AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY STERNBERG

An Oral History Conducted by Barbara Tabach

The Southern Nevada Jewish Community
Digital Heritage Project

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PREFACE

On August 25, 1931, Augusta and Herman Sternberg welcomed their second child, Gerd (aka Gary), into the world of Cuxhaven, Germany. Augusta was a devout Christian of Polish ancestry who had fled Russian persecution. Herman was a German-born Jew salesman and inventor. The couple fell in love and had two children, Gary and Ruth who was a year and half older. By 1938, German politics were targeting Jews and Herman was ripped away from his Christian wife and children and sent to a concentration camp. Fate and friendship rescued Herman with the option to go to China. And so begins the history of the Sternberg family and how they all would eventually live together during World War II in the confines of a Jewish ghetto in Hongkew, China from May 1939 to July 1948.

In this oral history, Gary explains how the family came to live in the United States—Cleveland and Los Angeles. In 1957, he married Noreen and they eventually came to live in Las Vegas where Gary worked for Sears selling washing machines, had a repair business and an importing business with Noreen. Gary was an entrepreneurial soul and inventive much like his father. He owns three patents.

He had an extraordinary career as a dealer. He was not the stereotypical young dealer-to-be: he was in his 40s when he signed up for the Michael Gaughn Dealing School in the mid-1970s. Gary's charming wit and ease of making friends soon gained him a position at El Cortez and then Caesars Palace. It was the same personality that would sustain his stellar thirty-one year career at Caesars. He was employed there from April 1974 until his retirement May 8, 2005.

Though Jewish tradition would identify Gary as Christian, he self-identified as Jewish, officially converted and has been an active member of the Jewish community. Among his anecdotes—and he has many—is one about securing a $30,000 donation from Frank Sinatra and Jilly Rizzo for Congregation Ner Tamid.

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February 12, February 15,
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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Barbara Tabach

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SESSION 1

Today is February 12th, 2015. I'm sitting with Gary Sternberg in his Henderson home. Where shall we begin? We've started chatting here. There are so many things to talk to you about.

Well, we might get so confused that nobody's going to be able to make heads or tails out of this. **Well, that's where the editing and the table of contents and the indexing that we'll do later will help people go through all of this.**

Let's start with where you were born. You were looking at a map.

Okay, we're looking at a map of Germany. And this is Hamburg here. There's a river that goes from Hamburg to the North Sea, which this is the North Sea here, and it's called the Elbe River. It goes right down to the North Sea and Cuxhaven is right at the mouth of the Elbe River, what flows into the North Sea. It is a small resort town. It's a resort town and a fishing community, beautiful, beautiful place. We lived right behind a dike and the ocean, just a short block up to the dike.

So you were born in what year?

1931.

So what was it like as a child in Germany in 1931?

Well, we're talking about cold and northern Germany gets extremely cold. It gets so cold that the saltwater freezes and you have big ice shoals floating around and icebreakers and stuff. It gets very, very cold. And the summer is just beautiful temperatures. It's just very nice. Went to school. And then, of course, Hitler started with his persecution and the whole thing changed. Air raids and bombardments.

But not to get ahead of myself. As a child, just fun, just a kid's dream.

Did you have siblings?

I have a sister. She lives in St. Joseph, Michigan. She's a year and a half older than I am. She's freezing her tush off right now. And every time I call her she says, "I don't want to know; I don't want to know [about the weather in Las Vegas]."

And here we are having record warmth, right?

Yeah, and you go outside and you've got to take your jacket off it's so nice. The temperature right now is seventy something degrees.

We can't complain, right.

No. By the way, if we would have done this like a couple of months ago—my voice has been kind of harassing me. We wouldn't have been able to do this. For a whole year I had a voice that was so bad. Just croaky and raspy. They couldn't figure that out—anyway, I wouldn't have been able to talk into the microphone.

So if you get too tired, let me know because we can always come back and pick up from where we leave off.

Sure. Of course.

Well, take me through your family. Your parents were both German-born?

No. My mother [Augusta Sternberg] was born in Poland. My mother was Christian and she raised us Christian, both my sister and me. We're kind of a different situation than most Jewish families because we're like half and a half. My father [Herman Sternberg] was Jewish; my mother was Christian. She raised my sister Ruth and myself in the Christian faith.

She came from Poland, a place called Lengoven, a very poverty stricken area. Most of Poland was. They're rural areas and very poverty stricken area…She used to tell us about the atrocities and the Russians and political strife and the Cossacks and rapes and murders and

killings. It goes on and on. She relocated to Germany. She worked as a housekeeper for an Orthodox Jewish family and she learned all the Jewish customs and all the Yiddish expressions. She had more Yiddish expressions than any Jew you know, ever, ever. And then she met my father in Cuxhaven and they got married.

Do you know the story of how they met?

No, I really don't. My father at that time—he was like a traveling salesman. He used to sell medical equipment and supplies to hospitals and doctors' offices. He used to go around on a motorcycle, traveling all over in the area around northern Germany and that's what he would do and this is how they met. A lot of times he'd take my mother along. She'd ride along on the motorcycle and they'd go all over the place. They had a lot of fun.

My dad, he had a practice in Cuxhaven and he did a lot of foot work, like callouses and bunions and all kinds of different things. He used to have people coming in from all over Germany...Cuxhaven was a resort town. So a lot of times these people would be on vacation and just come to see him special. He made artificial limbs. He made arms. He made corsets, arch supports, hernia trusses, all kinds of stuff. I used to love to watch him. He did all these things, very, very talented.

Then when we came to the United States, he couldn't continue that because he needed a medical license to do that and he would have had to go for a doctorate. Of course, he was in his fifties and it wasn't feasible [because of language barrier].

So he was self-trained?

Yes. Self-trained, but he learned a lot of that in hospitals on the job, kind of OJT.

OTJ, on the job.

That'll work for me. But he did continue when we—I'm getting ahead of myself. Well, actually

not because he continued a lot of this stuff in Shanghai, also. He worked for the Jewish Hospital in Shanghai. Wherever we went, even in a one-room flat, he'd have a workshop and he'd do things, not as extensively, needless to say, what he did in Germany, but he always did things, worked for the hospital, just made a few dollars when it wasn't possible to make a living over there.

So he had a trade that he could use—

Oh, yeah.

—no matter where in the world you ended up.

Right, yeah.

[Pause in recording]

So now that we have our coffee and our coffee cake that was made by...?

Aunt Bess'.

Aunt Bess. It's great, delicious.

I'm sure if you like it, Mary Lou can give you the recipe for it.

Yes, I love it. So we were talking about your dad and your dad and mom...we're still in Germany.

We're still in Germany in Cuxhaven.

And so how did it come about that you left?

My father was in a concentration camp. He got in a concentration camp in 1938. They picked him up, yanked him out of the house. We didn't know where he was or anything about it. They put him in a concentration camp; it was 1938, and he was in there for about a year. Through friends of his—he had a lot of good friends politically connected friends—they got him out with a condition that if he didn't leave right away, they would put him back in and forget it; they'd

murder him. So when he came back out, he said right away, "We can't stay here; we're going to have to leave Germany." Of course that was a real...I was about seven, eight years old at the time. "We have to leave Germany and we can't stay here because..." I mean he read the writing; the constitution tells you everything, right?

But at the time me and my sister and my mother [Augusta Sternberg] were Christian; we weren't Jewish, but my father was. So his was the immediate urgency that he had to get out. So now we're trying to make arrangements to leave the country and it turned out that there was only one passage left and China was the only place to go because nobody would have Jews. They tried Cuba, South America, all different places. You couldn't get a visa to any of these places. So the only place left was China and a lot of German Jews had already gone to China to escape Germany sensing the imminent danger of what's happening.

So the way I hear it is they went to the ship lines and the only way to get out was by ship. They went to the ship lines and there was only one passage left and it was on an Italian luxury liner, just the one passage. They could not accommodate the three of us. So my father wasn't going to go, but my mother insisted. She said, "They say they're going to murder you; they're going to kill you." By that time we already knew what was happening in concentration camps and everything. Of course, my mother won the argument and my father left and he left on this luxury liner. I mean really gorgeous ship, right? High style and stuff. And went to China. Then we started making arrangements for us to get out. That passage, by the way, was the last passage on a ship and the last ship to go to Shanghai, and that was out of Genoa, Italy.

So my mother, my sister and I, we left there, no income, our finances are dwindling down and stuff. Then finally my mother found a waitress job in an upscale restaurant by the ocean.

So had you all gone to Italy, then, together?

Oh, I'm sorry, no. Let me go back. We couldn't go; we had to stay behind. My mother, my sister and I stayed behind. My father left because they would have killed him right away. But we were in no imminent danger at the time because we were Christians.

So you stayed in Germany.

We stayed in Germany, right. Okay, yeah.

I wanted to make sure because he left from Genoa.

Right. So that was about a year and a half that was really, really tough. We had no income and had a hard time paying the rent. The house we were living in, we were in a whole section of the house, but it was rented. We had no income and people helped us out. Those people we thought that would be able to help us out, they had...well, my parents had some good friends and the man was a ship building engineer. They were very wealthy, had a big villa-like home. My mother thought they could help us. But they had their money confiscated and they were on a budget. The government had them on a budget, like an allowance kind of thing, and they couldn't help.

Then my father had a good patient and she was a widow, a single woman. I don't know. But she was very, very wealthy and had a lot of—she was the one that got him out of the concentration camp. She helped out and she got my—I mean nobody would talk to my mother because knowing she was married to a Jew nobody would help her, right?

And you were living in a Christian neighborhood?

Yes. There's very few Jews in Cuxhaven. So she finally got her a job and we assumed it was one of her restaurants that she got the job because she was just hired, no questions asked. She had no background and never worked on the outside except in housekeeping and stuff. So she found a waitress job and that kept us going for a while.

Then we made arrangements. But in the meantime—so now, in 1940 the war starts. So

now the war is going on and Germany had invaded Poland and the war starts. So the war starts with England; Poland was invaded and stuff. So now they start the whole thing. Germans are all elated, *oh, wow, we're going to rule the world*. They're going to be the dictators of the world and everybody's elated the fact that Germany overran Poland in such a short time that, *wow, we're the world might now*.

So now air raids start. So now we're getting bombed by British bombers. Most of the nights we were in a little bomb shelter in a basement with bombs falling all around. For little kids...it's scarier than hell.

Oh, it has to be.

I don't know how my mother did it, but while she was working she made arrangements. Finally we got the passage arranged, but we couldn't go by ship; we had to go by land. We had to go from Cuxhaven. And it was very difficult to make arrangements in Cuxhaven because agencies and travel and stuff like that was very difficult to arrange.

My mother had a sister in Berlin. She never got along well with her. She wrote her a letter, the situation we're in, blah, blah, blah, and she didn't expect a lot of results from her. A few days later she gets a letter back saying that she'd love to have us, we can stay with her and she'd help us make arrangements. It was great.

So after we packed up—oh, there's a little incident I should mention. While all this is going on, the air raids and the war and the fear of war and stuff being rationed, you couldn't hardly buy anything anymore like bread, butter, meat; it was very, very scarce. Like I wrote in my book, when I was a little kid just playing outside, I used to get hungry and the only reason I would come into the house is because I was hungry. Then I was hungry and there was nothing to eat. It was a different kind of hunger.

My mother made arrangements. The only way we could go is by—so the Jewish Joint and a lot of Jewish organizations helped, also the same organizations that helped my father with money because we had hardly any money. So she made arrangements and we went to Berlin with my aunt and she put us up in her apartment. She had a big apartment and she put us up. She did all the groundwork already, where the organizations were that she had to contact and everything. It was great. And we had a wonderful time there. My aunt's husband, Uncle Kurt, later on he was drafted into the German Army and he was killed in combat.

So the only way to get out of Germany to China was over land and we had to go from Cuxhaven to Berlin, from Berlin to Moscow, Russia, through all of Russia, Siberia, to a place called Harbin, which is on the other end of Russia, which is almost on the Pacific Coast, via the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The whole trip took, I think, about maybe eight or nine days on one train. But it wasn't bad. It was a luxury train. It was great. We had good food and nice company. We had Russians soldiers on there, officers. They played with us. As kids it was really good.

We went to Harbin. This is where things change. On the train when we went from Berlin to Moscow, we stayed at the Metropol Hotel, which at that time was Russia's crown jewel hotel. It wasn't just a flea bag. It was a gorgeous high-line hotel. We stayed there for three days. While in Moscow we went sightseeing, the Red Square, Saint Basil's Cathedral, Lenin's Tomb and we found out where Lenin was buried. That's a joke...We had sightseeing. And in the hotel we ate in this incredible dining room with music. I've got pictures of all that stuff.

Oh, you do?

Yeah. I got online and I downloaded—

Oh, not ones that you took.

No, I didn't have a camera…even today it's still a very high-class hotel. And from there—the railroad station was right in this same area, like three railroad stations near Red Square. Just about everything was within walking distance.

From there we went on the train. And the uncertainties of food and how we would be treated, a young woman with two little kids, can you imagine?

And so this train, it ends in Russia?

It goes to Harbin, which is a city in Manchuria. We went through Manchuria, also. I've got to add Manchuria to this whole thing. Went through Manchuria. Manchuria was occupied by the Japanese. So when we left Russia and we went across the border into Manchuria, Manchuria was occupied by the Japanese. We get to the railroad station and the train, of course, stops. You've got all these Japanese soldiers with fixed bayonets yelling commands and stuff like this. Scared the shit out of us. This train stops and an officer shouts commands and all these soldiers, they scurry on to different cars in the train and they stand at attention in each car with fixed bayonets. They come around to all the windows. They rip the shades down, pull the shades down. An announcement was made...you better not look out the shades. And who was going to argue with these guys with the fixed bayonets, right? So obviously, the Japanese had a lot of military installations that they didn't want anybody to see. So that was the secrecy and the guard; so nobody would look out. So now we couldn't move around as readily as we did on the train. So things weren't so much fun anymore.

We wind up in Harbin. In Harbin we stayed in some kind of hotel for a day or so. I can't remember exactly there. Then we went on a train, which was a typical Oriental train. It was packed with stinking Chinese, coolies, fleas, human waste. Coming from where we came from...my mother was a neat freak. Everything had to be just right. Well, this was total disaster

to her on this train we go into a port city on the Yellow Sea and I can't remember the name of the city it was. But the train trip took about a day and a half, maybe two days. It was terrible. The train was terrible.

So now we get on the ship, which was a Japanese ship. And the only thing I can remember, the last name was *Maru* because all Japanese warships are named *Maru*. When we went to the pier, the taxi took us to the ship and we looked at the ship and it was a rust bucket. It was one of these, like a tramp steamer and the worst you can imagine. Here again, now, this ship was worse than the train and we had to cross the Yellow Sea to Shanghai. While we're in port we're watching these coolies load up the ship with rice, with bags of rice. Everything was manpower. Everything is manpower. And they were loading these ships and I'm watching. I'm standing on the ship looking down on the dock. The one coolie drops a bag of rice and the rice spills all over the dock and a supervisor comes along and he kicks him and he hits him. I'm nine years old at the time. Oh, my god, he kicks him and makes the guy unconscious. They drag him away. Probably threw him in the ocean. I don't know. And these coolies were loading rice bags on to the ship. They were working like ants carrying these bags up the ramp, around, come back out the other side and then get more rice bags. They were loading these one bag at a time.

Well, we wound up in Shanghai. They were low class—the people that travel, they're real poverty stricken. I mean they don't have money to travel. But these guys were just a little bit above the people on that ship. They were going back and forth, I guess, to jobs or whatever. But they were just low-class Chinese.

Were there other people other than Chinese people, I guess other people like yourself on this voyage?

No. We were the only ones.

Just your mom and you two kids.

Yeah. Because keep in mind that in 1940, the German Jews didn't leave Germany because they were either stuck in Germany or in concentration camps already.

So now we finally wind up in Shanghai. I can't remember what we ate, but it was just like canned crap that we ate on the ship because everything is contaminated. The water is contaminated. Everything stinks. China stinks. Wherever you go in China, it stinks. But that's not saying that China didn't save our lives.

Well, it was culturally a shock.

Yeah.

So we get to Shanghai. My father meets us on the dock and we're all happy and stuff. So we take either rickshaws—Hongkew [also spelled Hongkou] where we lived in Shanghai, Hongkew is a suburb of Shanghai. It's called something else now I'm sure and it's a suburb of Shanghai.

Now, Shanghai for the most part is filthy and Hongkew is the ultimate of filth. This is a real bad suburb in all respects. This is where all the Jews wound up at because the rent and stuff like that was too expensive in the better parts of Shanghai. There was some very, very luxurious settlements in Shanghai. There was the French Quarter, the English settlement and different things where all these established people in Shanghai, the traders, lived in these areas. But we lived in Hongkew.

So was Hongkew created just to house the Jews?

No. Hongkew was actually a suburb, but this is where all the Jews happened to congregate.

So you create your own conclave or ghetto or however you want to describe it.

Exactly. But even then Hongkew—well, so we went to this street, which was called like little

Israel; it was Chusan Road, which was like little Israel. They had Jewish delis there. They even had a fur store there. One of the Russian Jews had a fur store there. Oh, yeah. But don't forget this was before the war now and there's still some commerce going on in Shanghai. And it doesn't make any difference where you put Jews, they're always going to find something to do. In other words, they're not going to sit there and die; they're going to do something and try and better themselves. And even in Shanghai where everything is just negative, everything is bad, they found places to eat and worship, have restaurants and theaters and schools, everything.

So now we run into a problem. We're in this deli in this restaurant and all my father's friends crowded around us. They want to know about Germany, about Hitler, about concentration camps, and everybody is shooting questions at my mother. We're dead tired from this awful trip, right? We're just dead tired and they're all with questions. And I can tell my mother is getting really, really...my mother had some real expressions. She didn't have to say anything; she expressed herself. And she's getting mad about the men that my father is gloating over; his family is here now. He's happy because his family is here. But these people are shooting questions at us.

I'll never forget this one guy comes up to me and he says, "You want candy, little boy?" In English. And I said, [German]; what does it mean? And this guy was crazy, right? But this is one of the experiences I remember. And he's laughing at me because I didn't know what candy was and he's laughing at me. My mother's expression is going from bad to rotten and she's getting so mad. She's tired. We're all tired. And now he's pointing his finger at me. "The little boy doesn't know what candy's like." This guy must have loved candy; that's the only English word he knew. And my mother points her finger in his face and she says, "Get the hell out of here and leave my son alone, you idiot."

My father gets upset because she mistreated his friends. So this didn't sit very good. That was one of our first...where things didn't go the way they should have. So then my mother is saying, "Okay, where are we going to live?" She says, "You have set us up with a place to live, right?" He says, "No, I was going to do that right now." Well, this is where their first big argument started.

So they put us up in some friend's house or something, some apartment for a couple of days because I remember sleeping on like little army cots and stuff. So then we found a place in Hongkew, which was on the second floor in a building and it was like a one-room flat. To conserve space we had like double-tiered bunks, like bunk beds. My sister and I slept on the upper beds and my parents on the lower beds. And we even had a balcony. By Shanghai, Hongkew standards, this was luxury. This was good stuff. And we had something that very few people other people had; we had a WC. You know what that stands for?

Water closet.

Right. We had that. Now, it wasn't a private one because the whole building used it, but nevertheless, we didn't have to use the—

There was plumbing.

There was plumbing, if you want to call it that because if you can imagine our plumbing...you go to the bathroom, the plumbing and all the waste goes into the sewer and it winds up in some treatment plant, right? In Shanghai, the plumbing all goes down a pipe on the outside of the building and then it goes down into a trough, which is open, and all the waste flows down for quite a length and then it goes into a sewer. That's why everything in China stinks.

But we had a water closet; this was a real luxury. We had a balcony and the balcony overlooked the Japanese garrison. And it was kind of fun because we used to watch the soldiers

do their exercises. There was like an empty lot next to it where they used to do their exercises. They used to fight with bamboo swords, like simulated swords with bamboo body armor. They used body armor for bamboo. Even the Egyptians used steel, right? But anyway, it was pretty effective, later on I found out. They would have these drills with the sword fighting…

So by Shanghai standards it was luxury living. My mother was just...And then to cook there was a separate room in this building where each family or each woman would have her own stove, which was coal fired in a charcoal or coal briquettes. In my book I'm at this stage where I'm describing the coal briquettes because if you bought the cheap ones that we thought we were getting a bargain—they were all handmade by different vendors, like street vendors and stuff. And you would only buy enough briquettes for one or two meals because they were heavy to carry and you had to place to put them and, also, economy-wise you didn't have the money to outlay, say, a whole bunch of coal. So it took a lot of talent just to go shopping, among other things, just for briquettes; that was a whole deal because if you wound up with bad ones they wouldn't light because they would cheat you and put too much sand in with the coal and they wouldn't fire up.

So you had to learn the lay of the land.

You had to learn the whole thing. In Germany a lot of us just turned on the gas stove.

Right, I get it.

So your dad was making money—was he doing a similar career?

He did. Even in this little flat, he had a little workshop and he made stuff. He had a sewing machine that certain things had to be sewn. And he had a workshop and he had like a little forge, I remember, on the balcony where he forged certain steel items and metal items. He found out places to buy things. But commerce is completely different. You don't go online and call up

Amazon. It didn't work that way. And he made things and he worked for the Jewish Hospital. They had a Jewish Hospital in Hongkew, a small hospital. And he made just a meager living, just enough to get by.

So you get settled in there.

We got settled in there. We're up on the second floor.

How many years were you there?

In Shanghai? Eight years. And we lived there from October 1940 to July 1948...[father arrived in May 1939].

So now the Germans start working their way into this thing and the Japanese considered us German nationals, citizens, for which they had very, very high respect and very high admiration. And when they were talking about European Jews, they thought they were the ultimate because Jews were so smart. They had Einstein. They had all the intelligence, the medical, the inventions, all these different things. They really thought very highly of us.

Rumors had it—we didn't find out until later on—that the Germans were already building gas chambers on the other side of the Yellow River. They had plans for us already, but the Japanese wouldn't let them go ahead with this thing because they just opposed them over there and they didn't have the kind of power like they had in Poland or in Italy or wherever you want to go. Nothing ever happened with that.

So now war starts with the United States. Pearl Harbor [Dec. 7, 1941, attack]. One day we weren't that far from the river—the river and harbor is a huge complex in Shanghai because Shanghai was a huge international trading port—and we heard gunshots. What it was is the Japanese sank an American gun boat in the harbor. They tried to get out of the harbor and they sunk the gun boat. This was December seventh and a few days after that. I think it was around

December tenth when they sunk the gun boat. So now this thing starts with Pearl Harbor. The Americans get into the war and the Japanese start whatever it was.

To backtrack a little bit, the Japanese invaded China in 1937, but only certain parts of China; Shanghai was one of them where which they totally conquered and they occupied it and they had the garrisons, they had guards, they had Japanese soldiers patrolling the streets and stuff.

But now with the war starting, the whole thing intensified. Soon afterwards, they came around and they talked to the leaders of the Jewish community that all the Jews have to move into a certain part of Hongkew, a ghetto. It's going to be a zoned off area. It wasn't walled off or anything. Not like the ghetto here, like the blacks say they have ghettos and they can't get out because the poor kids can't get out of ghetto. Our ghetto was different and we knew it. If you left our ghetto, you got shot; it was that simple and everybody knew it. So you followed orders.

So you weren't barb wired in.

No, it wasn't really, no. There was a boundary and on the streets they had Japanese guards and you just didn't go past that area. Because you didn't want to get shot.

Would you like some more cake, Barbara?

No, I'm fine.

So you had to move out of the apartment?

So now we had to move out of the apartment. Well, all the Jews from Hongkew and are put them in a very highly concentrated area. There was no place to live, no places to live. You couldn't rent. You couldn't do anything. All the commerce that was then—all the limited commerce that the Jews had then was further limited to nothing. So now there was no place to go. So they established homes. They were called *heims*. *Heim* actually means home. But they

were homes. The one that we lived in was an old Chinese university. It was walled in. It was a big complex with buildings and houses and large dormitories and stuff like that. I don't know how they acquired that, but it was called the Chusan (now Zhoushan Road) Road Heim. It was a huge camp. It was a lot of buildings in it. That was the only place that we could live. We first got there and it was...I can't imagine. By comparison to people in concentration camp and a thousand people lived in this small area, it wasn't that bad, but it was bad enough to be bad.

When we first got there, Barbara, I'm nine years old then. They put us in a huge room, like a huge dormitory kind of room with double bunk beds stacked almost on top of each other, right next to each other. Men and boys would live in the same room and women and girls would live in the same room, the kids and their mothers, fathers and their sons would live in the same room. It was ridden with bedbugs and lice. Not to be discriminating, but the Polish Jews, their personal sanitary was not very good. They brought in a lot of lice and bedbugs. My mother was out of her mind.

I remember my father was sleeping on the bottom; I was sleeping in the top bunk bed. The only place to put anything was under the bottom bed. I had brought with me from Germany my prized possession, my erector set. I put it under the bed and my biggest worry was that somebody was going to steal it because there was no place to put anything. Clothes were in boxes and stuff. There was no place to put anything.

And this is how we lived for a while. It was absolutely...the bedbugs and the stench and the bathrooms were a big mess.

So finally my parents put up a big enough stink and we were able to move into the hospital. Now, the hospital was a concrete building. It was the nicest building in the whole complex, which was an ex-hospital. It used to be a hospital when it was the university. It was a

really nice building and it had bathrooms on each floor, communal bathrooms.

So it wasn't a functioning hospital; it was just a building?

They called it the hospital because it used to be a hospital. There actually was like a first aid thing on the ground floor that they used for first aid and medical services for the inhabitants of the camp. We lived on the third floor. There were three floors. We lived in one big room with five families. Everybody had a little bitty section in the room. Again, double-tiered beds. Everybody's section was kind of closed off with drapes or sheets and stuff like that and that was the only privacy you had. We lived there for a number of years, until after the end of the war.

Unbelievable.

Here again, we had our soccer team. Matter of fact, there was a soccer field right in back because there was a soccer field there from when it was the university. We had the soccer field. We played Ping-Pong. We'd take old weathered junkie picnic tables and push them together and we used bricks instead of nets. And the balls that we used were like cannon balls; they were really crappy balls. And then just a piece of wood was the paddle. And we played Ping-Pong.

We had entertainment. They had like a big assembly hall that had a stage in it. They put on concerts. They had people that brought their musical instruments with them. We had some very, very talented musicians. We had some very, very talented soccer players, football players that organized Little Leagues, like the picture I showed you.

I've got to get some water. Excuse me.

[Pause in recording]

Caesars Palace in the casino—I'm on a dead game.

You were working as a dealer there.

As a dealer, right. I'm a dealer. I'm in the casino. I'm standing by the table, but there's no players on the table. And this is the section of the casino that's closest to the Forum Shops. I don't know if you're familiar with the layout. And I'm standing by that game, minding my own business. I was just watching people go by like I always do. "Gary, Gary." I look around. Who is it? It's...oh, what's his name, Weissbart. They're friends of ours, Dick and Cherrie Weissbart. He's a lawyer and she's a kleptomaniac.

"Gary, Gary." [She calls out.] And when she talks to you, she spits, so you've got to back up. Nicest people. But Dick was never really successful. He was kind of involved in questionable deals. "Gary, Gary." I says, "What are you doing here?" She says, "We're living here." I says, "You're living at Caesars?" She says, "Yeah." I says, "Why?" She says, "They're remodeling our house." I says, "Okay; that's nice." She says, "Yeah, but we're not doing it; the movie company is doing it." I says, "What movie company?" "Oh, they're making a movie called *Casino*." I says, "Oh, that's nice." She says, "Yeah, and they threw us out of the house." I says, "Why?" Because it took them several months to rebuild that house. And I knew the house; I was in it a number of times. The house is off the old Stardust Golf Course and the streets up there are called like Chiefs and—I don't know if you're familiar. It's almost behind the Boulevard Mall; that area up there. They had a house right in a cul-de-sac. And they chose that house. That was the house that she ran the cars into in "Casino." It's a two-story house. It has a spiral staircase going up the second floor. And she says, "Yeah, and they're paying us so much for it. They're remolding the house." She says, "I'm so excited."

So I've got to back up. And she's going on and on and on, on how they chose the house and everything. So that was the house, the Weissbart's house. I'll think of her name. Yeah, that was the Weissbart's house that they chose. Talking about the movie *Casino*...I'll tell you, you

can't start on anything in the city or anything that I don't have a story for. Yeah, so that was one of the stories.

So let's get you from Shanghai to Vegas.

Then we'll get into the movie "Casino." Your editor is going to have a hell of a time with that.

Well, this is okay. This is fine. But we don't want to stay on—

Cherrie Weissbart.

You don't want to stay on the casino career. You want to go back to Shanghai.

Yeah, we're going back to Shanghai.

Okay. So now we're aware that the Germans are trying to influence the Japanese. So now they put us, you might call corralling the Jews, into a small area, which will be highly concentrated with mostly Jews. But Chinese live in this area, also, in Hongkew. It's like a suburb would be, like Henderson to Las Vegas. That would be Hongkew; it was a good-size section of town. So within Hongkew they establish a perimeter of a ghetto for the Jews to live and you had to have a special permission and a special pass to get out of it. And the only one that could issue that pass would be the king of the Jews. Now, the king of the Jews is a little bitty Japanese guy. He was a colonel or something in the Japanese military. And there is a picture of him in there with a crown and a cape.

In this book about Hongkew, [The Jews in Shanghai] okay.

And his name is...I have two different names on this guy. It's actually Goya, G-O-Y-A or something like that, but we also used to call him Goria, which is close, just interpretation. If you went to his office and you required a special pass for medical services out of the ghetto or stuff

like that or for whatever reason you needed to get out of the ghetto, you had to get a special pass and he was the only one that could issue that. And if he didn't like you or if you were tall, say, for example, he would climb up on his desk and he'd pick up his ruler and he would hit you over the head with a ruler because he was the king of the Jews, and the only reason he did that is because he could. That was the king of the Jews. He was Japanese and he was in control of the ghetto. Even though everybody hated him during this whole episode from, say, 1941 until 1945 at the end of the war, it turns out that he was kind of a hero after the war; that he admired the Jews. But that was kind of a put-on thing he did. It was also thought that he was instrumental in not allowing the Germans to do what they wanted to do or give them the free reign.

