheard of. If you grant credit to one person, they would tell their friends and we had quite a few customers on the Westside. Like I said, I wasn't lying to you. I was over on the Westside almost everyday for business reasons. About the business climate changing, without being cynical or sour grapey, that's really what put our store out of business was the business climate changing. As Las Vegas grew, chain stores began to come into Las Vegas. We had Sears very early on. Sears came in probably clear back in '36 or something like that. JC Penney was here. They didn't have stores that were appliance oriented. Even Sears in the early days didn't have appliances, not major appliances. As the town grew, then the bigger chain stores came in and the little guys like our store, had a hard time surviving and we didn't really survive. It not only happened to us, I know of four other smaller appliance stores similar to myself that all went out of business within about 5 years in Las Vegas. But the same thing happened to other merchants. Unless you had a niche, maybe you had something that you really specialized in that maybe the big stores didn't have or they didn't have the variety that you had, it was tough for the small business man to survive. Same thing is true for the small casinos. They didn't survive either.

Tell me how you feel about the Wal-Mart's of the world today. [Laughter]

I might say that I had a taste of the other side because when I closed my store and needed to work, not so much financially but I wanted something to do, I felt I was old enough to retire, I went to work for Sears. By this time Sears was a very dominant figure in the appliance business. I was doing basically what I'd done most of my life except I wasn't the boss anymore. I saw the other side of it from the chain store side. They do some things much better than we did. They're better organized, their salespeople are better trained. Their

displays are much better. They have a better variety of product. They have some big advantages. The big advantage they have over the small business person is their buying power. They could buy the same item that I used to buy at a much lower price from the manufacturer. That's where their edge is. As far as WalMart is concerned, they of course have gone way past Sears as far as volume's concerned. They do probably three times as much business as Sears. I admire the family because they started out a little like I did with one little store in Arkansas. But they had a big vision and followed their vision. One thing you do lose in the larger businesses, you lose personal relationships with the proprietor and the customer. They don't know the customers. They don't know you. They taught us at Sears to be very polite and do our very best for them, but you don't really know them.

What is your attitude, and those of your friends, about gambling?

I probably have a little different attitude but not so different than the Mormons. In our church, we don't gamble. The first person who was a Christian Scientist, who is a devote Christian Scientist, would not gamble at all, period. Not one nickel.

Play the lottery?

No. The Mormons, if they're devote Mormons, they're the same way, so we're not alone in Las Vegas in that aspect. I do know in our church, occasionally we'll have someone who works in the business and the Mormons do too. I frankly would find that difficult. It's rare in our church but I don't know how rare it is in the Mormon church.

In a town like this where so much employment is associated with the gaming industry, isn't there some forgiveness or leeway?

In our church, we draw the line if you're in a job that you're not actually dealing the cards, you're not serving the booze, you can, we say fine. You can work in a hotel, you can work

in a shop in a hotel. In fact my wife at one time ran a shop in Caesar's Palace. She didn't own it but she was the manager. We've had people who have been very good church members in every way and it worked. We've had entertainers in our church, worked as musicians or singers or dancers.

Is dancing okay?

Oh yes that's okay, yeah that's okay. [Laugh]

What do you see as the future of Las Vegas?

I've always been kind of, well not kind of, I've been on the conservative side. I keep saying, I've been saying for the last fifty years, "It's gotta stop, it can't get bigger". But it doesn't ever seem to stop growing. From the track record of the last fifty years I'd say it's gonna keep growing. The water problem is possibly going to slow us down. We're facing, right now, severe water problems. Water is the reason there is a Las Vegas. In that sense we're back to the beginning.

One series of questions I want to end with. I want to talk about your wife. I didn't ask you about her working outside the home. I'd like to know also a compound question, you're children, their names?

I'll start with my wife. She had worked when we were married. After we were married she didn't work for approximately 20 years. By the time the kids were out of high school, she began to work for a lady who had gift stores in several hotels. She had become acquainted with her through playing tennis. She became a manager in one of the shops the lady owned in Caesar's Palace. It was mainly children's things, toys and children's clothing. She did that for maybe 10 years. She retired for a couple of years and went back to playing tennis for a couple of years. Then she got interested in travel. She went to a travel agent and she

