

This is Claytee White and this morning I am with Laura Belle Kelch at her home here in Las Vegas. It is August 2, 2000. How are you today?

I'm fine.

I'd like to start with your early life. Tell me about where you grew up and your family.

I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, right on the Ohio River where all the traffic went through traveling west.

Give me your mother's and father's names and if you have sisters and brothers.

Arthur Henry Gang and Gertrude Gang and I had a brother, Hall he has passed away.

What did your parents do for a living?

My mother of course was a homemaker and a mother and into all women's activities. Both of my parents were always interested in what was going on in the community.

When did you come to Las Vegas?

I came to Las Vegas in 1939.

What did your father do for a living?

He was in the manufacturing business, as his father was. They manufactured things that were used by the railroad.

Give me an example.

Switch stands and water columns. Of course they sent them all over the world. Cincinnati was a manufacturing community.

How long did you live in Cincinnati before you left?

Golly I don't remember. (Chuckle)

Did you leave there with your family?

No they stayed there their entire lives.

Tell me a little about your educational background.

I went to the University of Cincinnati. I was in Applied Arts. I thought that would be great. I'd like to be in the manufacturing business making tiles, I was interested in art. My father was too. He was interested in penmanship. They'd all come to him when they were giving awards and ask him to write the names down because of his writing ability. He was a wonderful example as was my mother. I went from Cincinnati after I married, I went to New York City, lived in Greenwich Village, 55 West 11th St. From New York I moved to Los Angeles.

How long were you in New York?

Not very long.

Would you mind telling me the year that you were born?

1912, September 1st, 1912.

We went to Los Angeles and were in the radio business. My husband was a writer. He wrote for WLW, the world's most powerful radio station in Cincinnati. Its headquarters were in Mason, Ohio. When they wanted to take amateur authors, plays that amateur authors had written, I always had a lead in one of their plays. From New York City, I moved to Los Angeles and KFWB, Warner Bros. I participated in the programs they had on the air there too.

Your husband worked for KFWB as well?

Yes, he was the chief engineer there and he designed all of their sound studios. He also did all of the recording.

How did you meet your husband?

In radio.

You started in radio after college in Cincinnati and he had already finished college?

Oh yes.

Was he from Cincinnati as well?

No, Los Angeles.

Did he find himself in Cincinnati because of jobs in radio?

No, it was when I moved west that I met him. I met him in Hollywood. Bing Crosby was the man. Decker Record Company always recorded Bing Crosby, but they would only have my husband as the engineer, the mixer on his program. My husband would tell these stories about Bing standing in front of the microphone practicing, chewing his gum and finally he'd say, "this is going to be a take". Max would say, "okay". He'd take his gum out of his mouth and put it on the microphone and start singing. I have a lot of those records.

Getting back to the sequence of events, I just want to make sure I have it right. When you left Cincinnati, you did not know your husband.

My then husband.

Oh, you were married twice?

Yes.

The first husband is the one.....

He was a writer.

Once that marriage ended, then you met your current husband and you met him in Los Angeles?

Yes, and he'd been in radio all through his high school years, an amateur radio man. He had all of the equipment at home. When he'd come home from school, he'd turn it on and send notes and cards to other broadcasters in the same position he was in and made a collection of the cards from these other people from all over the United States.

Was he what you call a ham radio operator?

Yes, exactly.

Where did he go to college?

Cal Tech. He was an instructor there also.

The two of you, in 1939, decided to come to Las Vegas, am I right?

Yes.

Tell me what brought you here.

Well we worked for Warner Bros. and that year the operators decided that they wanted to have a say in what was going on in radio. They signed up with the union. When these men, my husband included, said they didn't want to work for that outfit, they decided they would have their own radio station somewhere in the United States. They did a survey and found that the area in Las Vegas had no reception, no radio reception. They came over here and interviewed all of the business people. There weren't many. There were only about 8,400 people in those days. They then left KFWB, Warner Bros. and came over here. We came in July of '39 [1939]. Oh was it hot! We didn't know where to stay, where to put the building. The extinct nightclub owned by the Cornero Brothers, that's way east of town. We had to renovate the building.

Was that the Meadows?

Yes, that's where we had all the ground cover which takes I think about an acre for your tower. We finally got the whole station ready to go then a couple of our partners decided that they weren't making enough money. They didn't see any future in it. It was my husband who saw the future. He knew that it was possible and that it would be a success. So, we bought the other fellas out when they decided they didn't want any part of this. They went back and joined the union. That was when we first started and that was the hot summer of '39. We went on the air November 1st, 1940.