So he protected you.

There were all kinds of rumors going around, but the rumor going on—and when you're in a situation like that, Barbara, rumors are always going around rampant and they're never any good. They're always bad rumors. And the rumor was that they were going to corral us into a small section, put all the Jews in small sections so the Germans would have better control over us if they wanted to nab us and put us in concentration camps. That was the rumor then.

So now we move into the Chaoufoong Camp. We lived in, like I explained, this awful room. It stunk. It was totally overcrowded. The summers in Shanghai got super humid; it's kind of like Florida. The winters got very cold and the summers were extremely hot, but it's the humidity that's awful. When you add corpses in the street, you add human manure, you add degrading and rotting vegetables in the streets, sewer in the streets, floods that overflowed the sewers that bring the sewers out of the sewers on to the streets, it's not a good situation and this is why disease was running rampant. But one thing that the Japanese did do when they invaded Shanghai—the diseases in Shanghai, in China in general but especially in Shanghai were so

rampant and they had this place occupied and they had to protect themselves. They had vaccination stations all over the place.

Like now we're running into this problem where some mothers say, "I don't want my child vaccinated because"...blah, blah, right? In Shanghai that was a different deal. You didn't go from one place to another without your pass and you didn't go from one place to another without your vaccination card. They had guards posted on various areas in the city. If your vaccination card wasn't up to date, you had to get vaccinated right then and there or you just didn't go any further; that was it. And you weren't go to argue with these guys because they had the rifles with the bayonets. So it was as simple as that. But the Japanese are extremely clean. They're very...sanitation, very clean there. So that's one thing.

So now we moved into Chaoufoong Road Hiem. We were living in this horrible situation there with the bedbugs and the filth. Like I said, Shanghai in the summer gets extremely hot, gets very, very humid, and the winters get cold; there's no heat in these rooms. So now my parents were in on a deal because...it had something to do with the stuff that he was doing for the hospital. This has nothing to do with the building we were in; it's just the name of the building right now. But he was doing a lot of stuff for the hospital, which was in a remote place from where we were living. He said, "If I'm living in these conditions, I can't do all the stuff that I want to do for the hospital." So they put us into the hospital building; there were five families in one room and the room probably wasn't much bigger than this area right here, the kitchen, living room and all this stuff, and they were sectioned off into five families. Then they gave him a little space where the cooking area was for a workshop and he set up his workshop and he had his tools and he did his stuff. Under the most adverse conditions he was able to make stuff.

He was amazing.

Just primitive. But my father was very...I inherited my father's mechanical abilities. I can prove it because I have three U.S. patents. That's a whole other story.

Whenever possible I'm in his little workshop that he had sectioned off where the cooking area was. I'm in there and I'm collecting all the tin cans I can. At this point I'm maybe ten, eleven years old or something. I'm collecting all the tin cans I have because I cut them up and I make toys for the girls, like little woks—I would hammer them out of tin cans—and frying pans and little cooking utensils that the girls would play, toys for the girls. And they would pay me a little for it and I had enough for maybe candy once in a while or something. And everybody says, "Oh, Gerd (Gary's German name), you're going to be an inventor when you grow up; you're going to be an inventor." Oh, sure. It turns out I am. So we did all those things.

The women had a whole kitchen area in there, which was one large room. If you can imagine one room and all the women cook in this one room. This is where the food preparation is and everybody has their own stove. Like the stove I mentioned, it's either fired by coal briquettes or charcoal. But charcoal is expensive, so the choice of fuel was coal briquettes. And you see all the women fanning the stove to get the fire going and it stunk from carbon monoxide and coal fumes and food preparation while my father is working in this room sectioned off for his little workshop in there. But it worked. We survived all this. It's really amazing, human nature, when you do what you've got to do.

And so you were going to school and you were playing sports.

I'm going to school and I'm playing Ping-Pong on warped, weathered tables. I'm playing soccer. As I get a little older, I'm a soccer player and I wasn't really that good. I thought I was, but I wasn't really that good. The team I played for was Barcelona and Barcelona was ranked the lowest team in the league. I couldn't handle that. The number one team was (A Ha Fow),

A-H-V, translating into—abbreviations was Alta Herren Verein, meaning old gentlemen's club or old gentlemen's association. That was the top team. Like the men's, they had three divisions.

This is within that—

First, second and third division. Within Chaoufoong Road Heim, yeah, the camp. But all the Jews in Hongkew would be playing on this field, which was at the Chaoufoong Road Heim. It was a real organized league.

So now I'm trying to get on the A Ha Fow team. They finally accepted me. Boy, I'll tell you my head wasn't big enough to get through the door. I was the hotshot. But now the problem comes in; I couldn't play on tennis shoes or just junkie shoes because half the time we didn't have shoes; the soles were falling off or something. And you couldn't play on that team unless you had football shoes or soccer shoes, cleated shoes. I didn't have any. So now what am I going to do? My father scrounged me up a pair of shoes that somebody gave him. I put them on, but they were too small. But I can't admit they were too small because that was my only shot. So if I admit they were too small, I wouldn't be able to play. So I had to wear those shoes. But playing with those shoes, I couldn't play worth a damn. I could barely run in those shoes let alone kick the ball. So I wound up as first replacement on the team, but still that was a great honor. That's where I was at. On that picture...I'm not on that picture. I thought I was, but I'm not on that picture because I had amoebic dysentery and I was really, really sick when they took that picture. But that was my team.

What language were you speaking?

German. Oh, that's another thing, language—talk about language. That's a whole other thing. Among our parents most everybody spoke German, but among the kids we spoke English.

You learned English?

Yes, you learned English. It's not like people come across the border and they're here for twenty years and they can't speak a word of English or read or write. When we went to school, the language in the school was English and if you didn't learn it, you didn't learn. You'd be surprised how fast you learn the language and how fast you're able to talk.

So you didn't have to learn Chinese or Japanese?

Yes, Japanese, we did. That's another thing. It became compulsive to learn Japanese, which was really hard. I was a good student, anyway. And the Japanese teacher we had by the name of Posner was a German Jew. His name was Posner; I'll never forget. This guy was just as brutal as the Japanese. Any slight infraction, wham, you get it across the back of your hands with a ruler. That was our Japanese teacher, yeah. Yeah, Japanese was compulsive until the end of the Japanese reign and then it was taken off.

So now, I've got to digress: When we first came to Shanghai, where we were living, in this apartment or this flat, SJYO School was quite a distance. SJYO; that stands for Shanghai Jewish Youth Organization is what it stands for and that was the name of the school, also, SJYO School. There was also another school by the name of Kadoorie School and the Kadoories were Sephardic Jews that were long established since the beginning of the 1900's, long established Jews like some other Jewish families. They were usually, oh, from Iran or even some Russian countries. They were very, very wealthy and they were all in the import-export business. If it weren't for them, a lot of the Jews in Shanghai wouldn't have survived. It's just that way. And that was named after one of the Sephardic Jewish families, Kadoorie. I'm running back and forth here.

But since we were Christian, my father found out that we qualified to go to a Christian missionary school, which was within reasonable walking distance from where we lived. So we

got enrolled into this missionary school. And the reason they had a missionary school there is besides the German Jews there were also a lot of other German and Austrian families that escaped Germany for different reasons; number one was persecution because they were communists, because they might have been gay, there might have been criminal activities or something like that and they escaped Germany and Shanghai was a pretty good place to go to. So there were also a lot of non-Jewish families living in that area. So they had this missionary school there. It was a small school.

We learned a lot about God and Jesus. We didn't learn a lot about reading, writing and arithmetic. But the other advantage was also that we got fed in the school. We had dinners and we used to get fed in the school. They had a nice kitchen in there and we used to have our regular meals in the school, which was a big thing.

Tell me about leaving Shanghai. What do you remember about learning that the war is over and you can—I mean get me to United States. How did that happen?

After the war the ghetto lifted and we were not restricted. We could go anyplace we wanted to go. Also, we're living in Chaoufoong Road Camp and the living conditions were terrible, five families in a room. So now, towards the end of the war, we're getting bombed by American bombers and they made a mistake and they bombed the Jewish section and we had like thirty-something Jews die from the air raids because it was a mistake. They were supposed to bomb a Japanese factory and they bombed part of the ghetto. Also, they used to drop bombs near our school because there was a Japanese uniform factory there close to the school. All these scary things. But we used to sit in this most solid building in the camp, in the Chaoufoong Road Camp was our building because it was a concrete building. We used to huddle on the bottom floor. There was no air raid shelters or anything. Then towards the end of the war we used to

have a lot of raids and you've got these bombs dropping all over the place and stuff.

Then after the war a place we used to go to for swimming, we called it Leprosy Lake because from the bombings from the air raids...the Chinese just bury their dead all over the place and a lot of these graves were unearthed from the bombs. So they had skeletons and human remains scattered all over the place.

But that was a great place to swim. It was like a little inlet lake. So we called it Leprosy Lake and that's what we used to swim in. But we had a good time there. It was muddy and we used to slip into the water and we had a good time there.

You could still be a kid.

I could still be a kid. Then after the war then my father started making some money because he was able to do his work and stuff. We moved into another place on Tongshan Road, Lane 818. And the way a lot of these places are laid out is there are lanes and then there are buildings. So you have a lane number, which was 818, and then the building number, which I don't remember, and you had the buildings inside of these lanes and they're all sectioned off. It's a weird construction. It's a weird way. And then walled around it and the walls would have broken glass cemented on top of it to keep people off the walls, so they wouldn't climb over the walls. We lived there until we left Shanghai.

Then we finally—and we had applied. Right after the war my father got really active. And the United States was, of course, the best place to go to. A lot of the Jews went back to Germany. Later on we learned that a lot of them came to the United States because they couldn't handle Germany because of the misery that they caused and the people and the confrontation. The whole thing became an impossible thing. They came to United States. Later on we had some friends that went to Santo Domingo. Some people went to South America, Australia. But

we decided to come to the United States, which most everybody went to.

So there was a period of time where the war is over and you're making a decision about where you might go.

Right. But now you had to apply for the visa. You had to apply for the documentation to get into the United States. And we couldn't just swim across the Rio Grande. We had to apply for it and it took time. And like all these people now that feel they're entitled to live in this country, they're not because anybody else who has to come to this country has to come through the channels, legal channels, not illegal ones.

And so finally we got the news that—so now by the time we got out of Shanghai—I was there for quite a while, longer than some people did.

How long did it take?

Three years. We didn't get out until 1948.

So you're still living…

We're still living there. But we're not living in the camp anymore. Now we're living in a more civilized place.

Oh, okay. You could choose to move somewhere else.

Right. Now you could live anyplace you want if you could afford it. All this time we're still going to school and stuff. We finally got the word the visas were finalized and we're going to immigrate to the United States. That was it. That was the best news we could have.

Did you have family living in the United States?

No.

Did you have to get sponsors or something like that?

You did, but the Jewish Joint did all of that. Yeah, they did one hell of a job. They brought

everybody over and they sponsored everybody. To show that we were not destitute, because you couldn't come to this country like the Mexicans and the South Americans do now with just being totally dependent on welfare; you had to show income and you had to show money, so the Jewish Joint gave everybody some money that came here.

The Jewish what? [Jewish Joint Distribution Committee]

Jewish Joint organization. They were the ones that were the instrumental part. It's a worldwide organization. This organization is like UNRRA, different names, and they're international organizations that help Jews especially during the Nazi era where everybody was going in all different directions. We finally got the okay to leave Shanghai. What was I going to say?

We were talking about documentation, sponsors.

Oh, yeah. So the Jewish Joint, when we came to the United States, gave everybody three hundred dollars because we had to show some monetary worth. They set us up in apartments in a certain section of Cleveland. We lived in Cleveland, a certain section of Cleveland where half of the European Jews lived. It was like a little Germany. But the Italians had the same thing in Cleveland. We had Little Italy. We had Little Shanghai. Later on we were called Shanghainese.

Oh, really…

Yes, that was the nickname: Shanghainese. We lived on Edmond Street and it was a two-story apartment block, all red brick apartments. But we had to show some worth. They set us up in that. We went to the Salvation Army and picked out furniture and stuff and we furnished the place. We were living like kings. We had furniture. We had a place to cook. We could turn on a gas stove. I mean it was incredible. These were old apartments. They were big, spacious apartments, a dining room and everything. We lived there for a number of years.

Then I got drafted into the service. Took basic training for antiaircraft artillery, radar.

What year were you drafted?

In ‘51 in antiaircraft artillery. So now the Korean War is raging. I’ve got it made because antiaircraft...I’ll tell you, the North Koreans don’t have much aircraft. So they don’t need any antiaircraft people in Korea, right? So I complete my second eight weeks of basic training. I’m getting ahead of things, though.

I complete my second eight weeks of training as a radar operator. Got my orders to go to Korea. Now, why in the hell would I go to Korea for antiaircraft radar? Because the geniuses figured out to use the radar for counter-mortar radar, for artillery observation. Now, this is where you’re not sitting in back of the lines and waiting for airplanes to come along. This is where you’re sitting on the front of the lines with a big ass radar set where you’re everybody’s target, detecting where the mortar shells and artillery shells are coming from. This is what I did for a year up on the front line.

Out of all this stuff I’ve been through, Barb, under a lot of artillery fire, mortar fire—I wasn’t subjected too much to small arms fire because I wasn’t quite that close to the front. With all that radar equipment, the worst I ever got out of the whole thing besides illnesses in Shanghai like amoebic dysentery, which almost killed me, the worst I ever got out of it was a cut on my leg trying to dodge mortar shells trying to get through some barb wire. That’s the worse I ever got out of the whole damn thing. So figure it.

You were lucky. So you were in the service, Korean War vet. You get out of the service what year?

In ‘52. I was in it for twenty-one months. They knocked off three months. I was supposed to be in for two years, but they knocked off three months because I wasn’t a citizen then. And with all the rumors going on in the military—you talk about rumors, rumors are always abound in the

military—with all the rumors going around in the military—I didn't hear this until the day I was discharged that they were going to—until I got back from Korea and I was at Camp Atterbury in Indiana. They were going to discharge me three months early because I wasn't a citizen yet. I was only in the country for three, four years. They knocked three months off from my military service and I didn't have to do any reserve time. What else can you ask for, right? Because the military and I, we didn't get along real good with all the stuff going on. And just having come from the bombings in Germany and China and so on, going back from the frying pan into the fire that wasn't fun, anyway.

You went back to Cleveland after the discharge?

Yes, because my parents were living in Cleveland. My sister [Ruth Sternberg Watts] had already gotten married to some guy who she met in Shanghai, a navy guy. When they came to United States, they got married right away and they lived in St. Joseph, Michigan. It's near South Bend, in that area.

It's on Lake Michigan. Now she lives in St. Joseph, Michigan, which is right on the lake. This is twin cities, Benton Harbor and St. Joseph. Anyway, that's where she lives now. My sister is a year and a half older than I am. She's a widow, too, now. Her husband died, but that was for the better, anyway, because this guy was worthless. He was not my favorite person.

We won't put him in this story.

He doesn't deserve to be in any story.

Well, tell me how you eventually got to Las Vegas.

Well, from Cleveland...my in-laws moved to Los Angeles because they got tired—of the winters.

You got married when?

Ooh, yeah.

We've got to get you married.

Oh, let's get me married first. So I met my wife, Noreen, on a blind date. My best friend fixed us up. I met her on a blind date and the rest is history. We hit it off really, really well. So we decided to get married in '57. We had a big, big wedding at the Tudor Arms Hotel in Cleveland, which is now part of the Western Reserve University complex. We got married. In Cleveland I worked in a factory. I was a shop foreman and I worked for them for about ten-something years. Then in Cleveland I went in my own business servicing washers and dryers, repair. We also had new machines. We used to handle Maytag and Speed Queen washing machines and dryers, me and a partner. But I was in this for a couple of years and the partnership didn't really work out well. So I sold it out to the partner and went back to work in the factory as the foreman, which was a good job, dangerous, but it was a good job.

Did that and then we decided to...my in-laws moved to Los Angeles because they couldn't handle the winters anymore. So soon after we sold our house and we moved to Los Angeles, also. We lived in North Hollywood to begin with in an apartment. Later on we moved to Canoga Park in an apartment. Are you familiar with Los Angeles? [Lived in LA from 1964 – 1969]

A little bit.

In the valley, in San Fernando Valley. Did that and we're always trying to be entrepreneurial. So we started a business like a decorator store. My wife's always putzing around and decorates something. So we had an idea of starting a business of taking on consignment, different art objects and stuff. We had driftwood tables. The name of the business was called Driftwood Decor and Other Delights. We had wall sconces, driftwood tables, big, heavy tables, and we took in all kinds of art objects because every other person in the valley is an artist and everybody

either paints, they make crafts, they do all kinds of stuff. So we took in that. The store where we were at didn't get a lot of traffic and it was a real struggle. So we finally gave that up. While I was doing that I was working for Sears.

We moved to Los Angeles with my daughter [Pammi Blackmon]. Packed our belongings and shipped the rest by moving van and went to Los Angeles. I didn't have a job, nothing. It was just cold turkey. Found a job right away at Sears, Sears and Roebuck, the Hollywood store. You talk about a fun place, the Hollywood store.

What made it a fun place? Why do you say that?

Because all the people used to meet there. We were down in the basement, major appliances, and I sold major appliances. That was a good job. It was a commission job and I was a hotshot salesman. I used to win all these different sales contests. One of the sales contest I won, which was through the Los Angeles Gas Company, was an all-expense week vacation to Mexico City. That was the kind of vacation that you couldn't pay for. It was just incredible, the best of everything and the most of everything. We were gone from early morning until late at night. By the time we got done with our vacation, we needed another vacation. They flew us to Mexico City, my wife and I. All the Mariachis and the hors d'oeuvres and the margaritas. We stayed at a brand-new hotel, the Camino Real Hotel. Just before we stayed there, the President of Mexico stayed there. One thing in the hotel that I remember...in the lobby they had an ocean in there, which was one of the first manmade oceans that would spill over like waves. It was really neat. A beautiful, beautiful hotel, real luxury, brand-new hotel. But I used to win most of the sales contests.

So I worked for Sears for a while and I did good with it. I sold washers and dryers, stoves. And then I transferred out—so I worked at the Hollywood store. You'd be surprised,

even Sears, a lot of movie stars used to shop there.

I'd get phone calls like: "This is Mrs. Paul Newman. Gary, what kind of washer would you recommend?" Oh, Mrs. Newman. I go home. "I just talked to Mrs. Newman." "Oh, you talked to Joanne Woodward." No. She calls up and she says, "Joanne Woodward;" that's right. I said, "Who's Joanne Woodward?" Oh, Paul Newman's wife. Or Vincent Price or Liberace used to stop by all the time. I got one of Liberace's autographs on my business card and he draws out a piano with this real neat autograph. I used to get autographs from all these different people and they used to stop by and we used to chitchat. Like [Dan Blocker] from Bonanza, who played Hoss; he comes up, "Gary, Gary, I can buy that washer now." I says, "Hey, what happened?" He says, "Oh, I just landed a job; I'm going to be in a TV series called 'Bonanza.'" He says, "That washer I was looking at I couldn't afford? Now I can afford it." All different people like that used to come off the movie set to the store.

That would be fun.

All dirty and crummy because there used to be like a sand lot in the Hollywood area where Universal Studios is. They used to shoot a lot of movies up in the mountains, in the Hollywood Hills. They used to come right off the lot all crabby and full of dust. It was, "Hi, Gary, how you doing?" They came down the escalator and greet them. And some of these movie stars surprised me; I sold them stuff and couldn't get their credit approved because they never paid their bills. They were always someplace else except where they were supposed to be and they wouldn't pay their bills and they didn't have any credit and they couldn't buy this stuff. Again, surprising as it is, some of these people didn't have any money. They were making movies; they were doing shows; they were doing interviews they didn't have any money.

We don't think of them that way, do we?

No, we don't. Oh, I can't think of all the people I used to talk to down there. It was a fun job and I did good with it.

So then Noreen got scared with the earthquakes in L.A. The place used to shake in the valley, a place called Northridge where a lot of earthquakes were coming from. Canoga Park is right up there.

So we used to come to Las Vegas maybe two, three times a year. In those times you jump on the airplane, it took a half an hour, forty-five minutes to come down here. It was thirty-eight dollars for a roundtrip airplane ticket. We used to come down here all the time.

What was your favorite place to stay?

My favorite place was the Sahara because I liked the casino. It was black, it was dark, it had a low ceiling and they had the slot machines I liked. In those days you had nickel machines where a few quarter machines were unheard of. Nickel machines were the most predominate slot machines. Yeah, we used to stay at the Sahara, the Hacienda. Hacienda was nice. We used to go to the Hacienda. Do you remember the Hacienda?

I remember the Hacienda.

Yeah, it was way out on the Strip then.

Yeah, it was one of the first ones that they imploded, yeah.

Where else did we stay? Nothing real expensive. The Sahara was a really good price and I liked the place. They had a nice pool, nice building and stuff. Yes, we stayed at the Sahara a lot.

Were you a gambler at that time?

I love the slot machines. I never liked the table games that much because, first of all, it was too much money involved. In those days you didn't put a hundred nickels in a machine; you put one nickel in at a time and the big jackpot was two dollars and fifty cents—no, that was the regular

jackpot was two fifty. And the whole thing would drop into the tray out of a little thing in the machine that was covered by a window and all the nickels would drop out into a tray when you hit a jackpot. And the big jackpot, I mean the really, really big one, was ten dollars.

But anyway, Noreen got petrified every time—we had a lot of earthquakes out there. They were little ones, but you never know how big they're going to get. So now I'm the hotshot salesman at the Hollywood store. So I'm talking to my boss and transfers are really, really hard to get at Sears. I don't know why that was. My boss was Tom Keeler. I says, "Tom, do you know my wife is getting kind of edgy with the earthquakes." And he said, "Eh, I can't blame her." I said, "I checked into something. Last time we were there, I talked to some people. They just opened up a whole new Sears store at the Boulevard Mall." And before that Sears was on Fremont Street. JCPenney was on Fremont Street. Sears was on Fremont Street. And the Sears warehouse used to be on Bonanza, which is now the combat area. I says, "And I talked to the department manager out there. He says they're looking for good salesmen and they were interested in me. Do you think I could get a transfer out there?" He wouldn't let me go. He says, "You've got a good job here. Why do you want to go? I like you. You like me. We've got a good relationship." Blah, blah. He says, "You're making money." I says, "Yeah, but, Tom, the earthquakes."

So finally...it took her a long time; I had to talk to a store manager and he didn't want to let me go. Finally, I wrangled it to where I got a transfer to Sears Boulevard store. It was brand-new. The Boulevard Mall was brand-new; the mall was brand-new. So I went back to Sears.

Later, what happened at Sears is they started phasing out the profit sharing. And when you work for Sears—and people say, "Who do you work for?" I work for Sears. "Oh, you got

profit sharing. Oh, you're going to have it made when you retire. You're going to have a lot of money. You're going to have a great retirement and so on." Well, that was the big thing about Sears; you didn't get rich working there, but you had a nice retirement and the job was good. But now they're starting to talk about phasing out the profit sharing because for whatever you put in the company, they used to match certain amounts of money and it cost them money. So now you've got all these...I call them intellectual idiots, all the Harvard graduates come in there and they're trying to shave pennies here and save dimes there and nickels here. Profit sharing was one of the big obstacles and they cut that out. And then they were talking about putting us on straight salary. Well, I was on commission and I made money that way. On salary we wouldn't have made a lot of money because on commission you had the incentive of selling and you worked hard. On salary, nothing.

So I quit Sears and I went into my own business, washers and dryers service, but I didn't sell new machines. I started a shop on Main Street, 1040 South Main. It was just north of Charleston.

What was the name of it?

It was Appliance Outlet, 1040 South Main. I still have an old telephone that was in that store when I moved in, one of those real old ones. And Noreen says, "Throw that junk out." I says, "That's a beautiful telephone. I want to keep it."

Dial up?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah, rotary.

And the company that was in there before was an exterminator, Truly Nolen. It was an old established company here in Las Vegas. He had those little trucks going around with the Mickey

Mouse ears on it and stuff, bugs. Truly Nolen was the owner. And I had this shop and I was doing service, only on washers and dryers, which I was really good at. I was a good service man, washers and dryers. Once in a while I would do a dishwasher, but that wasn't my favorite because they're hard to service. And I did good.

So now it's becoming really, really hard because I'm doing everything myself. My wife helps out in the office once in a while, but just sitting there on Main Street wasn't her favorite thing to do. She'd rather play bingo or something like that. So I'm doing everything myself and it was hard to make a living with it. I was making a living, but it was tough. So now I try to hire different guys, different servicemen, and you couldn't. In those days mechanical people were impossible. Everybody was a dealer, carhop, restaurant waiters, cocktail waitresses; stuff like that. It was really hard. Good service for anybody was really hard to find.

Sounds like you're describing people who were working for tips and making a lot of money.

People who work for tips make a lot of money in hotels, those were the kind of people. So even people like mechanics would come to Las Vegas, they soon look at the gambling business and they'd drop their stuff and become dealers or whatever in the hotel business. I hired one guy at one time when I was just about fed up. I just threw my hands up. I had a guy who was a good mechanic, but he was a drunk. I had a good account—I had several laundromat accounts—I had a good account with a laundry mat. The owner from the laundromat calls, "Gary, your guy's over here again and he's sitting in the corner in a puddle of water." He says, "He's just sitting in here drunk and he's chasing out the customers." He says, "I can't have that." So I lost that account and I had to fire the guy. I tried to hire other servicemen. I'm very picky, anyway. I'm very fussy, anyway. Just couldn't handle the business. I mean I just couldn't get anybody

decent and I couldn't afford to pay a ton of money, either, because the business didn't warrant it.

So now I get pretty sick. I was in the hospital for two weeks and I had a pulmonary embolism. I was on my back flat when Desert Springs Hospital first opened up. Matter of fact, the top floor was totally empty because they didn't have enough business. They only had a few beds at Desert Springs Hospital. I was in there for two weeks flat on my back. They wouldn't let me move because I had an embolism. If it dislodges, you'll die. Don't want that to happen.

Well, once I came back I had lost all the business I had established, machines I was in the process of fixing and so on; people called other companies. So I talked to Noreen and we're talking it, the toughness, the hardness of the business and machines are heavy. But I weighed like a hundred and thirty-five pounds and had the energy of a five-hundred pounder. I was strong as a bull and nothing would faze me, right? So she says, "Why don't you go to dealing school?" And I says, "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea."

So while I'm doing the business, at night I close-up the shop and I go to dealer school in Ogden downtown, Michael Gaughan's Dealing School. That was Jackie Gaughan's son, Michael. He and Frank Toti had a dealing school downtown. I started there. In the dealing business when you're an upstart, you're treated like a coolie, like a low life. This holds true when you start in the casino and you just get mistreated and you have to overcome that. But I went to Michael Gaughan's Dealing School, who partnered with a guy by the name of Frank Toti. Frank Toti didn't have anything except...he was good friends with Michael Gaughan, but he had nothing, but he was good in the gambling business and he's been friends with—one of these days I always keep saying I've got to go back and say hi to Michael because he doesn't remember me from the dealing school.

And he was also a pit boss on graveyard shift at the El Cortez where I worked later. So I

go to dealing school. So now I start dealing school. I close up the shop at night I go on Ogden to dealing school, come home, get up the next morning, back to the shop, do service work and go to dealing school.

How long is a dealing school class?

At dealing school it depends on your ability and how much time and effort you want to put into it. There's no set time. Like you take a course in English, you start in January and you're done in June or something like that with a particular credit course. Dealer school doesn't work like that. I always used to say, "I'm a dealer school dropout." I used to tell that to my players. Where did you learn to deal? "Oh, I'm a dealer school dropout." It was funny. Is that why you're at Caesars Palace? Yeah.

But I took to it pretty good. I'm forty-four years old at this time. Well, they say forty-two, right? And you don't start that job at that age; you're too old for that.

Oh, really?

You're like a has-been. You're in that business because you've been in it, not because you want to go in it.

One example, I'd be standing on a game dealing cards at Caesars and I'd get a player. "Oh, what are you doing?" "Oh, I'm going to be retiring from the police force pretty soon." "Oh, that's nice," I says, "Where?" "Oh, Los Angeles." Blah, blah, blah. He says, "This dealing looks so easy." He says, "When I retire I want to go to dealer school and learn how to deal." "Oh, yeah. Well, you're going to retire. How old are you?" "Fifty-five." I says, "No, I don't think so." "Why not? Well, it looks so easy." I said, "Because everybody you see at Caesars Palace is an accomplished dealer and like anything else, it's like police work, it's easy because we're good at it." That used to be my answer and people used to think it's so easy to

deal card at fifty-five or learn the game at fifty-five, which is next to impossible. You can't do it.

So you go to dealing school. Is that a six-month course, a year course?

Well, I went to dealing school. So now I'm getting pretty good, Barb. I feel like I'm a real hotshot. I'm not really because you don't know a damn thing about dealing until you actually get into live action. So now, to break in, in dealing—are you familiar with the sequence it takes to get a dealer job?

No.

Okay, here's your education. If you ever want to do it, this is what you've got to do.

I think I'm past that.

By the time I get through telling you about this, you're going to say, "No, I'm going to stick to education." So now I'm going to dealing school. Michael Gaughan is Jackie Gaughan's son. Jackie Gaughan just passed away, one of the idols, one of the statues, the pillar of the community, Jackie Gaughan. I don't know if you ever met him.

Never met him, but I've heard people speak highly of him.

He was an incredible guy, incredible guy. And Michael was a fun guy, but he was a character. He was a big guy. He was a character. To explain this character thing, he was a pit boss at the El Cortez on graveyard shift and later on I got the job there. They have restaurants all over the El Cortez. He'd order and pick up boxes pizza, then spread them out on an empty crap table and they all hang around a crap table and chomp away on pizzas. That was Michael.

