

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH WALDEMAR JACKSON**

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee White

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African American Collaborative

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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A Collaborative Oral History Project

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## PREFACE

Waldemar Jackson was born on May 29, 1957 to Charcohe Ann Jackson and Lisele Wall Jackson. The Jacksons were one of the first black families in the West Las Vegas neighborhood, Vegas Heights. Waldemar grew up facing some racial tensions and prejudices, but has always held to the belief that hate accomplishes nothing.

Waldemar attended school through the tenth grade before dropping out to obtain his Graduate Equivalency Diploma. He entered the Air Force in 1973 as an aerospace ground equipment repairman. He was stationed at the George Air Force Base in Victorville, California, but had the opportunity to go overseas in temporary duty stations. Waldemar travelled to Germany, Italy, Greece, and England.

In 1975, Waldemar came back to Las Vegas and began searching for work. He worked as a gardener for the Sanitation District. He then found a job with James Wood Construction building prefab (modular) homes. When that company went under, Waldemar was hired as a slot floor man for the Marina Hotel. The Marina closed after the Culinary Union strike, and Waldemar began working for airlines, first as an aircraft fueller and later in baggage screening.

Waldemar suffered the loss of his mother in 1999. In the aftermath, he turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with her passing and candidly shares these struggles in this interview.

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May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Claytee White

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**This is Claytee White. It is May sixth—May fifth, 2013. We're in the West Las Vegas Library and I'm here today to interview Mr. Jackson.**

**Mr. Jackson, could you please spell your first name and pronounce it for me?**

Waldemar, W-A-L-D-E-M-A-R.

**Thank you so much. So the first thing we're going to do is just talk about your early life. We're going to just start by talking about those first few years, those first few memories. So tell me about your family, your parents and what your parents did for a living.**

My father was a skycap at McCarran—not the new one, but the old one that was on Las Vegas Boulevard. My mother was a post office worker. Growing up here, the first thing I can remember is the racism. As a child, we would go to the parks on Sunset. We'd be on a certain side of town—the West Las Vegas side of town, past Bonanza.

**So tell me about some of your first memories. So you grew up on which street?**

Balzar.

**And where is that?**

It's right near Martin Luther King and Balzar.

**So is it near Owens, near...**

It's right next to Kermit R. Booker.

**Okay, so good. And your father was a skycap?**

Yes.

**Did you ever get to go out the airport with him?**

All the time.

**Good. So tell me what that was like.**

I loved it because I loved planes. I loved jets, planes, and everything. That's why I'm an aircraft fueler, by trade. I went into a lot of other things; such as roofing, construction, driving a rig. Knowing the people from the airport and the people from the post office, I had a variety of life. I wasn't raised racist. We often had parties where it was as common to see white people at our house as it was to see black people. As a child, you realize there's different cultures and you have to adapt and learn. It didn't bother me one bit. But it did bother me when I was told by police here—when I was riding my bike in the early years—that I had to be on a certain side of town at dark. I grew up in an all-white neighborhood for the first five or six years.

**Where was that?**

In Vegas Heights on Balzar. We didn't get to go outside the gate and play, because none of the white kids would play with us. We were one of the first black families in Vegas Heights.

**Give me the boundaries of Vegas Heights.**

You have Martin Luther King and Carey.

**Martin Luther King is on the west?**

Right. From Lake Mead over to Carey, Martin Luther King to Revere. The houses in between those four streets are Vegas Heights.

**So give it to me. Martin Luther King to Revere. And then?**

Lake Mead to Carey.

**Lake Mead to Carey, okay.**

Those houses are called Vegas Heights. If you go down Martin Luther King you'll see it says, "Welcome to Vegas Heights."

**So describe the houses to me in Vegas Heights.**

When I was coming up, it was very, very beautiful. It had big elm trees. Unfortunately, the neighborhood went down because of a lack of funding—the lack of ability to pay to have those houses fixed up again. The neighborhood didn't go down because blacks moved in. Most of the trees died due to the Japanese beetles that invaded.