What kinds of things had you heard about Las Vegas before you moved here?

Not very much, there wasn't much to tell, but it didn't make any difference to us. If they needed a station, and we felt they did, then we knew that we could be a success.

What was your role at the very beginning?

I was a bookkeeper. I never did any writing. I had my own radio station program for an hour a day called "Listen Ladies". It was all about subjects that the women would be interested in.

Give me an example.

Cooking, how to take care of your family, the babies and the children and the doctors, the necessity to have a library. Very exciting times.

Did you have any guests on the show?

Always, oh yes.

Give me some examples of the people you invited.

The agricultural extension agent, he'd sit there and talk and women who were professional in cooking and painting and gardening.

What is an agricultural extension agent?

He tells you all about the trees, all about the plants, all about the botanical questions, he'd answer them all for the people. He was very helpful.

You weren't married when you first moved here to Las Vegas, is that correct?

Yes.

What made you decide to get married?

Gee, we just fell into line.

Give me your husband's full name.

Maxwell Kelch, graduate of Cal Tech and in radio practically all of his life.

Where did you and Max first live when you first moved here?

In that extinct nightclub run by the Cornero brothers.

You lived there as well?

Oh was that tough!

Tell me what that was like.

It was this huge building, rooms all around. They had served food of course, that's where I had to do the cooking, (chuckle), but we survived.

Was it a hotel at that time?

No, it was a nightclub.

No hotel?

No.

So you lived in a portion of the nightclub? Were there rooms somewhere?

Yes. To cool it was something awful. No refrigeration of course, no air conditioning. When I bought supplies for cooking, butter would melt. He built a form out of some lath in a teepee style and on the top, he put burlap sacking because the first thing we did when we came to town was buy a horse. We had to have food for the horse too. When we bought the food it was all in a burlap sack. We put that sack around this teepee form and put holes in a can that we put on top, maybe a twenty-five pound water can, so it would drip water on the burlap sacking.

Anything you put inside this little teepee would be kept cool, so the butter no longer melted.

That was tough. I'd never lived under conditions like that.

Was that your husband that constructed the teepee?

Yes.

Was the nightclub still in operation?

No.

Were you the only two living there at that time?

Yes.

How close were you to your nearest neighbor?

Shortly there after, we rented a house from a neighbor there. That was very convenient.

This is in the Boulder Highway area of the city?

Yes.

Was the horse for transportation?

I'd ride him uptown to do my shopping because they had tie up rails in front of all the stores.

How did you bring all of the goods back that you had purchased?

On the saddle, I'd tie it on, but I wouldn't have to buy that much. Because we bought property over on Sunny Pl, off of Bonanza Rd, we would go downtown from there. We'd go through the underpass to Bonanza Rd.

So today if I wanted to find that property, where on Bonanza Rd. are you talking about, is it near Martin Luther King?

Martin Luther King would be right.

That was part of the MacWilliams town site?

I don't know, but a big development occurred there.

Is this still the first year that you were here that you were able to purchase over there?

Yes.

Were your neighbors all of European descent, or did you have neighbors of color as well?

No, we just had two neighbors on the street; one on our side of the street and one across the street.

Do you remember their names?

I can't think of it now.

How long were you here before you started your family?

Four years.

Did you still live at that location once you started your family?

Yes.

Where did your children go to school?

I don't recall the name.

When you and your husband first arrived, before the children, what kind of recreation did the two of you have? What kind of fun did you have?

Getting acquainted with our neighbors and there weren't many of those. The Chamber of Commerce, oh yes, that was very important to us. Eventually my husband was president of the Chamber of Commerce. During the war, when they refused him in the service, he wanted to join the service and build radio stations abroad where they needed him. But they said no, where you are is more important because of Basic Magnesium and Boulder Dam. He was stuck here, but he realized then that when the war was over, and people could now get back on the highway, get in their cars and go where they wanted to go, have them go to Las Vegas. So he was elected president of the Chamber of Commerce and he figured what we should do is get the people concentrated on the fact that we wanted to make Las Vegas a point that everyone wanted to come to. On all the highways, we hired a very outstanding advertising agency, we put signs on the highways telling them how to get to Las Vegas. That's what started Las Vegas really going.

