

An Interview with Eleanor Walker

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Preface

Eleanor Walker served as President of the Las Vegas Chapter of the NAACP from 1971 to 1975. She has held several jobs throughout her lifetime, including ones at Pan American Airways, AT&T, and Caesars Palace. She was among the first black individuals to hold a position in many of the companies for which she worked, paving the way for future generations. Some of her most noteworthy work was with Operation Independence and the NAACP, as she played a role in many positive changes made for Westside Las Vegas and the African American community.

Though Walker was born in Arkansas, she has lived in Las Vegas since she was three weeks old. She graduated from Rancho High School in 1961, among eleven other black students in a class of 457 graduating seniors. Throughout her high school career, she was an active participant in programs such as the Sun Youth Forum and Junior Achievement of Southern Nevada. Walker spent her first year of college at the University of Colorado in Boulder, but she eventually graduated from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Throughout her lifetime, Walker has always referred to herself as a pioneer. She has opened many doors for the black community in Las Vegas and believes strongly in community involvement. Though she is no longer able to be as active as she was in her past, her positive impact on the city of Las Vegas will be seen for many years to come.

This is Claytee White. It is June 3rd, 2004. I'm with Eleanor Walker in her home in Las Vegas. How are you today?

I'm fine. Thank you. How are you?

Good. So I'm here just to talk about some early memories of Las Vegas. But first, tell me where you grew up.

I grew up in Las Vegas. This is home to me. But there is a little bit of a fluke concerning my birth town. My parents were married in Mississippi from Piney Woods Boarding School. They met there, and they moved out West. But my dad was in the military when I was born. So my mother came here. She hated it because she thought it was a very sinful city. So just before I was born, she went to Arkansas to be with her relatives. Three weeks after I was born, she came back home, which is Las Vegas. So I never even knew anything about Arkansas until I visited when I was 11 during the summer for two months. Then when she had my brother almost three years later, she did the same thing. So we're just kind of misfits. People expected us to know something about Arkansas, but we never did because she went to give birth when she was able to travel. And then with each child after that, I remember her crying, although I was too young to realize, the next two, that she was having a baby. She just didn't want to have a baby here. But by then, my dad was out of the military. So she had no excuse to go back to be with her relatives.

Now, where in Arkansas was she from?

She wasn't from Arkansas. She was actually from Louisiana. Her mother died young. Her aunts and uncles migrated to Arkansas, Chicot County, which is close to a town called Lake Village. Then she went to boarding school, she and my aunt, when they were little girls. My dad went there to boarding school, but he was from Forrest, Mississippi. So that's where they met, fell in love, and got married. When they moved here, actually they moved here because they just assumed -- my mother was white and they didn't allow my parents to ride the bus together or anything like that. So they felt in danger there once they left Piney Woods. So they moved. Then in later years, when they died, I sent my brothers there to go to school because my parents died when my brothers were like 12, 13, 14, and my sister 15. So they went, and one of them finished there, which is a great school.

So the only place I had ever known until I went away -- well, I went on trips in high school, and I'll tell you about those. But we went there in the summer when I was 11. We were all excited because we thought we were going to get to pick cotton, not realizing how hard it was. My cousins would have given their lives to trade with us. But every morning, my aunt tricked us, and we never got to go. Actually, they weren't picking cotton. They were doing something like hoeing cotton. We had told all the kids in Las Vegas who had never seen cotton, except those who migrated here. They said, oh, you're lying, you're not going to pick cotton. But all I got to do was come back with a whole bunch of mosquito bites. They were all over us. I started to school with my legs wrapped up from my toe to past my knees with sores. But anyway, it was quite an experience, and I never went back again until I was an adult and had children. I wanted them to meet my mother's older uncles and aunts. So that was a real experience for them.

Give me your mother and father's name and your brothers' and sisters'.

Okay. My father's name is Elgin Holbert, which the first two of us were named by Mother, and she named us after my -- Eleanor Elaine Holbert. My next brother is Elgin Holbert, Jr. My mother's name was Mary Stewart, which is S-t-e-w-a-r-t. So she had four brothers and sisters. My dad had one sister, who had moved here prior to my dad. My mother, two of her brothers moved -- well, and her sister moved here in later years.

As far as the siblings are, I'm the oldest. They would all tell you I'm the bossiest. And I still, even though I don't feel like I'm bossy, at least three of them think she's trying to tell us what to do. So Elgin Holbert, Jr., was my oldest brother, who was very quiet and easygoing. So my mom loved us all equally well, but he was her pet because he was so nice. I was always too opinionated and talked back. My sister Yolanda Linette Holbert was nicknamed by our daddy's mother Tita gal. That Tita has stuck with her all her life. When she went to kindergarten, she wouldn't answer to Yolanda, and they kept looking to see why she wasn't at school. She says that's not my name. It's Tita. So then the next one is Gerald Holbert, Gerald Jerome Holbert. He is the artist in the family and a unique personality. Then there's Charles Holbert, Charles Emmitt Holbert. He was named after my mom's uncle and my mom's brother. He's the one who actually graduated from Piney Woods. Then the

baby is Wesley Pearl Holbert, who was named after my daddy's mother -- they called her Wesley -- and his father, who was named Pearl Holbert. So that's how the six of us got our names.

Then we have my mother's sister's daughter, who is actually our first cousin, but we call her our sister because she was with us from about six weeks old until my aunt came here when she was like three or four. Most of the time, she spent the time with us. When my parents died, some of them stayed with Aunt Carrie because, like I said, they were so young when my parents died.

How did your parents die?

Well, my dad died first of emphysema. He died at the age of 46 on August the 4th of 1965. My mother died of cancer and rheumatoid arthritis at the age of 43 in December of 1965. So they died within months of each other. Prior to that, my dad had gotten a spot on his lungs in World War II over in Europe. So it turned into something like tuberculosis. So he spent the entire four years of my high school days in the hospital, in the VA Hospital in California, so it was real difficult. I never went to see him because I was always working or something. But my mother and the kids went a couple of times. During that time, my mother was sick for an entire year with cancer. She was very, very strong in her faith. She always said for a long time she thought she had cancer, but they never found it. Then one day she just passed out at work. They took her to the hospital. She just prayed and said, Lord, I can't leave my kids now because there is no one to take care of them. She was blessed to live after my dad got out of the hospital and he got home. He went to the hospital just after I started high school, and he got out just in time to go to my graduation. That was a really proud moment for them. Because when I grew up, many of the girls were dropping out of school in the seventh and eighth grades and they were having babies. Some of them were getting married. In my graduation class at Rancho High, there were 457 students. There were only 12 black students. I was in the top 5 percent -- 10 percent. I had a lot of honors from going to school.

Which year?

I graduated in 1961 at 17. During high school, it was a time where I was supposed to

go to Las Vegas High. I lived right across the street. Then they had given me a scholarship to go to Gorman. But then Rancho was new. They had like one or two years before me. My mom said it was the boys, but I was still pretty shy about boys. But when I went to Rancho, I was in my introduction and all that, and I decided I don't want to go here. Then it was going to be like I had to go to Las Vegas High. But at that time my relatives and friends were mostly going there, many of them, but I didn't want to go. They were having a lot of race problems at Las Vegas High. So Harvey Dondero was the superintendent in the time. That's Thalia Dondero's husband. So I just marched myself up there, and I told him, I do not want to go to Las Vegas High, even though I was supposed to. He says, well, Eleanor, you live in the zone. I said, You have never had problems with me at school, and I have always represented the school well. But if you don't let me go to Rancho, I'm going to act bad from the first day, and I know you don't want me to act bad. So he said, okay, Eleanor, I'm going to let you go to Rancho. I think I was the only one who had special permission to attend Rancho with all of the perks involved.

How did you get the courage, whatever it takes, to go up to an adult and say something like that when you were -- what -- 17, 16?

No. I was 13. Actually, I was 12 when that -- because high school started in September, and my birthday was the 19th. So I was two weeks from 13 at that time. Well, I always kind of thought I was grown anyway, not that it was anything that my parents had for me to do. But often times or sometimes when my mother was at work and my dad hadn't gotten home from work or something, I baby-sat my sisters and brothers from a very young age. I took care of them. I can remember a couple of times going to school like 15 minutes before it closed because it was always drilled in my head that education was the most important thing a person could have. My teachers gave me no problem because they knew that I wanted to be there. I would help other students in school.

So when I went there to Mr. Dondero's office, it was something that I felt like I wanted and it was going to be good for me. I always got in trouble about my mouth at home. But my mother would support us in anything she felt that we were right or had a good rationale. She was very quiet. She talked a lot to people, but she didn't do things unless

somebody did something to us. And then she could be quite defensive of us.

So you learned that kind of behavior just by watching her take care of herself and take care of the children?

Right, right. I guess so. And my daddy would help me with my schoolwork. And my mother said we could do anything we set out to do if we were willing to do the things it took and make the sacrifices. So I just was never intimidated.

I had a history of going and doing stuff because when I was about -- I couldn't have been any more than five years old, they were giving away Christmas trees at the -- it was not the Jefferson Center. It was like the USO [the Jefferson Center was the USO during WWII], which later turned -- so they were giving away Christmas trees. I remember we had three rooms at that time. We were living in a yard known as the Mexican yard. It was a beautiful yard, which is vacant now, between Jackson and Monroe and F and G. And there were lots of grapes and peaches and plums and fig trees. It was really nice. So we rented from them, and it was mostly Mexicans living there. One of the young ladies, Mary Ruth, works for the school district right now if she hasn't retired.

So we lived there, and I walked up to the center to get Christmas trees. When I got there, I had no clue as to how I was going to get them home. But I told them I needed three trees because we had three rooms. As a result, two of the ladies wanted to be our godmothers. One lady picked me, and one picked my sister. Auntie Mae Calhoun was my sister's. She's alive. Vera Horton was mine, and she died a couple years ago. So they just thought it was funny, I guess, and they took me home with a nice, big Christmas tree.