Real casual.

He owned the place, or his father did.

So now I'm a pretty hotshot dealer. You don't go to downtown to casinos. They just laugh at you. Think you're crazy if you apply for a job as a break-in dealer, since you are a

break-in dealer; you've never dealt to live action.

Why did they laugh at you there?

Because you don't qualify to get that job. You just don't qualify.

Because you don't have experience.

You don't have the experience. But you break in downtown. In those days downtown you had dollar action. A higher limit table was a five-dollar table. Once in a while you might deal on a quarter game, which is twenty-five dollars. But the usual is a dollar and five dollars. It's a dollar. Even though they come down on you if you screw up. I mean you're always under tense scrutiny. Because you are only a break-in.

So now I'm trying to get a job. Now, this a whole thing here. I'm trying to get a job. I'm going to Michael Gaughan's Dealing School, which was the best. There were maybe two dealer schools in town in those days because it was only a few casinos. I'm going to Michael Gaughan's. So now I'm hounding; day and night, Barbara. I can't remember—when I think back now, I wonder how I did it. I did the repair work during the day and then in between I'd go to casinos. The Carousel Club downtown, the Mint, the Fremont, the Golden Gate—all those joints downtown—the Pioneer Club—I'd go to all those places. And you didn't go to personnel to apply for a dealing job. That just wasn't done. You'd go to the pit boss to apply for a job. You go on. "Who's the pit boss?" "He's over there." Go to the pit boss. "Hi, my name is Gary Sternberg." I says, "I'm looking for a dealing job." "Where are you working now?" "Oh, I'm just breaking in now; I'm going to dealer school." "Can't use you, but maybe Joe on graveyard shift can use you. Talk to Joe Smith on graveyard."

Go back at two o'clock in the morning on graveyard. "I'd like to talk to Joe Smith." "What do you want?" "I want to talk to him about a job." "He's over there." "Mr. Smith, I'm

looking for a dealing job." "I can't use anybody right now."

And this goes on and on and on. And Barbara, I'm getting so discouraged. I go to all the break-in joints. And I'm still going to dealing school, I'm dealing the cards, I'm learning, I'm getting pretty good. Michael thinks I'm doing pretty good. But Michael used to put some of the dealers on at the El Cortez, but there was a big demand for that. All the dealers in the dealer school wanted to break in at the El Cortez because that was one of the best places to break in because the people that worked there were all experts. The people on the floor were all experts. You had Jackie Gaughan. It had a reputation. It wasn't like breaking in at the Carousel Club or at the Golden Gate Club or other low end casinos.

I'm going around. Finally I talked to somebody who was a friend of a friend who was a floor man at the Golden Gate. The Golden Gate was owned by a bunch of Jewish guys, superstitious as hell. If you wore something red, they'd kick you right out. They were crazy. So I can't remember his name; he says, "Why did you come down? I can't promise you a dealing job or a break-in job." And a break-in job would normally constitute that you might work the games. They'd put you on a game if you were lucky enough and you're dealing to live action, which was whoa. Then if you got good enough—and that was without any pay, without tokes, nothing. They just allowed you to do it. The rules were completely different then. The government would never let you do this now to where you work for nothing. You worked for nothing. He says, "But they might put you on as a shill. And then if you're a shill and got your foot if the door"—you know what a shill is?

Yes.

Okay. "You work as a shill"—and this is where they really treat you not like...not an underdog, they treat you like a dog. He says, "You will be a shill and then you get your foot in the door

and then maybe they'll let you deal live action." He says, "They're not going to pay you for it, but they might let you deal some live action so you can get some experience under belt."

Sounds great. I go apply at the Golden Gate Club, which is right on the corner of Main Street and Fremont Street, owned by these Jewish guys, a bunch of brothers. "Yeah, what do you want?" I says, "I'm looking for a dealing job. If you need a shill, I'll try that until I can get to deal." I says, "I'm working at my shop during the day. Do you have anything at night?" "Yeah, come in at two o'clock on graveyard."

I come in. So they tell me what a shill is. You sit down and play cards. You can't hit a soft seventeen because—never mind; that's technical stuff.

Go ahead.

You have to do a certain procedure when you're a shill. So you're sitting at a table and they give you a few dollars, which they keep track of because you're actually betting money. You act like a customer to get a table started. And then as players sit down, then you leave. You either take a break or they send you to another game that needs a shill. It might only have one player on it, so they put a shill on that game. "Hey, go over there. Sternberg, go over to that game." You don't get any breaks; you just go in between to get a cup of coffee and a sandwich. "Get yourself over to game two; they need somebody on game two." So you leave your sandwich and your coffee; I mean that kind of stuff. And you're treated like an enemy because you're the low life. Shill is a low life. So I did that for a while.

I'm just itching to get on a game. I'm pretty good. I deal single deck and I'm pretty good. I'm just itching to get on the game. So after a few weeks over there I'm getting pretty disgusted with not only the way I'm being treated, but the whole situation is not my thing. I'm above that.

So I'm talking to this guy who recommended me for this job. He's a floor man. And I said, "Any chance I can get on a game and deal?" I said, "I've been shilling here for about three, four weeks." He says, "Come on, Gary, I've got a dollar game over here. Why don't you get on this game and start dealing?" I says, "Really?" I get on the game and I start dealing away. And he says, "Hey, you're doing pretty good." I says, "Yeah, I know. I've been practicing long enough. I practice at home. I practice at school." I even made a blackjack table from an old layout from the Sands. I made a chip rack, which I still have today, a chip rack and I have chips and I'm dealing at home. Don't give up.

He says, "Yeah, come on." And he says, "Hey, you're doing all right." I'm dealing away a little bit. One of the Jewish bosses comes by. "What the hell is that shill doing on the game?" He says, "What are you doing on the game?" I says, "Whatchamacallit just put me on the game." He chews the guy out up and down. I thought he was going to fire him on the spot.

Who was that?

The floor man, the floor man that put me on the game. I thought he was going to fire him he got so damn mad. The owner was fuming because he didn't authorize me being on that game. I felt so bad for the guy because he was doing me a favor. He made such a fuss that I took my apron off and I walked off, just walked right out of the place.

Same scenario, I'm trying to get a job. I hit all the joints at all different hours. If somebody tells me Joe Schmo is the pit boss in that casino and he's going to be at seven o'clock in the morning, I'd be there at seven o'clock in the morning hounding him down. Forget it; just I couldn't get any place, Barb, not even a lousy break-in job for eighteen dollars a day and ten dollars in tokes. Couldn't get a job. I'm getting very frustrated and I'm trying to get out of the service business.

In those days the whole thing was favors. Everything you did in this town was favors. You were paid back for something, for a favor that somebody did; that was the whole thing. One of my customers by the name of Dick Nee, who later on we became friends, one of my customers Dick Nee, Dick Nee had a real nice house on Shirley, which was off Tropicana, which was right across the street from Liberace's property. Dick worked at Caesars Palace. I was out at Dick's house and fixing his washing machine. He appreciated it so much because I came right out, I did a nice job on it and he's happy his washing machine is fixed. He says, "Gary, you're so good with all this stuff." He says, "Two or three people out on my hot water heater. They tried to fix it and it's not working. I can't get any hot water. It works; it doesn't work." He says, "Can you take a look at it?" I says, "Dick, water heaters are not my thing." I says, "But I'll take a look at it." I took a look at it . I said, "It's simple. Your thermocouple is shot." What's that? I says, "I'm going to run over to..." Oh, who was it? Corbes Hardware or somebody who was in town, one of the hardware stores. You didn't have Lowe's or Home Depot. You didn't have anything. I says, "I'll go pick up a thermocouple and I'll put it in." I put in a thermocouple and the thing worked fine. I says, "You know, Dick, you're in the gambling business. I'm so damn frustrated. I'm trying to get into the gambling business." I says, "I'm just spinning my wheels." He says, "Where have you tired?" I says, "You name it, I've tried there." He says, "Let me have your telephone number. I'm going to talk to a friend of mine." I says, "Who is that?" He says, "Oh, a fellow by a name of Marv Valone. Marv is a floor man at the Bonanza."

Remember the Bonanza Club? You know where Bally's is now? Used to be the MGM? That used to be the Bonanza Club. Bonanza Club was on the corner of Flamingo and the Strip and it had sawdust on the floor. They had wood floors with sawdust on the floor. And they were

the only ones that had three movie theaters. That was the first casino that had movies in the casino, Bonanza.

It was like an old western joint. He says, "He works at the Bonanza." He says, "They're going to tear the Bonanza down." He was giving me the whole story. "They're going to tear the Bonanza down and they're going to build the MGM on that property." He says, "Let me talk to him and see what I can do."

The next day I get a call. "This is Marv Valone." He says, "Gary, I understand you're having a problem getting a break-in job." I says, "Yeah, Marv. Can you help me?" He says, "Meet me at a gas station on the corner of Tropicana," and whatever. He says, "At two o'clock and I'll see what I can do for you."

Okay. At one thirty I'm at the corner at the gas station at Tropicana, wherever it was. "Marv?" "Yeah, I'm Marv." "I'm Gary Sternberg. Nice to meet you." He says, "Get in my car."

I get in the car and we drive downtown. He takes me to the El Cortez and he talks to one of the guys, who is a part owner in the El Cortez. In those days a lot of these pit bosses weren't just pit bosses; many were part owners. A lot of these guys had like a half a point in a casino, a quarter of a point. That sounds insignificant, but it was a lot of money because they started these places or they get a half a point because they assassinated somebody for the mob and stuff like that. This was all this was.

He goes into the pit and he talks to a friend of his by the name of Stalker, a Jewish guy. He says, "Al, I've got Gary here. He's a nice Jewish boy." He says, "I want you to give him a chance. I want you to give him an audition." And you didn't just walk in and get a job. You had to get an audition first… It's like doing a movie audition. You get on a live game and you

deal cards for a certain length of time. The pit boss and the floor men and everybody in the casino watches you and you're nervous as hell and you do an audition. This is SOP; this is normal [standard] operating procedure in a casino. You audition to see what you can do.

And he put me on a game. Put an apron on, put me on a game and I start dealing away. And the pit boss comes over and says, "That guy's pretty good." He says, "So what do you want?" He says, "He's looking for a job." "He's got a job." Just like that, Barb. I'm knocking myself out trying to find a job and in an instant I have one at the El Cortez of all places.

Because somebody referred you.

Because I did a favor for Dick Nee. He has a friend Marv Valone who knows somebody in the business. He takes me in there. It's just like that, just like instant employment. "He's got a job." Okay. "Report in the morning at two o'clock on graveyard." He says, "You're going to get eighteen dollars a day, but you're not going to get any tokes for the first two weeks until we find out what you can do. No guarantee. If we feel you're not qualified to do the job, you're going to get fired." That's how that worked in those days.

And what's a toke? Just define it.

Oh, tips. Tips, yeah. That's professional terminology. He says: "You don't get any tokes for the first two weeks and you'll get eighteen dollars a day"—or fifteen dollars a day, whatever it was. Wow. I came in the next day. They put me on the game. I'm nervous as hell, Barb. Everything is at stake now. If I don't qualify, if I do a lousy job, if I screw up, miscount or something like that, I'm out on my ass. I start dealing and the boss comes over. He says, "When you come in tomorrow, you're going to be on full pay and you're going to be on full tokes." Wow.

Just in one day?

Just like that. I mean he just seen me deal and right away they put me—well, normally—

What game were you dealing?

Twenty-one, blackjack. And in those days all single decks. There were no shoes or anything like that, all single decks. And that takes a lot of practice. It takes a lot of talent to deal that game. I got a job in dealing at the place I wanted to get in the first place, the El Cortez. But you walk in there and they don't even talk to you. Like, "No." I come in the next day and I start dealing and he puts me on full tokes. I mean my head was so big I didn't think I could get out the door. I come home. I was so excited. "Honey, honey, you know this thing where they're not going to give me any tokes for two weeks?" She says, "Yeah." I said, "They're going to put me on tokes right away." So the total amount you were getting—I'm guessing now, if I remember right—like fifteen dollars a day and the tokes might have been ten or fifty dollars a day, so you're doing thirty, maybe forty dollars a day. How one thing works into the other…

So now I'm dealing at the El Cortez. I'm not making any money. I'm making like thirty, maybe thirty-five dollars a day. But I'm happy. So what I'm doing now is I'm working at the El Cortez, but to supplement I put ads in the Nifty Nickel, which used to be a newspaper here for ads, all kinds. If you want to sell a kitchen table, you put an ad in the Nifty Nickel. So I put ads in the Nifty Nickel and I work out of the apartment fixing washers to supplement that because thirty dollars wasn't enough. So I do that. So now I've got two jobs again; I'm fixing washers and I'm dealing at night and everything is fine. These are break-in jobs and they're not enough to make a living, but if you get good enough then you can go audition in other casinos because now you got your foot in the door and now you can talk to people in higher paying casinos and you work your way up the ladder.

So I'm at the El Cortez and I'm dealing away. Everything is fine and I'm there several

months. While playing Ping-Pong—now, I have to get into this right now and then we'll get back to that. When I first came here, a bunch of UNLV students put an ad in the paper to organize a table tennis club and I saw the ad and I contacted them. They were a couple of Asian guys and some other guys from the university, students at the university. They were organizing and looking for table tennis players. So I called them up and I went down to the student union and played table tennis. They loved the way I played. I was good at it. So we started organizing a table tennis club.

So we just started that and then I get a phone call from somebody and he says, "Gary, my name is Neil Smyth. He says, "I just came to town and I understand you're involved in a table tennis club and so on. I'd like to talk to you." So he came over to the apartment and then we start playing at the club. So Neil was not that good of a player. Like tennis and other sports, if you're not real sharp, a lot of people don't want to play with you. So Neil had a funny style and we're playing at the (Phil Maribella Teen Center), which is by Alta up there on the west side—north side. And I took him there and Neil and I became good friends. I says, "Neil, you've got to do this and that." And he really, really appreciated it because other players didn't want to play with him and he really, really appreciated it.

And one day we're sitting there and I says, "Neil, what do you do?" He says, "I work at Caesars Palace." I says, "Really?" I says, "What do you do?" He says, "I'm the comptroller." No kidding. I says, "You know, Neil, I'm a dealer right now and I'm trying to break in; I'm trying to get into a better casino. I'm pretty good at it. Do you think they'll give me an audition?" He says, "Gary, when you think you're good enough, you're going to get the job."

Now, listen to this. I'm at the El Cortez. Okay, Gary, you're working at the—now, this is among my peers, right? I'm dealing away. "So where are you going to go from here, Gary?

Are you going to try to get an audition?" I says, "No, I've got a job at Caesars." Oh, sure; oh, yeah; yeah, right. You're going from the bottom on to Caesars Palace...there's no place to go from see Caesars Palace because you are at the top. That's it. Guys are making a ton of money. And I says, "I'm going to Caesars." *Oh, sure; oh, yeah, yeah; give us another story*; this kind of thing.

So Caesars has no opening, can't use anybody because it's a small casino. But to make a long story short, Neil gets me an audition and I get the job right away. Normally they wouldn't hire anybody with less than three, four years' experience. You have to be like a master dealer over there. I auditioned for them. The guy that auditioned me was one of the old-school guys by the name of Mike Velardo. Him and like all the other executives at Caesars, they were wonderful, wonderful people. They weren't like these jokers at these downtown bust out joints. These were sophisticated people. And I auditioned on a quarter game in the front line. For some odd reason, I expected to be nervous as hell; I'm going to drop the cards and they're going to be all over place. And I came in there—and before I had the audition I would practice at home because instead of single deck, a lot of the games at Caesars were also shoe games now; the shoe where you take the cards out. But I dealt single deck mostly. This is a lost art now. Single deck dealing is almost like a lost art. I practiced at home. I bought a shoe, a plastic shoe, and I dealt out of the shoe and I'd practice and practice and practice.

Then I introduced myself to Mike Velardo, who was the twenty-one casino boss. He's in charge of all the twenty-one games. He says, "So what do you deal? You deal single deck? You deal shoe?" I says, "Well, Mr. Velardo, I can deal shoe; I practiced with it, but I've never dealt shoe in live action because they didn't have it at the El Cortez. I never dealt shoe on a live game, only single deck." "Oh, then we'll put you on a single deck." I couldn't believe it

because I figured if you couldn't deal a shoe that was one of those things you wouldn't even get an audition. He says, "Come on, I'll put you on a single deck." So he puts me on a front line game, a quarter game, twenty five-dollar game, full of people. I'm dealing away. I thought I would be petrified and I'm feeling so good. I was so happy with myself, right? Then later when Neil is talking to him, he said, "How did my friend Gary do on the game?" He said, "He's a good little dealer." He told Neil that.

So now I'm qualified to get the job at Caesars. So now I'm still working at the El Cortez, but I didn't get the job yet because they didn't have any openings. So it wasn't until about two or three months later that they finally had an opening and I got hired. This is how I got into Caesars Palace.

And that's where we'll pick up next time. Does that sound good?

So Neil Smyth and I, we did a whole bunch of stuff for Las Vegas. We started Las Vegas Table Tennis Association. We brought the U.S. tournaments from New York to Las Vegas. We brought the Communist Chinese team over for an exhibition. Yeah, we brought the championships over to Las Vegas. After that they were always played here. Now they're back someplace else; they took them. But for many, many years the United States Table Tennis Championships were always held in Las Vegas at the convention center.

I didn't realize that.

That was the U.S. Closed and then they started to have the U.S. Open, which U.S. Closed is only for American players, but the U.S. Open is international. We used to have people from all over the world coming here to play table tennis. And then we had the U.S. Open here usually in July and the U.S. Close was usually in December when it was slow.

And Neil...I got to tell you about this guy. This guy is one of those incredible people.

So do you want to pick up with that when we get together next time? With Neil, table tennis and Caesars.

Yeah, this is a whole new era.

[End Session I]

SESSION 2

Today is February the 15th.

Fifteenth already? Half the month is shot.

Twenty fifteen. Once again, I'm with Gary Sternberg in his home in Henderson, Nevada. Gary, we were going to set aside talking about your career at Caesars.

At Caesars Palace.

That's a big chunk of your life. Maybe if you can incorporate any other work; kind of your work resume—let's look at it that way because you said you had import-export business [from 1988 – 1997]. You had a lot of things going on.

My wife always tried to be entrepreneurial. I usually wound up doing most of the schlepping, most of the work.

Smart woman.

Right, yeah. She used to say, "Well, my business this and my business that." And people used to remind her, "Doesn't Gary do most of that?" Well, yeah, okay.

We tried all different things and then we wound up with one that was really good and that was the import business that really went well. I set it up and a friend of mine helped me with it who was already importing stuff from China. But we're getting mixed up with Caesars Palace now.

But let's talk a little bit about the import business because you said you're importing mostly from China. What kind of things were you importing?

Give me a minute. I'll show you.

So this was your first catalog?

The first catalog and it was terrible. They were going to reprint it except we already had a trade show, the ASD [Associated Surplus Dealers] Show, which is the—are you familiar with the ASD Show?

No.

It's the associated merchandise dealers and associated surplus dealers. It's a big show in Las Vegas for consumer goods. They started real, real small. A couple of Jewish people started it at the Dunes and they expanded to where when they come in they draw like forty, fifty thousand people to that show.

Does that show still exist?

Oh, yeah. But they sold it in the meantime. I think they sold it to Freeman Exhibition or something.

The printer screwed it [the catalog] up. It was supposed to have a light blue background and it's dark blue and all this stuff was discolored and bad. We had like sixty-eight items to start, I think, in the whole thing.

And these are sequined appliqués that you sold. [looking at the catalog]

And these are some of the other ones.

And these are more—

Professional. We had a lot of gaming motifs. We did really good with that. We had the UNLV license. We had scarfs and all kinds of stuff.

Very nice.

We started out and we did the trade show in Reno and we had just one booth, a ten-by-ten booth. We started out and didn't know what to expect. Before you know it people couldn't get close to our booth there was such a crowd around it and we did like a hundred times our best expectation. It was amazing. We came back and we were just...

Was there no competition selling similar items?

No, no, there was no competition. There was competition in the business at the Reno ASD Show, it's generally known as the ASD Show, Associated Surplus Dealers, and there was no competition.

We didn't have an office; we just worked out of the house. I had the garage set up. I had tables and boards and stuff and we had all this stuff laid out. We only had a hundred pieces of each item because that was the minimum we could order. But for importing, a hundred pieces is nothing because normally you need ten thousand, you need a hundred gross, you need a zillion gross of things. But this is all handmade stuff. The whole thing just worked out perfect because we didn't have that kind of money and we were able to buy just a hundred of each, of each style, of each color and so on. This is in the winter, like just before Christmas. It's cold in the garage and there was a little heater and I had these tables and board and we had all the appliqués laid out on that. We had all the style numbers on it. We're filling orders, filling orders as fast as we could. We worked until two o'clock at night and I still need to go to work the next day.

You're working at Caesars at the same time.

I'm working at Caesars, yeah. It went so well...we had that for about three or four years, but then the trend changed and the appliqués weren't that popular anymore. So we phased out the business and sold whatever. But let me say this, though. These items, we sold them to stores in

town here, different craft stores. The Williams Costume—I don't know if you're familiar with Williams Costume.

Williams Costume is an old, old established costume shop. They have anything from different sewing things to appliqués to. They used to be down on Second Street downtown or on Casino Center or something, one of those streets there. I don't know if they still exist or not, but we used to sell to them. We had that Bonanza Gift Shop on the corner of Sahara and the Strip. They sold the hell out of our stuff. But most of it we sold to people that did flea markets and they did really well with it.

Interesting, yes.

Yes, we did really, really well with it. We sold everything either COD or on credit cards and we never had think bad debts, because flea market people are usually not too reliable as far as money is concerned. Many of them in one day and out the next. Yeah, we did that.

And then we phase out the business and I had a lot of trouble. We were over on Polaris near Desert Inn in the light industrial area up there. We had a big warehouse. I had set up the warehouse. Everything was numbered and everything was computerized. Even a kid could fill orders the way I had it set up. It was really, really nice. We had a warehouse, we had a couple of offices and we had three girls working for us and Noreen, my wife, was working in there.

So did she do something more after you phased that business out?

No, because this is where I had an invention that there's no way that thing could do wrong, right? It was going to be an absolute success and make a ton of money. I'll show you what it is in a minute. It was geared for cosmetics industry. It could have gone a different direction, also, but it was geared toward cosmetic.

They were called PEEPS: Personal Eyeglass Earpiece Protector Sleeves.

And what is it: You have glasses. When you have your hair colored; that was the primary aim. Like you take your glasses off because it's going to mess up your glasses with hair color. We went to a very, very expensive trade show in Long Beach, a cosmetics trade show. The first thing I saw in that trade show—and I saw the kind of people; I mean they were all freaks…But you should have seen the freaks that worked at that show and owned a lot of these businesses. And that show was very, very expensive and we went into that. To make a long story short, by the time I got through with that project, I invested close to a hundred thousand dollars in it and I'm talking about travel expenses and hotels and everything else, design. But what I did with this project is something that people seldom do; I invented it, I cultivated the product to where it was usable, to where it was marketable, I designed the boxes, I designed the brochures, and I had it made in China. And the same people that used to export the appliqués to us were also instrumental in working this project.

We went into a trade show. First of all, we had a booth in a horrible location; no traffic. We were in back of a great big stage thing. It was horrible. We couldn't get any customers back there. But what we did sell, I had to refund most of the money because the product was made bad.

But this particular project—if you can imagine something that you start from scratch to finish and every part of the way it was like somebody would throw a monkey wrench into it. I called it "The Project from Hell." Everything, including the printing. We designed a box and one was a letter "S" on the box that we didn't notice right away this and when I sent the artwork to China, they sent it back and said, "Gary, that "S" doesn't match the rest of the..." I looked at it. I said, "Oh, my god, it doesn't." And then I had to get bar codes for it and I had all these different things.

Anyway, so what I did sell...the way it was supposed to be sold is I was going to sell the stuff to distributors and the distributors would have their reps sell it to beauty shops and all different whoever they sell to. Something you would never believe could happen; that it wouldn't sell—number one is, first of all, I had to take the product back because it was made bad. Oh, the distributors and the reps for distributors would go on selling it. They would order some and a box of a gross I think sold like for thirty-seven dollars wholesale. I called these people up and I said, "You ordered..." I'm trying to find out why they're not selling. He says, "Gary, my reps won't sell the stuff." I said, "Well, why not?" They said, "Because they have to make out a special purchase for thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents and they won't do it." I couldn't get the stuff sold. And that was the only way. I mean I wasn't going to retail it. You couldn't retail it.

Oh, my. So what did you do?

I wound up dumping it. I had fifty thousand boxes of *PEEPS*. And the item cost me—I had it broken down...I've got to show you. The artwork isn't very good on it. We were going to have it refined real professional after we started with it.

So you just abandoned this product and moved on to something new.

Well, what happened is eventually I sold the patent to a company in Denmark. That's another story…[*demonstrating*] Most of the sleeves won't separate the way they were designed.

So then you put it on your glasses?

Right. But what makes it unique...it's just a little sleeve like that, which is okay. But when you take your glasses off you can't see well, right?

So now to thread your glasses into this, into a little sleeve is almost impossible. So what's unique about this, this has like a little turnover here, like a little return, like a little pocket,

and that's what made it patentable; otherwise, it wouldn't have been patentable.

Oh, okay.

So all you have to do is look at the red tab, put it on top of that and it slides right in. So now when you're painting, you're working on a greasy car, you're a mechanic and you want to take your glasses on and off, this keeps the dirt off your glasses' ear piece. And we thought this was terrific. See, like this one didn't do it; it's supposed to separate.

Yeah, I can see you had manufacturing issues.

See, it's supposed to go like this.

So you move on from this product, then. What was one of your most successful inventions, then?

None of them, really. I didn't make any money with any of them. I've got many inventions. I got three patents. I got dozens of inventions. You're looking at one right there.

What is this?

It's my invention.

The napkin holder?

Right.

I like it. It's a good shape.

Yeah, and it's really, really simple. But I'll get into that later.

So you had this passion for creating and all of that.

Love to do it.

So you're doing all this at the same time you're working at Caesars.

Right.

So let's move onto Caesars.

Okay, fine.

I think you talked a little bit the other day about getting your first job at Caesars and how that happened.

Well, the first job was at the El Cortez.

Yeah, but how you moved from El Cortez to Caesars.

Right. I moved from the low end all the way up to the top, Caesars. That's as far as you go. That's the end of line. A funny story was a few days after I started—and we had a house up at Spring Valley on the other side of Rainbow and Flamingo. Pardee Homes opened up that area up there and we bought one of the first houses up there. We're living up there and there was no shopping except one Vons store. Well, on the way home I was picking up some stuff and I've got my uniform on. I'm standing at the check outline and a lady turns around and goes, "Oh, you work at Caesars." I thought I was a big shot, right? You work at Caesars; you're a big shot. "Oh, you work at Caesars. Oh, you're in the casino?" Yes, the casino. She says, "Oh, they just hired a new dealer at Caesars." And I says, "Yeah, me."

They know, oh, wow.

That's how word got around that they hired a dealer at Caesars Palace, honest to God. So that was one of my favorite stories.

What was your uniform like?

Would you like to see it?

Sure. Is it going to be the real uniform?

Yeah.

Oh, you still have it. That's great. So you're wearing this white shirt with the black pants.

[Showing uniform shirt and medallion] Black pants. And they used to have a Caesars logo on

here, but later on they didn't put it on anymore. Of course, all dealers wear an apron like this. But I don't want to spend the time looking for it. Like this. Of course, I had a smaller waist then. But we had leather aprons, actually. These were really nice, a nice material and these things lasted for—get all dirty. But then later on we had leather aprons.

So that's to protect you from...?

It protects your pants from rubbing against the table, but mostly it covers your pockets so you can't steal chips. That's the uniform. And then this medallion we'd wear over the shirt like this and that was the uniform.

So you've got your Caesars medallion. You've got your shirt. That's so awesome. So you were at Caesars how many years again?

Thirty-years, thirty-one years and month. And the reason the extra month is because I needed that because we had this idiot girl in human resources; of course, it was personnel, and she had my insurance screwed up. So my medical insurance, because of the transition from my regular commercial insurance into Medicare and Social Security, I wasn't sure if it was going to be transferable. So I went up to my boss and said, "I can't leave," blah, blah, blah. "Why not?" "Because my insurance may not transfer correctly"—and that was important, right?

Right.

"Whatever you want, Gary. Whatever you want. If you want to work another month, okay, Gary. If you want to come back part-time, come on back part-time." The only problem was part-time, of course I wouldn't accept because I would've had to go on the floor and I didn't care for that.

So describe your job, what time you went; how did all that work?

Everybody that started at Caesars was going to be working graveyard shift or swing shift. Me, I

started day shift. Day shift was the shift that everybody wanted. I started day shift. I didn't really care. They could've put me in between, whatever. That didn't matter. But I started day shift and day shift then was from twelve to eight. And then later on as the casino expanded and we had more and more games, some of the day shifts were like from ten to six, eleven to seven and one to nine and we had all different kinds of shifts. Most of the time I worked from twelve to eight. So I was able to sleep in late, which is my kind of thing.

And I lived up in Spring Valley and Flamingo didn't go through then because it stopped at Decatur. So most of the time I had to go down Spring Mountain. But the problem with Spring Mountain is if you hit it wrong, you'll wind up because of the railroad crossing—were you here when they had the railroad crossing?

Yes. It still crosses Eastern. I don't know if it's the same railroad, but, yeah.

Anyway, now they've got a bridge over it. They got the bridge over it. So if you got stuck by the train, you didn't make it to work on time. No cell phones to call in late. And sometimes a train would just sit there because they were changing cars and you were sitting on pins and needles and there's no way you're going to make it to work on time. It happened to a lot of people that lived on the west side.

So you had to build in extra time sometimes to get to work.

Right. You had to make sure. Or the other way around would have been Tropicana, but that was a long way around because it was real difficult to get around to Caesars. You didn't have Frank Sinatra Drive and those streets didn't work. But from up there [Spring Valley], the way it was if you didn't hit the train. Seven minutes. Boom. Zip right across.