After reading just a tiny bit about your husband, I wanted to refer to him as Mr. Las Vegas.

Do you think that is a good description?

Oh that has been used frequently, yes.

Was that advertising person that he hired Thompson?

Yes.

Tell me about that campaign that you, your husband, Mr. Thompson and the Chamber put together.

We went to all of the business people and explained to them what the plan was. They were behind us from the very beginning. Oh yes. They all made their contributions. That's why we could afford this Thompson Agency.

I think the name of the promotion that you did was called the Live Wire?

Yes.

Why did you name it that?

Because they were being active, they weren't just laying back now.

This was 1944 that he was president of the Chamber?

I don't remember.

He is president of the Chamber at this time, 1944, tell me about some of the activities that you are engaged in. Do you still have your radio show?

Yes.

Are you involved in women's clubs?

Yes, Mesquite Club for instance, the oldest women's organization in Las Vegas.

What did you do?

They did everything that was good for the community. Taught the women, informed the women and got behind all of them to take care of what they could at that time, which was a lot.

Do you remember any of the projects that you worked on?

Library, because in Cincinnati, I would ask my dad what words meant and he'd tell me to look it up. He had an encyclopedia set behind glass doors that I would always go to. When I looked for a library here, it was just a little cement building down in the main part of town. The Mesquite Club women were very interested in the library from the beginning. They assembled all of the books that the members owned at one of the member's homes, and that was the only library. Then they had one downtown next to the brick building in the park. If you stood up against the wall, you could hear what was going on in the judge's chambers. The women chose me to be chairman of their library association. I went to all of the business people about the library. Of course culturally that's the main thing, you have to start there. We did. We collected enough to start the first downtown real library, and we had a children's room! We knew how important this was for children to go to. And before a lot of people moved into town to use all of that facility, we would allow big businesses to have their corporate meetings down there.

Now your mom was a civic leader?

Worker, yes.

It sounds like you were a chip off the old block. Can you tell me what downtown looked like in the early 40's?

Just the main drag, Fremont St. I'd go down and shop on my horse and they had tie up rails in front of all of the stores.

How many stores were there?

Well there was one for every necessary product.

So we had a grocery store, a drug store, was the movie theater here already?

Yes.

Would you and your husband go to the movies?

Yes.

What about nightclubs and casinos at that time on Fremont?

Yes they did have, they weren't large of course.

If you and your husband wanted to go out to dinner In the early 40's, where would you go?

We'd go right on Fremont and the highway. I can't remember the name of it but it was right near our radio station so we'd go there frequently.

The place that you went to dinner, was there any gambling, or just a restaurant?

It was just a restaurant I believe. We never gambled.

Why is that?

We don't approve of it. We don't think it's necessary.

Even though he saw this as having a major future, he knew, the two of you knew that you did not want to engage in the activity?

We have always been asked when they were building a new casino or a new hotel, if we wanted a part of it. We always said no. We never invested in anything to do with gambling.

Tell me then about churches. Did you and your husband ever participate in any church organization?

Yes, Presbyterian. We are founding members of the First Presbyterian Church here.

Where was it located, do you remember?

We held our meetings in the Bunker Brothers Mortuary.

When you first got here, 1939, did you ever hear people talk about how Las Vegas got started, how it was auctioned off?

Oh yes, always interested in that.

Do you remember any of the stories you heard about that?

No.

How did you get your mail when you first arrived? Was it delivered?

Yes it was. We had a box out on the street.

Tell me a little about the business that you and your husband started. Who were some of your advertisers?

Of the radio station? The newspaper of course.

What about the stores downtown, did they advertise with you?

No, I wouldn't say so.

So how, at the beginning, did you get that first financial support?

Well, from our own pockets and my parents were willing to help us. They believed in us.

You were sole owners, you and your husband because your other partners left?

Yes, they couldn't see a future at all.

Did you talk to them, let's say ten years after that? What did they say then?

No, we didn't.

Give me the names of your children.

My first child, my daughter, is Marilyn. My second was a son, Robert.

Are they still here in Las Vegas?

Yes they are.

What kind of work do they do?

Well of course my daughter is involved with a fabulous, wonderful, beautiful successful ranch over in Sandy Valley. She has 70 horses, 7 wranglers, they are serving meals now and people are so interested. Big corporations and big hotels have their annual meetings held there now.