At that time we would do the trees on Christmas Eve. It became a tradition. But really what it was, we couldn't afford to buy a tree before they got so -- and my mother had so much faith because my dad was here working, and he worked construction and whatever else. But at that time there were six kids -- no -- maybe there were five at the time. I think my brother was born later. But the last three are only a year and a half, a year apart, three little boys. Anyway, then we would make that paste that children eat. We would take that and cut out the things and make the chains out of them, and we would string popcorn. Those were just some really, really great days because all of us know now that we were poor, but

we never ever thought of being poor as a result of what I know now as ingenuity. I kind of like hustled all the parties and stuff. Because when they would have the old hotels, the mobsters who were over it, and they would have these big parties at Christmas and sometimes at Easter. I always managed to get tickets for us to go.

My mother would be home with the babies, so I had a lot of freedom because I was catching the bus, going all over town at least by seven. She just told me what number to watch for. Sometimes I'd go to my dad's job on the construction site and pick up his check. I would go to Safeway on the bus and buy the groceries. She would always tell me if there's money left, such-and-such, I could buy ice milk, because they had the best ice milk you ever tasted, and sometimes the gingersnaps or the vanilla wafers. I always managed. That taught me how to manage my own money because I knew I had to buy wisely to have something left. Then after I got the groceries, they would put me in the cab, and I would come home. You know, they had every reason to think I was grown anyway. Sometimes I was reminded that I wasn't because I would end up getting a whipping for doing something that I thought it was okay to do.

But anyway, when they would have these parties -- and they had a picture that my grandmother had. I don't know what happened to it. But the Review-Journal used to be on the corner of Main Street and where Washington is. That was their original office. They had a glass door there. They had said come line up for tickets for the Desert Inn. I was the first one in line, and they caught me peeping through the door with my hands trying to peep in. I got tickets for us to the Desert Inn, and that was great. Because when you got there, you had the show, the Santa Claus, and some of those bands. They were house bands. Like Spike Jones, he would put on a great show. We would have this wonderful dinner with this service. To me the food was delicious.

The whole family would go?

No. It would just be the kids. The party was for the kids. But when I'd go there, they would give us a dollar, which was like being rich.

Silver dollars?

Usually a paper dollar. We would have that. And then we'd have a basket of candy

and fruit to take home, which was enough to have at home for the family. So then we'd get a really nice toy gift. So when I would get in line -- and I was really kind of smaller than some of the kids -- then I would let them know I had -- my brother was big enough to go with me most of the time and then finally my sister. But whoever was at home, I would always tell them, I have this one this age and this one this age, and I would really like something for them. They would always say, okay, wait a minute, and they'd give me a gift for everyone. My mom said never take more for yourself than you have coming. So I didn't. It was really nice.

Then we would go to the Flamingo. They'd have a party, and they'd put on a big show for the kids. They gave desserts mostly, and you'd get a gift there. So I would get a gift there.

Then Easter time, the old Frontier, they had the Silver Slipper there. They would have a really nice Easter party. I don't know if anyone's told you, but they had like an amusement park. They had a merry-go-round and the bumper cars.

This was the Silver Slipper?

Yes. And the Ferris wheel. So on that day, they would open it up, and we could ride everything for free. They would give us these nice big cookies and Dixie cups and punch. So I would go and take my brothers and sisters out there. That went on for a few years, also.

Then one year I decided, which I just think that I've been forgiven in recent years, but I decided we don't need to spend Momma's money. We need to save it. My mother felt so bad because both of them, my dad and mom, did not want me to take on the responsibilities that I had assumed anyway. At that time it was much worse than it is now in the heat because there were no trees and all these buildings in between. So we went out there one day, and I decided to save the money and we could just walk home. I think my sister has forgiven me. Because for a while everybody that she met, she told about us having to walk home. Well, it had been drilled in me, and I had gotten a whipping for taking a ride with someone. So I wasn't about to ride. All these families were picking up their kids. We didn't have a car at the time and my daddy was at work. So I told them we're going to walk home and give these dimes back to Momma because it only cost a dime to ride the bus. As we were walking

down the streets, people would offer us a ride. I had told them to say, No thank you, our feet have just begun to enjoy the walk. I think if they knew some curse words, they would have cursed me out. But anyway, we walked home. My mom was just so hurt. I think she cried. She said, Eleanor, why did you walk home? Why didn't you spend that money?

Where were you living?

On the Westside. We were living at that time on Madison and H. The house is still there.

And you walked from which of the hotels?

The Silver Slipper.

So that's at the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and -- what was that?

Going from here, just past St. Louis, on the other side -- well, no it's closer -- it's about half past -- it's closer to Spring Mountain Road. So that's where we walked from.

Oh, and we had popcorn out there, and we got to play all the games inside and everything. My favorite was this Nickelodeon machine. You could play it, and the piano would play. It was very exciting. So those were nice things. Doing that kind of stuff, we got to get things that some other kids wouldn't get out and find out what was going on. Plus, I sold a lot of bottles. I sold copper wire. I sold rags, anything that I could hustle up. My cousins, they were my dad's cousins, when we wanted to go to the movies, whatever I got, they matched it so my brothers and I sisters and I could go to the movies. My mom never -- and my dad either -- they wanted you to work, but they never wanted me to do that, to get out there. But it was in my nature. At that time milk bottles were a nickel apiece, so they were real good. So we would go to the movies. There was a place called Skaggs Payless, which was a drugstore right across the street from Fremont Theater. I would go in there before because the candy was like two for a nickel, three for a dime, four cents. So we would go in there and buy whatever candy and stuff we wanted, so we wouldn't have to pay the higher prices in the movie. So it worked out very well there, also.

Then during Helledorado, my mom would give us money. First, we went to the parade every day. My mom would let us walk up there because it was very common then for kids to walk from the Westside to Fremont, but not from the Strip. But the bad part about it,

you had to walk through the tunnel, which was very bad.

Where the railroad is now?

Yes.

So under the railroad tracks?

Right. But most of the time, we would walk across the tracks. They had put a fence up there, but usually someone put a hole in it. We were always told to be extremely careful and don't walk through there alone because sometimes vagrants would hang out in there. So that was all a little scary. So when you had to walk through there, you ran to hurry up and get out of there. But on the way there, right at the corner of F Street and Bonanza, there was Snowflake Bakery. And the only doughnuts that come close to those doughnuts are Krispy Kreme glaze. But they would be really big. The ladies would be so nice because we could go to the back door and get them right out of the oven. I know that sometimes they would just let me do it because I'd say, okay, I'm sharing these with my brothers and sisters. So they said, well, this one isn't so big, you can have two of those for a nickel. They would be hot, and they would be delicious. So that was always a treat, too.

Like I said, we could get to go to Helldorado at least on Children's Day when the prices were a little bit cheaper.

The doughnuts, was that a black-owned business?

No. It was white. I can see the ladies now. Well, anyway, the ladies had on the white aprons and the white caps on their heads. I can remember them having to lean down so that I could pick the doughnuts out. All along the way, people were kind of watching kids, even though there were some mishaps. I can remember a young girl getting raped while we were in elementary school from this man watching every day.

But we would go to Helldorado. That's what I was leaving off. We had enough for one ride, and we could get one food item we liked, maybe a little bit more. Seems like we'd have about a dollar-fifty or 75 cents apiece. Then one brother would always spend his money and just have a fit because he wanted money from the other brother. But whenever we went, I always wanted to take something back to my mom. So I would throw dimes, and I would always get a little dish or something. My son kind of came up the same way.

Whenever he went, he'd come back with this little stuff wrapped in a napkin, and I couldn't fuss because that's what I did, too. My mother would say, Why didn't you spend all your money on yourself? But I had enough. So that Children's Day was really good because going to those parades were just absolutely wonderful.

During that time, it would be so hot. They still sold things that at that time were expensive. My dad, by then, was working at the train station. But we would go further down Fremont Street, farther down the road, so we could see where they did the tricks in front of the judges. I can remember one day with my brothers and sister going by one of the places because it was so hot. I went in to ask for a cup of water, and they were so rude to me and said, no, we can't serve you here. I said but I'll pay you for the water. I had a nickel or 15 cents. No, you can't come in here. I said but they're hot. I don't need water. I just need it for my little brother and sister. I was thinking about that not long ago. I said, Do I remember any sympathetic eyes, or do I remember ones that were just bitter and cold, like get out of here? But I like to think that one set of eyes looking at me felt bad, but nobody felt bad enough to get up and give me some water. We were so hot. But we knew when we got to the train station, we could drink the water out of the faucet. That's what we did. But I can remember just almost crying, telling them I don't want it for me. They're just little kids. In actuality, I was a little kid, too, because I probably wasn't any more than eight years old at that particular time. So that was one of those experiences.

But when we got over to the train station, we got to see my dad when he was on duty when we did that because sometimes he would come to work while we were -- he would still be home when we left. There was somebody giving us potatoes chips, which I realize now were probably stale. But we were glad to get it anyway. Then we'd go home. We did what we were told to do. At that time I still was bossing them, telling them what to do and what not to do because my momma depended on us to do the right thing.

But it started out -- I call it kind of pioneering. Because when I was in third grade, I was the Spelling Bee champion of the school. I had practiced. My dad just read off all the words over and over. At home I could spell everything. Then the night that I was to go on -- and I still do this sometimes -- I had this easy word, disappear. I thought that I had

spelled it correctly, but I kept thinking I had used two Ps, but I only used one. Now, any of the harder ones, it wouldn't have happened to me because my brain would think and I could think of them. They were still proud because I was the only black kid who had ever been in it at that time. So that worked out.