So when you arrived at work, what was the first thing you had to do?

The first thing you do, you go into the dealers' room, which is like a lounge, dealers' room, and

you sign in. We didn't punch time cards or anything like that, but we signed in. We picked up our tokes from the previous day and they were all cash then. Later on, of course, the IRS got on our case and that's a whole other story. But we got cash and for tax purposes we used to declare like 25 percent of the tokes and nobody cared. IRS didn't care. Nobody cared. This place tax-wise, the town was totally different than any other kind of business, and the reason being the racketeers would go into the cage, in the count room. They come out with suitcases of money before the counting was done. They would then take it to Chicago, New York, wherever their home base was. In other words, they steal the money out of the corporation before taxes. IRS didn't know. They didn't even want to get involved.

Another thing that people can't believe is on the game we'd have a big player and the cocktail waitress would serve him a drink. "Gary, give her a nickel." You take a nickel—this is five bucks, five-dollar chip—take it out of the rack and give it to the cocktail waitress. This was very common. The bigger players, they were a quarter, twenty-five bucks. Take a quarter out. But you had to get it approved by the pit boss or the floor man. "Oh, Gary, a quarter for the girl." And you'd take a quarter out of the rack and give it to the girl and that was before taxes. There was no accounting for this stuff.

In the pit we had these islands…Most of the pits are arranged where you have all the paperwork, the pit clerks work in there and they used to do the markers and all this stuff. We had drawers in there with packs of cigarettes and underneath we had cartons of cigarettes. It was like a cigarette shop under there. And then for the pit bosses and the floor men they had a drawer that was full of gum and peppermint and Life Savers and snacks to nibble on in the pit. And the way it got there is you'd give the cocktail waitress five bucks or ten bucks and she'd go to the gift shop and buy peppermints for you. But you just take it right out of the rack and you

give it to the cocktail waitress and she'd come back. Or we used to give a carton of cigarettes or two cartons of cigarettes—I mean I didn't, but they did—and she goes to the gift shop and trade it for candy and stuff. In the pit there was a whole drawer full of this gum, anything, candy bars, anything like that, a whole drawer full of stuff.

The amazing part of that is this went on for a long time where they just took money out of the rack. A funny story is I'm on a game and I think it's like a five- or ten-dollar game, a low-end game, but I've got one big player on the game, a regular player with a high credit line. And the guy gets a drink and he says, "Gary, give her a quarter for me, will you?" I say, "Sure." So I call out, "A quarter for Joanne," or something like that. "Go ahead, Gary." So I take out a quarter and give it to the cocktail waitress. And the guy is sitting on the other end playing nickels, playing only five bucks, he says, "Oh, give her a quarter for me, too."

Oh, my.

Yeah. And the whole table just burst out laughing because most of the players knew the procedure and what was going on. Everybody on the table burst out laughing. I said, "No, sir, it doesn't work that way." And this high roller guy is playing maybe five hundred or a thousand bucks a hand. So that was one of the things.

Everybody is saying how Las Vegas has changed. And I would say, yeah, it's changed, but not necessarily worse. It expanded. It got bigger, more people lived here. But it was a different kind of atmosphere then. It was still different. You traded services for shows and dinners and stuff like that.

Now, was that a decision that the dealer could make? Who made those decisions about comping people?

Oh, that was the power of the pen. The floor men who watched the games, the floor men had

some power of the pen. They could write you up for a buffet or coffee shop or something like that. But for a show or a fancy dinner in a fancy restaurant that had to be done by the pit boss. And if it was something for a group of people or something like that then it had to go to management up to the third floor and they had to arrange that. But for the most part, most people in the pit had the power of the pen. Joe Schmo had something wrong; he called me up like when I had the washer business called me up, "Gary, I need my washer fixed." "Oh, you work at the Flamingo?" "Yeah." I says, "Oh, I'll fix it for nothing. Fix me up with a dinner." "Sure, no problem." And there are thousands or millions of dollars, I bet, over a period of time were done in trades like a barter system. You do something for the pit boss and he'll fix you up with a dinner. It wasn't his; it belonged to the hotel, right?

And the shows belonged to the hotel, but he would trade for personal use, and that was a common practice.

So what were some of your favorite shows that you saw?

Oh, god, Barbara, I can't tell. After a while I wouldn't even go to a show anymore because we've seen—one of my favorites was the Lido de Paris. That was at the Stardust. That was a beautiful, beautiful show then. The scenery, very extravagant. And the Stardust was run by all racketeers. Yeah, all the big shows.

At Caesars we used to have family night. This is when they couldn't sell all the tickets. We'd have the Bolshoi Ballet. We had Mexican Folkloric. You know what that is? We had Mexican Folkloric that they brought into Caesars. Those shows did not sell well. We had musicals they couldn't sell. Everybody wanted to see the big extravaganza. Now they have "Mamma Mia!" They have "Chicago" and all these different things and they film it. But then everybody wanted to see the topless shows; they wanted to see the boobs, and those were the

shows that were very popular and the shows were incredible.

I did a favor when I was doing the service work—I did a lot of favors for people and a guy by the name of Jimmy White. And Jimmy White was the maître d' at the lounge at the Riviera. The lounge at the Riviera, if you didn't know somebody, you couldn't even get close to it let alone get in it. Jimmy White was the head man at the lounge. And these rooms are small. Normally the lounges, they were like open lounges and you could even just stand on the outside and watch the show. But this lounge was a closed lounge. And all you could do is have drinks, little bitty tables, like nightclub tables, and you get drinks and that's all you could do, no food. And the entertainers in there was like Totie Fields, Jack Carter, most of the Borscht Belt people, the comedians and so on, and Louis Prima and Keely Smith. I can't think of all the names that used to be in there, all the top headliners, Shecky Greene. They all appeared at the Riviera lounge.

People come into town—at first when we bought the house it was the Sternbergs' Hotel—"Gary, we're coming down Tuesday. Would you put us up, please?" Because we had an extra room. We cut that out after—and people got like we owe it to them because, oh, I know somebody that lives in Las Vegas; they're going to put us up. At first we did it, but then we cut that out. But even later on they found out that I know somebody in the Riviera lounge. And the average gambler or the people that I knew didn't have the capacity to get into those high roller places or what took a lot of juice to get into. "Gary, can you get us into the Riviera lounge?" "I'll see what I can do."

I would call Jimmy and say: "I got a couple of people coming in Sunday. Can you get them in?" "Sure, Gary, just send them down." That's how things were done here. It was amazing.

What about the restaurants at Caesars? Did you have a favorite one there that was good?

Then they were all good. The coffee shop was called Nashorium. Yiddish for *nashing*; meaning to snack. You know that expression?

Yes, I do.

Nashorium. All these things were designed by Jay Sarno. The guy was crazy, but he was a genius. He was one of the ones that designed and built Caesars Palace, Jay Sarno. A lot of these things...the cocktail waitresses' uniforms that were absolutely unique were designed by Jay Sarno.

The coffee shop was the Nashorium. The Japanese restaurant was Ah-So, which was also a gourmet restaurant. I think it's still there. Later on we got the Nero's—no. It was the Spanish Steps and then later on it changed to Nero's. It was steak and seafood.

We had a really, really nice, one of the top places was the Bacchanal Room. And the Bacchanal Room...that wasn't a dinner; it was an experience. There was a limited menu. You might have three, maybe four different items on the menu to choose from. They'd start out and they had wine girls in there. They were like elite cocktail waitresses and they were going around with what looked like bags, like leather bags like they had in the old Roman days. Everything was geared towards the Roman era. And we had wine girls going around the Bacchanal Room and you had for different dinners, your white wine, red wine, depending what you're eating, lobster tail. Most everybody is eating lobster tails. And they had a way of pouring; I mean these girls were really trained. They had these wine bags and they would hold it way up and then that stream of wine would go right into your glass. And then you had other girls that would come around and they would peel the grapes, then put them on your forehead, and they massage your forehead and they had their boobs in back of your head. They massage your foreheads with

grape juice and they peeled grapes, just for the guys. The women didn't get those treatments. The grape girls.

Now, did you know Nat Hart?

I did, yes. Now, Nat, I was going to get to that. Now, Nat Hart was an institution. Nat Hart was vice president of food and beverage. Later on he started cooking lessons. Now, Nat Hart was brought up—I don't know what kind of credentials he had or where he learned it, but Nat Hart knew everything about serving dishes, food, wine. The guy was a genius. He was an institution in town, Nat Hart. He was Jewish.

Noreen kept bugging me all the time, Gary, Gary, you've got to get me into Nat Hart's cooking school. I says, "Honey, he only gets ten people in there for each class." I mean he used to have a regular program. It might last a couple of months or so and have classes every other week or something. I said, "He's got ten people in there." I says, "You know what you have to do to get in." "Well, why don't you talk to Neil Smyth about it? Maybe he can get us in." I says, "Forget it, I'm not going to even ask him." Because it was impossible. Only the top people in town or the wives of the executives in town would go to Nat Hart's cooking school and that was that. Yeah, Nat Hart. He was in charge of all the restaurants. He was the food and beverage director. Yeah. You've heard about Nat Hart, huh?

Actually, I had the chance to interview his son.

Really?

Yes, which was interesting. And then Nat gave the library, Special Collections—or Steven did—his father's brochures and photographs and things that we've started a Nat Hart Collection. So it was interesting to hear people talk about him.

What I'm saying now, does that...?

Yeah, I hear that. Those are some great stories about him. Did you know Jay Sarno personally?

No. I know of him. I've seen him in the casino. But Jay Sarno built Caesars Palace with other people. You know what the original cost was to build Caesars Palace?

No, I don't.

Eighteen million dollars. Later on when they remodeled the swimming pool, it cost like fifty million dollars…There were bungalows around the pool and then it was just one tower and that wasn't even very high and then it just had the bungalows around the pool. Then they kept adding and adding and adding.

So when you worked there was he working there at that time or had he left?

I've seen him this the casino, but I can't really remember if he was working there or not because he went on to Circus Circus. He designed Circus Circus in the same manner that he did Caesars Palace. Everything—the cocktail waitress' uniforms, the motive—everything was genius, just genius.

The concrete blocks that were kind of unique on the outside of Caesars and in back of the concrete blocks they were like transparent. I don't think you've ever seen it before it was changed. They were called Sarno Blocks. I should've taken one when they tore them all down and they rebuilt Caesars on the outside. It was a façade, like on the outside. And in back of the Sarno Blocks they were backlit with turquoise fluorescent lights. So the whole front of Caesars Palace and on either sides with the Sarno Blocks had that turquoise fluorescent light and the whole place looked gorgeous. And the front entrance was black marble with all the fountains and all the marble statues and all. It was an incredible place, very classy.

Then they put on a new front; they built a new entryway. Whoever's design that was...it

had to be cantilevered; in other words, it couldn't have any support from the outside. They had that front torn up for I don't know how long only for the purpose because they didn't want any pillars holding up that ceiling in front of Caesars; it had to be cantilevered. It cost a fortune and overruns on cost because they ran into a lot of problems with it. But I remember it took them forever to build the front and it was inconvenient. They had to bring guests around the side, the north entrance.

People used to say, "Gary, every time we come down here, they're banging away, they're doing this, they're doing that, you can't go through there because it's under construction and stuff." My favorite saying used to be, "Caesars is never not under construction." And it wasn't.

They would tear out floors and put in beautiful marble. And they had these experts brought in from Los Angeles to install these marble floors and walls. They'd tear out one section and put suites in it. When they built the north tower, they had two penthouses up there, two or three penthouses, and one was like eleven thousand square feet with its own swimming pool. This is up on the roof, now. They all had their own swimming pool, Jacuzzi. They had living rooms. Before that we had the "Sinatra Suite," which was just for high rollers. You couldn't pay for that; it was only for comps. One time I guess from a lit cigarette, the bedspread in the Sinatra Suite caught on fire and it burned part of it. They put it out. And to replace it was like thirty-five thousand dollars. It was like mink or chinchilla or something like that that was the bedspread.

Now, how about your clientele? Were there people who would always want to gamble at your table?

Oh, yeah, a lot. I had a very good following. Talking about following, Telly Savalas was one of my [players]. A couple of times he had me taken off my blackjack game and moved me to mini

baccarat. Baccarat is played in a special pit. Guys wear tuxedos and all this stuff and it's a real high roller game. Later they came out with mini baccarat, where the layout is like a blackjack game. Have you seen it, mini baccarat?

No, I haven't. I don't know much about that game at all.

Mini baccarat, it's been around for a while now. Mini baccarat is like a big blackjack table and just one dealer deals it and he does everything. He does the cards. He does the money. He does the vigs. Telly Savalas used to love to play mini baccarat and he loved when I dealt to him. When he played he was real loud and a lot of the dealers really didn't care to deal to him because it attracted a big crowd, noisy and distracting and stuff like that and you really had to concentrate on what you were doing. Telly used to sit down and he had this whole gang of cronies around him. And one of his cronies was Nick Rosetta. He used to be an actor on "The Untouchables" with Elliot Ness and he used to act in that, a good-looking Italian guy. He'd sit right next to Telly and Telly would never stop smoking. He had one cigarette after the other. And Nick was right there lighting his cigarette like he was his slave. And I often wondered about it; jeez, these guys are really kissing his ass.

A funny story I'll tell you. I'm dealing mini baccarat. And Telly would bet like five hundred, sometimes a thousand dollars, but he wouldn't bet it in those denomination of chips. And he says, "Don't give me society chips, Gary. Don't give me those society chips." He'd get real nervous. Society chips to him were a hundred-dollar chips or bigger. I had to pay him off in quarters. And a thousand dollars' worth of the quarters is forty chips. That's about this high. I'm dealing to him and Telly has taken down a thousand-dollar marker and he's got a stack this high, one stack.

I mean it was my screw-up. I'm trying to be a wise guy because I'm a big shot and I've

got this big crowd around. So I grabbed the whole stack on the very bottom chip and just slide it over and you can do that without the stack falling over. So the way we used to do it when you take a marker down, you would take the chips and put it on the right side of the chip rack and it would stay there until it was signed off by the pit boss or the floor man, until he took the markers down and then you had to sign for it that the markers were taken down, all procedure. But the money would stay there until it was all taken care of and then you would take the chips and put it in your chip rack, until it was all done.

I slide this big stack of quarters on the right side of the chip rack and I started dealing. But out of the corner of my eye, the whole stack is going like this; it's leaning over. Just leaning over. Out of impulse I'm trying to grab it, but my hand isn't big enough because it was a big stack. Chips scatter all over the place. You talk about embarrassment. I couldn't find a place to hide or I would've hid. Now, chips are all over the place. On the front, I've got this big crowd around. I thought, oh, shit. This pit boss comes over. He's laughing. He thinks it's funnier than hell. Chips are on my side. All the people that are standing around and all these cronies, everybody's helping picking up the chips. I says, "Shit, we're going to be three or four hundred dollars short." But I got every one of them back, every one of them back. I couldn't believe it. Counted them down. But then Telly Savalas was acting in "Kojak," right? So then later on we laughed, "Yeah, yeah, Telly, this Kojak is instilled in these people. They wouldn't fool around with him."

Yeah, I used to have a lot of people used to look for me. "Where's Gary? Where's Gary?" "Oh, Gary works day shift; he isn't here tonight." Next day I'd hear about, "Oh, Gary, so-and-so was looking for you." I mean that happens a lot because I had a lot of personal rapport with a lot of the players. I enjoyed that. I really enjoyed that.

I used to go home and I'd say, "Who is such-and-such?" To Noreen. And Noreen would say, "Uh, you dealt to her." I'd say, "Who is that?" "Don't you know what that is?" I used to deal to some of these people and I knew they were actors or they were personalities.

Next to me one time I had...oh, a basketball player, Jordan, Gordon, Jordan.

Michael Jordan?

Michael Jordan was playing and he's playing five or ten thousand dollars a hand. He's playing big time, a reserved game. It was right next to my game. I'm watching him. I'm on a dead game. One of his friends that's with him. I can't think of his name right now. He always hangs around with him. And Jordan is a stiff. He won like a couple million dollars and didn't give us a dime. Nobody wanted to deal to him because he was a stiff, just like Evander Holyfield, the fighter, a stiff, never comes up with anything. Oh, it was Barkley.

Oh, Charles Barkley.

Charles Barkley. He was with Jordan. Jordan picks up his money and he's off to the cage. A few minutes later Barkley comes by and throws a five-thousand-dollar chip on the table and he says, "Here, this is for my stiff friend."

That sounds like Sir Charles, yeah. So when they give you those tips, you get those the next day or are those split up between...?

Okay. Let me explain how the tips work. Later on it became a different procedure because then we had to run it through payroll.

Let's talk about before that.

Okay, the way it worked before then. A player would give you a tip and you'd put it in your pocket and you had to tap it on the side of the chip rack that it was a tip; that it was not the company's money. You tap it on the side of the chip rack and you put it in your pocket.

Your shirt pocket.

Your shirt pocket, right. A customer gives you tips. Some players prefer to just give you the tip and they put it on the table. You're not allowed to take anything from a player's hand; they have to put it down and you pick it up, for security reasons so you don't exchange money or steal money. Because wherever there's money, Barbara, somebody is there to steal it or figure out how to steal it. And the casino was a prime place for doing that. You would put it in your pocket, your shirt pocket. And then when you get off the game, we had toke boxes in the pit that were next to the podium, where all the business transactions, like an island in the middle. We had the toke boxes there and then you just emptied your pocket and cleared your hands to show somebody your pockets were empty, cleared your hands and you went out of the pit.

Then we had a special committee that was elected by the dealers of people—most people didn't want to do it. But we had a special committee that would at a certain time, like say, twelve o'clock at noon, they would go around to all the pits with a hand cart and they would pick up all the toke boxes from all the pits. They had a special room next to the dealers' room that was locked and everything and they would open up the boxes, which were locked with padlocks on them, they would open up the boxes and they'd dump all the chips on the table. First they would sort them out and put them in racks, like nickels and quarters was categorized in racks. Then they count the racks, count up all the money and get the amount of all the chips that were there. Then they would take the sorted chips in these chip racks. They used to be wooden racks; now they're aluminum or plastic. They'd take them to cage, to the count room. The cage would verify the amount that's in there. Then they would give them cash for those chips. The count person or the toke person would then take the cash, take it back to that counting room. They divided the cash into envelopes had to divide—like say, for example, there was, say, a hundred

and ten—we didn't do cents or anything like that, just even amount. Say it was like a hundred and fifteen dollars. So they knew how many dealers were on that shift. So they had to get so many hundreds, so many tens, so many fives or whatever. So they had to get that. It was pretty involved. It took a little bit of organization.

And then they would take the money back and we had little brown envelopes and they'd put out the money in stacks and then fill the envelopes with that money. Then by that time somebody had already all the names off the roster of all the people that worked the previous day and they would have the name on the envelope. And then when you came into work, one of the toke guys would be sitting there with a tray full of these envelopes and pull it out and give it to Sternberg and give it to Joe Schmo and whoever was working that day as we came into the dealers' room. You take your money, take it out and put it in your wallet.

The IRS would get about 25 percent of that declared for income. We used to insist that tips are not income; they were gifts. Some people thought they were going to get away with that but, of course, they didn't. Some people lost their houses, everything they ever worked for and owned, and future income. They lost everything. They weren't going to declare tips.

So you talk about like people stealing and theft and all of that. So what are some episodes that you can—were you ever accused of stealing?

No, never, never. We had cheaters—for example, card cheaters. They used to need the cooperation of a number of people including a pit boss or floor man and a dealer and stuff like that except for counting cards, but that's a different thing. But actual cheating is like if you have...what do you call it, a shoe that's rigged? There's a name for it—called a cooler. A shoe is—I'm sure you've seen it—is like a plastic box. You deal the cards out of it.

Originally we used to deal out of the hand, which was a real art. That's what I used to do

real good. But then we dealt out a shoe. A shoe can be anywhere from a four-decks, six-deck or eight-deck shoe. And the way they worked that scam is they would have a group of people that would take up every seat on the table. Say there's six pots. A lot of blackjack tables have seven spots, but we had six spots on our table. You would have six people sitting down at a table. They somehow got Caesars Palace current cards because they used to change the logo on the cards all the time, periodically. And they would take a prearranged shoe, say six decks in a shoe, which was a common shoe, and they would prearrange that. The dealer, when he shuffled the cards, would take—say they sit down and the dealer first takes the cards and shuffles it for a new deal. When the dealer shuffled the cards, he would transfer—and this had to be done in a real sly way; this is where a lot of them got caught—they would transfer the cards to one of the cheaters at the table and transfer it for a prearranged shoe. The prearranged cards would go into the prearranged shoe and then as the cards came out, everybody is happy and everybody is a winner. Also, so it wouldn't be so obvious, they knew after a certain set of cards would come out that it was a loser. So that person would bet just, say, five dollars and some of the other people who were going to get winning hands would bet a hundred or a thousand or whatever. Do you know what the eye in the sky is?

Yes. Explain, though, what the eye in the sky is.

Eye in the sky: Originally when I started, the ceiling in all casinos—this is downtown, us, everybody else—they had one-way windows in them and over the ceiling would be like catwalks. You would have security people, specialized people who knew counting, who knew cheating. They were well versed in that and they were well paid. And they were secret to everybody in the casino; you didn't know who was up there watching you. Even a lot of the pit bosses didn't know who was up there. So if they ran across them in the casino, they didn't know

the guy is an eye in the sky; that was a secret. And they would be standing up there and they would be watching the games. And if they suspected cheating on a game or something phony, and they knew the phony games opposed to the legitimate games, they would stand up there with binoculars and watch the game. And then to prove it if they later on would have to take it to court—they didn't have video then; I mean video was too expensive—they had actual sixteen-millimeter film cameras up there. Then they would bring a camera over a game and focus the camera on the game and the camera would collect the evidence. In the dealers' room, they had a whole section in there with cabinets and cabinets of film they were keeping for evidence from cheating operations. Yeah, sixteen-millimeter film they used to use on that.

What would happen in an episode if somebody got caught or suspected of cheating?

Security would come in and arrest them and then the police would come in and take them to jail. Then the film would be evidence if there was a court case. But somehow they didn't prosecute. The mob didn't feel to prosecute these people. A lot of them weren't prosecuted that were cheating. They might break their hands or something like that, but that was enough. They wouldn't do it again then. They had their ways of doing it. They had their own justice

And was everybody aware of their ways of doing it?

Yes. One time we had a floor man, a wheel dealer and a pit boss...there were about three or four people involved. They were actually stealing checks; checks is chips. They were actually stealing checks and five-hundred-dollar checks. And the way they would work it is they had a scam going. A lot of the times the floor men would just pick up roulette checks, you know how the roulette works?

Well, in roulette everybody has their own color chips. So say you buy in for a hundred dollars. You would get, say, a stack of purple chips. I would get a stack of white chips. So you

have all these different—I forget how many different color chips; I think around eight sets or colors. There was quite a few, enough for everybody on the table, say like eight people on the table. And dealers would take those and play with them; they would shuffle them, shuffle them and they go in between each other. They'd play with those. Sometimes the floor men would just come along and pick up a stack of them because they were worthless until they were bought. Like if you buy a hundred dollars' worth, it would be twenty nickels. If you bought quarters or whatever...so each chip might have a different denomination. And then for the eye in the sky and the pit bosses to see what chip was worth how much, they would put them on the rim of the wheel and they would put a marker on top to show the amount per stack, say twenty or a thousand or whatever. They would put a marker on top showing that the green chips are worth twenty-five dollars apiece or five dollars or a dollar apiece or whatever.

What they would do is the dealer would come along and he would have some white chips in his hand. White chips were five-hundred-dollar chips. He would take a stack of colored chips. But the five-hundred-dollar chips, those were actually worth five hundred. They weren't roulette chips; they were regular casino chips. But they had a lot of those because they had to cash out people. So you had the color chips, but then you also had regular money chips, anything from a dollar, five dollars, twenty-five dollars and so on up. And they would take a white $500 chip and they shuffle a stack of roulette chips and work it into the stack. The eye in the sky couldn't see it from the top; you could only see it from the side. So the floor man had to be in on that because he's looking at the stack or what's going on, but you can see the white chips now in between the regular chips, say red chips. So the [dealer] would ignore that and they would take that and shuffle them and they have three, four white chips in there. Then the floor man would come along and the dealer would put the chips aside and then the floor man would

come along and play with those and take out the white chips and put them in his pocket.

We had—what the hell was his name?—excellent wheel dealer. To deal roulette takes a lot of talent, to move those chips. It doesn't look like it when it's done by an expert. It looks like it's real easy, but it's not. You have to handle the chips and pay the winning bets. It's a whole process. It takes a lot of experience. One of the guys was the brother of one of the big doctors in town. And he was always bitching about how they don't pay him enough; we handle millions of dollars a day for the casino, but they only pay us blah, blah. Idiot. For your qualifications you probably have a third grade education and you're making sixty, seventy thousand in those days a year, but it wasn't enough for him. And he was one of the ones in on that.

He felt entitled to more money.

He felt, yeah, he was entitled to more money, yeah.

So what are some of the nuisances of being a dealer or working at Caesars?

I usually worked the front line or main pit, which is the pit when you first come in the front door, and the front line was all the big money or high limits. Ten the back of it was reserved games. A bunch of people sit down on my game—it's a quarter game—real nice, very congenial and and the one girl. I says, "Oh, you've got a sexy voice." "Oh," she says, "Thank you." "Oh, where are you guys from?" "Cleveland." "Really, you're from Cleveland, huh?" And I says, "Where in Cleveland?" "Cleveland Heights." "I used to live in Cleveland Heights." Right away we got a real nice rapport going, talk, talk, talk. And she goes, "Oh, this is my mother." She had the whole family. There were about six or seven people at the table and a couple are standing behind. She introduced us all. I says, "Where do you live now?" "Oh, we live in Los Angeles." "Oh, yeah. I used to live in Los Angeles. Where, in the valley?" "No, Malibu." Malibu, okay.

I says, “I suppose you live right on the ocean, right?” She says, “Yeah.” And I says, “What do you do?” She says, “I’m an actress.” I says, “Really? I’m sorry, pardon my ignorance, but I don’t know who you are. What do you do?” She says, “I just got done with a movie called ‘Officer and a Gentleman.’” I says, “Yeah, what did you play?” She says, “I play the bitchy broad.”

I come home and I said, “Honey, who’s Debbie Winger?” “Huh, you dealt to Debra Winger? You got me an autograph?” I says, “No.” “You didn’t get me an autograph?” That was one of these instances. I had a lot of those encounters.

Was it better to be not star struck than to know who they were?

Well, I wasn’t star struck per se because doing that it probably would have interfered with what I’m doing because you’ve got to concentrate on what you’re doing. But I enjoyed that. I can’t tell you how many people I dealt to, sports people. Oh, I should’ve kept—at that time it wasn’t that important to keep a list, but now I look back and I dealt to all these different or important people. Like all the different fighters, the boxers. Evander Holyfield, for example, he was the one that got his ear bitten off by Mike Tyson. Larry Holmes. You know Larry Holmes? A big heavyweight. And Larry Holmes had one of his first big-name fights and I forgot who he fought that time. He’d see me and he’d make a beeline for my game. He was always playing nickels, before he got big. So he was training for this big fight, for this big event. I’m kidding around. We had a real nice rapport going. He said, “Come on up to the suite”—him and his whole entourage, a little ways down from the dealers’ room, off the building off to the side of the casino, they had a whole part of the wing up there. He says, “Come up after work. Meet some of my friends.” And I did a couple of times. All the promoters and the managers and everybody there and a whole bathtub full of cans of beer and ice. Everybody’s sopping away beer,

including me. I'm talking to all these people. I don't know who the hell they are and I'm talking to all these people up there. Then one time I said, "Larry, when you win that fight, I'm going to call you Mr. Holmes. I'm not going to call you *Larry*." "Oh, Gary, you can call me anything you want any time." We had a real nice rapport going. He wins the fight; he wouldn't even know me anymore.

So how about management? Who were some of the key management in all of that? Talk about management.

Okay, let's talk about management. When I started there management was Billy Weinberger – also from Cleveland. And, Barbara, a lot of these people they didn't have college educations, but they were so smart. They were just geniuses and they knew gambling, they knew courtesy, they knew how to take care of customers. It was a whole different ball game. They didn't make a lot of stupid decisions.

Billy Weinberger goes back to Cleveland and Billy Weinberger had a restaurant in Cleveland on Short Vincent. Short Vincent was a real short street, obviously, because it's Short Vincent. He had this real high class restaurant. A lot of the mob used to hang out there. I wouldn't swear to it, but, needless to say, anybody that was in command in those days was part of the mob or at least controlled by the mob.

We weren't employees; we were his family. We were the Caesars Palace family; we weren't employees. Billy Weinberger used to come down in the casino. And we had some players, some regular players of reasonable stature or movie stars or sports, and he'd come down and he'd sit down at the table while they were playing and he'd talk to them, kibitz with them and stuff like that, very nonchalant, very casual and stuff like that. He'd just sit there. Mike Velardo, the twenty-one boss, would do that. Mokey, the casino manager, would come down

and do that and he'd sit with the customers. Remind me to tell you the first day I started Caesars. And to come down and sit with the customers and kibitz. "Oh, what do you need? You want to go to the Bacchanal?" Get the pit boss to write him up a ticket for the Bacchanal. But for the Bacchanal, they didn't really write up tickets like they would for the coffee shop; that reservation was called in to the maître d' and when you came up to the Bacchanal, to the front door, the maître d' would greet you with a big card in his hand. It had all the names listed on it. "I'm Gary Sternberg." "Oh, yes, Mr. Sternberg, I have you right here." Checks him off and they guide you to a table and pull out the chairs and cocktail waitresses come around. It was high class. It was top of the line.

High class it sounds like.

And this is what made Caesars Palace *Caesars Palace*. That's why a lot of the big ones, like the Tropicana, the Desert Inn, the Sands, they eventually went down the tubes. And Caesars Palace became bigger and bigger and bigger and this is what did it. That tradition was kind of carried over because now it's nothing because Harrah's took it over.