She has the space for it. It's not a place that you can spend the night. There are no hotels. She

has access to BLM land for the running of the horses. They go up to the mountains and camp overnight, it's all taken care of by the wranglers. Children are just really fascinated. They have small animals that they can pet and talk to and watch. It's amazing that a woman is running this thing, but she loves it. She has these wranglers that know what they are doing and the cook, Big Tony, knows what's he's doing. It's just a delightful place to visit.

Do you go out there often?

I go out about every Friday and spent the night. I have a trailer out there and my daughter has a trailer.

If you go out there for a day, she has a location where you eat, and a conference center?

Yes.

How far from Las Vegas?

It takes about 30 or 35 minutes down the highway.

This is going toward Los Angeles, before I get to Primm, before the state line?

She is in California. The ranch is in California.

So the school children go out to ride the horses?

They can, oh yes.

And what does your son do?

He's in all kinds of ventures, real estate, owns a lot of property.

Tell me about your occupation, your avocation.

(shared chuckle)

Well I don't have one now, I just love my home and it's just the right size for me.

Tell me about the artwork.

Oh, well I was in Applied Arts at the University of Cincinnati and then it just got too costly. I couldn't afford to continue my degree but I found a group here, Lucille Bruner was one of the founding

(end of tape 1, side 1)

You were telling me about your artwork.

Oh yes, in Cincinnati. I was always interested in art, especially watercolor. I met Lucille Bruner through Mesquite Club and a group of other women that then founded Nevada Watercolor Society. I taught out of the community college [Community College of Southern Nevada]. This was before they had much of a campus. I taught in a closed up business building. They all came there. That was fun.

How long did you teach?

Several years.

I have walked around your house. I know how beautiful your paintings are. Did you ever have showings of your work? Did you ever sell your work?

Oh yes.

Tell me why you stopped.

Because I had to live alone and take care of the place. I don't know.

When will you start again?

I don't know that I ever will, but I have the most wonderful watercolor paper ever manufactured in stacks, all the brushes and the colors. One of these days when I get the urge, maybe.

We are about 1944, your husband is president of the Chamber of Commerce, you are active in the Mesquite Club, you are also doing watercolors at this time, how do you divide your day?

You have children, you have a husband, a radio show....

No.

So you stopped your radio show, you are teaching at the Community College, how do you divide your day and find time for everything?

Very simple, just have a schedule all written out and follow it.

Tell me what you heard about Block 16.

Well it wasn't pleasant. That was a big point in Las Vegas yes, but we had nothing to do with it.

I don't know whether that sort of thing should be approved or not. I'm not the judge.

Being the members of the kinds of organizations that you and your husband were a part of, did you ever try to do anything about Block 16?

No.

Did you ever hear of a Block 17?

No.

I did some reading about the number of weddings that took place. This town was so young and so alive and so vibrant, there were a lot of weddings. Can you tell me what a wedding was like at that point?

They had a number of wedding chapels, right on the Strip. You could get married quickly or have a very luxurious wedding. You could come here and get a license and get married and then leave very quickly.

Did you ever meet any of the stars that came here to get married quickly?

Walking Box Ranch, Clara Bo and Rex Bell, yes I knew them well. Walking Box Ranch wasn't too far from here and I could ride my horse, take a friend and her horse with me. We'd ride out to the Walking Box Ranch. The head man out there, the foreman of the Walking Box Ranch, his name was Percy Odett. He taught me how to rope. I just loved that.

Tell me what they did at the Walking Box Ranch.

That was her getaway. Rex Bell also. They raised horses.

Did the public go there for any reason?

Yes they did have times when they opened it up. She was a favorite movie star of mine. As far as the movies go, these westerns, I was really intrigued because my grandmother owned a movie theater in downtown Cincinnati. It cost 10 cents to go in and view the movie. In front of the theater up by the stage and the screen, the whole front of it was an organ. The organist would sit there and play while she was watching the movie, play the music that was good for that particular scene. That was just wonderful.

It sounds like the women in your family were really hard workers, but not just that, you were creative, innovative and good business women.

Yes, yes definitely.

Tell me more about the women in your family.

That grandmother was into everything. She was willing. Close to Cincinnati is Kentucky where they have race horses. She would always go to the races and watch the horses run. I suppose she bet on them. We never discussed that.

Did she dress up for the Kentucky Derby?

Oh yes.