I remember in one grade, they wanted to move me up to a higher grade. And the principal said, no, that I wouldn't be mature enough. But I already felt grown up. My mom, they talked them into it because they didn't really know any better. They said I needed a social life. But when I got older, most of my friends were older than I was anyway. But at the school, there were some excellent teachers that helped to --

Where did you go to elementary school?

I went to Westside Elementary. Then I went to Madison. From Madison to Rancho. Then I took my first year at University of Colorado in Boulder. Then I came home. I actually took a couple of classes at community college, but I graduated from UNLV. When I graduated from UNLV, by then, my parents were dead. I believe somehow they know that I did go back to school and did get my degree.

They do. Tell me what kind of work your mother did.

My mother was a maid. It's interesting that many places she worked wanted to give her a job if she wouldn't tell people that she was, as they say, colored. She goes, no, no, I'm not going to do that. So nobody believed that she was anyway. She would just do the maid work. One of the last places she worked was at this sporting book. They said, Mary, we're not asking you to -- just don't say -- just do the work. Nobody's going to ever believe you're anything anyway but what you seem to us. But she'd rather do the hard work than turn her back on her race. That's what happened.

Like I said, my dad was a redcap, but he worked construction work before then. He actually went from Union Pacific to the hospital, and then he wasn't able to work anymore.

What does a redcap do?

They're like the present-day porter or skycap, but they carry the bags. That's what my dad did. He was always bringing potato chips and goodies home for us. But the potato chips he cooked himself were much better than the ones that he brought from the train

station. It's interesting because one of my best --

(End side 1, tape 1.)

Janice and I became good friends actually before we started kindergarten because we lived down the street. My dad was friendly with her mom and stuff. We just thought she was rich. She had the pearl earrings and the little diamond earrings and everything and money to go to Hamburger Heaven, which was a real big deal because the hamburgers were only like between 12 cents and 17 cents. And when we got to go there, it was a real treat. But she would say, I want to come to your house because your dad makes potato chips and cheese toast sandwiches. And sometimes he would take the cheese and put tomatoes on them and put them in the oven, and she would like that. She'd go, I want some of that. And we would think, Why would anybody want to come do this when they can go to Hamburger Heaven? And the little potato peeler was what he did the potato chips with, and I think that was one of the most important cooking utensils in a kitchen. Sometimes he'd cook a big roasting pan full of them, and we loved them. So anyway, that was some of the stuff that happened.

Now, also, when I went to Westside School, Ms. French was the principal, and you probably heard of her. She really was good. I realize now how much that woman fought to try to get us equal things with other schools. But we'd get apples every year a couple of times. They would send apples over there, and we got them. I was always glad to get them. But our books, we'd spend most of the beginning of the month of the school term going through erasing and cleaning our books and finding out what pages were missing. We didn't think much of it at that time because it was just a part of going to school. Then there were some teachers who had students under them who did better overall: Mr. Moore, Henry Moore, and H.P. Fitzgerald because they would give it back to the kids or whatever and tell them they're going to beat some sense into them. But the kids who went under them overall did better in school than the ones who didn't get them. But we had a lot of things.

I remember walking to the dentist's office because we could get free dental care. Dr. Manino, down at the Health Department, did my teeth. In the third grade, he told me that bubble gum was bad for my teeth, and I have never had a piece of bubble gum since then. He

made such an impression on me about taking care of my teeth. That was funny when I think about it later.

But in the fifth grade, that was when Madison Elementary opened up. That was funny because I was supposed to go there, but I didn't. At that time one of our neighbors, who wasn't that much older than us, had gone away to college. We were so excited that those kids who lived around him in that block refused to go to Madison. We wanted to be with him. I can remember some of the kids thinking that I had failed when, in actuality, I had helped most of them with their homework. But I did get in trouble about my mouth because it was easy. And then I would help all the other kids. Because at that time they had boys in classes that were much older than us, but they had problems learning and stuff. So after I'd do that, then I'd talk to everybody. So I kept getting in trouble. Then one day I had all A's on my card, but I got an F in citizenship. So my dad gave me a spanking. So I didn't do that anymore.

They were very firm, my parents, about certain things like not taking rides. As I kid, I can remember my dad's friend was going over to their house. You know Brendon Monroe Williams?

Yes.

Well, Monroe's dad and my dad were good friends. So when I got to Hamburger Heaven -- that's when I was living in the Mexican yard -- I could see my house. But to see how young I was, I figured, well, I can see the house, so I'm safe. He said, I'm going over to your house, come on I'll give you a ride. And I said no. All the way from Westside School to where Hamburger Heaven is. Then my daddy, when he came, said I told you not to get in the car with anybody, period, no man, period. He said, Well, Elgin, I told her. He said, Well, I told her not to. Then I got a whipping. You know, now the years have gone past, I do know kids who had problems, girls and stuff. So they were very wise to make sure that we didn't get ourselves in those predicaments.

Tell me about the Mexican yard.

It was just like an orchard in the middle of the Westside. At that time quite a few people, though, had mulberry trees, grapevines, and pomegranate trees. A lot of people did

because the Westside wasn't nearly as barren as it is now. There were some places that were bad because we moved from there into a shack. But in that yard, we had the person that owned it, Irwin Torres, I think, or else his son (junior). He worked at Sears as an appliance repairman. His wife was Ruth. I was friends with their kids. They had like three kids or four. So we rented a house. Like I said, there weren't many places black people could rent. It was a three-room. I remember we had a living room and a big bedroom and a kitchen, which was pretty nice in those days. But we had to go outside to take a shower. There was a shower outside and a toilet outside that was community. And then they had a house on the alley that was a duplex, with a Mexican family living on one side. I don't remember who the other family was. There was a house in front with an Indian family living in it.

Do you remember the years that your family lived there?

It had to be around -- let's see. I was born in '43. It had to be like in the late 40s.

Okay. So go ahead. You started to say something about an Indian family.

Yes. They were Indian and Mexican, I think. I was friends with her. One was Virginia, who was the older one, and the other one was Gloria. Then we had some cousins. There was another house up front. They were cousins on my dad's side of the family. They still live here, too, the descendants of them. So everybody got along pretty well. There were problems within the families. But I always liked to meet and be involved with different people. Momma had enough children. But this lady had a lot more, a Mexican lady. And she used to cook these tortillas, the flour tortillas, on a wooden stove. So I would eat the beans and the tortillas. And my momma would say, They're poor, Eleanor, that's all they have, and you're not supposed to go eat their food. I said okay. So one day I went around the corner and came through the alley. Their house was like one place between us. When she said, Well, did you come, you want some beans and tortillas? I said yes. My momma caught me. So I got a whipping about that. Even though we had kids, it seemed like it was so much fun to go with the big families. At that time my mother wasn't the best cook in the world. She learned to be a very good cook. And people used to say at that time -- it's like we say she learned how to cook like white people. So as a result, a lot of some of the things we ate were different. My dad was a better cook.

And another family, I'd go over there. They had these tin pan plates. I lived on Jefferson then in the back of our cousin's. We rented from them. They had about 11 kids, too. They would cook beans and corn bread, which I liked, and Kool-Aid. So I would always go there. My dad told me to stop going eating the kids' food because they couldn't afford to feed me. But I always thought I was insulting them if I didn't accept the food. So I did. So I went over to play. I said, please, let me go play. They said, okay, if they're eating, you come back home. So when I went, the mother said, oh, you come on and eat. And I did, and I got in trouble then, too.

But anyway, we moved out of the Mexican yard, not because it wasn't a nice place to stay, but because there was a man there who was mean to the kids. He was going to hit my brother. They were playing outside because you washed outside, too. He said they were going to get dirt in his tub. He talked bad to my brother. My mother went out there and threatened him in no uncertain terms. She said that we better move because she didn't want to have to have a problem. So we did. For a while we lived -- also, that yard was directly across from a building owned by Victory Baptist Church now. There are apartments next to it. Then Jackson -- the Town Tavern, where that is, it faced on the other side. So it covered the entire half block.

How many Mexican families would you say were living on the Westside in the 40s?

Gee, I don't know. There were a lot of them. And the interesting thing is, many of them went to Catholic school because there was a family -- I can't remember. I'll give you my cousin's name because they really know the Westside. Anyway, they owned a grocery store, a little grocery store where we all used to go buy candy on the way to school. They always had these beautiful princess dresses at Halloween in there. The Mexicans who had a little money could go to a black or white school. The poor Mexicans went to Westside School. There were quite a few, but nowhere the ratio that there is today.

But blacks outnumbered the Mexicans?

Yes, at that time. Yes, they did.

Describe to me what the Westside looked like on the whole.

It looked almost as barren as it is today because there weren't that many people. But it wasn't empty buildings. When we first moved in our house on H and Madison, we were the only house until you got a little past about Van Buren. In the back of the road was dirt. It was rocks in the road. Behind us, there were actually Indians living in tents back there for a while before they pretty much moved them all down off of Main Street. So then you would walk down this road about three blocks, and there was a place called Mother Garner's which sold barbeque that was excellent. She was a mother in the Church of God and Christ. At that time -- it wasn't Upper Room yet because Bishop Cox named that later. But she had a pig farm. She raised pigs there. That's right on that property where John Edmonds, that empty plot there. It's right on the corner now of Owens and H Street.

Nucleus Plaza?

But not across the street. It was on this side where Von's is. And it was down closer because all that back in there was really dirt roads. When we went back there, we were going out of town. Right there on Van Buren -- somebody probably told you that -- there used to be a ball field where they played baseball on Sundays, the adults. People went to watch, and they sold peanuts and stuff. But where the school is, I think it's Booker Elementary on Martin Luther King, they used to have rodeos out there. Then right where those apartments are off of Allen and Lake Mead, one of the streets is the same. If you go back south, there were some roads over at the school -- Cootie Snootie Avenue and Cow Trail Boulevard.