had this trip all planned and the travel agent said, "Why did you come to me? You have it all planned, you've got all my work done. Do you want a job?". So he said there's gonna be a school this summer, you go to that school, come back and I'll give you a job. Turns out she was a travel agent for over 20 years. Now that's her vocational activity. I have two daughters. One is a school teacher. She's been a school teacher in Las Vegas. She went to the same school my sister went to school, it's a church school, college, graduated with high honors, came back got married, had kids and has been a school teacher now for 20 years. The other daughter went to school in Reno. Had a hard time getting through school just like I was, played around a lot. She finally got out of school after about 6 years and became an advertising representative for a real small local newspaper. The newspaper went out of business and she went to work for the Review-Journal. Worked for them for about 6 years, felt she'd hit a dead end. She couldn't go anyplace so she moved to California and went to work for a bigger newspaper. She works for the Orange County Register. She has lived in Southern California now for 18 years. Not married. She has done well. She has her own house. It's about half paid for. She has a fancy car and she does well.

My very last question is how long were you at Sears?

Seven years.

Any closing comments about life in Las Vegas?

I'd like to emphasize the fact that I think there's a real stable backboned community. What I mean by that is they're people who have good morals and there's a lot of churches in Las Vegas. There's lots of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and people are interested in their kids. I think the schools, although sometimes the papers make out that they're not so good, I think they all around do a pretty good job. I now have grandchildren growing up.

This is Claytee White and I am here with Mr. Darrell Luce and it is October 6, 2003. How are you this morning?

I'm just fine and happy to come back and finish up my interview.

You mentioned while talking about Boulder City that it was inside the fence?

That's correct, yes. There was a fence there across the road and it was the only entrance to Boulder City. I'm not sure how far the fence extended to the sides, but there was no way a vehicle could enter without going to a gate. The guards would stop all vehicles and ask for identification.

It was an actual gate? Almost like a gated community.

Very much so, with guards, 24 hours a day.

When you talked about downtown and block 15 and block 16, could you give me, just for the record, which streets we're talking about?

Block 16 was on N 1st Street. I know that. To be honest with you, I'm not sure where block 15 was; possibly on 2nd Street. Today that's Casino Center. I'm not positive.

At one time on the Westside, there was a lot of night life over there. Were you familiar at all with Jackson St. and what it looked like?

The only thing I can remember, on the corner of D and Jackson, there was some sort of a tiny gambling casino and bar. I think it was called the Town Tavern. Later on, maybe into the 60's, on the opposite corner, there was a small hotel about three stories. My recollection is it didn't stay open too long.

You don't remember any beauty shops or restaurants or anything like that?

On the corner, near the corner of Bonanza and D Street, there were two small stores, a grocery store and a liquor store. The liquor store was run by Gilbert. It was called Gilbert

Brothers I think. The small grocery store was run by a man by the name of Snyder. His first name was unusual, it was Lincoln. They were both white people. I'm not sure when they started but they were going great guns in the 40's. I don't remember when they closed up.

When you were in high school, at one point you went to a military high school near or in San Diego. Can you tell me why your parents took you out of that school?

Well the better reason is why they put me in there. In the eight grade, unfortunately I got into a violent argument with one of the teachers. I was disciplined for it. My parents were very embarrassed. They felt that I needed some discipline. I went to the military academy in ninth grade. A place called Pacific Beach, a suburb of San Diego. I more or less served my term for a year. I came back and finished high school at Las Vegas High School.

Did the discipline help?

It got me interested in the military activity. Las Vegas High School had never had ROTC before and in my junior year, they started an ROTC unit. I jumped right in. Because of my prior training, I became an officer right away. I went on and took ROTC at UNR. Because I never graduated from UNR, I never got my commission. I actually finished my ROTC. I was ahead, because when I went to Reno, they jumped me ahead two years in ROTC. I didn't get the commission because I didn't have my diploma. I went on and got a commission after going into the Army.

Describe the railroad cottages to me, your earliest recollection of what railroad cottages looked like.

I remember two models. There was a real basic model made out of large concrete blocks. Much larger than what they use today. Maybe double the size. They were made here in Las Vegas. The railroad workers made the blocks here in Vegas. The railroad ran the town in

the early days. They were the bosses of everything. I know from reading the papers, most of them today are gone. There maybe a few left.

How many rooms do you think most of the houses contained?

I think the smaller ones were two bedrooms, kitchen, bath and the living room. The larger ones must have been three bedrooms.

When you said that this was a railroad town, can you give me any examples of the kind of influence that you saw or that you felt as a result of this being a railroad town?