**So describe the typical Vegas Heights house to me.**

Large lots—three, four bedrooms. They were nice. They usually had large trees and such.

But when most of the blacks moved in, if something happened after dark, you couldn't call Metro. Not until the sun came up. Vegas Heights had one thing in those days—one path of asphalt going down the street. If two cars were going in different directions, one would have to get in the dirt. That's how wide the streets are. But now they're big. They widened all the streets, gave us streetlights, sidewalks.

But back in those days you didn't have streetlights. You didn't have sidewalks, just a patch of asphalt saying the name. It was really zoned for horses and ranches. I grew up in a neighborhood with diversified people, because you did have whites. There was a Japanese family that lived behind us. They had a shed and a stable. Sometimes, eh, you wish there were no horses.

**So tell me why.**

In the heat, the horse manure made the neighborhood reek. It was like a stable. You didn't leave doors open too much, and everybody had swamp coolers. That was before central air-conditioning came along. But when it came along, everybody switched. That made it nice.

**Tell me where you went to school.**

Back in those days, they called it Highland Elementary. That's at Highland...Martin Luther King and Balzar now. I can't remember the year that Martin Luther King was changed, because it was Highland Drive. But that was the name of the elementary school there, Highland. I went to Highland, then I went to Garside, and then I went into the Air Force. I took a GED.

**So how far did you go in school?**

Tenth.

**So Garside is a...**

Junior high school.

**Okay. And then where did you go?**

I went to Valley. But I took a GED to pass that so I could get in the Air Force.

**Tell me about your brothers and sisters.**

Well, there's not much to say except for they worked every day.

**Are you the oldest?**

I'm the youngest.

**Okay, you're the youngest. How many brothers and sisters?**

I have one brother and one sister. My brother has—I can't count how many kids, but I'd say six or seven. My sister only has two and I have two.

But growing up here...I couldn't see myself growing up anywhere else. When I went into the service, I went to another city. There's nothing like being able to go to the store late at night and get something to eat. In other cities, I thought I was losing my mind when I went out at ten o'clock and they said, "Where are you going?" The police actually stopped me and asked me where I was going.

**Where were you, which city?**

I was in Champaign, Illinois. They asked me where I was going. I said, "I'm going to the store to get me some milk and something to eat."



They said, "Not at this time. Everything closes at nine o'clock."

I said, "What? Are you kidding?"

**Why did you decide on the Air Force? Did it have anything to do with your father's work?**

Nope. My mother was Air Force. My father was Army. I liked aircraft as a child, so that's why I went to the Air Force. Besides that, they have more technical training.

**Wwhich year did you go into the Air Force?**

About '73.

**And you were born in which year?**

Fifty-seven.

**So in 1973 first you went to Champaign, Illinois?**

I went to Lackland Air Force Base right outside San Antonio, Texas. That's basic training. My tech school was in Champaign, Illinois.

**What kind of training?**

Aerospace ground equipment. That's repairing most of the flight lines equipment, such as DOD sixties, which are gas turbine engines—they start the aircraft. We did so many things as ground equipment repairmen—hydraulics, pneumatics—it was a wide open field. I've been trained in electronics, pneumatic systems, air condition, refrigeration, gas turbine engines, and regular engines. Anything that had to do with starting an aircraft and getting a jet off the ground, we repaired.

**After the Air Force—well, tell me more about the Air Force. Were you always stateside?**

Stations, yes. I was stationed at George Air Force Base, which is in Victorville, California. But I did go TDY—temporary duty station—overseas to prepare equipment and come back. But as far as being stationed overseas, no. Just temporary duty.

**So you got to travel to what countries? Give me some of the countries.**

Germany, Italy, Greece, England. Those were beautiful days.

**What did you like about them?**

Different experiences, different cultures. But you had to realize they weren't used to blacks, just like the United States wasn't.

**What kind of experiences did you have because you were black when you were in the European countries?**

Not being able to speak the language was very difficult. Finding someone that could interpret what you were saying was...whew. Most of the time they didn't want to be involved with you because you were black, especially in Italy. Very, very rude at points. But the countryside is beautiful. You really don't have to have them say it to you, but you could feel that nobody wanted to be bothered with you because you were black.