Well, once I guess when I was -- I had to be ten or something, I was older, and we rode the bikes out there. My dad had told us not to go out of town. But I was always figuring out how I could do something. When you asked me about going to Mr. Dondero, I just was not going to be limited to what they told me I could have and do. So I wasn't thinking he didn't want us out there. I'm figuring that he meant that he didn't want us out past dark. So my rationale was if we hurry up and ride real fast on the bicycles, we could get out there and back in the same amount of time it would take us to ride around the blocks. And we were able to. So when I came back to town, I got in trouble again because my dad said, I told you not to ride those bikes out of town. So that's really funny to people now because I mean, it's

not even far. It was walking distance. So those kinds of things I did because I always was kind of adventuresome. My mother called me a road lizard because I liked to go all the time. She would say "just like my dad".

And going back, when I was a little toddler, just crawling, I couldn't really walk, my mother thought my dad had me. He was leaving home, sneaking out so he could go play cards with the guys, and I crawled behind him. I was definitely less than two because I don't think my mother had my brother then. Oh, my mother was dying. And this family called, Elder Morgan, who used to be a minister at the Church of God and Christ, and his wife found me. The police were looking all over for me. They found me later that day in the bed of Sister Morgan and Elder Morgan's house because they could see I was cleaned up and all that kind of stuff. But they didn't know my mom. They knew my grandmother. So I guess that was my first experience about going away from home. Police were everywhere looking for us and in this little small place, you know.

But I went on. We lived in the house. My parents built it because my mother said she just wanted a place for us that we were going to be safe. And they built and paid for it as they went along. But when we lived off of Jefferson in the 610 block, we rented from my cousins. One New Year's Eve they were cooking pig's feet and stuff like that, and it boiled over. Their house caught on fire and burned it up, and we had to move. During that time, my mother wouldn't do anything that seemed like that you were superstitious. So they were telling her she needed to cook some black-eyed peas. And she said, no, that's wrong, and I'm not going to do that. So they were getting on her about it, my dad's people, who loved her. She didn't do it. They did it for good luck, but their house burned down. Those cousins, I'm as close to them as brothers and sisters.

So we ended up moving across the alley in a little two-room shack. When my uncle came here, he had to stay with us, also. We rented from Ms. Thomas, who owned a lot of property. She owned about that block over there from Madison -- no -- half a block from Madison to the alley and from F to G, except for where the church and a couple other homes were. So anyway, when we moved back over there again, there were other families that moved.

All those houses from where we lived -- Evergreen Baptist Church built their church there -- they've all been kept up very well from Madison on that corner back to Washington. It's interesting because in recent years they've built two nice homes that they've kind of let go. But the people who lived there in that block before all kept their houses up beautifully. One of my friends lived there, who now lives in Philadelphia.

But through the years, I was always, like I said, I always wanted to find out what was going on. If there were those parties, I was one of the first to find out and tell the other people. At school, I wanted to be a cheerleader in Madison. I remember Stella Parson was one of the advisors. She said, no, that doesn't suit you. I was so disappointed because my grades were good. Then when I went to high school, it was just racism, period. I never got to be a cheerleader. I wanted to. And the cheerleading teacher, she always found an excuse. So I was in the pep club. When I joined, I got others. Now, I don't remember, but I think I was the first black member in the pep club at Rancho. Then I would encourage other people. As a result of going out of the area, two or three days a week, I walked home up that hill to Madison Street, and it never bothered me because I wanted to stay after school.

During those times, they had the Sun Youth Forum. I forgot what they call it now [*Sun Youth Forum still exists*], but they still have something sponsored by the newspaper. And the kids would go out and have these different committees. Well, the Sun Youth Forum, they would pick the kids from the high schools, and all the ones would meet up out there. We would have discussion groups, committees, and panel members. We discussed issues that were current. Then when we discussed them in the committee, we would come out and have a panel to discuss them overall. Then they'd have your picture in the paper and all of that. I was always in that.

But the most wonderful thing that has had the biggest impact on my life is Junior Achievement [Junior Achievement of Southern Nevada]. Every year I was the top junior achiever. Had it not been for Mr. Jim Ford -- who at the time I didn't realize how much that man really stood up for me and what a wonderful person he was. He's dead now. I always thanked him and my mother and my dad. But if I wanted it, he wasn't letting anybody cheat me out of it. But I kind of protected him, too. But the first time I was the top achiever -- and

you had to lead the company or be an officer. But most of the time I was the president. You had to have sales enough to make a profit. It taught you how to set your business up and your plan. You would sell stock in your business. And the idea was to make money so you could give your people a dividend at the end of the year. Every year, my company did. One year we sold those convention center plates. And I bet they're collector's items now because we didn't make that many of them. It had a picture of the first convention center in Las Vegas on it. I was in the paper because I sold a bunch of them to WMK Mix It, a cement company. I don't have any of these pictures. That year we gave profits twice to our people. I remember my dad was so excited, and my mother, because they'd helped me. And we were able to pay them 40 cents on the investment of their dollar or something like that. It was really good. Then one year we did candles. Another year we did trivets. And they had like several companies at each school.

So when you were the top achiever -- like the first year was Governor Grant Sawyer, and I was invited to sit at the head table and be the speaker. All of the publicity pictures and stuff. So the first year I won a trip to -- I had to go to Seattle, Washington, to represent Nevada, the entire state. So I remember crying most of the time because I told my mother I couldn't see how anybody could stay in a rainy season every day. But, of course, I was the only black kid again. We were invited to a chinchilla farm because this kid's parents owned a chinchilla farm up in Washington. And I never even heard of chinchillas before. They always put us up in the best hotel in town and gave us money to spend. I mean, everything was first-class.

You didn't have a problem with staying in the hotel?

No. I just did it. The only problem I had was that it rained every day. It was so exciting because on the way -- we flew United [United Airlines]. When we got to San Francisco, they took us on a tour of the plant. They showed us how the engines were tested and gave us this wonderful lunch. Then we had to land early. Something happened. One of the engines caught fire or something when we were going over the lake into Seattle. I didn't even have sense enough to be afraid because I was so impressed with those testing the engine that I knew that it was going to be taken care of anyway.

Then another time I went to San Diego. At that time I rode down there with a couple guys that were -- one of them was old enough to drive and a girl. And I remember them thinking I was asleep. We passed by Riverside or somewhere. And they were like, well, that's where they go there, and they said niggers. And I never told Mr. Ford because I knew he would be very upset and very hurt for me. So I was seething inside, but I was pretending that I didn't hear them for his sake. When I got there, again we stayed at a topnotch hotel. I mean, ball dancing, everything. I'm thinking at the time, oh, he just liked to dance because he would always come and pay me compliments and dance with me. But that was so that I wouldn't feel left out. There was a young black fellow at the time and we were friendly. But he would always make sure that I was okay. They always gave us lots of money so that we could catch a cab because there would be one or two days that we could go.

So at that time I went to the Cotton Patch Barbeque place, and it was real ritzy for me. It was white table clothes and the whole bit. And that was the first time I ever experienced a finger bowl. I didn't know what it was, but neither did the young girl with me. I had convinced her to go with me. I asked them because my mom had always said if you don't know what it is, ask. Then he told me you dip your fingers in it. They gave us these hot steaming towels. So that was something. I always learned something. Then there were several things like that, always wonderful experiences, things that I could never afford. But it gave me a thirst to want more in life. I remember we went to the Elizabethan Theatre in Vancouver, Canada. I went there, also.

As part of the high school?

Um-h'm, yes. It was all paid for. Like I said, he did a wonderful job of shielding me from the hurt of the racism. Some places there were no problems.

But I told my mother, I said, I don't know what to do when they have all these fancy things. So she told me, well, at the table watch whoever I thought knew just what they were doing and follow them. I can remember sitting just where I could see her without being obvious. She had that cameo-type skin. We had pheasant under glass. I mean, we had like the best steaks, lobsters, all that kind of stuff. So what she would eat, I would just sit and do my mouth, and then I'd watch her because she was so adept at -- it was like an art, her eating

with her knife and fork. So those are just things I learned and opportunities that were afforded to me.

Wow. That's great.

It really was. I think Junior Achievement should almost be mandatory. We each had sponsors. Like a couple of my sponsors were from the Nevada Power Company a couple years. They would be executives, not middle management. I can remember what this man looks like, but it was a big title -- at the time one of the biggest title companies. It was tough because one of the contests, you would have to sell them something. I mean, they would give you hell, really. But they wanted to make sure you got it in the customer's hands and you explained the benefits and you went through all of it. Then when they would take me through all this, then they would just praise me because -- and like I said, Mr. Ford was always looking over. I can remember him arguing one time. He didn't think I heard him. He said she wanted it and cussed them, and he said nobody's taking it from her. So he really was my guardian angel. My mom did not overall trust too many men, but she never had any concern about my going anywhere with him. He used to be married to Faith Peterson. That family was giants in the real estate industry, she and her brother. They used to own a drive-in called Tip Top Drive-In on the corner of Charleston and Las Vegas Boulevard. So anyway, those were some of the experiences.

How did you become part of Junior Achievement?

It was an extracurricular activity in high school, so I joined it. I was always looking for stuff to join, like the pep club. It's like I was a pioneer to go open the doors for someone else. I usually did. Like the Latin Club. I was in Mu Alpha Theta. That's the honor math society. I got cheated in Honor Society overall because my PE teacher gave me a C, which I still don't feel like I deserved.

I wrote papers for a couple of teachers until my mother wouldn't let me. She didn't know at first, but I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. These were kids who had money. So they would pay me \$25, and that would take care of a lot of stuff for me. I would write the term paper. Some of the same teachers I wrote that term paper for would give them an A and give me a B-plus or an A-minus. So how could that be when I'm the one writing all

the papers, you know? I thought it was great to sell those. My mother said, Eleanor, that's not right. So I didn't do that anymore.