My early recollection is that a lot of the people that lived right across the street from us when we lived on 4th Street were railroad workers; engineers, conductors, etc. Later on, in the 40's, they built a few homes, the railroad I'm speaking about, back on the other side of the railroad tracks. It would be today in the area that belongs to the city. The city is trying to get something going over there, between the freeway and the railroad tracks, but on the west side of the tracks.

So on the other side of the new shopping center [Las Vegas Premium Outlets]?

Yes, in that area. They had repair shops for locomotives, way back they had the huge ice plant. It was right along side the railroad tracks. They manufactured ice to put in the cars to keep the fruit being shipped from California to the east. Also they supplied all the ice for the ice boxes. We didn't have refrigerators, we had ice boxes. The railroad station itself was roughly where the Union Plaza Hotel is. It was, for a small town, the biggest thing here. They had a little park in front of it. From the railroad station, you'd look right down Fremont St. The park was maybe a couple of hundred feet deep, with trees and grass. It was a big deal in those days, shade and green.

When you were in the San Diego area, it was during WWII. You mentioned some of the factories were camouflaged. What kind of factories were those?

I think they were mainly airplane manufacturing plants.

I'd like to talk a little about the image of Las Vegas. You were here when there were Helderado parades. Now we have just the opposite, we have all these skyscrapers and everything is high-tech. Where is the real Las Vegas for you? What is your image of Las Vegas?

My image today is that I'm living in the city but yet I purposely make an effort to stay away from the Strip. Mainly because of the crowds and the people, the traffic. I have more or less an area that I travel in, off of the Strip. I know the center of the city real well. The outskirts of the city, I'm not familiar with at all. The church that I go to is in the old part of the city, downtown Las Vegas. I live in the outskirts of downtown Las Vegas. I shop in that area and very rarely go outside of it. Of course even that part of the town is not like it was many years ago. The area where I lived, right off of W Charleston where UMC is, there was a hospital there when I grew up. A very small hospital. We called it the county hospital in those days. That was really the edge of town. As you went out W Charleston it curved and went over to Bonanza. There was a street there but not too much else, a few homes. One of the early very elite sections was on Rancho. It is called Rancho Circle, which is near Rancho and Alta today. It is still there. It's quite a small area, but very exclusive. The homes today are all from one million to three million dollars. There were homes there in the 40's.

From the way the world sees Las Vegas today, do you think we could do anything like bring back the Helderado parade?

[chuckle] No. I don't think it would appeal to people. I've never been there, but there are two or three places in the country that are much smaller than Las Vegas that have a celebration centered around a rodeo. I know there is also one in Canada. They call it the Calgary Stampede. Reno still has one. They have one centered around the fourth of July celebration. I think it's something a smaller community can get involved with. We have lost the western atmosphere here. I don't think it would go at all.

The year after next, 2005, we are going to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Las Vegas.

From your past, from the 30's and 40's, what do you think we should include in that celebration, if you had to mention a couple of things off the top of your head?

I think certainly Helderado should be mentioned for sure. I don't think it should be forgotten. I think the railroad's influence in the community. There wouldn't really be a Las Vegas if it hadn't been for the railroad. When they first got the tracks going all the way from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City, they had to have places to stop where there was water. If it wasn't for the railroad, there wouldn't be a Las Vegas. I don't think I said this the other day, Union Pacific had all the utilities in the beginning. Every one of them, they owned them all. But the one they held onto the longest was the water. They held onto the water clear up into the early 50's. At that point, Las Vegas was beginning to grow quite rapidly. They, Union Pacific was very conservative. They didn't want to expand the water system very fast. Some of the businessmen in the community were very discouraged about this. Union Pacific was holding back expansion. The businessmen went to the State Legislature. My father was one of them. They got the legislature to pass a law that allowed them to issue some sort of bonds. They bought the water district. Union Pacific called it the Land and Water Company. This bill allowed them to set up what is now called the Las Vegas Valley

Water District. It allowed them to set that agency up and buy the water system. They were then able to immediately expand it. Also, they began to install water meters for the first time. Before that, we didn't have any water meters and each house paid a flat rate each month. It was quite low. You could use as much water as you wanted. My dad became the president of the water district. It was a non-paying job. Today there is a reservoir out in the western part of the valley built in the 70's that is named after my father. It is near Cheyene and Buffalo. When it was built, there wasn't even a road out there that was paved. We went out there when they dedicated it and you bumped along, driving on rocks. They always try to build reservoirs in an area that is higher than the area they will service. My dad was also a city commissioner back in the 30's. He was also president of the Chamber of Commerce in the 30's. Later during WWII, he served on a board that was very unpopular. It had to do with controlling ration stamps. In the war years, if you wanted gasoline, sugar, tires, meat or butter, you had to have ration stamps. If you wanted to get extra ration stamps for some reason, you had to go to the ration board and plead your case. Later on, clear up into the 50's and 60's, he served on the selective service board, which most people call the draft board. I replaced him when he got to the point where they had a mandatory age of retirement. I took his place and served during the Vietnam years, which was a tough job. You were making a decision basically on who was probably going to wind up in Vietnam. I was president of the Selective Service Board.