Yeah, it's a whole different entity.

It's a whole different ball game.

So Billy Weinberger was a good leader?

Billy Weinberger had a son. Billy Junior was a real piece of shit, disrespectful, nasty; I mean to his father. And Billy Weinberger was absolutely the nicest guy. Then when Billy Weinberger quit, he went to Atlantic City or something and he got a big job with one of the other casinos in Atlantic City. A number of times he'd come back and play on the big reserve game, which was usually five hundred thousand dollars minimum for reserved. A couple of times I dealt to him and he was betting like five thousand bucks a hand. His son, every two seconds he comes

around, he's looking and watching: is he winning, is he losing. He makes comments, "You know, Dad, you're going to blow your brains out. You're going to lose all that money and you're going to blow your..." And stuff like that. I was going to slap him. I mean nasty to the nicest guy in the world. Billy Weinberger was a very, very important man in town. All these guys were. And he's talking down to him like a dumb kid. That really bothered me.

And then Billy Junior was also charged with the responsibility of the Grand Prix. In the '80s we had—do you know about the Grand Prix?

[Pause in recording]

The Grand Prix was the big race cars, the big cars that race in Monte Carlo or something. In Europe—here it's not such a big deal. Here you've got the Indianapolis 500, which are other big cars. But other than that—

It goes on the streets, regular streets, right?

In Monte Carlo they do, but at Caesars it was different. But let me say first that Billy Weinberger, Jr., was in charge of this project. It ran way over budget. The Grand Prix budget ran way over and he screwed the whole thing up. Even though he had a big mouth, he had nothing to back it with. But he was in charge of the Grand Prix and we had two of those. It was '86—I got the poster in my office. It was '82 or '83; something like that. But it wasn't done—like in Monte Carlo they block off the streets and they race through Monte Carlo. In France they race around the streets and all this stuff and curves. At Caesars Palace they built their own Monte Carlo track. [Laughing] We built everything. They built Monte Carlo tracks in the parking lot. I mean we had all kinds of space next to Caesars Palace. There used to be a gas station back there and a convenience store and like a liquor store and stuff up on the street. Now it's all casino, but then it was empty space. Then further down there were some apartments. If I

remember right, they bought those apartments and then knocked them down. They were part of that lot. It was a huge dirt lot back there. And the track...they had to build bleachers for the people to watch. The track was done with giant cement blocks. They were individually cast and then locked together and then they made the track or the border or if you want to call it the perimeter of the track, they were bordered in these giant cement blocks. Later on they used them for parking lot and to zone off different things, but it looked tackier than hell because the cement blocks didn't look so good, right? But they were about the height of a three or four feet wall behind you. They were great big heavy blocks so if a car would crash into them, they wouldn't wind up in the spectators. This is how they built the track back there. It was funny. They had this whole parking lot back there and they built this track right in the parking lot. I mean it wasn't a parking lot; it was a parking lot and an empty dirt lot. Then they had to pave all the streets where the cars would race. They can't race them on the dirt. They would race all those cars in there.

I went out there a couple of times. The admission was pretty high, but you could just walk out there, anyway. People didn't know nothing. I say, "Jeez, these damn things are noisier than hell and who can watch this stuff? They're going around in circles. Forget it." I didn't even want to watch it for nothing.

And then we had half of France was here and the French are stiffs. They're not much gamblers and the ones that do gamble are stiffs. They don't come up with a dime. That was another joke about the Grand Prix. Oh, the Grand Prix, yeah, yeah, we made a lot of money in those days, yeah. But not from the Grand Prix. We went home...not too much money. That was the Grand Prix.

We had Mokey—matter of fact, I was just talking to my neighbor. He's very

knowledgeable. He's been in Las Vegas for a lot of years and he used to work for Delta Airlines and he knew a lot of these people. He was just talking to his son. Mokey is Al Ficento and Al Ficento was the casino manager.

I'm pretty sure—have you ever heard of Steubenville, Ohio? Okay, another story. Steubenville, Ohio, is on the border of Ohio and Pennsylvania. Steubenville was a wide open town. Everybody was bought off; all the politicians were bought off. And prostitution and gambling was the mainstay. It was small town. It was the mainstay. A lot of these real savvy casino people came from Steubenville. They were Steubenville graduates. If you graduated from Steubenville that's like the Harvard in the gambling business. A lot of these people were from Steubenville. Many of them were also from Cuba because Cuba had regular gambling especially the wheel dealers. They were good wheel dealers; most of them came from Cuba. They didn't speak any English, but they were good dealers.

And then Billy Weinberger, he quit and then the General took it over, Harry Wald. Now, Harry Wald was kind of a stocky guy. He wasn't very tall, but a stocky guy. He was always dressed to the nines. I mean there wouldn't be any lint on him. His suit was perfectly fit by tailors. Everything was tailored. And he had this big white head of hair. I'm still going to the barber that used to take care of the General. Harry Wald was Jewish although he never talked about it and he never got involved in any of the Jewish things in town, but Harry Wald was Jewish. He was either a Holocaust survivor or he was of German descent, but I know he spoke German. He was a general in the army reserves, the army reserves or National Guard, one or the other. He was a general in that. He became president of Caesars. Harry was very knowledgeable.

Then Neil Smyth, my friend Neil, was directly responsible to Billy Weinberger and then

he was just under Harry Wald. He was like vice president, operations vice president. And every morning before he'd go to the office, Harry Wald would walk to the barbershop, which was up in the north tower where Joe Trujillo, my barber who is still my barber now. That's another story. And I need some really intensive haircut, right?

[Laughing] You look good.

Yeah, right. And Joe Trujillo used to cut hair—you ought to talk to this guy—he used to cut hair for everybody including the Lambs. He still does for one of the Lamb boys that used to be sheriff and those guys, everybody.

Everybody loves their barber, when you find the right barber, right?

Yeah. Toni, his wife, used to do nails. I used to get my nails done all the time up there. I used to go up to the barbershop. But Harry Wald would be up there every morning and Joe would comb his hair out and it had to be just perfect. I mean this guy, as far as personal appearance, he walked straight as an arrow and he walked through that casino.

And the funny part is, Barb, they used to make a lot of movies at Caesars. Every time they would film a movie—in those days they would page people, "Gary Sternberg, please pick up the telephone. Call for Gary Sternberg." Or, "Call for Barbara"—

Tabach.

—"Tabach." Excuse me. Tabach. Then the house phone, you picked it up. "Oh, your wife is calling you; your wife wants to talk to you," blah, blah. When they were doing movies at Caesars, the telephone operators had a standing order that when they were doing movies, "Paging Harry Wald, paging Harry Wald." So during a movie a lot of times, movie sets were filmed at Caesars Palace, you would hear in the movie, "Paging Harry Wald, paging Harry Wald." We used to crack up about that.

That's great. [Laughing]

"Paging Harry Wald." Yeah, he did that.

Oh, what an interesting cast of characters you worked for. And most of these were Jewish men.

Yeah, Jewish or Italian.

Yeah. So were they connected with the Jewish community? Were you aware of that?

A lot of them were from the Jewish Mafia in Cleveland and Chicago and New York.

So that's the Jewish connection that you perceived.

Yeah, right. Like one of the pit bosses, Bob Wilkinson—I get along with anybody, but I got along with Bob Wilkinson half the time. Most of the time I chewed him out for something. But he got pleasure out of making women cry; making the dealers cry, saying something nasty to them. And Bob Wilkinson was the illegitimate son of a Cleveland mobster, who owned the Alhambra Theater and the Alhambra Bowling Alley and a night club. So he knew about gambling, but he never dealt a card in his life. But he was on the floor because of the gangster connection. Many other people, too, like at the Stardust you might see—you know what the Big 6 is?

Tell me.

Big 6 is the Wheel of Fortune. And it's got that name, the Wheel of Fortune. But any third grade flunky can deal the Big 6. I mean in five minutes I can train you to deal a Big 6, this Wheel of Fortune. The Big 6 dealers traditionally were those that couldn't deal cards or were too stupid to deal cards. They put them on the Big 6 because they usually had some kind of connection and they'd get the same tokes as the blackjack dealers would and stuff like that.

So that would irritate people?

No. That was part of the thing. Nah. That was part of the business. Nobody complained about that.

One of the stories you wanted me to remind you tell was about your first day.

Oh, the first day. The first day I start at Caesars.

They screwed up the schedule and didn't have me on the schedule. So right away, I'm like, shit, they didn't have me scheduled; somebody might have changed their mind about hiring me. I walk into the pit and the floor man who was doing the scheduling. This is the games; they schedule you on all the different games and stuff when you come in. Then I found out later when you come into the dealers' room, the first thing you do is look on the schedule to see what game you're on. But I didn't know that. I walk into the pit and I says, "Well, where do I go?" And the floor man says, "Oh, you're the new guy." Blah, blah, blah. He looks down and says, "We don't have you on the schedule." Oh, my god, this is a disaster. I don't have the job, right? So he says, "We'll find a game for you." So he says, "Go over to game eleven." Game eleven is the big game, big, big game. It's either reserved or it's five hundred dollars minimum bet. He puts me on the big game and says, "But don't worry about it, Gary, we don't expect any action on that game today." Not true. I stand on the game. Not two minutes, a guy sits down. I'll never forget this. A guy from Canada. Personal friend of Mike Velardo's. "Let me have a three-thousand-dollar marker." In those days that was a lot of money. "Let me have a three-thousand-dollar marker." I'll never forget, a three-thousand-dollar marker. Okay. So how do you do markers? You want it in hundred-dollar chips. I cut out three thousand dollars.

Mike Velardo comes over and sits next to him. And I couldn't believe he said this. This was a shoe game and Mike knew I was dealing single deck. He says, "Gary, if you can't handle that game, we'll put somebody else on it." I couldn't believe he said that because if you can't

handle the game at the El Cortez, you're out on your ass. At Caesars Palace, the top joint in the world, he's asking me if I can't handle the game, he'll take me off and put somebody else. I couldn't believe he said that. "No," I says, "I'm cool with this, Mike. I can do it. I've been practicing at home with a shoe and stuff." And I dealt the game. I did real fine. And Mike Velardo, the boss, the twenty-one boss, the important man in the casino, he's sitting right next to this friend of his while I'm dealing cards, a break-in dealer, an inexperienced dealer, dealing cards to this guy who just bought a three-thousand-dollar marker, playing black checks, which are hundred-dollar checks, playing black checks with the casino boss sitting next to him. So what else can go wrong? Everything went fine.

That's awesome. And that would have been during Weinberger's era?

Yeah, that was Weinberger.

So this is when it's very family oriented.

They're really family. We only had a few dealers then. We only had a few games then. After a while the casino expanded and expanded.

How many dealers were there would you guess?

Oh, at that time?

Yeah.

I would say maybe—well, baccarat, craps, everything else, we might have had maybe a hundred and fifty dealers there. Maybe 200.

Covering twenty-four seven.

Right. It was craps and all. Each crap game used to have three dealers on it and a box man. Yeah, and then baccarat and everything else. But baccarat was separate. We didn't split tokes with baccarat. Baccarat was separate.

What was your favorite game to deal?

I dealt mostly twenty-one. I tried the wheel, roulette, but I just didn't take to it. But I dealt all the other games. We had like three-card poker. We had Caribbean Stud, later on. And then they came out with a million different varieties of different blackjack games and some of them were so ridiculous and stupid even the dealers couldn't figure it out.

All right. Well, I think we'll wind it up for today. But this was great. Thank you so very much again. You're a great storyteller and great hospitality. Thank you.

Hey, my pleasure. This is fun, Barb.

Good, good. It should be.

It's fun.

So tell me this story about—what's the person's name?

Marty.

Marty. And what's his last name?

Bucheri, but don't ask me to spell it.

Okay, I won't ask you to spell it.

Yeah, it's Italian, Bucheri.

I'll figure it out.

Marty Bucheri, I think, came from the Chicago mob, but he was on the floor. He never dealt. He never dealt cards. His son worked in the baccarat pit, which was an excellent job, and he was a baccarat dealer. Marty is the nicest guy, gets along with everybody. He's maybe in his middle fifties, sixties; somewhere around there. I wasn't busy. I was on a dead game, which means I didn't have any players. We're just talking about all different things about his experiences and the old times. They used to call them the bust out joints or the cigar store joints. Cigar store

joints was a cigar store in the front and gambling in the back. This like especially in Chicago they used to have a lot of those. One day I come into the pit at twelve o'clock and Marty is already in there. I says, "Marty, what's going on?" He wouldn't even answer me. He's nervous as a Cheshire cat. He's just running around and he's nervous. He's picking up stuff, moving ashtrays around and all kinds of stuff. God almighty, I've never seen Marty like that.

So now he was telling me a story. I says, "I missed you the last couple of days. Where you been?" He says, "Oh, I went and had to go to Miami." "Oh, yeah, for vacation?" "No, on business." He came back from Miami and he's nervous and he wouldn't talk. The guy is just wound up. That night he got assassinated in his own car. They knocked him off in his car. Shot him in the back of his head with a twenty-two caliber pistol.

Wow.

When he got into his car, there was already somebody in the who shot him.

So did you ever know the rest of the story?

Something went wrong somewhere. No, nobody knew the rest of the story, but it was within the mob. He was one of the guys.

In those days you had couriers and you had different people. The mob had overseers in the casinos about the money and stuff like that. And they had couriers that used to be able to go into the counting room and just load up suitcases of money and just walk out. A lot of times maybe the money didn't go where it was supposed to. I'm not sure on that. But a lot of these things happened.

I went to Marty's funeral, a big funeral. All the mobsters in town were there. Then a few days later, Marty's son got promoted to pit boss in baccarat. That's how they paid back.

Wow. So was there gossip a after that or just life went on?

No, nobody knew. But even if there was gossip, there never came any gossip about that because you didn't second guess those kinds of things. It was just an acceptable thing. It's weird. And I'm not one of these guys like some of these people that worshiped these gangsters like the celebrity status. No, nothing ever became of it. No conviction.

Let me ask you one more thing, which I didn't ask you before. You were here and you were working on the Strip when Ralph Engelstad had the birthday celebrations for Hitler?

Yeah. Oh, yeah. At the—

Imperial Palace.

—Imperial Palace. Right.

What do you recall about that and how you felt about that?

Well, first of all, a lot of write-ups in the paper about it. Then they came up with these stupid excuses as far as, oh, he collects Nazi and Hitler memorabilia and that wasn't too commemorate Hitler; it was just a theme for a birthday party. Right. Yeah, it was a big, big thing in town, oh, yeah.

Well, it helped lead to the formation of the governor's council and Holocaust education and all of that.

I'm not sure about that. Or if it had anything to do with that.

Well, it seems to me Edythe Katz got behind that.

Oh, Edythe Katz; that's another story. I know Edythe from way back.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Do you have a short story about Edythe?

No, except Edythe and I used to work on the Holocaust survivor thing and she was also on the

governor's council. I went to her house a number of times. Have you ever been to her house?

No.

She had a beautiful house. I don't know if she does now, but she had a beautiful home at Rancho Circle. Her husband was a judge. She had a beautiful house on Rancho Circle. This is where all the really wealthy people lived, Rancho Circle. That was the address in those days, not anymore.

It's kind of a neighborhood that's coming back.

Is it?

Yeah. We did a whole project on that general area.

Oh, Rancho Circle?

Yeah, that general area of Rancho Circle. There's some really beautiful homes in there.

They are, yeah.

And a whole new generation of people living there.

Is that right?

Yeah, it's cool.

Yeah, the McGuire Sisters lived there since way back.

I think she still owns her home there, yeah.

She does?

Yeah. Well, thank you, Gary.

[End of recorded interview]

SESSION 3

Today is April seventh, 2015. This is Barbara Tabach and I'm sitting in the home of Gary Sternberg for another session to go down memory lane a little bit.

Yeah, we're going through all kinds of stuff here. We've got tons of it and we don't know where to start, where to begin and where to end.

You have had a very full life. I want to fill in a little bit on some of the things we've talked about before today, Gary. Let's just take the table tennis because that's sort of story in and of itself. You mentioned it before, but I want you to expand on how did your interest in table tennis even begin?

In China, in Shanghai. Now, table tennis in China for years and years and years was always a major sport. I started playing in the Chaoufoong Road Camp. This is the camp that we were in. Now, sometimes I might lose track of what I've told you and what—

Feel free to go ahead and repeat things. Don't worry about that.

Okay. The camp we lived in in Shanghai—because we had to move into this camp because we were outside the ghetto where we lived. So the camp was inside the ghetto and we had to move into this camp. Of course, it was very, very congested. But staying on the theme of the table tennis, the camp was an old Chinese university. It was all walled in. It had a lot of big buildings in it. We lived in a building, which was called the hospital building because it used to be a hospital when it was the university. The hospital building was one of the nicer buildings on the whole campus and we lived with five families in one room. But still, we had it much better than most of the other people.

But getting back to table tennis, we used to start playing Ping-Pong with just pieces of wood. And the balls they had—the balls in this game are very important and now they're

becoming very expensive. The cheapest balls, they were like cannon balls. But we used to play nevertheless. We used to take picnic tables and put them together. They had like big lunch tables, right? We'd put them together and they were all weathered and warped. Of course, we couldn't afford a net, so we used bricks across the table for a net. And we used to play on that and we had fun doing that.

Was that something you played as a child in Germany or you took it up because in China it was popular?

In China, yeah. I started playing that in China, yeah, because in Germany I was only nine years old. And nobody there played table tennis.

But we started playing that. Then at the Jewish school I went to, SJYA School, which was the Shanghai Jewish Youth Organization—Association, we had a table there if you could ever get to it, one table there. So I started getting pretty good. When I came to the United States, like in Cleveland and Los Angeles, I always found table tennis clubs and I got pretty good at the sport. I wasn't terrific at it, but I was very active in it. And a pretty fair tournament player.

Then how did it evolve when you got to Las Vegas?

So when I came to Las Vegas, a couple of students at the university, at UNLV, they had a little ad in the paper, "Anybody who wants to organize and get together, table tennis players," a couple of (Asian) guys, they were students at the university. I called them up and we got together at my apartment where we were living. We got together and we decided that we're going to form a club and we're playing at the student union at UNLV.

So then shortly after that Neil Smyth came to town. Neil is such an organizer. He's an amazing person. He passed away about four or five years ago.

And he came to town to work at Caesars?

At Caesars Palace, right. He was drafted by Caesars to be their comptroller and he had worked in the financial part in the casino business in Puerto Rico and his family and everybody lived in Puerto Rico. When he came to Las Vegas, he didn't know anybody, but he loved playing the game. He also wasn't a terrific player, but he loved to play. And I can't remember how we got together on this, but I remember Neil coming over to my apartment. We used to live right by the Boulevard Mall. He came over and we talked about it. He says, "Yeah, we should organize a club." And some of the guys that originally started it, we all got together and we organized a club.

Then another person got into it, Murray Hertz. Murray Hertz was also president of the club at one time. Now, Murray Hertz used to own a Honda motorcycle agency on Boulder Highway and that's before Honda cars became popular. He started out with motorcycles, to go back into that a little bit. A funny thing with Murray Hertz was Murray Hertz was a wonderful guy, but he had eyesight problems. But he also loved to play and he was also an organizer, great organizer, and he owned this motorcycle agency on Boulder Highway. One time I asked him, I said, "How did you get such a"—after a while when I knew him, he had this big motorcycle agency that was the place in town. So he told me this story of how they shipped him double or triple the amount that he ordered from Honda and when he was going to send them back, they wouldn't take them back. So he put on a great big sale of motorcycles and he sold them all. He reduced the price and he sold them all because he had no place to put him. He wasn't geared up for that kind of volume, right? And from that he just blossomed into this huge motorcycle agency. And then from motorcycles when Honda cars came out, he was the first one in line for Honda automobiles. That was Murray Hertz's Honda. It was a big name in town.

Okay, Murray Hertz, a good friend of mine. We organized all different tournaments.

Then we were all playing at the Phil Mirabelli Teen Center on Alta and someplace up in North Las Vegas. It's a recreation center, parks and recreation center. We played up there and they let us use one of the rooms up there; it wasn't very big and it wasn't good facilities, but we didn't need good facilities. We just had a good time no matter where we played. We had different tournaments in there and I got all those trophies up there from all these different tournaments that we did and stuff and medals and we had a good old time. Murray Hertz phased out and then we got different people into it.

Then Neil came into the thing, right? I didn't know what Neil did; I didn't ask what he did. One time I'm sitting next to him and I said, "Neil, I've got to change your game." I said, "You're going to stagnant. You have a weird style. You love to play. And you're not mad." I said, "But you can improve a lot if you change your style." So I tried to change his style; it wouldn't work. But he really, really appreciated it and we became good friends. And I said, "Neil, what do you do?" He says, "Oh, I work at Caesars Palace." I says, "Really? What do you do?" He says, "I'm the comptroller." I said, "No shit." I said, "You know, Neil..." And we talked about it a bit. At that time I was in the appliance business.

Now, this is before you had come to work at Caesars, you're talking about here.

Oh, yeah. Yeah, this is how I got into Caesars.

Right.

I says, "No kidding." I said, "You know, Neil, I've had some physical problems and I've got to get out of the business I am in, which is too hard on me. I can't find proper employees." Because in those days, mechanical service was very bad here in Las Vegas and good servicemen were very hard to find. I had one that I had to fire him because he was a drunk and I lost some major accounts that I had, laundry mat accounts. We used to service their machines. Lost those

accounts. Then I had a pulmonary embolism. I was in the hospital at Desert Springs for two weeks on my back. So when I came back and I was trying to keep the business going.

But in the meantime, I was also going to dealer school. I wanted to become a dealer. I figured doing washing machines is too hard for one person. It's too difficult business, physically. So I went to dealer school and I went to Michael Gaughan's dealer school.

Right. And you told me about that previously. Let's stay on the table tennis.

Oh, okay. All right. Stay on table tennis. Well, we're actually on the table tennis right now.

All right. Because he—

Yeah. So I'm talking to Neil. I'm telling what I do and he's telling me what he does. And I says, "You know, Neil, I'm going to dealer school and I know it's very hard to break into one of the Strip joints." I says, "Can you do anything for me at Caesars Palace?" He says, "Gary, you keep to dealer's school. You find a place downtown to break in and if you're good enough there, I'll get you a job at Caesars." That was it. You know what that meant? That was like impossible. There were only a few games, only a few dealers at Caesars. It wasn't huge like it is now.

So to make this long story short, I went finished dealing school. I got good enough. And then I had problems getting a place to break in. That was the most frustrating part because I had the best job in town all lined up, but I couldn't get to the next step because I couldn't find a place to break in.

Were you able to play table tennis even though your back was hurting?

No. What I had was...You know what a pulmonary embolism is? It's a blood clot that goes up to your lungs…Well, I got it taken care of. I was playing all the time.

So that didn't affect your table tennis?

No, it didn't affect my table tennis.

I'd like to know is if table tennis became important enough at Caesars that they held these tournaments.

Okay, yes. So now we got the club going and everything else. Neil and I were very instrumental in it. So Neil got into the university and we played in the gym at the university. They let us have it twice a week for like three hours at a time, but we had to pay them. We had to pay him like twenty-five or fifty dollars (per night); because I was the treasurer, I used to pay them all, just for the lights and stuff and the facilities. We had a really nice setup. Then they canceled it.

So Neil was also an officer at St. Viator's Church and he talked them into letting us use the gym at the St. Viator's, which was a beautiful facility. We had six tables set up over there and the club expanded and expanded. Before you knew it we got all the top players in the country playing in our club. They all came to Las Vegas because Neil found them jobs all over the place. In a loading dock, and a lot of dealers, too, a lot of dealing jobs he gave up. He was just the nicest guy.

So this was—I don't mean to interrupt your thought there, but I'm trying to understand. Neil used these people that he met through table tennis as his network for finding good employees?

And good players. It kind of evolved, actually. Neil wasn't that involved in table tennis until I got him going through my club and Neil then made the club into a huge success and then it became the Las Vegas Table Tennis Association and it drew in and people found out about us, Las Vegas, and everybody wanted to come to Las Vegas and we wound up with some of the best players in the country.

Living here?

Living here.

And working at Caesars?

Right.

Well, now, were any of those people that we know?

Yeah. You wouldn't hear about it because table tennis is not...in reality table tennis is not a good spectator sport like tennis is.

How long did they run those tournaments there?

The tournaments, well, this one ran from...

It shows for a couple of days in December of '77. So for how many years...?

Well, it was more than that because we had U.S. team trials and stuff that actually lasted about four or five days, but the actual tournament lasted for a three days.

Does it still go on, these tournaments here?

No. Well, yes and no. I'll have to—hold a minute.

[Pause in recording]

We started the club. We played at the university in the gym and then we played at St. Viator's and this is where it got really big. We had a lot of members and I can't remember exactly how many, but we had a lot of members. But somehow Neil got with the U.S. Table Tennis Association in New York, a guy by the name of Sol Schiff, who was the president at the time, Jewish guy. Sol was the nicest guy. He ran the table tennis and the tournaments were always held in New York. But now we're getting all the big players in Las Vegas. So Neil is telling him, "Look, I'll make you a deal. We're real slow at Caesars around Christmastime." He says, "If you can arrange it, to get these people out here, I'll give you real good deals on the rooms and the food is cheap. You can have a ninety-nine cent breakfast. And kids and everybody can come out here just as long as the kids don't run around the casino." And so he made a deal with Sol

Schiff and they moved the whole...In December we started the first tournament here, the U.S. Table Tennis Tournament.

That's pretty cool.

Oh, it was fun. So like I said, we were promised the tennis pavilion and the tennis pavilion at Caesars used to have four tennis courts in a metal building in back of Caesars and we're supposed to get that because they were supposed to have like eighty tables set up. So instead we couldn't get it because they had some other things; something got screwed up. So we had it in the convention room and it was terrible conditions. Everybody complained about it, but everybody loved being there.

So was the first one in '76?

Seventy-six, yeah.

And like in this program that I'm looking at, the 1977 one, there was this thing called Caesars Palace Parade of Champions featuring Pancho Gonzales, boxer Joe Louis, Al Rosen.

Al Rosen, the baseball player, uh-huh.

Paddy DeMarco, he was a lightweight champion it says, 1954. Ralph Dupas, he was a middleweight champion. So who were these guys? Why were they in this program for table tennis?

Because these were the goodwill, the ambassadors of Caesars Palace. Whenever they had an event and stuff like this, a lot of these guys were always put in the programs and stuff for prestige.

Ah, okay.

People used to come into Caesars—well, we're getting sidetracked. And these were all the big

names, all the sports people; these were all employees of Caesars Palace. Joe Louis used to...It used to be embarrassing sometimes. I'll deal a big game and Joe would just sit down on the game and he says, "Put me up a quarter." People didn't mind and they put him up twenty-five bucks. Play a hand, play a few hands and leave. And they loved it. But I thought it was embarrassing for somebody of Joe Louis' stature to beg for money like that. But they didn't mind. Nobody cared.

Because they liked saying that they played...

Yeah, "I played with Joe Louis; Joe Louis played on my game."

So to kind of layer this in, you started working yourself in 1974 at Caesars.

Right.

So working at Caesars, you've got lots of sports figures that are kind of coming and going.

They're greeters. Like Al Rosen was a host; he was a casino host. But like Pancho Gonzales, he was the tennis pro at Caesars. Matter of fact, his wife worked as a twenty-one dealer; I think her name was Cheryl, a really nice lady, but they got divorced because he was screwing everything.

Oh. The temptations.

With skirts on. Yeah, women went nuts over him.

He was a pretty famous guy. I remember him. And so we talked before we started recording, also on the floor dealers—you worked there. Blacks had already become dealers.

Yes.

That had changed in Las Vegas by then. But women...what about were there women dealers?

I couldn't tell you the year when we started with women dealers. Women? That was out of the

question. How can women be dealers? It just doesn't exist. And you have to keep in mind in those days the only gambling there was was Las Vegas. There used to be Cuba. There used to be some of the islands, the Caribbean Islands. Then, of course, there was gambling in Steubenville, Ohio. You know about Steubenville? …

I'd like to get to understanding what it must have been like when women came to be dealers in the 1970s. What's your recollection on that?

Women first came in and they were all juiced in. Some of these were like girlfriends of racketeers.

I can't remember her name. She was a really nice lady. She wasn't very tall, big boobs, nice figure, gorgeous figure, very pretty. But she was already in her late forties. And to get into the dealing business in the late forties is very, very tough. It's like becoming a doctor in your forties, right? Nicest lady. In the dealers' room she used to tell us all these harebrained stories about, oh, the mobster this and how they come out of the counting room with suitcases full of money, and she knows all these guys that carried the money back to Chicago and carried the money back to New York and all these racketeers. She used to pride herself and brag about it. One day I said, whatever her name is, I said, "If all this stuff is true, you're blabbing it around. Somebody's going to knock you off." Sure enough, sometime later she drowned in her swimming pool in the backyard and she was a good swimmer.

So she was one of the first women dealers that you recall.

And she was one of the first ones, but I cannot remember her name, nice lady.

Were you a member of a union? Talk about the union.

Where my experience with unions is that...unions, first of all, shouldn't exist because—black people say, "Oh, yeah, they were wonderful in the '20s. People had the rights to work and they

weren't oppressed by the employer." But the way the unions are like the employer is the enemy and the unions are their friends when, in fact, it's the other way around.

I had several experiences. One of my experiences is when I was assistant store manager in Los Angeles for a discount operation and I was in the appliances and hard lines and they went on strike. According to the unions, the owners—now, this is a private company, right? They made a big deal because the owners came in trying to talk to the employers. That wasn't allowed. Their own company. They weren't allowed to talk to their employees. And the unions got the employees. I was in management then, right? And the employees, they were so hyped up and so misguided that in the sporting goods department they exchanged ammunition in the ammunition boxes so all the stuff was out of sync. They had one caliber in the wrong box and bad stuff. They did that just before they went on strike just to sabotage the company and they did all kinds of stuff. But that was okay. But the owner of the company wasn't allowed to come in. And then all of a sudden you have all these friends that turn into your enemies. It's like the enemy camp all of a sudden. I thought that was the worst—I couldn't understand this in this country with the freedom that we have that these unions can proliferate like they do. It's just unbelievable to me.