You said a few minutes ago that you didn't want to go to Las Vegas High School because of the race relations at the time. Could you explain that to me?

Well, they were having a lot of fights up there. The kids were fighting each other, the black and the white. They had more teachers there who had a reputation for being racists than they did at Rancho at the time. But it's almost like the North and the South. The South gets blamed. But actually some of the things are much worse in the North than they are in the South because we had our share at Rancho, and it was more covert than overt, I'd say. The kids themselves fought. Now, the football players had it easy because they used to call it like Hampton High because he was so good. But I feel like a lot of those teachers exploited the black kids because they went on their sports and they didn't really go out of their way to teach them their academics.

I would always try to get in stuff. I ran for office at Rancho. One time I probably would have had a better shot and I was going to give up, but they always have some good teachers. Mr. Tibias, who ended up being the principal there in later years, said don't you give up, and you go in and talk, and you tell them I am, and let them know that you are proud. But then I did what he said, but I followed his mannerism. And I probably would have done better had I been me. But then also I ran for homecoming queen and stuff. I didn't win, but there was a big mess about it. One of the teachers got really mad because, from what I heard later, I had enough points to win, but they took it from me. So then the black guys said we're going to have our own homecoming queen. So they still made me their queen down at Jefferson Center. So it was things like that that you didn't get to do. I remember my chemistry teacher, I made straight As in chemistry, and I had honor classes in chemistry. And he was good, but he told me -- I wanted to be a research chemist, and he distracted me from it. When I went to Colorado, I had lost interest, and I didn't do well in chemistry because, at the time, to me a pharmacist just dispensed pills. I wanted to be making something really happen, you know.

But anyway, during that time they had different shows around. It was interesting

because I joined stuff and I had a few other girlfriends I could talk into doing things. I remember I was going to try out for this holiday mouse for a fashion show. Then they told me I wasn't -- I didn't look -- actually, what it was, black enough. They told my girlfriend they'd pick her instead because she was more exotic looking. There's a lot of discrimination on colors among our group. Many people thought light-skinned kids never got discriminated. But many times we got it from both sides, you know.

In high school they also had this program, Distributive Education. Do you know about that?

No. Distributive?

Yes. What they did was find jobs. I really wasn't in the program. But you know how they go pick somebody out to represent. I was always asking them. They knew I needed help basically, but I wanted to earn my own way. So they gave me a job at the Nevada unemployment office. I was the first black person to work there. I was a kid. I wasn't qualified completely for what they hired me for because I didn't type real well.

(End side 2, tape 1.)

So anyway, I worked at the unemployment office. And they were going to let me work some more, but then I went and worked for my aunt. She was the manager at a collection agency, and I'll tell you about that. So at the unemployment office, it worked out well. And they decided after I had been there, well, they'd hire some more black people. So that was a test case. But then I worked with my aunt in the summer. It was Whiteman's Collection Agency. At the time he was the only one who would hire somebody black to do that kind of work. And she was totally qualified. When he died, he left it to her. But it was just too much. She said too many bills and all that and too much for her to do. But when she moved here, she helped so many people. She was at Piney Woods, and she stayed after my mother left for like 26 years. She was there when she came to Las Vegas, she helped --

Doing what?

Well, she was doing everything practically. She worked with the students. She ran the office there, you know, that program that taught the kids office work. She traveled with the Cotton Blossom Singers as their chaperon. One of the girls, whom she called her

daughter and was very much her daughter, was just here last weekend. So we hadn't seen her for 20 something years. My aunt is dead, also, now. She's a mother, Rene, whom I told you we call our sister.

So anyway, I worked there. Then in later years, I went away to college in Boulder. The reason I ended up at University of Colorado was because one of my girlfriends. We got our signals mixed up. She graduated ahead of me, and she went to the University of Denver. I'm thinking Gayla went to Colorado University because I should have never been there. That school was so expensive. But when I went there, there were 22,000 students on campus, and there were only a hundred black and that included the Africans. And at that time there was a divide. I used to date an Ethiopian guy, and they dated because they could take us to dinner and stuff. They were gentlemen because -- most of them. There were some bad ones. Especially from Ethiopia, if you let them know that you're used to being overprotected and stuff, they respected that. But I had fallen in love with my husband, my ex-husband, Sara Ann's husband. So I ended up coming home after the first year and marrying.

When did you meet him?

Well, I've known him all my life, but I never thought I would like him at all. When I first started dating him, I still didn't. He was saying that he couldn't go to school because he didn't have enough money, when the truth was he had too much money and he was partying the whole time in California. But Janice and I were such good friends. And she was like, How are you dating my brother? You know, like what you want to date him for, and stuff like that. It was funny because we have some ways alike and some that are very different. Anyway, so I married. Shortly after that is when my parents died. So then I helped with my brothers and sisters.

But during that time, they elected Tom Purcell, who is another wonderful person in my life, Sara Hughes, you may have heard of, and Gwynn Weeks. They worked with the Democratic Party a lot. So they had told him if they help him get elected, he said he would hire someone black. So he interviewed me and hired me. So that made me the first black person to work in the court system here. That was justice court. I got problems from other

blacks. I can remember one black person who had become a city judge here. He had become a city judge. I was the first black clerk who worked in there. People would come up there and say they're not going to let me wait on them. I don't know what I'm doing. And Tom Purcell was so wonderful. He would say, well, she's smarter than anyone else I have here. And if she can't help you, she determines who I talk to, which wasn't entirely true. His sisters, who were his friends, were older than I am and they had been experienced in the court. But he was just a good person. He never failed to take up for me.

Then one woman came there and tried to say I was taking money when she was the one taking money. She was the accountant, and she was taking money. He had so much confidence in me and I never let him down. He said, We're going to set a trap. Because when I told him, he believed me. And sure enough, I would count my bank out, and it was right every night. The next day I would come in, it might be over some or under and stuff like that. So she was doing that. But he let her go.

Now, Janice was the first black person who worked in the DA's office. By that time Judge Guy had come in. So he came in after I started working in the justice court. After that, they started hiring people in the justice court and the DA's office. So that was the two of those.

Plus, when I was a kid, I was the one to be friendly with the couple of white kids who were at our school and the Mexican kids who nobody would have anything to do with because I always enjoyed meeting different people, and I still do. I lived in New Jersey for seven years, and I loved it because there were so many different ethnic groups. You could go to the affairs they were having and really get involved instead of just speaking to them and not knowing. Then you find out there are so many ways we're so similar. I remember on my job, the Chinese people would tell me, Eleanor, you my spokesman, you talk for me, you can talk. They would want me to represent them on things.

But in Nevada, when I married, my husband was the first fireman to pass all the tests. But he had to actually go to court for them to let him on. So in the meantime, Monroe and Larry Powell, they get like credit and notice for starting, too. But my husband had passed a couple months before them. Then when he did, he coached them. So that's what happened

there to get on to the fire department.

What was it like working at the fire department as one of the first --

Horrible. Horrible because he would come home upset, and they would try to give him marks. Now, one thing, he is one of the most finickiest, neat, clean people I've ever met about his -- it reminded me of my dad because my dad would go to work every day at the train station and haul baggage. But his khakis were perfectly ironed with the perfect crease. His shoes were shined like you could look at your face in them. Well, James was the same way. He was going to have his hair cut properly, everything. He'd go to work where he could go somewhere if it were not for it being a uniform. So they would try to find fault, and a couple of them would just stay on his back. He was the kind of person that kept stuff in him. So finally he just quit after he had hurt his back on the job, for which he didn't even file a complaint even though I thought he should have. But it was hell what he went through, and there were maybe one or two -- as they started to accept him. One captain who was decent, but one was just a total butt-head, you know.

Even at the unemployment department, I'd get along with people really well, but there were still people who were a bit resentful, the older ones. The younger ones weren't, I find. They were a lot better.

Tell me about the Cotton Blossom Singers.

Well, they still have a choir from Piney Woods. But what they did was they went all over the country raising money for the school. They sang a cappella. It was wonderful. They would sing most of them in these towns of white organizations. I have not met anyone yet who went to Piney Woods who did not have some degree of success in their lives. Because when they left there, they were academically talented. They all had a trade they could use to earn a living. Just walking around the campus was so inspirational. I visited there for the first time at 11. You have all these sayings, you know, that you can do it or quotes and stuff everywhere you go on the campus. They worked hard. As my brother said, they had their own dairy and their own post office, all this stuff, and the kids did all of that.

They were here recently, the choir. I was supposed to help them, but unfortunately I ended up going into the hospital. So I was just sick the whole time. So I just feel wonderful

now because only about a month ago I started driving again since October. I had been in the hospital several times. But thank God for my mother and growing up on the Westside that you just keep on pushing, you know. And growing up on the Westside was interesting because -- especially when I moved to other places, the town was so small, no matter how protective your parents were, you were still exposed to everything. So I said if a person can survive here and in New York City, they can make it anywhere. Because I've seen people come here, good people, and the city ends up eating them alive because they're so excited about the money and the fast life. But we had a chance to see it all. If my parents were living, I know they've be very proud of my brothers and sisters.

Now, I mean, I had my share of racism. There's no doubt about that. I never let it keep me down. You just keep on pushing and pushing and never accepting no, that I can't do this. Those are the kinds of things. And the church was very influential in most of our lives, also.

Which church did your family attend?