Did you ever go with her to that?

No, I was too young. My other grandmother, they owned an estate. We had, my parents, had a lot right next to them so I grew up next to my grandmother, my aunt and my uncle. That was just wonderful. I can remember her out pulling weeds. That's what I do here when I'm out for a walk. I walk down these secret paths here in Spanish Oaks and see the dandelion going to seed

and I can't stand that, so I pick them right up and I carry a little bag I can stuff them in. I can remember her bending down in her skirt that reached the ground and she would always pull weeds, so I knew that was alright for me to do. (chuckle)

I want to ask you about some of the activities from the early 40's. Do you remember the beginning of BMI [Basic Magnesium Incorporated]?

Yes.

Can you tell me a little bit about any of the politics you remember about the building of that factory or about the hiring of the workers?

No, not about that, but it was something that we needed here desperately. That was another establishment that said you cannot leave Las Vegas and join the Army. These buildings and Hoover Dam were so important. For 24 hours a day we had to listen to a certain signal on the air and on that certain signal we had to douse our transmitter so the enemy couldn't fly in on our signal and bomb these places. The Aerial Gunnery School, very important. The Hoover Dam, very important. Basic Magnesium, very important.

Can you explain, once more to a layperson who doesn't understand the language, again about the signal and how you had to react?

Yes we had to listen to a certain station 24 hours a day.

Was this everybody in Las Vegas or certain designated people?

Oh no, we did, the owners of the radio station. On a certain signal, douse our transmitter, cut it off so that the enemy couldn't fly in. If they had come over here and bombed the West Coast after they bombed Pearl Harbor, they would have come in on our signal and bombed all of those places.

Can you tell me some of the activities that took place here in Las Vegas as a result of the war?

No.

You don't remember engaging in any war bond drives? Do you remember any movie stars coming here trying to.....

We did the advertising of that, the knowledge for the local people from the radio station, oh yes. Every evening at 6 o'clock we'd have the news so the entire community would listen.

Did most people own a radio?

Yes, it was just amazing. Sears and JC Penney sold so many radios.

The war was really a major impact on you and your family?

Oh yes.

How many hours a day is your husband putting in at the radio station?

We had a very good head for all of the activity. We were very grateful for that. His name was Ralph Dow. The people that we had on our staff were very good.

About how many people did you have to employ at that time?

I can't remember, just a handful.

Did you ever drive out or go out to Basic to see Basic Magnesium?

Yes and we had groups like the Mesquite Club that would have trips like that for their members.

Did you ever see an area called Carver Park?

No.

In 1947 the Flamingo was completed. What were people in the town at that time saying about Bugsy Siegel, what he was doing, his death, the Flamingo? What was the talk in town?

Well this was just a part of the betting in town so we didn't know very much about it. Bugsy appreciated the radio station because when we moved to the hotel El Rancho Vegas, he sent over a beautiful tree for the lobby. Bugsy was an alright guy I guess, but in the wrong business.

What was the difference moving to the El Rancho Vegas?

That was tremendous, just wonderful. We were really amazed, when he came to town and had a flat tire at 5th and Main and he watched the traffic go by and he said, "By golly, I've got to have a hotel here." That's when he started building El Rancho Vegas. He came to us right away. He asked if he moved our tower and all of your equipment would we move to his new hotel. We said yes! There we were, right on the Strip. We a lovely green lawn view from our offices right down to the strip. People would stop by and ask if we would mind if they would have their picnic lunch in front of the tree on the lawn. So, of course we wanted them.

This presence, this mob presence that you don't like to talk about, how did the community, those of you who were business people, how did you feel about that presence coming into this town?

Well if that's what they wanted to and they would be a success that would be helpful to all of us of course.

What about the military presence? Tell me a little about the Gunnery School, Nellis and all of the soldiers here. What kind of change did that mean for you and your family and your neighbors?

No, no difference. We just encouraged it. They were a good influence.

Did you see military men everywhere?

Yes. They would take us on tour so we would know what was going on up there. Of course this was through the Chamber of Commerce always.

What kinds of things would you see on the tours?

I can't describe it now, maybe something like you'd see today.

At the end of WWII everything sort of goes back to normal. For you, it probably means less being alert all the time. So a period we call the Cold War starts. Atomic bombs are being tested now not too far from Las Vegas.

We were always on the scene. Always invited to be there.

Did you ever see one of those tests?