How does that work? You are under which government agency?

That was called the Selective Service System.

And it's part of...?

Federal government.

It's a completely different department? Is it part of defense?

I suppose, I don't know. It was all civilians, all volunteer. Maybe not all, they do have paid workers, but the board themselves that were set up in each community were civilians with no pay. The one here only had one paid worker that ran an office that was in the federal building, the Foley Building.

How often did you meet as a board?

We would meet at least once a month. If there was a work load that was heavier, we would meet a second time. We had to interview, and this was the toughest part of the job, you had to interview every young man who applied for conscientious objection. A lot of the work was paper work. The ones that were conscientious objectors, you would see them face to face. They would come in and you would talk to them to see if they were really sincere about being a conscientious objector.

Were there women on that board?

No.

Any cases that you remember that you can share?

I remember one because the general trend, well if a conscientious objector was granted that classification, he would not be completely free from any obligation. He would either be put in one of two categories. He would either be put in a non-combatant role and still have to go into the service or he would not have to go into the service at all, but he would have to serve like in a veterans hospital or in some federal building like the janitor. He was required to do some service for the federal government, but not in the service.

What determined who went into which category?

Generally, there were some young men, for religious reasons, who didn't want to take orders from a military person, they did not want to salute the flag. Those would be the people that would go into civilian federal work.

Did they get paid the same as a soldier?

I don't remember that. The other category, like I said, they would be a medic or they would be a clerk where they would be in a non-combatant role in the service.

A lot of men went to Canada at that time. Did they decide to go to Canada if the Selective Service Board said to them they would have to go into the military?

I can't answer that. The only thing I can say is there was a branch, I'm not sure who it was, that tried to track these people down. Of course the idea of going to Canada, then you would be outside the jurisdiction of the United States Government, that was the idea. If someone was high on the draft and decided to bug out, they would attempt to find them. They could be arrested if they had actually gotten orders to report for service, for duty. If they didn't obey, they would send some sort of federal marshal. They would actually send someone out to arrest them. They would then stand trial as a draft evader, and could be sent to prison.

Earlier you were talking about your father going to Carson City and dealing with the water district. Tell me about some of your father's other business friends and the kinds of businesses they owned.

The first department store in Las Vegas, really, was called Ronzoni's. When we lived on 4th Street., we lived next to the Ronzoni's. They had a nice home, we lived in a duplex. We met them early on when we came to Las Vegas. They had started in one of the little mining towns, I think Tonopah was the first place they had a store. Then they came to Las Vegas.

They knew Las Vegas was beginning to grow. I think they came here a little bit after my father, but in the 30's. They started a little store downtown of Fremont Street. They prospered and built a bigger store. They were really the first, I call a department store, in Las Vegas. We were very familiar with the Ronzoni family. You asked about White Cross Drugs, it was run by Mr. Farren. Bill Farren was his name. He was a friend of my father's. There was also the first western store to sell western clothing and Indian jewelry, it was called Smith and Chandler. It was on Fremont Street. Most of the early businesses were on Fremont Street., or like my father's business, about a half a block off. Smith and Chandler also ran, during the summer months, a similar store near Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. They always had at least one Indian jeweler working in the store making Indian jewelry in the store. My dad knew both of those gentlemen. There was the Apache Hotel which was three stories high, maybe 75 feet in both directions. 75 feet frontage on Fremont St. and 75 feet going down north on 2nd Street He knew that family. I think they are called Silvagni. You don't pronounce the G. There was the Von Toble family that had the lumber company on S 1st Street. The senior Mr. Von Toble came here the very day, 1905, that they auctioned off the lots and bought that property. He had sons that carried it on. Three sons. There was another family that were pioneers that came here, I think, perhaps the very first day also, their name is Beckley. They had a building on the corner of 1st and Fremont. Downstairs they had a men's clothing store, upstairs were offices they rented out.