My mother was Lutheran, and that's what she loved. But she had so many kids, most of the time she couldn't afford to buy the clothes and go to church. It wasn't on the Westside, either. I went there a few times because we had a black teacher, Mr. Tabius, and he and his wife were the only other black Lutherans. My dad's family went to Pentecostal Church of God and Christ, the original one on F and Madison. So I went to the Methodist church first. At that time it was Reverend Kinard on the corner of Washington and G. It's a Pentecostal church there now. Then I went from there to Church of God and Christ under Bishop Cox. I went from there to Second Baptist. I had a very good experience in various churches. I went to Victory because my kids went there. Then when I moved to Atlanta, I was under Dr. Barbara King at Hillside. I belonged there. When I went to New Jersey, I visited a number of churches.

Dr. Barbara King. Now, when were you in Atlanta?

I was in Atlanta from 1983 until the end of 1990.

My church in Los Angeles had her as a guest speaker several times.

What's your church in Los Angeles?

City of Angels.

I went to church there. My goddaughter-in-law is there, Brenda Williams and Monroe's daughter. So I've been there like three times, at least. One time I was there, she was there.

That's a wonderful place.

It is. It really is. Although at the time, many of her teachings were very similar to what my mother taught. I went to a church that was very strict, the Church of God and Christ. But all of my teachings really came from my mom. The church just reinforced it because there were things -- like my mother said it was a sin to be greedy and gossipy. And I would see church people doing this. They would tell me at the time pray for my momma because she's a sinner because she didn't belong to that church. That used to be the attitude. I still loved the church, many parts about it. So when she suffered so and died, for a while after that, I refused to go to church for a couple years.

But what happened, the reason I left the church, because I was a kid and I was doing everything they said do. They would say don't wear a red dress because you're going to be Jezebel and you're going to tempt a man. And in my mind, well, one day I wanted to tempt a man because I needed to get a husband. Then as I said, they had these little fashion shows at the center. Nobody could have been more protective over us than my mom. I had modeled this little shortie nightgown, but everything was well covered up. It was in the front page of the paper, in the middle front. And some of them were talking about it. I'm like, huh-uh, they're saying all this stuff, but my mom doesn't gossip, she doesn't talk about people and all that. So Bishop Cox was gone, and somebody called me up to the front. They're going to pray for me and all. I get up, and I'm really skinny and little, and I said, Well, thank you for your prayers, but I don't any longer think this is the right place for me, and I'm leaving, and I'm going to a different church. So then everybody fell out and started praying and crying again. Again, I told them I was leaving, and I left. That evening I went and joined Second Baptist. So I went there for quite a while.

But anyway, it still was a good experience because you learned a lot and it kept you morally good for the most part because you had someone reminding you of what to do. But

I always had a reputation for being fast. I wasn't fast because I would, you know, kind of watch over other girls. But I talked too much. So that's why they said I was fast. So when I graduated from high school, it did my heart good to get the honors and stuff. And some of the ones that had babies -- and invite one of these people who said that I wasn't going to even make it out of high school. That was the first invitation I gave out, to just let her know, okay, I'm out, and I'm going further. That was the thing that helped me to go on and do stuff.

I was also the first black person that worked in the state legislature.

What did you do there?

I was the aide for Senator Lamb, Floyd Lamb, and I was a legislative clerk that sat up at the front and did the minutes and stuff. Leola Armstrong had introduced me to Laxalt, and I got the job. Although the Westside always voted for Democrats, in Nevada itself, there've been Republicans that helped us to do stuff, you know. I'm a registered Democrat, but I vote for who I feel like that's going to do the best for whatever. So anyway, after that they started hiring people up there.

Tell me about Sara Hughes.

Now, Sara Ann knows her better, but Sara Hughes was in the union. As a result of being in that position -- and she was very active in politics. Because at that time, it seemed like they were more serious and committed to the caucuses on the Westside. And I started going to that early and going to the regional meetings like up in Winnemucca or somewhere like that. Well, Sara Hughes and Gwynn Weeks and especially Sarann Knight Predy, they were some of the women who were always involved in getting things done on the Westside. Well, they knew my parents. And when they needed somebody to do something, I guess to go be the test case, a lot of times they would call me to do it. That's what happened with some of the stuff. There were some other things, too.

But it's interesting because my husband being the first fireman, the first one to pass everything. Then he was one of the first three -- like he and Lightford, Calvin Lightford and Richard Walker and somebody else, they were the first dealers on the Strip, also.

Give me your husband's name.

His name is James Edward Walker. That's Sarann's oldest son. Richard Luther

Walker was the next one. Both of them and Calvin Lightford were some of the first dealers. There was another one, but I can't remember which one, whether it was Cubi Bush or somebody else, all started around the same time.

Where did your husband deal?

First time at the Fremont Hotel downtown. He went from the Fremont to --

Do you remember about which year that was that he was the first one to deal there?

It was in the early 60s. The early 60s. It was interesting because, of course, he wanted to go to the Strip. So he would go to the Desert Inn and try out. They would say, Go practice at the Fremont, and we'll give you a job. You know, they were resisting it. But they would send young white dealers down there. They would tell him, Go watch that young kid at the Fremont because he is fantastic. And if you could deal half as good as him, we'll give you a job. But that's the story of our lives.

Working for AT&T, they would send people to me to train, but then they wouldn't give me the promotion until my ornery self said, If I don't get the job, I'm not training another person. You will either give me the promotion, or you'll train them yourselves. Because if I'm not good enough to do the job, how can I train them to do it? And so they did. Sometimes all it takes is for you to speak up for yourself. And they may not like you, but they'll respect you.

All during Junior Achievement, going backwards, there was a girl and her father was one of the union bosses. Well, I can't think of her name, Lynn something. She hated my guts. And every chance she could, she would talk bad to me. But that's because I beat her with everything. Because there, it wasn't about your race. Mr. Ford didn't let it be that. It was your abilities and your talents that kept you going. Even after I was married and stuff, she hated that.

But then it was interesting because at one point I got tired of being a pioneer, so to speak. Well, when I got married, the first house we had, the only black family that had lived there before us were the Inkspots. And they got moved out because somebody put a bomb or something in their yard that didn't go off. But when we bought the house, it was a VA

repossession. So that's how we were able to get it, over on Denby Avenue. Then when we moved out and had it up for sale, one day someone called and said, Well, we really liked that house, but are there any of those colored people living over there? I said, No, sir, there aren't. I said, The one family that lived there moved out because we wanted a better neighborhood, you know. So we moved over in Rancho Manor, right off of Alta and Rancho Road. We were the first black family there. And then the --

What is the area called?

I thought it was Rancho Manor Estate -- Rancho Nevada Estates. But then Rosie Buwar and her husband moved there, also. So then we had two black families. It was a beautiful area. And today that's one of my regrets, that when I divorced I just left. I said, well, I want to finish school, when I should have stayed. Now I could be living well. But we had no trouble there.

How long were you married?

Off and on for -- somewhere between 14 and 19 -- well, we first married in '61 -- or was it '60?

That was the year you graduated from high school?

Yeah -- no. It was '62 that we first married. Then we were divorced in '69, I think, or '68, '69. Then we remarried the next year or year and a half. Then we didn't divorce until '92. But we split up in '77. So it was an interesting -- that's the same thing we did when we were going together.

How many children do you two have?

Well, I had two, but I only have one now. That's a very bad first. When my daughter was kidnapped and murdered, the detective came and told us they didn't believe a little colored girl could get kidnapped, and they kind of tried to cast shadows. But thank God for Detective Hatch and George Knapp. They have had it all over the TV, what kind of kid she was. I was really blessed. Just recently. It's been on TV a number of times and on the radio. And Mr. Knapp said the kids calling in, black and white, were all crying and talking about what a wonderful kid she was. So I was truly blessed.

My son has been in trouble, had problems because, one thing, he's never adjusted to

his sister's death. But I thank God because I think we're going to find out real soon. And that was 23 years ago. Yep, it was. At the time I told them how could you look for her just as if you believe it when you don't believe she was kidnapped and everything. I told them it was true.

But she was the first. It's interesting that your kids go through the same things. I can remember my momma going to the school really upset because one of the teachers told my sister, you don't have to work too hard -- my sister's very smart, also -- because all you're going to do is mop floors anyway. Oh, my God, what did she say that for? My mother was over there immediately. When my daughter came along, who was also very smart and very much a leader. When I was over at NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], she kind of ran the youth group and she was in everything in school. One of the teachers told her, well, you don't have to work so hard, discouraging because she saw leadership ability. But Jamey wanted to be a cheerleader. And anything she set her mind out to do, she was going to do it. And I'm like, Jamey, don't get your hopes up, because it was still the same thing all these years later. One morning at 3 o'clock in the morning, the house is completely dark, I hear all this yelling and somebody hit the floor. I get up and run in there. I'm like, What on earth is going on in the dark? She says, Momma, I'm practicing the cheers, and I have to learn how to do the splits because I'm going to be a cheerleader. And she was. In her senior year, she was the head cheerleader at Clark High School. And people would go just to see her smile because they said she had such a beautiful smile. She says, They come to watch me, not the game. Because she'd tell me, You come watch me. I'm like, I don't watch the game. Well, you're coming to see me cheer, momma.

I think that I've been the youngest female president of the NAACP here. We had a wonderful chapter. I was there until I just literally quit.

When were you president?

I was president from '71 to '75. I had quit working at Pan Am to volunteer. Then I just decided I thought I could run it better, so I ran for office. We accomplished a lot because those sidewalks and stuff in Vegas Heights and the lights, we're the ones who did that. Now, some people want to take the credit, but we were on the news two or three times every week.

What happened is that a kid had gotten killed on the railroad tracks, laid there like a couple hours or more because the ambulance didn't get there. They said that the reason they had so many problems was because they couldn't see the addresses. And I'm like, okay, well, we're going to fix this. We're going to get some lights over there.