Yes.

Can you tell me how close you were?

No.

Describe it for me.

We'd go out early in the morning and just watch the sky, or you could go out your front door or your back door.

What did it look like?

It was an explosion, that's all I can say. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

How did they inform the Las Vegas community? Did they let you know in advance?

Definitely by radio, KENO.

Tell me about the call letters K-E-N-O. Can you tell me the story about getting those call letters?

West of the Mississippi, it had to have four letters and it had to start with a K. We thought we wanted keno, K-E-N-O, because it's a word and it's a business here in Las Vegas. But the illustrious federal communications commission we thought would grant a gambling game name to a radio station. We said, K-L-V-N, Las Vegas, Nevada and our second choice was K-E-N-O. We waited months. Early one morning Washington called, Washington, D.C. and they said they were sorry but they had given our first choice to a ship at sea. We'll give you your second

choice. We just leaped up and down. I looked over at the horse's water barrel and on the rim of the barrel was a mountain blue bird, the blue bird of happiness. Oh that's what happened, that's what we wanted!

Did you ever know anyone who worked at the test site?

Oh yes, because they were interested in Las Vegas, the radio and other organizations that we belonged to, like the library. I was secretary of the Citizen's Library Association and we decided we wanted to build a downtown library. I sent letters to all of the organizations and all of the people that I knew. The money kept flowing in. I answered everybody that sent a contribution. As secretary, I had to write a letter of thanks. On the bottom of the stationary, I wanted a logo. I wanted something on the bottom of the stationary. I kept thinking about what I should put there. Lloyd Douglas was a friend of ours, the author who wrote *The World*, yes a very dear friend, his son-in-law was a partner of ours in various businesses, I asked Lloyd to suggest something. Lloyd called the next day and said, "How about this: A well equipped public library is every man's university". I thought that was great. That was on the bottom of all of the thank you notes that I sent to people.

So the test site was one of the organizations that helped support the library?

Oh I wouldn't say that, no.

If you were doing the kind of history we were doing, who are some of the other people that you know here that you would want us to interview?

I would have to give that some thought. A lot of the people have already left, they died.

When we talk about those atomic bombs that were tested here, how do you see that as influencing or impacting the city?

I think it should have happened and I think that we realize that we had the one spot in the United States that could handle this sort of thing. We were behind it certainly.

When there was going to be an atomic test, did they close the schools? How did they handle school children?

They kept them indoors. They were usually very early in the morning.

In 1955, the Moulin Rouge opened. This was the first casino/nightclub where African-Americans could actually go into and participate in the fun and gambling and see the shows.

Was there any special talk about the Moulin Rouge at that time?

Oh yes of course there was.

Do you remember any of the stories you heard?

No, but we were all for it, 100%. It was a beautiful place. We were there for the opening.

Tell me about opening night.

It was really exciting. It was a beautiful place. The location was good, near where we lived. We were certainly for it and the people running it were very nice.

Even in 1955 you and your husband continued to live at the same place you lived when you first arrived?

Oh no. We quickly moved into a home down there where we rented, then we brought property out off of Bonanza Rd.

Was that the first piece you purchased?

Yes.

How long did you live in that house?

Quite awhile.

So in 1955 when the Moulin Rouge opened you were still living there?

Yes.

During WWII a lot of African-Americans came to Las Vegas. They worked at BMI, the women worked as maids in the casinos, and they lived in tents over there. How far were you from that area?

We were far enough away. (chuckle)

Do you remember seeing that community?

No.

There were a lot of businesses in the 50's that were started on the Strip and some of them had to sell to somebody else, so the Moulin Rouge wasn't the only one that went out of business right away. There were others. That was kind of a down cycle for Las Vegas. How was that for the business community? Do you remember having any financial setbacks at that time?

No, we were always for that. I worked in the prospectors, I was secretary of the prospectors organization, which is part of the Chamber of Commerce.

What did the prospectors do?

They were a part of the Chamber of Commerce to develop knowledge throughout the country about Las Vegas and to draw people into Las Vegas. They were very successful at it.

How long did you work there?

Quite a while, I really enjoyed it. We'd go out to the Air Force, to Hoover Dam and on tours so that we knew all about these things, exactly what they were doing.

What did you and your family do for a weekend?

We would go to the mountains, up to Mt. Charleston! Before we even had the radio station started, we'd take all of our plans and go up to Mt. Charleston and spread out all of our papers on the tables and make decisions about things. Mt. Charleston was wonderful.