**Were you with groups of people when you would go into the villages and towns?**

Yes. Me and one of the other airmen would go in every now and then, because I really lost interest in trying to communicate with people. They didn't like our Air Force, and they didn't like my color. You get a dose of both.

**The other men that you were working with, were they black, white, Latino?**

White and black, white and black. I felt sorry for some of the guys that were stationed overseas, because you get the same rhetoric that you do here. Today it's changed.

**What is the difference?**

You don't really have a black side of town anymore.

**You're talking Las Vegas now?**

Las Vegas. You don't really have a black side of town anymore. You'll find blacks all over Vegas, and you'll find whites on the Westside, which was predominately black. You'll find Spanish Americans, Mexican-Americans, everything. It's all become a big boiling pot.

**What do you prefer?**

I prefer the way it is now, because you can go on any side of town you want to. Some places, you're going to find people that hate you. It's like that anywhere. But the majority of people, if you tend to your own business and leave theirs alone, are cool.

**Once you got out of the Air Force and came back, did you come back immediately after getting out?**

Yes.

**How many years did you spend in the Air Force?**

Only a couple.

**Okay, so in 1975 you came back to Las Vegas?**

Right.

**Did you see any differences?**

Not after that, no. No. But it's like they said—the Rat Pack broke the hotels and their discriminations.

**Do you believe that?**

Absolutely. The one thing hotels understand more than anything is that it wasn't about black or white. It was about green.

**Do you think that the Rat Pack changed the rules?**

Oh, definitely.

**Ooh, wow.**

The Rat Pack was working at the hotels, but Sammy Davis Junior couldn't stay there. He could entertain there, but he couldn't stay at the hotels.

**Exactly. So you don't think it was the work of all these people in the black community that did any—**

It comes down to dollar bills.

**I understand.**

It came down to dollar bills. The blacks in the community couldn't change those hotels whatsoever. Money going out their front door changes everything.

**What did the Rat Pack say they were going to do?**

The Rat Pack would come over and entertain at the Moulin Rouge. When people from the Strip realized they were going over there... you would have a lot of people from the Strip coming to the Moulin Rouge. The Moulin Rouge was making money hand over fist.

**So it was open—**

The showrooms on the Strip were empty. The second acts or third acts would be empty.

**The Moulin Rouge was open for six months before it closed that time. Why do you think they—and that was 1955.**

See, I can remember this. They couldn't afford the amount of money that the Strip lost with those entertainers being over at the Moulin Rouge.

**From what you learned when was the Strip integrated? The Moulin Rouge opened and closed in 1955. So when was integration?**

Oh, no. It didn't get integrated in 1955, because a lot of people were forced out. You have to realize that the mob ruled this place. The mob was very active in Las Vegas.

**Of course.**

They built most of the hotels that are out there.

**The old ones.**

Right. Well, you wouldn't even have the new ones if it wasn't for those. I've looked at a lot of things that have gone on here. The racism that was here, that isn't anymore. If a black man was arrested in the older days, he'd have five or six cars following him to the police station because he could end up in the desert.

**So you're saying that blacks had to follow the police cars?**

Yes.

**So give me an incident where you know that that happened.**

I got into an argument with my sister. It was a loud screaming match. One cop car pulls up, another one pulls up, another one pulls up. I'm defending myself because I'm not getting hit with night sticks. But once they realized that they couldn't just beat me, they stood back and they started to draw guns. That's when I turned around and let them handcuff me to take me to jail. I know everybody in that neighborhood knew, after I had been fighting with the police, that they had to follow me.

**So tell me who followed you.**

The neighborhood.

**So do you remember some of the people who followed you?**

I don't want to say names. I don't want to say names because it's not about putting their names into it.

**But those people would be dead by now probably; is that correct?**

No. No, they wouldn't. They wouldn't be dead right now, because a lot of them were just a little bit older than I am. There are things that have happened to young black men in this place. These things still has happen. When they call shooting a guy in his house justifiable homicide...there's no way.