I think I just forgot this man determinately, but he was a city commissioner. Jack was his first name. And I would never let people -- like they say, don't let them see you sweat. But I was so upset with him, I cried one night. Because his statement was why put anything over there, those people are going to tear it up anyway. If he were living, he could see now that none of them are torn up. The people are getting healthy. That was all under the group that worked with me.

At one point they were going to cut off the buses to the Westside completely because they said they were losing money. The national office helped us. They sent an expert in on transportation. We had meetings with the people to see what they needed. We made up a better route for the people. Plus, we saved money for the bus company. The NAACP Senior Citizen Housing on Eastern -- which after I left, somehow somebody let it go to the national office -- we're the ones who got that money and did it. We are the ones that were supposed to still have that. They had mass expulsions and suspensions from the schools. So we were always going out to the schools. Sometimes marches and people call ahead of time. But we kept those kids in school. So we were really doing stuff, you know.

We had the biggest membership attendance today. The place would be full, you know, on Sunday afternoons, when we met and stuff. So we did a lot. We had some police brutality cases. Then sometimes the people you help the most fight you the most. We had the biggest, I believe to date, voter registration drive, and we didn't have but \$500 to do it. But what we did, my youth group, which was wonderful, would go ahead of us door to door, knock on the door to see who needed to be registered so the registrar can go to that place. So we registered a lot of people to vote.

And all the things, the youth group, we took them on trips, mostly me and the youth. We went everywhere. Do you know all the places we went, I never had any trouble out of those kids, none of them. And many of them I didn't know. But it ended up it wasn't that

way, that my daughter ended up being friends with a lot of people that I grew up with. Like Brenda's daughter and my daughter ended up being two of the best friends. We had grown up together and I knew the parents of a number of others. We would go and stay. We would take the money and go off the beaten track. And somebody would always give them something. Like we had been to the NAACP conference, and we wanted to go to this concert. There were some white people in the car that gave us enough tickets for everybody in the group. They would go to the conferences and other people -- the kids would get in trouble that they were watching constantly. But I never -- they were some of the most wonderful kids, and the majority of them are still doing well.

Tell me about the NAACP today, here, the local branch.

Well, I can't tell you a lot because I've been too ill to be involved. It's my intention -- I told someone I was going to the next meeting. But quite honestly, when I came home, I was a bit disappointed because I came in during a time now -- they had already started that before I took over with Jim Anderson and Sarann Knight and Sara Hughes and Keller and all these people started the Concept Decree. So quite a few people we sent out were hired just as a result of getting jobs for people. Then I come back home. I'm going into the hotels. Like in the Mandalay Bay, I walked all the way through there and saw one black dealer. I go out there, you don't see people in the stores. So it's like it's gone backwards.

The educational system is still bad, whereas we had representatives at every single meeting out at that board. At the time Bernice Moten was on the board, and she would call us and let us know what was going on. And we went out there. We went to every meeting. We had somebody out there speaking on behalf of this community. Now, we did make one mistake, maybe more. But I remember we did march against Dr. Hinson or Hinman, who was a principal at one of the local schools, and she was doing good for the kids. But we had some misinformation. So that was one that we could've done differently. But we were fighting for jobs in different places and doing things.

Quite honestly, I don't see a lot of that being done. And even on the national level, there was some disappointment because I expected the present regime, I guess you'd call it, to be a little bit more aggressive in some of the things they're doing. The Legal Defense

Fund was always good. They always came through for us. But they're working separate from NAACP. And I realize it's hard. If I hadn't had a husband supporting me, I never could have done that because I worked harder and spent more money on that than any job I ever had.

Right. It was all volunteer?

All volunteer. They have paid positions. But when you're president -- I worked for a few months supposedly paid. But when I quit and decided to run it, then that was all free, and you have to put your own money in there.

So I can't knock it because I don't know what's going on. I just know that I'm not seeing the results that I personally would like to see considering we had so many hard workers in there in the beginning. We had kids in programs. We had after-school programs. There are people who have called me in recent years to thank me for what they got out of being over there and learning from us. I think you have to be a part of the community. I never felt like you can run an organization like that and not get involved in the community. There's just too much with all the growth and stuff going on in Las Vegas. Like this place across the street over there, if nothing else --

(End side 1, tape 2.)

Tired of being a test case?

Right. But it opens doors for other people.

You were talking about the property over here. Now, which property is that?

Right on the northwest corner of H and Lake Mead or Engelstad and Lake Mead. They do a lot of business there. I mean, people are in line waiting to buy chicken and all that.

You're not talking about Seven Seas?

No. It's right there. The one on the end there on Losee Road is good. But this one has been there forever, and they won't even clean the lot up. That's not a thing that NAACP normally tackles. But when you look at the economic point of view, they're making money in this community. They're not putting anything back because they don't even -- they may have one or two people who live here who are working over there.

So now, is that a black-owned business?

No. They're foreigners. I can't remember where they came from.

Asians maybe?

Yes, they're Asians, I think. From the Middle East, maybe. I'm not sure.

But I think they should do something. When you have people coming into the community, let's give a little something back to it. So I think there are things that need to be addressed more. Our school system. A number of things, I think, can be done.

Earlier you talked about the area called Vegas Heights. Give me the boundaries of what is Vegas Heights.

Vegas Heights starts right there on Lake Mead, on the north side of Lake Mead. On the east side, it's Revere, which is Revere, North Las Vegas, and H in Las Vegas. On the west side, Martin Luther King. On the north side, it's Miller. So when I was a kid, that was there, but it was all this desert, like I called the out-of-town area between. And they were only white people living there. Oh, and they had a spring in the desert, too. The kids used to sneak and go to a little water spring and stuff. The first black family that moved in Vegas Heights was the Snowdens. Jim Snowden's family was a big family. And, oh, we thought they had gotten rich and gone to heaven, that they had a house in Vegas Heights. It was really something, you know. Now there's mostly all black or maybe a Mexican family or two because when the blacks started moving in, they pretty much moved out. Then Bonanza Village was all white. So then blacks started moving in there, and they moved out.

Bonanza Village is that gated community in the Westside?

Yes, right. So that's all a part of the Westside. Actually, those two places I lived on Denby Avenue, which was Rancho Manor, that's the one where they didn't have any black families and many of them were quite -- they were either very good or very racist. I don't think there's a black family still in that development. And then in Rancho Nevada Estates. Then Dr. Buwar, but they moved out. So I don't think there is a black family there, either.

What do you think is the future of the historic Westside?

Oh, I think that we're going to see a much more mixed Westside than we're having now. Especially, there have been a lot of Mexicans moved in because of the housing prices. And there have been a few white families that I see from time to time in the different areas.

And I've seen a couple come in and buy houses and move.

But always when I was over NAACP, I always felt like the city -- or downtown wanted to get into this area and take it anyway. I'm seeing a lot of properties being bought by the city because we have the most ideal location. I mean, we don't get flooded out. We're close to -- in the middle of everything. So there are a lot of things that I think they'd rather do that.

Unfortunately, I was bedridden for so much time and had to stop working or I would've bought some of this myself. But I think that Larry Weekly has done a lot of good, like redoing the Doolittle Center. Before his time, I remember hearing that people said the library will never work. And it's a hub of activity and good activity. I just love it because they have all kinds of programs to help with the culture of our people and to bring the Westside up to something better.

I just think that what you're saying is right because I look at all of the beautiful buildings they're putting in. That library, the post office, the senior citizen center. I mean, these are beautiful buildings.

They sure are. It is unlike what they thought would happen. They're all kept up very well. So when you give somebody something, sometimes you give too much and people don't appreciate it. When my mother was sick for that year and my father was in the hospital that year, they never took welfare. My mother always thought somebody needed it more than us. God forbid, you know, with six kids. But we were blessed and we made it and we were happy. I was just as happy to get hand-me-downs as I was to get something new because I didn't have any shame about that kind of stuff, you know.

At one point the people who lived in the projects were kind of snobs to the rest of us because that was the best apartment. When I got married, we ended up living with Sarann for a while because we could not get a decent apartment. But the bad thing is if people knew you, whether you had any money or not, if they thought you had some, then they thought you didn't need to live there. Because the town was so small, everybody was in everybody's business. Whatever they didn't know, they made up what they wanted to go along with it.

But people were supportive of each other. I used to go over to a place selling cookies

for church and all that. So you've gotten away from a lot of that because now with some of the gang members coming from California, they're disrespectful to older people, whereas before they always were respectful and did the right thing. Kids fought and we thought it was awful, but there were no guns killing folks and especially other family members. So I'm glad they put that police substation, a couple over there. I've heard it made some difference.

But that's another thing, people always are talking about the crime rate. In my community here, we've heard of a couple of hubcaps getting stolen, but we feel extremely safe right around in here. There are a lot of older people who bought these houses when they were first built. There are some crimes. Whether it's because they feel like we don't have anything worth taking or what, we feel safer in this Westside than outside of the community. So that's a plus. Our property values don't go up as high because there is usually a stigma attached.

That's another thing that irks me is that the places that refuse to deliver -- now, I can understand if they've been messed up -- but there has to be a system. And it really was brought to mind during the time I was pretty much bedridden. If you call and you have a credit card or the police can let you know that there haven't been any stickups and stuff, in much of the Westside, so why does the whole group have to suffer? Because Pizza Hut or some of them have just made up their mind, well, we're not going to deliver to the Westside. Then I go and track the mileage, and we're closer than some of the communities that they deliver to.

So those kinds of things, some of those things can be addressed very easily, and they're not. And again, I know it takes a lot of manpower and a lot of dedication to run the NAACP because people will call you day and night, night and day. And the interesting part is sometimes we do have our own people who don't want to support. But when they get in trouble, they're running over for help. Or they mess up themselves, and then they expect you to bail them out. Or you help them, but they turn around and turn their nose up at some of their own people.

Do you think drugs are the cause of the major problems that we have?