At the beginning, how did you get up there?

We drove up.

In addition to having the horse, you had a car?

Oh my goodness yes. We had to go down to Los Angeles every single weekend to pick up more material to build the station.

How long did it take to drive to Los Angeles?

I don't remember, but it was beautiful. I never objected. Only we had to have an air conditioner that had to have a roll of material around it that you clamped in the window. It had a string to it. You'd put water in the thing that was holding this thing to the window. You'd pull the string and it would turn this roller down there so it'd get wet. As you drove along you took in air that went through that and made the car cool.

How did you pour the water in?

Say a jug.

Did you have to stop to pour more water?

Sure after the water was used.

Who would pull the string?

The passenger.

Did you learn to drive?

Oh yes, I've been driving since age 16. I never had an accident until I was involved in this one and the judges said to take her license away.

We've been through the 40's and some of the 50's now we are getting ready to enter the 60's.

The 60's are a time in this country where we have a lot of civil rights activities, we have another war, not a popular war. First tell me, you worked with Bob Bailey so you have a

picture of race relations in this city, can you tell me about different ethnic groups in the city?

Did you deal with only African-Americans or were there other ethnic groups you had dealings with?

I wasn't even aware of anything like that because I never had any antipathy to these various races or endeavors. I came from Cincinnati where as far as the colored people, they would wait until the Ohio River froze over and then they'd escape from Kentucky and come over to Cincinnati, Oh where they would be allowed to live. They were in school with me. One of my dearest school friends was a colored boy.

(end of tape 1, side 2)

You were telling me about a classmate.

This was in elementary school. He was a big strong member of my class and he was in all the sports. Very, very nice, we were good friends.

His name was Julius?

Julius Star.

When there were problems here in Las Vegas you didn't consider them any problems because you never had any racial problems?

Right.

How did you feel when you learned that the Strip was not integrated? Did you ever discuss that with your friends?

No, not really, but we didn't think that was right.

Were there ever any African-American women who became part of the Mesquite Club back in the 50's?

No.

At that time the NAACP was integrated. People like Greenspun were lifetime members of the NAACP. Did you know any white people who became members of the NAACP?

I don't remember.

When Howard Hughes came here and started buying property, did he become part of the business community in any way?

(chuckle) No, he wasn't a person's person. He didn't like people. He just kept to himself, and what a shame. I met him because I knew his alter ego very well. But Howard Hughes did a good job, wonderful for Las Vegas.

How did the business community relate to Howard Hughes?

They thought he was great because he was getting us out of conditions that we found we couldn't get out of. He was great for the community.

When you say conditions that you couldn't get out of, what did you mean?

The city, the buildings they couldn't finish. He came in and took over.

When you look back over the years and you look at the businesses in Las Vegas and how those businesses have changed, did the corporate structure change the way the business people, the residents feel about the city? When Howard Hughes came in and brought corporations in.....

Yes, we were grateful to him, but he was a man unto himself, and you couldn't really get to know him. That was due, in my opinion, entirely to his mother. She was so afraid that maybe he'd eat something or touch something that would cause him to be ill. It was unfortunate.

When you first moved here, did you see Las Vegas as a small town?

(chuckle) Oh, I'd never lived in a small town in my life.

Was there a certain feeling that you get, that you had at that time, like a small town feeling?

Yes that you just know everybody and everybody is your friend.

When did that disappear?

I don't know that it entirely did, but with these big corporations, it came in. Yes, but I have that feeling back again now that I'm the first woman member of the Rotary Club in Las Vegas.

Tell me about that.

Well I don't know how that happened. My husband had been president and I knew all about Rotary and then he passed away. Then they were considering inviting women to join. They called me and I said, "Yes!" I haven't missed a meeting except one year when I had a heart attack and I was in the hospital. I go to every meeting, every Thursday. I love it.

You told me about your work with the Mesquite Club and the library, what kind of activities do you engage in at the Rotary Club?

All of them, well I don't golf anymore.

What are some of the projects that the Rotary Club engages in? What are some of the good things you have done for the community over the years?

I can't remember them at the moment.

When you look at this city, who do you identify as the builders of the city? Where is the power? Is it the government, the business people, who do you see doing the good things in Las Vegas, building a nice city?