Well, how did the unions affect the workers on the Strip?

I'm glad you asked that. Shortly after I started, I think it was the first month, we went on a culinary strike and all the culinary members walked out and other unions walked out as well. So they think that Caesars Palace is going to go down the tubes now because they blackmailed them into whatever they wanted, but they couldn't get it. So they all walked out. So right away management organized the hotel and dealers became room maids. I was the casino porter for a while and I cleaned ashtrays and everything else. We didn't do a lot of business, but we had a

hell of a lot of fun. I was cleaning ashtrays and then later on I was vacuuming rooms and making beds. We didn't know anything about that. It was a sloppy job. People didn't mind. They loved it. "Hey, you guys are doing a great job," and stuff like that. They knew that inexperienced people are doing all the work. The only food available was the buffet; there were no restaurants open, nothing but just one buffet. So whatever you wanted, you had a choice; it was either the buffet or the buffet. We wound up cleaning up some of the places. I couldn't believe it. The kitchen facilities and stuff, they were filthy dirty. The kitchens were never so clean. Now, when the dealers and the executives and everybody got in there and started cleaning the place up, they were never so clean as they were when the union people ran it whose job it's supposed to be to keep it nice.

They went on strike and I can't remember how long they were on strike, at least two or three weeks I think. Like I said, I was cleaning ashtrays in the casino, sweeping the floor with a little dust pan and stuff like that. But we were all having a good time. And you couldn't keep the customers out. They said, "You guys are doing such..." They're complimenting us all over the place, right?

So the tourists didn't seem to mind?

No. No.

Was there a picket line in front of Caesars?

Oh, yeah, there was a picket, yeah, big, boisterous. Everybody's yelling and screaming how bad the employer is and don't go into Caesars and stuff like that. Of course, they can do that but the employer can't do that.

So did you feel intimidated when you'd cross that picket line?

Not at all because I was just waiting for somebody to dare me because I was...And our friends,

now, on the picket line—and they're people we used to work with—on the picket line yelling at us and screaming at us, "Stay the hell out, you scab." Or whatever, all the usual crap. It was unbelievable. A lot of Union people got fired as a result of it because these people went overboard. All of a sudden they're put in a position of power. They can tell the executives not to work. It was crazy, absolutely insane.

But the whole concept of union activities to me is insanity and they shouldn't be because it's not right. Union people are so indoctrinated, brainwashed, and they become so hateful. One minute you're their friends and the next minute you're their enemy. They become so hateful and even physically abusive—I mean verbally abusive and physically abusive even in some cases. Yeah, the unions are great, unions are great, yeah, in the '20s. Well, we're not in the '20s.

So between the unions and women dealers, how did you deal with those changes? What did you think about...?

Just go with the flow. People will bitch about everything. Like now, in 2015, when I talk to a dealer, they're complaining because they don't have bananas in the dealers' room anymore.

Bananas?

Bananas. They used to have mountains of fruit and pastries. That's a whole other story, the dealers' room.

Really? What was the dealers' room like? Describe it.

Well, it was in different places; they moved around as the hotel changed. One of the dealers' room was...I was standing at the window when Evel Knievel made his jump that overlooked the front of the hotel and Evel Knievel made his jump. "Aren't you going to watch him? He's going to jump right now." I said, "Give me a break. I don't go for this stupid crap. He's going to kill himself." Which he did, almost; got all broken up. He jumped over the fountains with his

motorcycle. Then what happened was at the end of the jump there was the parking garage for the valet, was like an open area. And he tried to get through that and when he hit the straw bales or something that were set for protection. He hit those and he tumbled over and broke himself all up and stuff. All these things that people thought was the most fantastic thing in entertainment...not for me. [Laughing] Give me a tennis or table tennis match or something like that; that's my kind of thing.

So over your career what were the biggest changes, do you think, besides fruit?

I mean that's what dealers complain about. And my the next question is, are you still making good money? "Yeah, we're still making good money." So why are you worried about the damn fruit for?

Did the tips go up and down with the economy?

As a matter of fact, at Caesars Palace they didn't. Even when the economy went down...Was it in the '70s? No.

In the '80s.

In the '80s? Eighties, middle '80s, '88, yeah. No, as a matter of fact, we did really good. They didn't improve a lot because we did lose some trade because they brought in people...they reduced the room rates to bring in more people, which was an incentive to bring in more people. But the people that took advantage of the reduced room rates were not big gamblers. But still, we worked very hard and we kept everybody happy. Then they closed up some games and they find out no because they thought it was going to get slow, but it didn't get slow, and then they were scrambling for dealers to open more games. It was a constant cycle like that. It was funny. But, no, people used to come in, "How's the economy affecting you?" And we don't know if we're in a recession right now. It's still great.

Yeah. So there were a couple of recessions in the '80s that may not have affected you.

No. The last one we had, I wasn't in it anymore, but it did affect it a bit. Yeah, they went down quite a bit. But Caesars Palace is always Caesars Palace. Now it's going down the tubes because Harrah's owns it now and these guys are just stealing in the form of bonuses out of the company like crazy, the executives. Did you see the article in the paper where—they're getting millions of dollars out of the company? I mean one of the greatest organizations in the world. And Caesars Palace has, behind Coca-Cola, the most recognizable name in business, right, and they're going to change it to Harrah's Entertainment or something like that. They're crazy. They're nuts. To take a name like that and just throw it away? I'm talking about the corporate, the whole corporation. Nuts.

Anyway, going back to table tennis...You want to go back to table tennis?

We'll go back to table tennis in a minute. I want to ask you. You pulled out one article here. Some of the more...I don't know how to describe them, interesting characters in U.S. history. You pulled out this article that you dealt to one of the 9/11/2001 hijackers.

Yeah. Nine-Eleven my son calls me up in the morning and says, "Dad, Dad, we're being invaded; we're being attacked." I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" "Yeah," he says, "They bombed the buildings in New York." It had just come on the news and they just found out that the planes didn't run into by accident; that they were deliberately run into the buildings. And I turn on the TV. My wife, she was still alive, and we were sitting there watching the TV. And I couldn't believe it, airplanes running into buildings.

So now they flash the terrorists on the screen. I almost fell out of my chair. I said, "I know those sons of a bitches." She says, "What do you know them from?" I said, "I dealt to them." I said, "I dealt to them last month, as a matter of fact." And I says, "This guy over here,

this Atta guy, he was the ringleader." And this other guy they were showing was Jarroh or Jarrah; something like that. He was playing on my game.

When you were talking about...It was Ziad Jarrah, J-A-R-R-A-H.

Yeah, Jarrah, right. I says, "I dealt to those guys." This Atta guy never played. Only the other guy used to play.

Atta didn't play, but Jarrah did.

Atta didn't play, right. He'd come on my game and I was wearing my Star of David on the job. There was no discussion about Jews or stuff like that. He was very polite and I dealt to him and I greeted him a couple of times because he played a couple of times before. I says, "Oh, how you doing? I haven't seen you in a couple of weeks," or something. He drew five-hundred- dollar markers. Now, if you draw a marker, that doesn't necessarily mean you have a credit line because you can make a cash deposit. So I have no idea whether that was on a credit line or whether it was on a cash deposit. He'd draw five-hundred-dollar markers and he'd play quarters and he was quiet, twenty-five, fifty bucks a hand.

And then Atta used to come over. He was real nervous and he'd sit down and talk to him in Arabic. Then he'd stop the game for a while and he'd talk to...Later on I find out that he was trying to get him away from all the decadent, evil stuff that we have, like women and stuff that the Arabs kill us for, right? And gambling, of course, is horrible. That doesn't go with Allah. Allah isn't going to allow that.

So a couple of days later I says, "This is ridiculous. These guys were playing on my game." So I didn't think anything further about it until I thought about these guys were actually drawing markers; that might have been a way to transfer money from one deposit to drawing money for their expenses and stuff, using it like a bank account. So I called the FBI and I finally

got a hold of an agent. I said, "Look, my name is Gary Sternberg. I'm a blackjack dealer at Caesars Palace." And I said, "I dealt to one of those terrorists." I said, "And the other one was at the game, too." "Yeah, yeah, we know all about it. We're not interested."

They didn't know much about them so I did some research on Google; there was nothing mentioned about them being at Caesars—you can Google it or something—and see step by step by step, the motel and where they drew money out of ATMs and all this stuff, but nothing about being at Caesars Palace.

Then a few days after that and it was just a few days before Nine-Eleven, it was in August sometime, about the middle of August, maybe, and I'm dealing on a different game that was a five- or ten-dollar game. It was a low-end game. I get this whole group of Arabs around my game. Two of them sit down and play. "You Jewish, Gary?" "Yeah, I'm Jewish." "Oh, yeah, you're Jewish. Pretty soon we're going to go [making machine gun sound]." They went like this, right? They're all elated like in a euphoric state. It was a weird situation. "We're going to [making machine gun sound]," real loud like that. I says, "Yeah." And they're playing and gibberish all over the place and they're yelling and something else goes on. I didn't pay much attention to them and especially since they asked me if I'm Jewish or not. That didn't set...What's it your business, right?

Right.

So I come off. I turn around. I come off the game. And the floor man says, "Gary, what's all that racket on your table?" I says, "Yeah, I've got a bunch of fucking terrorists on my game." You can cross that, but that's what I said. I said, "Yeah, I've got a bunch of terrorists." And I just said it off the top of my head. Then later on when I thought about it that might have been the rest of the bunch with the 9-11 thing or people that were associated with it.

So then I went back and I talked to our security. And this was sometime later. I says, "You guys still have the tape?" Because they tape all the games. All the games are on tape.

On surveillance tapes.

Surveillance tapes. I says, "You guys still have it?" He says, "No, we delete that because we only keep it for..." "Unless it's some court case involved or something like that, we keep it; but, otherwise, as a matter of routine, we don't keep them." Because I was curious to see who those people actually were on the tape. That was my experience on that. Yeah, the FBI didn't care.

That's very weird. I mean that's close to be touched by that story in a personal way.

Yeah. I know. It's weird. It's how things go around. And these people spend a lot of time in Las Vegas.

I've heard that. I did get a sense of that. So going back—we'll take a deep breath here—so going back to table tennis. We keep diverging from there. What else do we need to know about the table tennis, what it did for Caesars, for the community?

So now the word gets around that we're having a club here and Neil has gotten a job for a couple of the guys, for a couple of the players including Bill Hodge, the guy that just passed away. He got him a job.

So now we got the top, top players like D.J. Lee, who's a Korea, but he's an American citizen, D.J. Lee. He was five times U.S. champion. His wife, He-Ja, was seven times women's champion. We had Fred Berchon. I forget the first name. Berchon was one of the guys. He was kind of nutty. Most Ping-Pong players are kind of nutty.

One time I'm talking to a player who had just joined the club . He says, "Oh, I just came down here from Michigan." He says, "Yeah, my wife and the kids just came down here." He says, "We just packed up, hooked the trailer up to the car, and we came to Las Vegas." I says,

"Jeez, well, why you coming down here?" He says, "I'm a professional poker player." I says, "Wow, there's a lot of competition here." He says, "Yeah, I know. I'm good at it." Then they had the Binion's World Championship of Poker. He won the damn thing; the 1983 WSOP Championship.

What was his name again?

His name was Tom McEvoy. And he belonged to the club and he played. He was a pretty fair player. But he found us. So now we have all these top players. So now we've become the center for table tennis. We've got the tournaments here and we had all the tournaments until just maybe five years ago and then they went back to New York. Then I see when I looked on the website that the U.S. Open is coming back in July and the U.S. Open is—everybody from all around the world come here to play because we used to have that here for many years, also, and that it went someplace else. But I haven't been involved in it that much that I keep track of it except for what I read in the table tennis news.

Sports is like that. Any kind of sporting event that brings people here is good.

We used to have all these sporting events. We used to have people come in the casino, "Where's the stadium where Holmes and Ali fought?" I says, "Well, it's not here anymore." "Well, they fought at Caesars Palace, didn't they?" I says, "Yeah." "Well, where's the stadium they fought in?" I says, "That was just put up for the one fight." "You did what? You mean just for one fight they built a whole stadium?" "Yeah, they build it for a fight and then tear it down." Sixteen-thousand-seat stadium they built.

Just temporary.

I mean just amazing stuff like that, right? They can't do it now anymore because there's no room back there. But then we had a whole bunch of tennis courts because the owners of Caesars

Palace, the Perlman brothers, Stuart and Clifford, they were tennis nuts. They were excellent players, too. They had a whole bunch of tennis courts back there and then they built a tennis pavilion for indoor tennis in case it gets too hot outside. It was air-conditioned and everything else. They had four tennis courts. And this is where we played table tennis later on, too, and this is later on when we had all the table tennis tournaments. It was an ideal situation. It was a beautiful setup in there. We'd have like eighty tables set up in there.

Wow.

Yeah, we had a big, big turnout. Jeez, we used to have all these different events back there. We used to have the Circus of the Stars. Does that ring a bell?

Well, they used to get movie stars or entertainment people and train them into circus acrobats from trapeze to horse riding. Yeah. We used to have all that in the tennis pavilion. We used to have gymnastics, all the gymnastics champions on exhibitions in there. We used to have some amazing stuff at Caesars Palace. All these events were televised.

Everybody was very creative in how they would entertain people.

Caesars Palace used to be "the" place and we were the only ones that used to have all the big fights. Now, of course, they're at the MGM and they're not at Caesars Palace anymore because the whole regime changed.

So switching gears—are we done with table tennis?

Yeah. So, well, in the meantime, myself, I haven't played in about five years. We had a table tennis club here in the association in our clubhouse.

Oh, here at Sun City.

At Sun City, right. I was teaching people to play, a lot of hackers, of course, not the kind of players I was used to. Then finally I went out of it because some of these women would screech

and scream and you can't play a game under those conditions. And they were just giving me such a hard time because they were having fun, so that entitles them to screech and scream. I says, "Guys, when you're playing this game, this is not a screaming game." "Yeah, but, Gary, we're having fun. If you don't like it, get out." This kind of attitude stuff. Eventually it wasn't worth my aggravation. But then I started with different health issues and stuff like that. So I kind of dropped out of it. So I haven't played in about four years.

I could lose very quickly to you no matter what.

Well, yeah.

Let's change gears a little bit. I wanted to fill in a little bit on your relationship with Congregation Ner Tamid.

Okay. Congregation Ner Tamid started in the early '70s, I think. Are you going to talk to them?

Yes. 1974.

Originally my wife, Noreen, and I got into it…My wife and I got into it. Our son was getting of religious school age. Seventy-six. But we came in just after it was organized; we weren't one of the original organizers but right afterwards. Noreen and I became very active; matter of fact, my son [Adam Sternberg] became active in it, too, with the Itty Bitty Nitty. Nitty was the youth group's name. But he was little then and he belonged to it Itty Bitty Nitty. I love that name, Itty Bitty Nitty.

That's good.

He's still in touch with some of the people that he went to religious school with. Anyway, my wife and I got into it just a short while after it was started.

Where was it first located?

We have quite a history there. We're going back quite a ways. We started with services at a

Salvation Army Church on Palomino. It was Palomino or in that area. It's off Rancho Circle up there. Palomino Lane or something like that. This is where we had services, in a Salvation Army Church. From the Salvation Army Church we moved to a church on Maryland Parkway right near where Sunrise Hospital is, Maryland Parkway and Desert Inn or Twain. Yeah, Desert Inn. Then we moved to a Korean Presbyterian church on Maryland Parkway right across the university. When you go to the university, you go right by this Korean church. We used to have services. Matter of fact, my son was the last to be bar mitzvahed in that church before we moved to the new temple. And from there on we built this temple right here.

The one on Emerson.

On Emerson, right.

Before the one where they're located at now.

Right. Now, the Emerson one was built in two stages.

And when that was being built, you were on the board during that time?

Yeah, right. It was built in two stages. We didn't have a sanctuary to begin with, but we had like ten schoolrooms. We had a library, offices, and we had a social hall. And the social hall was also used for...the social hall was used for services mainly but also for social hall. We just had bridge chairs in there for services.

One of our volunteers in there by the name of Al Rostoff, he and his wife, they really did everything. They devoted their lives to it. They cleaned the place. They fixed it because we didn't have money then, right? At one time, one thing I keep laughing about, Al ordered a whole bunch of new folding chairs because the ones we had were bridge chairs and they were real hard on your tush, right? So Al told me one time, he says, "You know we've got a whole bunch of nice cushiony bridge chairs." Because they had to be folding chairs so we could use the hall for

other activities. He says, "I ordered them and they're cushioned. And one thing about them, even though they're cushioned, they're fart-proof." I always laughed about that. Al was just that kind, both he and his wife.

One time I remember Noreen and I put on a Hawaiian luau. Noreen was really good at organizing stuff like that. It was good. And I built palm trees because we couldn't afford decorations. So I went all over town looking for cardboard tubes to make palm trees out of it. I was looking for the carpet rolls. You know the rolls that a carpet is rolled on?

And I went into garbage cans in all the back of carpet businesses and I got cardboard tubes and so on. I used those tubes and I bought a spray painter. In the back of my house I had a lot of palm trees. So I dried the palm leaves and then sprayed them green and made palm trees. And then Al's wife—and I remember that because they both passed away pretty close to each other—she helped me wrap up the paper tubes, the trunks with brown crepe paper and make it look like palm trees.They came out gorgeous. They came out really, really nice. They were real tall, like six foot.

You used your creative inventor skills there. Your fabricating skills.

And made 14 trees, yeah. I make a lot of stuff.

Those are good memories of things that you do when you don't have anything.

I know, but I have fun doing it.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, I was just telling Marylou, also. And this is kind of off the subject here.

But I'm just making greeting cards. We have two birthdays coming up, two seventieth birthdays. One is for a good friend of mine David Mendleson. He and his wife, Rona—Rona used to be a teacher and David was an elementary school principal, and they were also very, very

active in Ner Tamid. There's like a group of us that are still together. Then another friend of ours by the name of Ron Ostroff, who is an OB/GYN, he's retired and he's seventy and they're going to have a party. So I'm making up greeting cards. The reason I'm going into this is because I was just telling Marylou, I says, "I'm spending too much time on some of these greeting cards." She says, "Gary, that's okay; don't worry about it. That's all you have." I says, "But I have a good time making it."

How special that is. People don't have time to do that.

Yeah. Like we make holiday cards and you're going to go on my mailing list. We make holiday cards that are legendary.

Well, that's very cool. I'm looking at the list of people who are on the building committee. So that must have been—did you guys have monumental discussions that you had to...?

Well, talking about discussions...board meetings. Originally the rabbi we had by the name of Weisberg—I can't remember his first name—he was kind of controversial. You want me to talk about some of the rabbis?

Sure, sure.

Okay. That's a whole different story. To begin with we had Rabbi Weisberg or Weisman. He was kind of controversial. Then he got fired. I wasn't involved with the decision-making part. We had Rabbi Weisman—Weisman, Weisberg, whatever. He got fired. Then we got Rabbi Hecht.

He was the person there when you were doing your building campaign?

Yeah. He's on there, right, as [Mel] Hecht?

Yes.

He is Hecht, okay. Right. Rabbi Hecht. We couldn't get anything accomplished at the board

meeting. We used to have board meetings at the Jewish Federation, which was then located on Twain by Maryland Parkway up on the second floor over some stores. We used to have the board meetings up there. Then when we had the temple, of course, we had the board meetings in the library at the temple. But we couldn't get anything accomplished because it was just about the problems of the rabbi.

He got divorced from his wife [and was ousted from the temple].

Did I tell you this thing about Adam's bar mitzvah class?

No.

"How was your bar mitzvah class today, Adam?" He said, "We had a great time." I says, "Yeah, what did you learn?" He says, "Well, we didn't learn anything today; we were at Caesars Palace playing the arcade machines." I said, "Say that again." He says, "Yeah, we were at Caesars Palace." Where the Omnimax Theater was, there were video machines up there, not poker, not gambling machines.

Games that the kids could play.

Games. I says, "Explain that." He says, "Well, the rabbi had a wedding at Caesars Palace. So he took me and two other guys. He gave us each a role of quarters and told us to play the machines while he was doing the wedding." So that became a whole big stink on how he would take the kids up there, leave them loose, nine-, ten-, eleven-year-old kids, thirteen years maybe. Well, he was close to thirteen. Leave the kids alone up there in the casino and take them there instead of learning. Stuff like that.

He made a ton of money off the weddings alone he did. Plus he's getting salary from the temple. He's doing weddings. He's doing funerals. He's doing bar mitzvahs and everything else, right? Getting paid for that. So then we had Rabbi Maline. Rabbi Maline came down from

Miami, Florida. He was a famous rabbi from Miami, Florida. When he was asked, how do you relate to God?..."Oh, I don't think God exists." This is a rabbi. I can say that but he can't.

His wife one time comes up to me...She comes up to me and she was always dressed to the nines, really expensive stuff, right? She comes up to me and she says, "Gary, Caesars Palace, they have all this money. They have millions and millions and billions of dollars." She says, "Do you think you could talk to somebody and let me have some of it?" I thought she was joking. I says, "Yeah, that's funny." And then another conversation comes up. It turns out she was serious. I talked this around and I told this to some of my friends that knew her and stuff like that. They said, "Yeah, that's something that she would say." [Laughing] Those are the kind of people that we had.

You've had some interesting characters over the years. So eventually it settled down, though. Rabbi Akselrad has been there for a number of years.

My wife, Noreen, she was on the board of directors. She was membership chairman. She was on the selection committee that selected Rabbi Akselrad. Since then the rest is history. Since then, since there was rabbi, we got enough money together to add to the sanctuary—not to add to it, but to build an actual sanctuary, which was later on added. It wouldn't show on there.

So it relocated to Valle Verde.

No. At that time we were still on Emerson.

You were still on Emerson, okay.

But we didn't have a sanctuary. We built a beautiful sanctuary, which was decorated by the interior decorator that decorated the Mirage and all the big hotels on the Strip, a lady. She was an interior decorator. She decorated beautiful, beautiful sanctuary. Now we're getting really classy. But we're landlocked over there because we couldn't expand. It was difficult to park.

High Holy Days, it was impossible to park. I wasn't involved in the new part anymore.

And the new part meaning the expansion on Emerson or the new location?

No, the one on Emerson; the new temple came later.

But you did say that the windows...Did you donate the stained glass windows?

Yes. These were actually donated to the Emerson temple. The windows are now in the lobby and front desk in the new temple on Valley Verde…But anyway, that's one of the windows. There are two round windows. One was on the inside lobby that looked into the offices and this one was on the outside going into temple. There were these big windows. And my wife and I, we were in the import business. They just added the sanctuary and we said, "Let's put something nice in there." I was always into stained glass because I made that window.

That's in your home entry.

In the entry, right. So I was always into stained glass. I did all kinds of stuff with stained glass. And we had our office—we had GAN Enterprises; it stood for Gary, Adam and Noreen. We were importers. In the same complex where we had the office and the warehouse, we had a stained glass company, a very renowned stained glass company for the whole area. We went in there one time and said, "What can you come up with?" They had this gal. She was great. She knew exactly the Hebrew letters and everything. She made the drawings. I had the original drawings from it for years and I finally framed it and donated it to temple. I think it's still in one of the offices, the original drawings from the windows.

Oh, good.

We had the windows made. I think our cost on that was right around five thousand dollars for the two windows. They came out beautiful. Then we had two burglaries and they broke this one and they also broke the Star of David one. It was fixed, but it wasn't restored the way it should

have been. Because if I don't get involved with it, it doesn't get done right. So that's the windows, yeah, and they were beautiful.

They're beautiful, yeah.

So now we have them in this temple here and the famous decorator, she puts a maroon drape in back of it. I says, "You can't have a colored thing in back of a colored window." "Yeah, but the famous decorator...are you going to tell the famous decorator she's doing it wrong?" I says, "Yeah, she's doing it wrong." I says, "It has to be a neutral color." So then we tried all different things. So I wound up crawling into this area in the back of the windows, which is like a box back there. Marylou and I, we went in there with rollers and we painted the backdrop for it so it's white. So now it's properly done.

I'm going to ask one last question. Kind of bring us full circle because as you said you were the child of an intermarriage.

Right.

And your mother was not Jewish; your dad was Jewish.

Right.

We know that from the other story.

Right.

So how did you choose to follow and become a Jew as opposed to the Christian world?

Yeah, okay. When we left Germany, first of all—I don't know if it came out in the story before—my mother was given a choice. Since she was Christian and the kids were raised Christian, she was given a choice. And everybody is telling her wherever she went, different agencies and stuff, "Why don't you divorce your husband? He's over there now; he's in China and you're over here. Why don't you divorce him and you can stay in Germany and no one's

going to bother you?" Later on they would have murdered us, anyway. And every time somebody would say that she got terribly upset. She says, "No, I'm not going to do that." She wasn't going to divorce her husband. They had a good relationship going.

And she was more of a Jew than my father was, I think. My mother, she was born in Poland under very bad conditions, poverty in Poland. But when she came to Germany, she worked for an Orthodox Jewish family like as a housekeeper. She worked for them a number of years. My mother had more Yiddish expressions than anyone you know or I know. I mean everything she had a Yiddish expression for everything.

When I went to China, I went to a Jewish school. I grew up with all Jews. In the camp they were all Jews. When we lived in the ghetto, in the camp they were all Jews. And all my friends were Jews. When I came to Cleveland, we lived in an area they were all German Jews from Shanghai and Germany that migrated to the United States and were all Jews. That's all I...

My wife's grandmother, Bobbi Friedman, she was Orthodox. And let me tell you, she was Orthodox. She was a mean lady. She didn't like me because I was a goy. She told Noreen, "You're not going to marry a goy; you're not going to marry a goy." I was a goy until...She was long divorced. Her husband divorced her a long time ago. She was all by herself. She was trying to watch her favorite television program and her television set broke and I fixed it. Now I'm a big hero. Now I'm in her graces. So whatever happens I can't go wrong. So to please her I actually converted. I was more a Jew than most Jews I knew, anyway. So I actually converted in Cleveland, so before I was married. We were married in a Jewish wedding, the whole bit, the rabbi the whole thing.

So that was when you formalized your Jewishness.

Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Wonderful. Any other—

That's where the name Gary comes from. "Gaaaa-ry." Bobbi Friedman. "Gaaaa-ry." Her English was very poor and she used to go, "Gaaaa-ry." "Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm coming, I'm coming." [Laughing] But my wife, Noreen, and I had a real, real close relationship with her.

Well, that's pretty cool.

That was in Cleveland. Yeah.

All right. Well, I thank you very much. Is there anything else you want to share with me before we...?

I got more stories than you've got time for, Barb.

But that really fills in the parts that I felt like we needed to talk about, I think. Oh, one more thing. I'm just looking at my notes here. The Frank Sinatra donation, the letter you gave us where he gave third thousand to the building fund. Was it for Ner Tamid?

Right.

How did that happen and why that amount? Give me some context to it.

After Sinatra was banned from Caesars Palace—you know he was banned from Caesars Palace?

I think you mentioned that before, yeah.

He was thrown out at gunpoint. So now they have a reconciliation and he's back at Caesars Palace and they had a big, big event. The front of the building at Caesars, they had a banner, "He's back; Sinatra's back." They had a banner from the top of the building all the way down to above the marquee where the entryway in the front, "Sinatra is back." It was a big, big event, all invited guests. And Caesars Palace had two chariots; one was the East Coast chariot and the other was the West Coast chariot. And both of them were big four-engine jet airplanes that were outfitted for just a few people, like maybe fifty people or so, maybe less, with living rooms and

bars and all the facilities. They were completely converted. This is how they used to bring the big rollers in from New York, Boston, Cleveland, Chicago. Then they had another one that used to ferry them back and forth from the Los Angeles/San Francisco area, San Diego area, and so on. The chariots were busy bringing in all the high rollers and everything else.

So anyway, we're building the temple and I was telling my wife, I says, "Honey, boy, it would sure be a kick if...Sinatra is giving all this money to hospitals in Israel and stuff like this." He's very pro-Jewish. Half of his friend are Jews. I says, "Wouldn't it be a trip if I could get a donation from him?" She says, "Nah, you're not going to do it." I says, "Don't tell me that."

So Jilly Rizzo—there's a book; I don't know if you looked at it or not—Jilly Rizzo was his right-hand man. Jilly had a bar in New York called Jilly's. It was a very famous place and Sinatra used to hang out in there. But Jilly became his right-hand man, also kind of like his bodyguard. Jilly's brother Joe was a pit boss in the casino and his son Willy was a dealer, but later on they made Willy a floor man because he was not a good dealer. So when you're not a good dealer, they make you a floor man. It works out.

So I talked to Joe one time. I says, "Joe, how can I get ahold of Jilly?" He says, "What do you want with Jilly?" I says, "I'm trying to get a donation from Sinatra." He says, "Oh, next time he comes down..."

So Sinatra is appearing at Caesars. So he says, "There's Jilly." He says, "Go talk to him." I says, "Jilly, we're building a temple and we're in desperate need of money. We need some help. I wonder if Frank...do you think he might come up with something?" He says, "He might." He says, "Let me have something that I can show him and let's see what happens."

And the next day I'm dealing away. He says, "Gary, the old man's going to give you guys thirty thousand dollars." "Wow. Fantastic." Because all the prices for the lobby. And then he

says, "He wants the lobby named after him?" I says, "Yeah."

Because a donation of thirty thousand is what you were looking for to...They can put their name on the lobby?

Right. Because we had all different amounts on here, the brochure. Oh, okay. See, the lobby was thirty thousand.

So some time goes by and Sinatra is performing in New York and Palm Springs. He's here, he's there, he's Florida, he's all over the place. And I didn't hear anything from it. I can't remember how it went. But all of a sudden, they forgot about it. And I panicked because I'm bragging to everybody, "I got a thirty-thousand-dollar donation from Sinatra for the temple." "Wow, Gary, when's it coming?" Here I'm stuck; I look like an idiot.