I think a lack of education. And the drugs become a problem because of lack of

opportunities that comes from not being properly educated and opening doors. I think that drugs are a symptom of a deeper problem. I feel like, well, overall the crimes are because of the drugs. But you have to come up with an answer. You have to go deeper than that. I don't think they're really being addressed.

It's just so sad that so many of our young people are in prison, and they're not always in there for things they did. You know, that's the sad part about it. But everybody deems you guilty until proven innocent in many cases. And the ones who are fighting it are totally overworked.

So I'm a real proponent of a better educational system. I'm not just talking about books and learning and college because that's not for everybody, but certainly trade schools and things that are going really help people to help themselves. I was always taught that a person is not doing me a favor by handing me a dollar. But if they let me know how to make money off of that dollar -- which goes back to Junior Achievement. That was so embedded in me that I don't think you could even live without it. You have to learn something from it. So that's it.

I consider myself a relatively intelligent person, and it's not so difficult for me to understand stuff. And I've gone through so much being mis-billed by the hospitals, not being able to get the service I need and stuff. And I think what about these poor people who can hardly read? What about these babies having babies? And it's just perpetuating a real bad situation and making it worse. Because if they don't know anything, how can they teach their kids? Now, I do believe in people working and helping themselves. But you have to give them something to work with. I don't think that's happening enough. I don't think it's happening enough.

I was watching the Los Angeles Police Department and how the gangs so much outnumber the police and how there's mistrust on both sides. Well, I feel there was an opportunity to get a handle on the gangs here before they got so bad. But at that point it was like we don't have a gang problem because it wasn't in the other areas of the city. But now when it moves to white suburbia, oh, we need to deal with this. Well, had you dealt with it when it was on the black and Spanish-speaking sides, then it wouldn't have bloomed into

such a huge unmanageable problem. So I just get real upset about some of the things that I feel need to be taken care of.

I want to just outline the jobs you've had. First job you had after high school --

Well, the last part of high school, I worked at the unemployment office.

Then after that?

Then I worked at the justice court. Then I worked for Operation Independence, the Westside program under Mrs. Johnson. I helped with the grants and stuff like that.

I went from there to Pan Am [Pan American Airways]. But when I went to work for Pan Am, I had actually been offered a job with Western Airlines. On the way, I'm like, huh-uh, I want to work for Pan Am because they say you had to be more educated. It was a challenge. So I stopped on the way, and they hired me. Which in hindsight, I probably should have gone on to Western because I would have probably moved on along like Hannah did.

Hannah?

Hannah Brown. She worked for Western. And when Delta bought them out, she went to Delta. Then she came back here and worked for the airport. I think she's temporarily presiding over the Urban Chamber of Commerce right now.

I've heard that name before.

Well, I told you the justice court. Then I went Operation Independence, Pan Am. I was the first black person on payroll in their office. Then I got another girl I knew a job. And from Pan Am, the next job I worked at for a little while at Caesars Palace was as a waitress. I was trying to go back and get my degree. I was traveling 110 miles a day. Off and on, I worked waitressing and everything trying to help, because when my parents died, I needed to help take care of my brothers and sisters.

Tell me a little about Caesars Palace.

I started there at Cleopatra's Barge, one of the waitresses there. Then they overhired, so they laid us off. But when they called me back, I had started to work briefly at the NAACP. But I think I only worked there a month or something. Then I decided to run for office. So when I ran for office, I became president of the NAACP. In between that time, I

taught at Clark County Community College. I taught their business classes. When I left, then I got my insurance license, and I sold insurance and did financial counseling. I also was -- what I've been told was the first black to do that. Once I did that, I encouraged some other black people I knew to do it, also. So when I went to Atlanta, I got --

Why did you leave here to go to Atlanta?

Well, it was right after my daughter died. But I had planned to leave here because I'm a nomad or something. I love to go and live other places. So my daughter and I had talked about this. I had sent her to Howard, and it just terrified her because she wasn't on campus and she had been real overprotected. So I let her come home, and then she started to go to UNLV. She worked at Frontier Savings and Loan in the meantime. So she and her friends had decided they would go to school. So I delayed it because we had thought about going before.

When the UNLV Rebels were real strong, I went there to the basketball playoffs, and I liked it, and I decided I wanted to try it. So I stayed there for seven years. I held a real estate license there. I started my own business, like financial consulting, where I would help small businesses to get their businesses up to par. So then I wanted to be a stockbroker, because that's what I really was getting a finance degree for. But when I got it, they wouldn't hire blacks to do that. So I hadn't decided to really fight them yet before I ended up leaving.

Then I went to work for AT&T when the market crashed in October. After that, instead of going with big companies, I went with these small companies, and they weren't good. I went to work for AT&T because I wanted to do international travel, so I took a promotion and went to New Jersey. And within AT&T, I had a lot of different jobs. They would tease me because everybody would say you've got to wait two years to go. I'm like, no, I'm going to do it in a year or whatever. It's just like when they say no, then I intend to do it. So I had marketing jobs with them. I had systems analyst jobs with them. So technical and different management. And I liked that because you learned something new with everything.

Then I got really sick. So my brother had to come get me. I've been home seven years. So it's time to go again.

Well, that's good. You've been here for seven years. And you're feeling much better?

Yes. The last month and a half, I started driving again, and I can get up. I would really like to move south, like to Mississippi. That's where I would love to go now.

Why?

I just really enjoyed it. And when I was with AT&T, I did diversity training on the side as a volunteer for them. So I got to travel all over the country. I had fewer problems there than even in San Francisco, New York, or New Jersey.

I believe that. What would you want to do in Mississippi?

Well, one of my girlfriends, she left AT&T and just boomeranged to Mississippi. She writes grants. But now she does it internationally. So she's been in Africa. She's been in Russia. And they come to consult with her. She's been in China. She was going to the Ukraine not too long ago. I haven't been able yet to say I can feel good enough to work, and my medicine is extremely important. So I can't commit to a real -- I don't know that I could work every day nine to five anyway. Because even at AT&T, I was somewhat of a rebel, and they let us work from home. We could pick our own hours. You would come in when you had a meeting. So it would be very difficult for me to go on a job and say I'm going to stay there, especially when I've been in sales and all of that. But I would like to do something. One thing, I could use the money. And the other thing, I don't know how people don't go crazy who never work or do anything.

So my sister said that's probably as bad as the pain. I have rheumatoid arthritis and other things because of the medicine. I have now Graves' disease and hypertension and sleep apnea, all this stupid stuff. But I feel like I'm healed and the symptoms are just going away now.

Good. That's a great place to be.

It is. Because I'm telling you the doctor had told me I wouldn't even be walking five years from that date, you know. Back in November, I think I was really just ready to stop.

But there is a lot of work to be done. And while I'm not involved in the community, my heart goes out to young people. I still will pick up young ladies and talk to them and take

them to church when they'll go, the ones that are on the streets and stuff like that. Because we were just blessed with wonderful parents who kept it in our mind to stay on the right track. And even so, we still made mistakes, but not to that extent. And then my mother always said that there but for the grace of God go I. So you have to reach back and help somebody.

What is your son doing now?

Well, right now he's in jail. He went to jail for actually a suspended driver's license. He got in jail. They said he spit on an officer and a lawyer. He's had a lot of problems. But he is also -- and I'm not saying this because he's my son -- he has served a lot of time for which he was not guilty. But by the time they scare him into plea bargaining, nobody's going to believe you anyway. And because of my experience, it has happened to too many people, even our people. So many of them are totally shocked at this thing going on because they don't want to know some of them.

But when they had those Iraqi prisoners that were abused, the two leaders were prison guards, one in Pennsylvania and one in West Virginia. And these same people are coming back to the prisons. Like the one guy made the statement, the Christian side of him said that it was wrong, but as a man, as a guard, he loved to see people -- his words in the paper was -- piss their pants. So these are the same kind of sickos that are watching over and making our kids worse than what they are in many cases.

There just is so much work to be done. It just gets overwhelming sometimes. That's some of my biggest things. There are things that I would like to see, programs I would like to see run. A lot of kids get missed out on who are really good kids, kids who have worked their way -- like my goddaughter worked her way through college, and she's been working really hard. This is one of them. She wrote a play that they're going to do later. She's going to do it at the end of September through October for a month.

You have to let me know. I'm going to leave a business card.

Okay, I'll do that.

I think you're needed right here, not Mississippi.

You know, there is stuff there to help people because they don't have any programs.

But I just liked it when I went down there. I don't like this nuclear stuff. I know they've been doing it all along, but not in mass like they're going to be doing it. But I guess where could you go? There is nothing. But it's just bad.

I know that we're going to have an election at the NAACP soon. I plan to start getting involved, too. I have not gotten involved with NAACP here. I just think it's something that we should all start doing.

I think we should support it. I really haven't decided that this time whether -- and more for health reasons. You know, like I said, I know it's going to be all over. But sometimes I work better without all the red tape because I don't have as much patience for that as I used to. And I never had patience for people playing politics and stuff. We were fortunate because we ran a pretty tight meeting. It's like, okay, we're going to have these and report back and do something. But when you get so much into the personalities -- and I don't know. I can't really now say anything because I haven't been that involved. I'm going back to where it was when I left here, and now it looks like so much of it has gone backwards. It doesn't just look that way. We've lost a lot of footing. I find that our people don't want to talk about the past. But we need to talk about the past so we don't make the same mistakes all over again.

I agree. I really appreciate this. I appreciate all this information about the community. I may have to call you, but I think this is a good interview.

Well, thank you. It's nice talking to you. I'll give you some more names of people who know the Westside. I was just over at a friend's house a few weeks ago, the ones of us who grew up together within a four-block radius. We're trying to put a reunion or something together.

Good. I'm going to leave a business card with you.

Okay. All right.

Okay. Thank you.

(End side 2, tape 2.)