The people of course, and Rotary. That's worldwide. They do things for the world or they do things for their own club. They have taken women in now and that has enlarged their whole thinking. It's wonderful. I love to go there and sit around the big round table with 8 or 10 men and maybe another woman or two and I just listen to them talk about the businesses and I feel that I'm part of the community that way.

Where do you hold your meetings?

We hold them now at Lawry's.

How do you get around without a car?

One of the young men, the grandson of the man who used to be superintendent of schools, he picks me up for Rotary every Thursday. When he can't, he sends his driver.

This is interesting that you are so vibrant and so healthy and so alive and yet they won't allow you to drive a car. How do you get around to do all of your other activities?

My son or my daughter, my friends or neighbors, a lot of people help me, but I have lost my independence. It is a terrible feeling. A taxi cab is not meant for people like me. It's just for tourists. You have to wait way past the time they said they'd be there.

Tell me about being a golfer, about being a woman golfer in Las Vegas. Were there a lot of women who golfed?

No, there weren't, but there are now and I think it's great. I used to go out at least three times a week, maybe just 9 holes. The community course is very nice.

Did you and your husband belong to a club?

No, he couldn't take the time off from work.

Did he ever retire?

Yes, oh yes.

As a retired person, did the two of you travel?

Yes.

Tell me about some of the trips that the two of you used to take.

We finally had our own boat and we'd take that boat down to the San Diego Yacht Club every summer. From there we'd go to Catalina Island. We spent the entire summer living on the boat at Catalina Island, with the children aboard. I remember I had to have drapes because we were

sleeping aboard. I had a little hand sewing machine and I had my son crank it and I made the drapes right on the boat. Then we finally got into flying. We had our own airplane, but I was always afraid of motion. I would get very sick on a streetcar in Cincinnati, just the movement of the streetcar. My dad would have to stand in the back and open the window and drape me out.

Did you fly the plane?

Yes! When he decided he wanted to get a plane, we bought a plane and crossed the country five times one summer. We went all the way up to Canada, down Maine to Florida, up the West Coast and across the country also. I took a pinch hitter course which teaches people how to fly. I learned all about the equipment. I no longer got sick because I knew what to do. We'd fly back and forth from San Diego where we then joined the yacht club down there. We got a really big sailboat. We had it about a year before my husband died. I sold it for what we paid for it. All those experiences, you should never say no to anything that you're afraid of or that you don't know about. Find out about it and do it, yes.

What do you see as the future of Las Vegas?

Oh, it's just going to bloom as it's doing now, which is good. Bringing in people, gambling.

What do you see from 1939 to the year 2000 as the major change, or the major changes in this city?

Well it would be the cultural things like the library and the arts and of course the university and the community college. Back in Cincinnati, we taught industrial subjects at certain high schools, so we had that here too. I was certainly behind that.

You are on the advisory board of the Community College. How did that happen, how long ago?

This is practically from the time the first president took over. I can't recall that date. It was practically the beginning. I am so for that, for young children. They don't have to learn all about English and about philosophical stuff, they need to face up to the facts of the world. That's what community colleges all over the country do.

As an advisor, what are your duties?

We have a meeting every month. We hear all about what has been going on and any new ideas and have input for that.

Are you in favor of the new college they are talking about building in Henderson?

NO!

(big shared laugh)

Why?

Because we have our colleges here and the cost is something enormous. If they can get going maybe in years to come, but I can't see now why they would do that. You need the money to keep these others going.

Do you know Dr. Harter?

Yes, I've met her. I don't know her well.

A woman president?

It's wonderful, yes.

How do you think Las Vegas is viewed by the country?

It's viewed as a place to come and have fun.

Do you like the way they see Las Vegas?

Yes, I think that's great. Agriculturally or manufacturing wise, we don't and so this is our main item.

This is what your husband started promoting back in the early 1940's.

Yes, a little town of 8,400 people.

From your house over in the Bonanza area, did you move here or did you move someplace else in between?

Yes, I moved to Rancho Circle, off of Rancho Rd. It's a private development. We had three corrals, a barn, a hay room, an Olympic sized swimming pool and forty fruit and nut trees in the orchard. All the children from the area came there to swim. That was wonderful. I was a Girl Scout leader.

Is that where your daughter fell in love with horses?

Yes. We always had horses there.

I thank you so much for this interview.

Well I thank you because you are recalling these things. It's wonderful.

(end of interview)