The name of the store was their last name?

Yes, Beckley Brothers. There were two brothers. My dad was friendly with those gentlemen. Bartlett hardware had a store on Fremont Street Mr. Cragin, Ernie Cragin, later on was the owner of The El Portal Theater, my dad was friendly with him. He was the

Mayor of Las Vegas for quite a number of years. Another mayor that came along quite a bit later, he was here in Vegas, maybe came in the 40's, was Oren Gragson. He started out in an automobile repair shop then went into the furniture business and then went into a similar business to us, but had both furniture and appliances. He became one of our friendly competitors.

When you talked about the locations of your business, at one point you moved to Charleston and I think I interrupted you. Tell me about that move. That was the third location?

Fourth, fourth location. In 1961 we moved to East Charleston near Bruce St., the 1700 block on East Charleston. That was the last location we were.

Prior to that location, you were where?

We were on South 2nd Street, at 116 right next door to the Golden Nugget. There was a tiny parking lot between us and the Golden Nugget. Western Union was right across the street from us. In the 30's and up in the 40's, there was a bowling alley on the other side of the street. Must have been Las Vegas's first bowling alley. The move before that, we were on the corner of 2nd and Carson. We were in a building that was also occupied by a grocery store called the Market Spot. It was run by an old-time family that was involved in politics later on. Their name is Levy. I can't think of the first name. The first location, as I mentioned was on Fremont between 5th and 6th. It was tiny too.

Las Vegas didn't engage in school segregation except for the first three grades. Why did the city, as a whole, become such separate worlds for blacks and whites?

I think, maybe the people, the black people that came here in the 40's, were used to segregation. I think that had something to do with it. They came from the deep south and I think in a sense they wanted to, that's what they were accustomed to.

That migration in the 40's, did you also see a migration in of a lot of whites at the same time?

Yes, of course the town grew a lot in the 40's. Not only because of Basic Magnesium Plant, but also because of the military activity. It wasn't Nellis in those days, it was Las Vegas Army Air Field. The town grew during WWII. Probably between 1940 and 1945 I'm sure it at least doubled in size, maybe more than doubled.

The last question I have from my review of the other tapes: You told me about your daughters but you didn't give me names.

We have Rebecca. Rebecca was born while I was still in the Army. Suzie was born in Flagstaff. They are just two years apart. I was out of the service when Suzie was born, that's Suzanne to be correct.

Since the last interview, did you think of other things that you would want to have us remember about Las Vegas, have us know about early Las Vegas?

I'd like to emphasize that during the 30's and even in the 40's it began to grow rapidly, but it was still a pretty small place. What I mean is a small town. In the 30's, maybe 5,000 people. In the 40's it may have gotten to 20,000. You knew a lot of people. Especially with my father being in business, customers coming in, he knew lots and lots of people that way. Because of his being active in the Chamber of Commerce he knew a lot of people. I grew up in a small town atmosphere. Very different, even in the 50's., it began to become a tourist town.

Your father had a business partner during part of his business career, Goodfellow?

Yes, Les Goodfellow.

Could you tell me a little about the Goodfellow family?

Yes I can. He was working in this small appliance store when my dad came down from Reno. The two of them formed a partnership. He lived on Fremont St. in a very modest home around 8th or 9th and Fremont. He unfortunately passed on very suddenly about 1939 or 1940. He was basically the same age as my father. Shortly after he passed on, my father bought his interest out. He paid his widow. I can't think of her first name. My dad bought her out. He was the sole owner of Luce and Goodfellow, however he didn't want to change the name. He never did change the name. Mrs. Goodfellow, at that same location I'm speaking about, maybe up into the 50's, built a very small hotel there. I'm talking about a hotel that had maybe only 10 rooms. That was her business. I can't think of what she called it.

What location was that?

On about 8th and Fremont St., on the corner. She lived for quite a few years but had no interest in the business once she sold out. In my whole life, I probably only talked to her maybe twice.

I really appreciate the information you had shared with us.

I was curious as to, can you give me some kind of concept of how many other people, like myself, that you are going to be talking to.

Right now we have several lists. Mrs. Boyer gave us a list. A couple of other people who are on our various boards here at the university have given us several lists. We are just working as many people as we can, as rapidly as we can. You are younger, but we have

some people who are many years older. We are trying to get to as many of them as we possibly can. We are thinking that by the end of the project, we'll probably have about 40 to 50 interviews. We haven't decided yet how we are going to display them.