**Rather than just being so general because we use this for historical purposes, I need more information. If you are going to tell me about an incident where the community—**

You want the names, don't you?

**Not so much the name, but at least you have to tell me more information—when this happened. You have to give me some information so that a historian, a student using this can now go and do more research and find out when this was happening.**

Well, there's a very easy way to find out anything in Vegas. If you go online, you can find it because it's public record. Metro has opened and closed. If you look back at most of the shootings that have happened here—and recently, I think it's just about two years ago, we had an unarmed veteran sitting in his car that was slain.

**Exactly. I just read about that in the newspaper. It's still going on; I'm still reading about that one.**

Right. How can you say that it is justifiable homicide? This guy didn't have a gun. He was just sitting in his car. That's unjustified. The people who did that shouldn't be on the police force, but it's gone on for years here. To me, Metro's gotten better, but it's still one of the worst. If you ask me, they go hand in hand with LAPD.

**When you got back from the Air Force, 1975, what kind of work did you start doing?**

Right away, I didn't start doing anything. I started trying to find a job. I've been a slot floor man, and I worked construction for a while. It was hard to find was a job that paid an amount of money that you could survive on.

**In 1971 we have what was called the Consent Decree. How did that impact jobs in the black community?**

In Vegas, it was not what you knew or what you were qualified for, but who you knew. When trying to get a job as a porter at the hotels, it still wasn't about what you knew but who you knew.

**Okay. The Consent Decree mandated that 12 and a half percent of all the jobs on the Las Vegas Strip and downtown would go to black people, not minorities but black people. So in 1975 when you were looking for a job, did you know about the Consent Decree?**

No.

**It wasn't talked about in the black community?**

Not much. In fact, this is the first I've even heard of that. And I read every day. I read the paper every morning, even back then.

**Okay. Did you know Donald Clark?**

No.

**He was the president of the NAACP. He was a minister in the area. Did you know Charles Kellar?**

No.

**Attorney, one of the first attorneys in Las Vegas, first black attorneys. Because they were behind getting this Consent Decree passed. It was when Donald Clark was the president of the NAACP.**

**What kinds of ways did you use to find a job in '75?**

Want ads. You go and apply and you hope like heck they'll call you.

**What was your first job?**

After getting out of the military?

**Uh-huh, 1975.**

I can't remember. I've had so many jobs.

**Tell me about some of those early jobs.**

Working construction. I was a gardener at the Sanitation District, but when my probation period ended I was terminated, and I couldn't understand why.

**What reason did they give?**

They said I didn't pass their probation period. I asked for a reason, but I didn't get one really. I could have understood if I called in a lot. I could have understood if I was late a lot. But I was there every morning and didn't call in sick. I realized they were not going to give me a straight answer. I didn't try to push it because it wouldn't have done any good to fight it back then. At that time the supervisor was a black man. I can't think of his name—his first name was Bobby, but I can't tell you his last.

But I just said to myself, "Well, that's just another job by the wayside." When you're on probation, they figure out if they want you or not. I couldn't see anything wrong with my work ethic. I didn't have to be told what to do every day or how to do it. I knew how to use the equipment and everything. It really puzzled me as to why I didn't make the grade.

**What were some of those other early jobs?**

Well, sometimes you have bad luck. I worked for James Wood Construction for about two years. I enjoyed it. I was building prefab homes. I really enjoyed that. We built half a house on

site, and then transported it on the diesel to the location. Oh, I enjoyed that. But economics gets you—the company folded. That was a sad one.

**Those were modular homes? Today we call them modular.**

Yes. It was fun to me. You built half a house here and you'd move it, then build the other half and move it. But when I was doing that job, I worked with mostly whites and got along with them. They loved having me around. When payday came we would all go to Sawdust Saloon.