So we wound up writing letters and then calling. I called his...Oh, what's his name? His accountant. I called his manager. I made all kinds of phone calls. I was busy with this thing, believe me, because I panicked now. And then finally I get Jilly on the phone. He says, "Frank don't remember anything about"—no. He says, "I remember that." He says, "But I think Frank forgot about it. I think the old man forgot about it." I says, "Can you remind him?" We're going back and forth, back and forth. Finally he comes back and says, "Yeah, he remembered."

So now I get a letter from his accountant. There's a letter in there about it that yes, indeed, there was a pledge made and the donation will be forthcoming and that they're going to pay ten thousand out front and five thousand for the next four years.

And the first check I got—because it went to the temple and we had a temporary office on the grounds we were building the temple; it was like a trailer. Lorraine was our temple secretary. I says, "Lorraine, I want the stub from that check. I want to make a copy of the check and I want the stub." Well, the stub disappeared. Nobody knew where it went. All of a sudden

I'm losing control here, right? But we got the first check and then we got the...yeah. This is how the donation came about. Then we wrote him letters inviting him to the inaugural when we opened the temple and stuff, but he didn't show up.

Yeah, so there's quite a few people involved. It wasn't that easy. There were quite a few people involved. There was Willy involved. There was Jilly. There was Joe. All the Rizzos were involved.

But you're tenaciously going to make sure...

I don't give up.

That's good. That's a good story.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And he lived up to his commitment.

And he lived up to his commitment. That was really quite an elation to get a donation like that not only from a Jew, but from a Catholic, a good Catholic and for a Jewish organization in Las Vegas. I thought that was...Yeah, that's how that donation came about.

That's substantial. That's great. All right.

Then later on I dealt to...he came down with his wife Barbara—he was married to Barbara then—and I think it was Nancy Olso. Yeah, Nancy. He sat down on my game and he started playing. And they clear the game. It was a dead game. It was a big game, high-limit game. Barbara sat down and they took the high-limit sign off because it was like a private game. Barbara sat down. So Frank came down and he says, "Take good care of them." Yeah, like I'm not going to, right? And I was just going to thank him for the donation or something, but he didn't remember what I was talking about.

So you actually dealt to him, too, then afterwards.

Well, I dealt to him at different times and that was not one of our favorite things to do because he was not easy to deal to. When he was losing he got very...downright nasty. He had a real temperament. But a very generous guy. Look at all the stuff...you know how much stuff he did for Israel. All these hospital wings and all different things he did for Israel, yeah. So that's how that Sinatra donation came about.

That's great. That's a great story.

Oh, and I've got to tell you: so now we built the temple and the inside lobby is like broken cinder block, kind of like that wall outside but darker. So we had bronze plaques made up for all the big donors—for the stage, the social hall, the classrooms, offices—all these different entities where people got recognition for donations. So we had a bronze plaque made up for Sinatra. We put them fixed in the lobby. It was nothing but a few days before somebody stole it. So now we put a new one into the wall with epoxy and mollies. I supervised that deal, right? Lo and behold, a few days later that got torn out of the wall, just left the holes in the wall. Amazing. I don't know who stole it. I don't think it was congregants. I think it must have been workers or somebody. So now we get somebody up there on a long ladder, because it was a real high ceiling in there, and put it way up there and finally it stayed up there. Like the third one that we made stayed up there in the lobby.

Oh, my goodness. And they've never shown up, huh?

No, no. No, they were gone.

But the windows were actually made for the other temple, for the old temple because we had them custom made for those round windows, for those round openings in the building. So when we moved and we went to the new building on Valle Verde, I talked to...I forgot who was president at the time. I says, "I don't want those windows left there." Because we sold the

temple to Scientology people, I says, "I don't want those windows left in there. They're going to destroy them and there's a lot of money and pieces of art." And I put a lot of time and effort, also, into getting it organized and getting them put in and all this stuff. "Well, we're going to have to talk to the architect." "Well, talk to the architect." They hadn't been hung and for a while there it didn't look like they were going to do it. I really, really got upset. So finally then I think it was Rabbi Akselrad came back and said, "Gary, they're going to take the windows out. They have to get a special company to be able to take them out because you don't just pick them up and move them. Take them out and it's a pretty expensive deal." I said, "So what? Pay for it. You paid for the rest of the building." Like I'm going to pay for it, again? I was so happy that they were able to salvage the windows.

Then finally, on the windows itself it has an inscription on it, "Donated by Sternberg family," or Gary and Noreen Sternberg and Adam and stuff like that, but it's not very visible. Everybody else got their signs on stuff. I says, "I want my sign." So I had to go nuts trying to get them to make up a little sign to put next to the window in the hallway in the lobby for the Sternberg family.

You got it.

Especially after I painted it; that was the big thing.

Painted what?

Oh, in back of the window, after I painted in the back drop. So in the lobby there is a big star...we have all these different stars. All the stars are for different donors and donations and stuff and I'm on one of the stars. It's kind of hard to find. One of the big stars has my family's name on it, mine and my family's name on it. And it also has a great big star off to the bottom left and it's got Moe Dalitz and Sinatra and Gary and Noreen Sternberg on it. So I'm on the same

star with Sinatra.

I'm going to go look for that. Thank you. That's a good one.

[Pause in recording]

So this is a Diana Ross anecdote.

Diana Ross. Diana Ross is impossible to deal to, demanding, asking for impossible things while on the game, giving everybody a hard time, got everybody running around in circles. She was on game one in the main pit. My friend Bob Hirsch is the pit boss and she's taking a marker out. To explain it...We used to have on the table before we had the computerized markers, we used to handwrite the markers. Then when you handwrite a marker, you write the marker, the person would sign it, and then we'd have a table card where you record the transaction and that was put in the slot under the table. And the transaction is how much it is and who signed and then the dealer co-signs it and stuff like that. Then we also had a player's card. The table card was green; the player's card was white. There were only a few people that ever used a player's card and they have to be big players like Diana Ross, big personalities and stuff like that. Instead of handwriting a marker, all you would do is record it on the table card and then the player could take the money up or down, give it back or take more. The player wouldn't even have to sign for it. Then only the floor man signs it and the dealer co-signs it. This is how the transactions were kept track of. But we called it the dummy card.

Ms. Ross sits down at the table and she's playing and playing and playing. Bob Hirsch comes over and he says to the floor man—I think it was...well, whoever it was. He says, "I don't see Ms. Ross on the table card." And the floor man says, "She's not on the table card; she's on the dummy card." And she jumps up and she says, "It's not a dummy card, you mother fucker," loud and yells it all the way. It's a player's card. And she sits back down and plays. That's the

story.

So she liked playing cards.

She likes playing card, but I'm just trying to show how obnoxious she was, just the most obnoxious person you could ever meet.

I'm thinking some of the other entertainers of different eras. Like Nat King Cole, did he ever play cards?

No. Jeez. No, not Nat King Cole. Harry Belafonte. I used to deal to his wife. "Shari," I says, "You can't be by the game, honey." "But I'm just talking to my mom. Can I stay?" "No, you can't stand by the gaming table." And Harry used to come by once in a while and say hi to them, Harry Belafonte.

Then you talked about you had Muhammad Ali and Howard Cosell.

Yeah. Muhammad Ali. They sat down. It was on a high-limit game. It was on the front line on a high-limit game. When they saw Muhammad Ali, the pit boss came over and took the sign down; that means nobody else plays on the game. The sign is the limit sign, like twenty-five dollars, a hundred-dollar limit. Took the sign down. And Cosell sits down. I remember he had this beige like a camel hair overcoat on. And Ali sits down and he helps him sit down because at that time he was already really, really shaky. He had that Parkinson's disease. He was really shaky. He could barely talk. But Muhammad sits down real quiet and stuff like this. I think Cosell takes out like a hundred-dollar bill and cashes it in for five-dollar chips. Mostly Ali was playing five-dollar chips like on a high-limit game. They let him do that. Then I can't remember what it was, but I asked Cosell something; you care for a drink or something like that. He gave me some real snotty answer. The guy was just nasty. You could tell by his attitude. You're just a dealer; I'm so far above you; I don't have to give you; that kind of stuff. Ali is just sitting there

minding his own business, just polite and nice as can be. Most of the guys were. Cosell, yeah, what a bad person that guy was.

Well, he drank a lot from the stories I've read about him.

Cosell?

Yeah.

I don't know that.

Yeah. So he had some stories out there about him I've read. All right.

You know about Kerry Packer, right?

Who's Kerry Packer?

Kerry Packer? You don't know about Kerry Packer?

No.

Kerry Packer is dead. Kerry Packer owns Australia, the whole damn thing.

The whole country?

Damn near. Kerry Packer is a billionaire, most generous guy. He was our benefactor. First let me tell you Kerry Packer...at one of the casinos Kerry has a heart attack. He called an ambulance to take him to the hospital. He recoups and everything else. The doctor tells him—and he didn't know who he was—he says, "If it weren't for those ambulance drivers, you wouldn't have made it down to the hospital. I want you to know that." He gave them each a million dollars, the ambulance drivers. He would play. Win, lose or draw, he'd give us four hundred seventy-five thousand one time, just one lump sum for all the dealers and it's all split up, and four hundred fifty thousand. Playing baccarat, a cocktail waitress, she's standing there waiting for somebody to order some stuff. She's just standing there. He turns around to her and he says, "Honey, what's the balance on your mortgage?" She says, "Ninety-seven thousand." He

peels off ninety-seven thousand and gives it to her. That's the kind of guy he was, Kerry Packer.

SESSION 4

Today is October 20th, 2015…As always we have so much we could cover and talk about, Gary.

Right now we're going to get a cup of coffee.

Perfect host, always getting me the cup of coffee.

Would you like a dessert? You have a choice again; you can have a piece of Marie Callender's apple pie or you can have some Death by Chocolate…A lot of people don't know this, but as you get older you're supposed to eat the desserts first just in case.

Why is that?

Just in case you don't make it through the dinner.

Well, you have a great sense of humor, for sure.

Thank you.

You were showing me your [greeting] cards. Tell me the history about how you started this hobby.

It's so much fun.

You were starting to tell me that about the guy that sold your cards.

Yes. I made up a card for him to kind of soften the blow that I don't have the car [to sell to him]; that he can't get the car. And I made it in poetry and I really like that.

Because he wanted to buy a car that you owned.

Right. So I made him up a card, kind of making fun of him because he kept procrastinating and procrastinating. Then the car was gone and he was very disappointed. This is how I started, with poetry. And I'm not a poet. I have no experience whatsoever in poetry, but we do pretty

good with it and we have a lot of fun with it. Like for the holiday cards, I do all the graphics on the computer. Mary Lou, she's kind of slow at it. So this year, I said, "Mary Lou, we've got to finish the card; we've got to finish the card." Well, she hasn't. Anyway, I finished it today. I finished all the rhymes today. The card is a poem. It's a holiday card, but it's actually in rhyme. It's funny.

But anyway, so then we used to get the cards; Sam's Club used to have boxed cards, card stock like this with envelopes for like eighteen dollars and change for a hundred and fifty cards and envelopes, hell of a deal. Now they discontinue it. Now you go online and you try to buy greeting cards and they cost you like twenty-five bucks for twenty cards or something like that, twenty-five cards with envelopes, real crazy prices. So we find out at Sam's Club you can buy two hundred and fifty cards, just stock, which is as good as in, for seven dollars and change, but they're not scored.

So this is where Gary's inventiveness comes in. You can fold the cards, but it looks terrible and it's very time consuming because at holiday time we send out about a hundred and twenty, thirty cards. So I made a device to score greeting cards. Now, I bought one of the Sam's Club, my favorite place; bought one at Sam's Club that cuts paper and also scores cards. But like many other things on the market, it's totally worthless. It does a lousy job because when you score cards they have to be accurate; otherwise, they don't fold right. So move this over and I will show you. So I made this, one of my inventions. It's a device. I wouldn't even call it an invention. This, you put screen doors with this; it's a tool for that. I happen to have that. Now, watch this. Put the card in here like this and square it up and everything.

Well, that's perfect, absolutely perfect. So this isn't a patented invention.

No…It's something you make. I mean there are devices like it except they don't work, but mine

works. Everything I make works.

Some people grow up and they're in a family that builds houses or that there's this familial tradition. You talked about in the earlier oral history session about your father's inventiveness. Did he spend time with you showing you how?

Even in Shanghai, when we were in Shanghai where there was nothing, where we lived with five families in one room and stuff like that he always managed to have a little workshop someplace to where he was making his stuff and I would fool around with it, help him. I think this is where I inherited all this stuff. But it's natural. I can look at something...

Being an inventor is terrible. It's a curse, really, if you want to call it that because you look at stuff and you criticize certain things that are really stupid. Like if you went to a store and you look at something and you buy it or you don't buy it, if it doesn't work, you take it back. But I look at it and go, "My God, how does something that stupid hit the market when you go through a patent search and there are so many genius devices in the patent office that never hit the market?" And you see it all the time. But I can look at things and I'm always improving. I have three patents and I have one trademark and I used to have a whole bunch of copyrights.

What was the first thing you ever patented?

My Super Scoop.

[Pause in recording]

There are some devices like this on the market, but, again, they don't work. Now, this is all hand made out of existing stuff. This is Plexiglas. This is plastic pipe, sprinkler pipe. This is a sprinkler pipe. I make things out of existing materials that I have in the garage—and usually pretty inexpensive. What it does is when you work in the yard...You use garbage bags all the time, but only if you can open them.

So what would I be scooping up with this once you put it together?

Once you put it together, you would be scooping up large amounts of debris, like grass clippings, branches, stuff that would normally require two people, one person holding the bag and the other person putting it in. You can just hold it down and sweep stuff in it. For example, fireplace ashes. I have a fireplace near the house and this was great. I use this a lot and this is like thirty years old. So how many things do you have around the house that are that old, right? This is all handmade. Fireplace ashes, for example, are difficult. You shovel them into a container and you carry through the house and the dust blows all over the place. You can hold this right into the fireplace; sweep the ashes right into the bag. You only use this bag once. Then you take it outside. But before you take it outside, you can put the lid on it.

So did you distribute this after you got the patent?

I tried. I spent so much money on all these different patents trying to market it. Coming up with something that's original and that works is a real thrill. I enjoy it. I love it. I love to work on it. I like to piddle around with it until I get it right. Then to get a patent on it is the biggest thrill because you're the only one in the world or at least in the United States that has started this and to make it work.

Then to make money with it that's the hardest part. The percentage of a patent being successful and making money is like four percent. Ain't very good. You go to companies and they won't take it for two reasons. Either they're too busy and they don't have time to get into a new product, or they're not busy enough and they don't have the money to get into a new product. That's what you get. Then you get these people before they even look at it, they start criticizing it because they didn't think of it. There's a lot of jealousy involved with you sell somebody a new product. The first thing people will say is, "Oh, Gary, I've seen this before

someplace." Well, where did you see it? "Well, I don't exactly know, but it looks kind of like that." Then you started questioning it and it's nothing like it. "Oh, let me be the devil's advocate and you should do this and this and this." Not realizing that an inventor has thought of all the different angles or most of them have; I have, all the different angles, what works, what doesn't work. It's like an insult and it really hurts your feelings when people do that. You try to tell them, "I've thought of that before."

And then this, when you're camping, for example, garbage is a big problem. This can be mounted with a strap on to a tree and then you have a garbage can. Then you stick the bag out and tie it up and you can put this on the back of a camper. You can strap it to a tree. This bracket can be attached to a cart, like a two-wheel cart. Then you can attach this and just wheel it around.

So it has a lot of versatility.

It has a lot of versatility and the amount of uses...I'd spend the rest of the day telling you about all the different uses this has. We don't have that much time. And it's all good. An example, in a ballpark where you have light stuff, like paper cups and plastic bottles and stuff, you can dump tons and tons of stuff and also since the bag expands as you put stuff. As opposed to a bag in the garbage can, which is restricted by the walls of a garbage can, this bag will expand because there's nothing holding it back. So you can put stuff in it. You can't put heavy stuff in it because you can't carry it. But the bag expands; so you can usually put twice as much in one bag as you would if it was in the garbage can.

So you envisioned this. And what year was that that you did the patent on that?

That was about 1976. I made a lot of different—normally I think of something and it works—let me explain it first. When it comes to some inventors with the mathematics to figure out the

angles, to figure out the cosine, the tangent and the angles and all this stuff, I can't do that. Less than that, I can't draw worth a damn. I can't draw a straight line. I'm terrible. My advantage is I can work things out in my head and recall it like a computer. Things that I thought ten, twenty years ago, I can bring back and look at it again in my mind. I can do that. So I can work out a product and instead of working it out on computer or paper, it just works out in my mind. It just does that.

That's a phenomenal talent. That's a level of genius to me.

Well...

But it also seems like you see...What's the old phrase: Necessity is the mother of invention?

Exactly.

So you see needs that others might not see.

Right. That's the part exactly.

So after the Super Scooper, what was your next most significant invention that you were able to get a patent for?

First let me say that any inventor who invents anything worthwhile doesn't have one or two or three patents. Well, I have three patents. But along with it goes a hundred other inventions or things in your mind or things that you jot down on paper or thoughts that you had. About a toothpaste tube—I'll show you that later. You're going to be one of the first privileged to see that.

I'm honored.

Oh, yes. It's not patentable. Some things you can't patent, but they're very useful. A lot of times you'll see certain households hints that people think of and they're very clever. People don't think of it as being clever, but most of them are very clever. But an inventor will have all kinds

of stuff and I have all kinds of things that I made over the years that weren't patented. An example is, oh, about four years ago or something like that, toilet, for example. You urinate in the toilet or you have a bowel movement in a toilet. The urination doesn't require a full set of water, to save water. Usually it flushes with like a half a tank. But people don't do that because you use a full tank, which is like four gallons—no, it's not that much—about two gallons or something.

So I invented a multiple flush device, tried it out, made it by hand. Again, plastic pipe, plastic stuff. It worked great. I said, "Boy, this is so good." And I went around. Now, multiple flush systems, they make toilets that are very expensive that do the same thing and there are also devices, you can go to Home Depot, but they require a lot of installation and the price on these is anywhere from twenty or nineteen ninety-five up to eighty dollars or something like that. The one I made originally required installation and that one I went on a patent search in the computer and I found out that a lady in South Carolina invented this and patented it exactly like mine with a minor variation, really, with a minor variation exactly like mine and it blew my mind, in '97 or something like that. Of course, I dropped it, but I still have it. I'll show it to you. With a minor variation. Mine would have worked a little bit better, but not that big of a deal. It blew my mind.

A patent attorney will tell you if you throw a whole bunch of monkeys in one place and give them a test, somebody's going to come up with a solution. That's exactly how it is.

So what was the second patent for?

The second patent was for Peeps.

Oh, you showed me Peeps before. That had to do with the spectacles.

Right. And I took that product from its inception, which very few people do. Most people are

not crazy enough to do it except me.

So what was the problem that you were trying to solve with that; with Peeps?

My wife came home one day and she's all upset. She said, "I had my hair colored and the side of my temples are all scratched up." How did that happen? "Well, from the moisture on your scalp and everything else, it's very soft. And this gal put tin foil around my glasses so I could read because I didn't want the dye to come off on the earpieces of my glasses." I said, "There's got to be something that will protect that." She said, "There isn't anything."

So at that time we had the import business and we had a shrink packaging system. I went down and I used that and I made some of these things. I came to her and I said, "Use this." She says, "Wow, that's great." But then when you take your glasses off, to thread the end of the earpiece onto this little sleeve, you can't see it. So I said, "Well, there's got to be a better solution."

So then the genius to this thing was—I'm very modest; you'll find that out—was that I made a little return on it… All you have to do is put this on the little tab and then slide it in. That worked and that was patentable. I did a whole bunch of these. Then I find out that there are some other things that are available like that but they don't work. They had the same problem I had originally, but I solved the problem.

So then I said, "This is great. We're going to get it patented." Well, we had some problems patenting. But we got the patent through; I got it patented.

But the whole project from its very, very beginning—sometimes you might have a recipe or you might make a dinner or something like that and it's the dinner from hell; nothing goes right with it. You either burn it or you scorch it or you overcook it, undercook it, whatever you do. This was the project from hell. From the very beginning I had problems with it down to the

very end. It was nothing but stupid stuff.

One example is I designed the box for the packaging. The packaging didn't come out that good. It was kind of amateurish. But a friend of mine designed the artwork on it. My son did the graphics on it. I designed the box. The name for the product was Peeps, Personal Eyeglass Earpiece Protective Sleeve or something like that. I had the mats for the printing. It was four-color print. The box was going to be printed four-color print. And the mats for it—I don't know if you're familiar with the color printing process. The mats are great big things and four different mats. Got that all done and we were pushing it because we had a very, very expensive trade show in Long Beach, a beauty show, and that's a different culture altogether. I mean you'll see some people there...You have no idea. But anyway, as soon as I did that, I said, "Whoa, this is not my business to be in." But we were pressed for time. We get the mats back. Without anybody noticing it, the computer decided it didn't like one of the S's in there and it substituted an S. Just stuff like that. Now we had to redo the whole thing again and they weren't responsible for it. It was like six, seven hundred dollars just to make those mats. Then we finally get it. So now I get the product back.

I was going to have this made in China because I have my import and my export agent in Hong Kong. I'm going to do this in China. I got a damn good price on it. It cost me seventeen point eight cents or seventeen point seven cents the box, the product, everything. The end result was supposed to sell for around a buck, which is a damn good price for anything.

So it would wholesale for a dollar?

No, it would wholesale for—well, I had different price groups because for different volumes. The idea of it was it was supposed to be distributed through beauty shops. It was supposed to be distributed through automotive parts.

So it wasn't a retail item. You wouldn't go to a store to buy it.

Oh, definitely a retail item, yes. But I wasn't going to retail it; I was going to be the wholesaler or the actual manufacturer. I was going to sell it to the middle men and they were going to distribute it to individual stores or major companies that distribute among their own stores, like Sally's Beauty Supply, for example.

That would make sense, yes.

Even like automotive places that sell automotive parts because you change your oil, guy takes his glasses on and off. He doesn't want degrees all over and that protects the glasses from that. Paint stores, for example, you're painting, you've got your hands pull of paint, you take your glasses on and off, and then the little sleeve gets messy. You just pull it off and put another one on. You get twenty-four of them for a buck. It's cheap enough, right? Twenty-four of those sleeves. I had a whole array of things that I had figured out. And the beauty shops were mostly for hair coloring.

I finally get the product to where they get it the way they wanted it and I went ahead and ordered fifty thousand boxes of this stuff. The whole office was up to the ceiling in boxes. I'm all excited. We're ready to distribute. We're ready to sell. We're going to go to a trade show and everything. Open up some of them and some of them worked fine, but about fifty-fifty, half of them were good and the other half were not. So I finally figured out that I thought they were going to make them by machine and make dies for it, but apparently they didn't. It looked like they were handmade. They were going to start that way first. I went to the trade show, anyway. To make a long story short, we wound up refunding money because people sent the product back asking to refund their money and stuff. We sold quite a bit of it except the product was no good.

So the lesson there was you could have a great idea, but you've got to be able to

manufacture it and quality control then.

And there were other obstacles along the way.

So what year approximately were you doing that?

That was about '94 or five. I have to look up when I got the patent for it. I'll show you the patents. That was the Peeps. My wife liked the name Peeps. I came up with it, but I didn't like it. But my wife liked the name Peeps. We had to get permission from the company that makes these little chickies for Easter. They're called Peeps.

Sure.

I had to get written permission from them to be able to use that name and they let me use it because it was an unrelated product. They had to bar code it. The boxes are bar coded, which is a whole process by itself. I had one here. I don't know what I did with it.

I know we talked about Peeps before. So I do remember that.

My favorite name was Condoms for Glasses.

No. Really?

But Noreen didn't like that. I loved it.

Well, it doesn't sound like a very feminine marketing name.

Barbara, you know the kind of publicity you get out of something like that?

You've got to think of the actual name of it. Condoms for Glasses I think would have been great. But it wouldn't have sold anyway because I couldn't get the damn things made right. When I got samples back, I even made a video to show them that this has to separate like this. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, okay, we're going to make them." Fifty thousand boxes, Barb, I had of those things. I finally got them to give me the money back, well, the money just for the product. From start to finish—and I had a lot of office time involved; I had three people working in my office

for the import business—office time and everything I was guesstimating about maybe a hundred, hundred twenty thousand dollars invested in it. That's not very much for a new product.

And then the next one—but there's a whole bunch of things in between there that are not patented. The next one was the ramp system, the scooter ramp.

Tell me about it.

My wife was handicapped. She was overweight and she had a lot of leg problems [due to] diabetes. So I got an electric scooter, one of these three-wheel scooters that's battery operated. That was fine. But what good is it if you have to take it apart every time? It's a monster taking it apart. The two batteries in this thing, they weigh a ton by itself and a handicap person can't do this. So it has to be like myself, a caregiver that takes it apart, put it in the car or put it in a van. I had a minivan at the time. I said, "This is crazy."

So I went around shopping for something that would put this thing, pick it up or move it into the vehicle. Went all over the place trying to find out, first of all, prices, what these things would cost because the scooter by itself was a couple thousand dollars at the time. Come to find out that it is very, very expensive to install to a car. You have to drill holes into the car. You have to run it by battery. You have to do all kinds of things by the time you get through with one of those devices. They have like winches that pull out and then it lifts up the scooter and then you push it back into the back of the van. Then the worst ones are the ones in back of the van that look like a little elevator thing on the back. You've seen it, right?

Yes.

They stick way out. For that you have to weld a trailer hitch. They attach a trailer hitch. You have to weld a trailer hitch to the underside of the car or a van, usually a van or truck, and it lifts it up. But then you're operating this thing in a parking lot and it sticks way out and you're in the

middle of traffic. So that's one of the hazards. In this climate it's not so bad, but if you're going back east where it snows and sleets, it throws it up and this thing gets messy with salt and all this stuff. It really cuts into the longevity of the product and these scooters are expensive. They get dirty. Even though you cover it, it doesn't protect it properly. But the best part is to have it inside the vehicle. The devices for that are very, very expensive, time consuming. They had to be installed on to the battery. They had to drill holes to install it. Very expensive, the whole setup, about three thousand dollars at the time I figured just to have one of these things installed. I said, "There's got to be a better way."

So then they have van conversions where they come take a minivan and they take it into the factory. They literally cut it up and they make it accessible for a wheelchair or an electric scooter with a real shallow ramp. What actually happens is the van actually drops down maybe six, seven inches, drops down with pneumatic pistons and stuff, pneumatic devices, and it drops down to make it very, very shallow because if you have a certain height and you have a ramp—I'll show it to you on paper—but if you have a ramp, it creates certain problems. One, the ramp is too steep and if it's shallow it comes way, way out, way past a handicap zone because the ramp has to be too long. Then the ramp has to be folded up to make it fit into the van. It blocks the windows. A million problems. I looked at this stuff and thought, *how can this be on the market?*

So I said, "Honey, I'll make you one." She says, "You're crazy." I said, "Yes, I'll make you one. This is going to work."

I remember when I had my appliance business and I weighed a hundred and twenty-seven pounds, but I was strong like an ox. I used to—I had a pickup truck—move washing machines and dryers onto the truck and all I had on it was a piece of plywood. It was a pretty steep ramp.

And, boom, I just pull them right up on to the truck. It was a piece of cake. People couldn't believe I did that.

So I'm visualizing this thing and I'm visualizing a pickup truck or some of these moving trucks where the ramp slides in and stores under the bed of the truck. So I get this thing all worked out in my mind, but there's one problem. The ramp can't be any longer—or my ramp didn't want to be any longer than the width of the van. So you didn't have to fold it and you had to store it someplace; you had to put it someplace. I figured all this out. I'm going to show you a video…I figured this thing out, Barbara, and when I showed it to people, "Yeah, we've been trying to figure this out for years."

What I did is: when the scooter goes up the ramp, there is a hump on the top. The scooter, when it goes across that hump, is pulled across the hump, it would drag on the bottom and tear up the bottom of the scooter and tear up the ramp system. I figured it out. It was no problem at all. I just looked at it and said, "I can do this, this and that and it'll work." And it did. All I did was put a roller in between to where the scooter rolls right over the roller. I'll show you.

Clever.

Yes, I think it was. But to sell the damn thing, Barb, you don't know how many places I went to. I went all over California. I went to Phoenix one time. I wound up talking to this manufacturer, a guy by the name of Star. They make those things that hang on the back of a car or a truck and also some other devices to load. Instead of me showing him my product, all he's doing is preaching Jesus to me. He was an evangelist. He was going to Africa to convert the natives to Christianity. And this is all I hear. I was supposed to stay at his house overnight. I excused myself. I said, "I don't want any of this part."

Anyway, to make a long story short, I went all over the place and I tried so hard. I even spent six thousand dollars to one of these rip-off patent promoters and they didn't do crap. They did a lot less than I did myself. They made up brochures. My brochures were better. But they went to trade shows and I went to trade shows, trying to talk to different manufacturers. But at a trade show it's difficult because they don't want to talk to you. They're busy selling stuff. They don't want to buy anything.

That scooter ramp works so well, but there's a whole lot of other stuff that is really, pardon the expression, genius the way I designed it. Normally any of these devices that get installed on a vehicle, like I said, you have to drill holes. You have to anchor it. You have to raise it up on a lift. You have to do all kinds of stuff. And then for whatever unknown reason, they wire it right on to the battery circuit breakers and stuff like this. Mine just plugs in like a cigarette lighter into a cigarette lighter outlet. It just plugs in. It works fine because it has an electric winch that pulls the scooter up. You'll see it [in the video]. And the installation for it, in a minivan the seats are held—you can take the seats on—and they're held onto brackets in the floorboard. I used those brackets to hold the device in. I made a special kind of anchor bolt that hooks into it. It takes a few minutes to install it. You can take it in and out. With the installation you save a thousand dollars. Your grandmother can almost install it. It's that easy.

So you never really got that off the ground, either, then?

No. I talked to so many people. Again, it takes a lot of money and it takes a lot of time. In the meantime, I'm working at Caesars Palace and I had the other business on the side. So I was fairly busy.

So do you have like one invention that never got patented that you wish would have?

Yes.

What was that?

You're looking at it right there, the napkin holder. Pick it up. Go ahead. That is another genius device.

Well, that's really nice. Why didn't it get picked up?

I never tried because I'm just tired of getting no for an answer.

So it does get discouraging after a while.

Very, yes. It's not only expensive, but it gets very discouraging because not only that people will try to critique your stuff that have no place critiquing anything.

Do you ever watch that show "Shark Tank?"

Yes. And you know what? The guys that critique the stuff are total idiots. They look at stuff. The good stuff they criticize and discard and the stupid stuff they take. I looked at it a couple of times and I couldn't handle it because these guys were totally out of their realm for what they were doing.

Interesting, interesting.

This right here, it's easy and it's cheap to manufacture. The molds to mold this—to fabricate it, injection molds probably wouldn't cost more than fifty, sixty thousand dollars, which is pretty cheap. It can be molded in one shot. The surfaces on this can be used for advertising. Barbara, hold off on the picture of that right now.

Okay, because you don't have a patent on it.

No, there's no patent on it and I don't want somebody else to profit by this.

Oh, okay.

If you go online, I have a whole folder full—you do a patent search, which is not very conclusive. But if you do a patent search, from the eighteen hundred something more people

have thought of napkin holders, anything from restaurant napkin holders where you pull the napkins out on those spring-loaded things and by the time you get it out it's torn. There are some devices and I call those Goldberg devices because they're totally off the wall, ridiculous, expensive to make or impossible to make, to manufacture at a reasonable price. Again, when you come up with an invention and if you could make a product for a million bucks apiece, you could come up with any damn thing. But how many people are going to buy it for a million bucks apiece to put napkins in? So it has to be cheap to make and it has to be practical to make and it has to make sense. For years and years I'm trying to figure out how to make a napkin holder.

You just stick the napkins in like this. Then they fall over. If you move it around on the table, they all fall out.

That's really great. I remember my mother always had napkin holders and it was always kind of messy.

Yes. Now, you go online and you find some things that boggle your mind for holding napkins. Some of those would probably cost maybe forty, fifty dollars to make, which is impossible. This would cost just pennies to make. But what it does is it stacks the napkins up and it falls always in one place. They don't fall out. The other thing is you can put little cocktail napkins in here that come up to here and to pull them out all you have to do is stick your finger in there.

Oh, that's the reason the notch is there. Got it.

As you're looking at it, I know you're not too impressed with this. But it is impressive. This is a hell of a device.

I don't use paper napkins.

Well, that's too bad. Once you have something like this, you would.

It's just part of my environmental footprint, so to speak, because I use cloth napkins.

Whoa.

Because I wash them.

It takes a lot of water and soap to wash them.

No. I throw them in with the towels or whatever. So it doesn't matter too much. But this was something I used to do all the time.

But anyway, this is a hell of a device.

Yes, it's very clever.

I've been using it and I made it. I've got to make another one for Mary Lou because I promised her.

Yes, you better.

But making stuff by hand takes time. This is Plexiglas. But anyway, this is one great product. This is good for promotional giveaways and stuff. You can put advertising on here, Joe Schmo Pots and Pans or kitchen tables or whatever. This is another one.

So what else do you want to tell me about creating, patenting—the mechanical side of yourself—that would be good for this?

What I could find out online, maybe twenty different devices that sell anywhere from a dollar up to nineteen ninety-five I think it is that will roll up tubes, toothpaste tubes.

The classic couple conflict story, how to roll up the toothpaste.

They used to make this out of metal. You probably don't remember that.

The packaging?

The tubes.

The tubes were, yes.

They were made out of aluminum. Now, when I grew up as a kid they were made out of lead, would you believe? Chocolate was wrapped in lead foil when I was a kid.

Oh, my goodness, I didn't realize that.

We used to make all these out of lead, toothpaste out of lead. We used to sell it for lead. Oh, yes, it was real healthy. I don't know how I lived as old as I have.

It's amazing we survived.

Exactly. Anyway, to roll up the end of the toothpaste tube, number one is you use it and you squeeze it and this product worked. Now, I'm not just talking about toothpaste. I'm talking about cosmetic tubes, anything that's in a tube. But let's use toothpaste for example, for demonstration. You squeeze it and the stuff winds up at the end. Now, they have things, anything that looks like a sardine can key to all kinds of devices that roll it up. There's one made in Israel, kind of like a big wing kind of thing that you put on the end, but it's very difficult to thread in. Average girl won't be able to do that because of fingernails and stuff. And then it squeezes the toothpaste up, but you still have the long tail on the end.

Now, I've been working on this thing for years. I'm looking at this thing and looking at this thing and I can't come up with anything decent for it. Then all of a sudden, *duh*. You roll up the end. Now it's not going to stay.

Because the plastic unfolds.

Right. Especially when you squeeze it, it opens up. If you leave it overnight like this, it will probably straighten out again. So you roll this up. You put a V into it and it stays. Now, that won't stay by itself because again when you squeeze the toothpaste out, this will open up again because it won't stay.

So some sort of device that holds that V shape.

Just a rubber band. It's not patentable or anything like that, but it's brilliant.

Yes. So you need a YouTube video that shows people how to do that.

Yes. I was going to put one. I submitted this idea to one of the local papers. I said, "I'm a Henderson resident and I've been doing this for years. I'd like to share this with your readers." You know what I get back? "We're not interested in this right now and I hope you have success with it." He never even read it. Had he read it, he wouldn't have wished me success because there's no profit in it.

So let's kind of get back to the Jewish heritage part of our talk today. Jewish identity...You were raised by a Christian mother. You were raised Christian, but your father was Jewish. You've eloquently told that story. So how would you explain or tell me the story about when you discovered your Jewish identity?

Well, just exposure. From the time I was nine years old and I came to China, came to Shanghai, all the people that I associated were all Jews. I went to school with them. I went to school with Jews. Then later on when we lived at the camp, they were all Jews from all over Europe and all different intensities, if you want to call it, or religions, some very Orthodox and some not Orthodox at all. But all my friends and everybody were Jewish and I grew up Jewish.

Later on in life I'm looking around, first of all, religion doesn't really fit my thing. I'm very, very Jewish. I'm not very religious, if you can understand that.

Definitely.

Religion to me is made out of fairy tales. We're talking about ancient concepts. We're talking paganism. We're talking about superstition and stuff like that. None of this fits into my brain and I can't believe how somebody will say, "Yeah, Moses opened up the Red Sea," or, "Noah

built an arc." People believe in it, not even analyzing, is it feasible? Could it be done? Could it be done at that age? But religion carries—oh, like kosher, for example, I can't understand it because a concept that was developed for a definite reason two thousand years ago—just like camels, we don't use camels anymore.

So anyway, going on and on, I can go on and on with this stuff. But I'm not very religious. I belong to the temple. I've been on the board of directors of the temple. I practically built the temple because I was with it when we first built it and I put a lot of money into it and gladly so. I got some stain glass windows on there. Did you see them?

Yes. They're beautiful.

And I even went back because the decorator screwed it up with a curtain in back of the big window and I painted it white.

I'm interested in knowing when you were nine years old in Shanghai were there other children like yourself who were Christian in there?

Oh, yes, absolutely. There were a lot of mixed marriages.

How did you deal with that?

We were all Jewish, but my mother made us go to church.

Even in Shanghai you went to church?

Right. Not very much. But my mother was very religious and she'd find places. Finally she belonged to a church.

She never converted?

She never converted, no. My father never converted the other way. But there was never—like sometimes there might be conflict of like politics especially religion where you have difference of opinion and stuff. My father honored my mother's beliefs and vice versa. As a matter of fact,

my mother made sure my father would go to services or buy matzah for Passover or observe the Jewish holidays because if it hadn't been for my mother, he wouldn't have done that.

So when you immigrated to the United States, how did you self-identify?

Well, again, the first street we lived on, the Jewish Joint put a lot of immigrants on a certain block, like a little German shtetl, like a little conclave. Many of the kids I knew...My best friend was half and a half; he was half Jewish, Littman, Litmonovitz. He changed his name, too. There's a story about that. I came to Korea when he was there a couple of weeks. He got killed right away. He was a combat medic. There's a story about that.

Then I used to hang out at the JCC. All the girls I dated were Jewish. Well, not all of them, but most of them were Jewish. I went to all different temple festivities and stuff. That was me. And I fit into it not because of the religion but what Jews are.

Explain that.

You can put Jews anywhere. Best example is China. And I'm not talking about concentration camps because there was nothing you can do about anything there. But you can put Jews in China in a totally strange, unrelated environment, and they make do. They invent things. They do things. They survive and come out of it okay. Israel, for example, Israel is a miracle.

Yes.

But it's the culture. Even with all the disagreements in the Jewish religion and all the (*hazarigh*) in it, all the arguments, I can't understand why anybody could spend a lifetime studying the Torah. That doesn't get into my brain. Just sit there and study and study the Torah.

So you would say—that culturally you admired what the Jewish back part of your heritage was about.

Yes. The perseverance, the intelligence. And I'm not that intelligent. But you go back into

history and all the brilliant people in medicine and physics, yes.

There was a discipline with that.

I don't think you can teach that. I think it's inbred. It's cultured. It's in your genes. It's the way it is. Some of this stuff spilled over into me. I'm very grateful for it.

…Now, your wife was Jewish?

Yes.

And then you raised your children Jewish?

Yes.

So that was not a negotiation or a discussion.

No. That was just natural. Well, wait a minute. Let me tell you first, before I married my wife, I converted to Judaism.

Oh, so you did a full-on conversion.

Oh, yes. I forgot. Yes, I converted to Judaism in Cleveland before I got married because my wife's grandmother, Dobie Friedman, she was Russian, spoke very little English, was an immigrant, of course. And Dobie Friedman was the most crude, obnoxious person you'll ever meet. She hated me because I was a goy. She didn't want Noreen to marry a goy. She was real Orthodox. Her husband divorced her because of...She was very frumpy. But Noreen was very close to her. One time she's watching a favorite television show on her black and white television. In those days you could fix television. I could fix any damn thing. She was so disappointed she couldn't watch her TV show. I went in the back and I looked at the thing and I went down to the drugstore. At the drugstore you can buy tubes and fuses.

Those early televisions, yes.

Went down to the drugstore and I got a tube or fuse or something and stuck it back in. After that

I was the greatest. It was okay for me. To me it didn't make any difference. I was more of a Jew than most Jews were, anyway. But I converted. So I converted officially, yes.

Do you remember what that ceremony was like?

Yes. I felt very awkward with it because, again, a lot of the stuff that I had to learn—I had a stack of books and stuff—a lot of stuff I had to learn I didn't agree with it. But I did it, anyway.

You didn't do an adult bar mitzvah?

Well, I didn't do—Mary Lou did a bar mitzvah just a couple of years ago.

Oh, really?

Yes. Because she never had the opportunity to do it, so she wanted to do it. Yes, I didn't agree with a lot of stuff. It didn't fit into my psyche. You probably heard the joke about the girl that wants to convert to Judaism. She tries all these different religions and she can't find one that she really fits into. She goes to temple. She goes to the rabbi. She says, "I heard the Jewish religion is it. It makes no sense with anything else. I want to become Jewish." He says, "Fine, we'll convert you." So he gives her a whole stack of books. "Read these and then come back." She does this. To make a long story—it goes real long, but I'm going to condense it. Comes back with a whole stack of books and she says, "Okay, I read all the books. Now can I become Jewish?" "Oh, no. You have to become a bat mitzvah." "What's that?" "You have to learn all these other things. You have to learn the Torah and the Haftarah, the whole business. And then come back." So she does all these things and it becomes a bat mitzvah. She says, "Now I've become Jewish?" "No, not yet." "Now what do I have to do?" "Oh, you have to go to"—well, I've got it backwards, I think. "But you have to go to *mikveh*."

So they take her to the *mikveh* and she looks at this thing. She says, "I'm petrified of water." And the rabbi tells her you have to be totally submerged under the water. She says, "I

can't do it." "Absolutely," he says. "There has to be another way I can do this without submerging my head under the water. I'm petrified." The rabbi says, "All right, you can go into the *mikveh* and you can keep your head above the water."

So she comes out of the *mikveh* and she says, "Now I'm Jewish?" He says, "Now you're Jewish, but you still have a *goyische kopf*."

Explain that.

"Now you're Jewish, but you still have a something."

What's that mean?

A Jewish head.

Okay, because nobody's going to know.

I'm sorry. A Christian head. You know what goy is, right?

Right. Yes, I do. But we're doing this for posterity.

Okay. "But you still have a *goyische kopf*." It's funny.

Very good.

Most of my jokes are not that clean. But anyway, sorry to take up the time with that.

When you look back at Las Vegas history and the role of Jewish people that you worked on the Strip for all those years, what would you tell people about the influence of Jews in Las Vegas?

Well, Las Vegas was built by a lot of Jews. For example, at my company, Caesars Palace was owned by the Perlmans. The Perlmans had to give up their part of the—they owned major shares in Caesars Palace. For your information, Caesars Palace was built with eighteen million dollars. Later on they remodeled the swimming pool and it cost that much, but then it cost eighteen million dollars. It was done by people like the Perlmans. It was done by Jay Sarno. Have you

heard of Jay Sarno?

Yes.

These people were Jewish geniuses. They were Clifford and Stuart Perlman and Billy Weinberger, for example. Billy Weinberger came from Cleveland. He had a restaurant on Short Vincent, which is in the gangster district out there. The mob had a restaurant on Short Vincent. He became president of Caesars Palace. The guy ran this thing like he had ten master degrees in whatever. I'm not even sure of his background or education, but he knew just what to do. Plus the Italian guys from Steubenville—you know Steubenville? Okay. We had a whole bunch of people from Steubenville and these people were all geniuses in the business. These people were all geniuses in that business and most of them were Jews and most of them had to relinquish their shares in Caesars because they were mob connected.

So what was the relationship between I guess the Italian mob and Jewish?

Well, the Italian mob, they're still Italians. Now, when they refer to different people, from what I understand, even in the movie "Casino," they refer to a Jewish person as "The Jew." There's always anti-Semitism, always an undertone of anti-Semitism. But they all got along fine and they all did business and they built Las Vegas. They literally built Las Vegas. We just had some company and I'm going down the Strip where I haven't been for years and years. I'm looking around. I said, "This place is totally different. I don't even know where I'm at." Really, stuff is torn down. But all these things, Circus Circus, Jay Sarno, Bennett. I don't know if Bennett was Jewish or not. But Bennett, these people were incredible.

My good friend Smyth, who later on became vice president at Caesars, got me the job at Caesars because in those days you didn't go to personnel to apply for a job. You went to the pit boss or you went to the casino manager. This is how things were done then. But Smyth got me

into Caesars Palace.

Right.

Caesars, the Perlman brothers brought Neil in because of his background. He was a graduate of Horton School of Finance and he was like a naval—

Was he Jewish?

No, Neil was Catholic. He was like a genius in the finance business. So they brought him in. He was a comptroller in one of the casinos in Puerto Rico and they brought him down here, the family and everybody, not knowing what he was getting into. He said, "Gary, I'll tell you the truth." He says, "The first couple of days I went around my office and I see the kind of people that we were associating with." He said, "I was ready to walk out." All the mobsters, all the crooks. Some of these crooks were downright stupid, the enforcers, the people that used to come in the casino with suitcases and briefcases to fill up stacks of money, to fill up the suitcases with money. They used to go straight into the counting room, fill up money, before the IRS even knew how much there was.

So he observed the skimming that was going on.

He observed all the skimming and all this stuff. Anyway, he stuck with it.

Why did he stick with it, do you think?

Because he was in the gambling finance business and this is how he was brought up in Puerto Rico in the casinos in Puerto Rico. He just stuck with it. He figured that Las Vegas—don't forget Las Vegas was the only place there was gambling outside of Cuba and Puerto Rico and those places or Monte Carlo. But Las Vegas was an entity all by itself and it was unique and it was different. People used to come down here just for the mystique of the gangsters. Some of these people have gangster worship. That's another thing I can't understand.

So even back then there was gangster worship, as you call it?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. When I was in the service, Las Vegas was just something you hear about, but you don't go there because of the gambling and stuff. Oh, yes, they have guys standing inside the pillars. They open up their machine guns and stand there. Guards standing in the casinos. You heard all these mystery things, all these fantasy things that people makeup about Las Vegas.

Because they really weren't standing there with...

Of course not. Can you imagine standing there for eight hours with a machine gun at a little pillar? I mean this is ridiculous. All these different things.

So how did it change for you? When you reflect back on all those years here, how do you tell people about the changes that you've experienced?

You get acclimated to it. Even if you disagree with it, even though you don't espouse to it, it's a good job and you stick with it.

So not everybody was associated with the—

Oh, no. Oh, no.

—the mob mentality?

No. Caesars Palace employee when I was working there—well, by the time I quit, they employed like five thousand people and they weren't all gangsters; they weren't all crooks. They were regular working people—the waitresses, the cocktail girls. Some were. Some got the jobs because of gangster association and stuff like that, yes. They were owed favors. They put them in the casino. And if they couldn't deal, they would put them on the Big Six.

The Big Six?

Big Six; that's the Wheel of Fortune. That's another invention I made. Couldn't get it on. Wheel of Fortune is a real rudimentary gambling game. Wheel of Fortune, the great big wheel, spin it.

You put your money on a dollar or two dollars, five dollars and so on. I revised the game to where it's more playable or more player friendly because it's not very player friendly only in the sense to where like roulette all players have their own colored chips. Say you bet on a red thirty-four and you win, the dealer knows that your color chip was blue and you get the payoff. But on a Big Six, the people put their dollars on it or tokens on it. And some people, they're a crook at that, deceitful, and they claim it's their money and the people don't want to make a fuss and then they give up. But then they get disgusted with it and they walk away from the game. They don't play it anymore because somebody is stealing their money off the game.

Well, I devised the game to where everybody has their own spot and there's no cheating possible. Give it to the guys. "Oh, it's going to cost..." I showed it to the executives. "Well, it's going to cost money."

And then I went into Shuffle Master, which is a big company. They started with shuffling devices, card shuffling devices and automatic shoes and stuff and it became a pretty good-size company. I went in there and I talked to some of these...They looked like young Harvard graduates. I says, "Okay, I have a new take on the Big Six." And one looks to the other, "What's a Big Six?" And they're in the gambling business. Right away I knew I'm not going very far with this. I tried all these different things.

Well, you know the whole idea of gaming has changed a lot with the generational shift. Younger people don't gamble as much.

The emphasis is on where...The gaming shifted quite a bit. It used to be to where even the big casinos had just a few slot machines. That was beneath the executives' take on gambling, slot machines, because it's not really gambling. You put a coin and you pull a lever. You hit or you don't. The table games—baccarat was the big thing, of course; craps; twenty-one; blackjack; and

so on—these were the big things. But over time some of this stuff has changed.

I remember it when Circus Circus, they took out some of their carnival things when they first opened up Circus Circus. For example, they had one of those electric bumper car things like you have at a carnival. They had one of those things in there. They had a lot of things at Circus Circus that they eventually wound up taking out and putting slot machines in there. Circus Circus, at one point they boasted they had the most slot machines of any casino in the world. They had five hundred slot machines. Now, you go into any of the other casinos they have like five thousand slot machines poker machines and slot machines. But then the guys that ran Circus Circus, Bennett and Sarno, they realized, *hey, the slot machines are where the money is*. Because they can make it any odds they want within the realm of the gaming commission. People don't know. If they hit two dollars and fifty cents, they're happy. And this is where the money is.

So it changed a lot to where casinos realized that a lot of people who normally don't gamble will play slot machines. The wives of the husbands who play craps, play twenty-one, and the women that don't want to play on the game, they will play the slot machines because it's simple to do and they win and it's exciting. Then before you know it, these casinos became bigger and bigger and bigger and the emphasis was put on slot machines. Then they became electronic and fancy.

By the way, a friend of mine down the street, one of my neighbors used to be the slot manager at the Maxim Hotel. You don't remember the Maxim.

Yes, I do.

You do. He was a slot manager there and he's got two antique slot machines to die for. I told him, "Next time you're not looking, I'm going to steal one of those." He's got a nickel one in

perfect condition and they're the old mechanical one-arm bandit things, beautiful.

Anyway, but it used to be to where quarter machines were almost unheard of; they were all nickel machines. And dime machines are very unpopular because of the size of the dime was hard to handle. So nickel was popular. Of course, women would be standing there playing the nickel machines with black hands. And then the habitual players, they would have cloth gloves to handle the nickels and their gloves were pitch black like they just come out of a coal mine. Then the payoff, like a lot of these machines, you hit a jackpot and two dollars and fifty cents would clunk right into the tray. If you hit the biggest jackpot, which was ten dollars, you'd have to call a change person to pay it off. You had to get a hand payoff. It had to be paid off by hand. Ten dollars was the big payoff.

Wow.

Oh, yes.

When did that change?

It changed over a period of time just like an evolution. And then the mechanical machines. I think the last holdout on mechanical machines was the El Cortez. The old people that used to play there, they loved them. They loved those mechanical machines. They were forever breaking. They had a big workshop in there and they were constantly fixing those old machines to where they couldn't get parts for them anymore, those old mechanical machines.

Then they came with cheating devices in slot machines was going rampant. Even the electronic machines, they devised all kinds of cheating things, anything from a coin on a string that they would pull in and out and register like a coin. There were all kinds of devices that would go under where the money comes out into the tray.

Did you ever deal with somebody who was cheating at your table when you were dealing?

Oh, yes. The old story is wherever there is money that somebody is going to try to get it from you illegally. Gangsters and crooks or whatever, if they would put their genius to work in a legitimate business, they could make a hundred times the amount of money they do trying to steal it. That's my...And it's true. And these people come up with devices and cheating systems in groups. You know what a cooler is?

Cooler? No.

They used that word in a movie with one of the...I forget what it was...one of the casino movies where the guy is supposed to exude luck, bad luck or good luck.

Oh, okay, like a shill.

Like a shill except they called him a cooler. Well, that's not what a cooler is, but that was a movie thing. What a cooler is, is a prearranged deck of cards which is exchanged—no. The regular cards off the game are exchanged for a cooler, a prearranged deck of cards.

But this gets very complicated because, say, for example, you'll have six spaces on the table and all the spaces have to be taken up by a person involved in the scam. Usually a floor man or a pit boss has to be in on it, a dealer definitely. And you'd have to have cards that match exactly the cards that are being used at the time, casino cards with a logo on it and stuff. And the cards are exchanged for a cooler, which are all prearranged. So you have four or six decks in a shoe, right? You only do that with a shoe game. Yes, you could do it on single deck, but let's assume it's a shoe game. So all these guys. And the way they come out is first spot might get a losing hand. The next spot. Then the guy, say he's in forth position, he knows everybody else is betting nickels, five dollars, and this guy is betting a thousand dollars and he gets the blackjack or he gets a soft hand, the good hands, splitting hands or stuff like that. But everybody knows where the cards are going to be. It's a real science…

What would happen to them when they get caught?

For a while the casinos...That was a whole different, other thing. Like for stealing, for the longest time in certain casinos, like Caesars Palace, they would never really prosecute people. They just threw people out of the casino, "Don't ever come back." They don't want to see them again. But instead of prosecuting them through a court of law on something like that they felt that wasn't the right thing to do. Why, I have no idea.

I used to hear the story, they didn't take them in the back room and break their kneecaps or something like that?

Oh, they might have. I've never seen it. I never heard of anything like that. But it was good for the movies.

Did I tell you about my deal when I was in a movie? They did a television series another Caesars called "Caesars 24/7." I told you about that, didn't I?

I don't remember.

We had a camera crew with sound, a director and the whole crew going through Caesars Palace, the rooms, the casinos especially the shows and everything, a whole crew. They were there for about three or four months. They were supposed to be a reality show.

Oh, really? When was this?

You can get copies of it online.

It was called "24/7?"

"Caesars 24/7."

So it's an early reality show?

Yes. I forget when now.

Pardon me, tell me your story.

All right. They were going around doing all kinds of things. One was a cat fight right in the front lobby with women fighting. People used to say, "Gary, I didn't know you had all these fights at Caesars Palace." I says, "We don't. It's just for the television thing." I called it rehearsed reality. Made up all these kinds of things.

But one thing, I come on my game. I was dealing three-card poker, which is kind of a fun game to deal. Never got it often enough because we only had two or three games. But anyway, once in a while I'd get it. It's fun to deal. I come on my game and I knew right away what was going on. They had the whole camera crew on my game, everybody with a camera and the sound and the guy with the mike, with the boom and stuff. I'm standing there and right away they stick a transmitter in back of my shirt or my belt and the microphone stick on my lapel. The story was they had a young couple that came into town. They were going from, say, Pennsylvania someplace and they were going to California, but they needed to win money so they could continue their trip to California. That was the story behind it. Lo and behold, they sit down on my game. The biggest hand you can get on three-card poker is a straight flush. Lo and behold, they were betting quarters and they get a straight flush and the payout was like five hundred and something dollars. But it was legit because I dealt it. I shuffled the cards and I dealt it. So I know it was legit. If it was anything else, I would have said, "Nah, they phonied it up." But it wasn't. It was fun. I'm on their video and I have to show you the video on it. I have it somewhere...

Did you ever like to gamble yourself, as a customer?

I'm not a gambler. I'm not a gambler. My wife was. She loved to gamble. Me, I'm not a gambler. Mary Lou and I go out once a week, once every other week. We go up to Green Valley Ranch. Then we have a regular ritual because I get my haircut at the Orleans. Now,

you're going to question that one, right?

At the Orleans Joe Trujillo is the barber in town. Joe Trujillo and his wife, Toni, and the whole family—his daughter, his sons, his brothers—everybody went into the barbershop business. He had this really exclusive barbershop at the top floor at Caesars Palace. I've gone to him since day one, since I worked at Caesars. I don't know why I went to him. But anyway, he had a real nice whole suite up there, barbershop, and Joe was the barber. Everybody, like, for example, President Harry Wald who was the epitome of tidiness. The first thing he would do before he'd go to the office is go up to Joe and he'd comb out his hair and trim a little bit, every morning. But Joe got like that whole suite up there. He was a real con man—or is still—and he got this whole suite for like a hundred bucks a month or something like that. But later on they kicked him out because that wouldn't fly anymore. That was next to the spa and there was a beauty shop up on the thirteenth floor—no thirteenth floor. You know there are no thirteen floors, right?

Yes.

On the fourteenth floor. I went to Joe for years and years. So Joe went around because he lost his place at Caesars and then he went to the Gold Coast and now he's got a real nice barbershop. He's got a whole suite in there. He's still cutting hair and his wife is still doing nails and pedicures and stuff. We're like family. You come in and get a great big hug and stuff like that. His wife loves Mary Lou. She sits down and chats.

But anyway, we go to the Orleans, all the way across town, just to get a haircut because with all the hair I've got, I've got to be careful who cuts my hair.

Really, yes, take care of it. You take good care of it.

Yes, because suppose you cut one ear off and then I don't have much left. But we go to Joe.

Then we have a ritual. Then we go to Big Al's Oyster Bar, which is a restaurant in there, fish and seafood restaurant, and we have lunch in there. We have lunch and it's great. It's very, very nice. The food is good. Then we play the poker machines. We win, we lose. We're not degenerate gamblers. The most we put into it at any one time is maybe sixty, maybe eighty bucks apiece and it doesn't hurt anything. A lot of times you walk out of there with money, too. But on the average you're not going to win; you're going to lose. But we have a lot of fun. Mary Lou and I, we have a ritual out of this thing and we do that.

But as far as a gambler, no, I'm not a gambler. Like now I'm looking at the stock market and I check the stock market every day. I used to have some stocks and to me that's like playing craps. I finally sold a bunch of stock that everybody said, "Well, you've got to get rid of it. It's no good." It was always hovering around. I sold it several months ago. I didn't take too much of a beating on it. But as soon as I sold it—now, it's predictable—the damn stuff is going up. That's my...

I understand what you're saying.

But I'll give you a quick story. I have a good friend, one of the officers at the table tennis club, Paul Terrio. Paul Terrio had a degree in journalism and he was a civil engineer and he was in charge of building one of the towers at Caesars Palace, very smart guy, good ping-pong player. Paul was real active in the stock market. When the news first came out that Caesars Palace was going to go into Atlantic City, everybody was buying the stock. At that time the stock was like five dollars and change a share. He says, "Gary, you've got to buy some stock." I said, "Paul, I'm not a gambler." He said, "But, Gary, you've got to buy stock; you've got to buy stock."

So finally, I put some money and I bought, oh, I forget, maybe five hundred shares or something like that at five dollars apiece, five dollars and eighty five cents. Then he comes back

and he says, "Gary, I'm buying this stuff on margin. This stuff is going up and up and up." So then I bought some more, about the same amount for eight dollars and change.

Stockbroker calls me up and he says, "Gary, are you watching that stock?" I said, "Not really." He said, "It's up to sixteen dollars and something. You should sell it." I said, "Nah, I'm not going to sell it. I just have a feeling about it." I'm a real expert at this, right?

To make a long story short, Atlantic City opens up. By the time I cashed it out, a share that I paid average for it like six dollars and change wound up at like a hundred and fourteen dollars a share. I was a damn genius. I cashed it out at the very height before it starts going back down again…The stock market is not just the stock market for geniuses. It's a gamble. It's a craps shoot. Always has been. Most people don't admit it.

So now, just like I said, I got rid of this stuff here. I didn't lose that much, but I didn't make any money on it. Now it's gone up to nineteen dollars or something like that a share. Anyway, but to answer your question, no, I'm not a gambler. That's a long story about that, right?

Okay. So before we wind up for today, are there any other stories that we need to include in this project that you'd like to share?

I was going to show you a few minutes of the video of the ramp, which is really interesting.

Okay. Before you show me that, anything else that you want to share with me that we didn't cover? Anything else before we look at the video?

I've got to show it to you on the computer because...

[End of recorded interview]

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