**Where is that?**

North Las Vegas, end of the Strip. I'll tell you one thing. They might like me, but when we called them rednecks in the bar because they played country and western, they didn't like seeing me. Me and my crew would end up getting into bar brawls. One of them would say something to me and they would think I was going to hit him. But it was always one of my coworkers. I told them, "Okay, guys. I don't like the names, but I don't want to see us in jail every week after we get paid. Let's find somewhere else to cash our check and have a drink." And we did. Three straight weeks, the North Las Vegas police had to come and break up a bar fight. One cop just told me he thought we just loved to fight. I told him, "No, we don't. We just want to cash our checks and have drinks." That's when one of the people that was in the bar said they don't allow niggers.

**And this was in 1975-76?**

Seventy-seven.

**Nineteen seventy-seven, okay.**

You had to deal with a lot of things here. It was really crazy.

**Where did you find to go that all of you could go in and have a drink together on payday?**

We started going to Jerry's Nugget. There, they didn't give a damn what color you were, as long as you had green. We started going to the Stardust. We went to a lot of places that are now closed down. I've seen so many changes. Even Martin Luther King—now there's three lanes headed one way and three lanes headed the other. When I was growing up, there was one lane going one way and one lane going the other way. I can remember everything past Delmonico, with the houses right there on Carey. After that, you had a bunch of ranches, and then you had nothing but desert. Nothing but desert.

Out to the west, where you have Fiesta, was all desert. Everything out that way was desert. We had dirt bikes and, believe me, we used to go home dusty. The reason why we really didn't grow up hating whites was because we had a hill. It was called Suicide Hill, which is now just Cheyenne. You won't find the hill now—it's been leveled and they've built houses. But there were white kids, Mexican kids, black kids and everything else trying to ride this hill. We would

go home dusty dirty every day. It was about a 25-foot hill up and then it dropped straight, virtually at a 45 degree angle, and then up another one. Once you got all that speed, you had to worry about hitting the next hill and then the next hill. You'd see kids flying off, helping each other up. But they closed that down when one kid was paralyzed. We didn't know how dangerous it was, but we were risking our lives, until he got paralyzed.

**This was when you were growing up?**

Uh-huh, I couldn't have been more than eight, nine years old.

**Those are the kinds of things you did growing up.**

It got to be fun going out, riding dirt bikes and everything. You don't realize hate; you have to be taught to hate.

**Where does all this hate come from? Tell me what happened.**

The hate comes from the parents. When those kids were out there riding with us, we would all go over to my house. My mother worked for the post office and my father was a skycap. They welcomed them, no matter what color. But when we go over to the whites' houses, some kids were allowed in, but we weren't. You grew up knowing that people didn't like you because of your color. The one thing that you will always remember in your life is how things were, and the way they have changed now.

**Those memories are still really powerful for you?**

Oh, yes. But not as far as hate is concerned. I don't have time to hate.

**Okay, good.**

Hate is something that'll occupy your time.

**You've used that word about 15 times so far.**

When you asked about my life, I grew up around that. It will mar a person's life. You have no choice but to deal with it. If you were thinking everything was going to be a bed of roses...it wasn't even close. You have the times to enjoy yourself, but there are the times that you have to deal with the common fact there are people that don't like you.

**Okay. So after that job working in construction, the place that closed, what were some of the other jobs?**

Slot floor man.



**How did you get that job and where was it?**

I went into rehabilitation for drinking. My mother sent me to Raleigh Hills because I was drinking too much.

**How old were you?**

About 24.

**This is when you were just back from the military.**

I wasn't just back. I had been back.

**Did you learn to drink in the military?**

Oh, yeah, for sure. When you got off work, you went to the NCO club. They had these things called shotguns. You put a beer in the window. As it gets hot, you poke a hole in the top. Then you shake it up and then you have to drink it all at once, because it's going to squirt out. We would have a pitcher full of beer and drop a shot of bar liquor in. A boilermaker.

**The entire pitcher?**

Well, the glasses. The glasses were giant mugs. You might as well say it was a pitcher—I know it was more than 24 ounces.

**Did most military men do this?**

Absolutely. White, black, it didn't matter. It didn't matter at all. When you were in the military, you learn to drink. That's what everybody did after work, even in the barracks.

**By the time you got back here, you were just drinking so much that your mother insisted.**

She insisted that I go in to Raleigh Hills. When I went in Raleigh Hills, I met a gentleman who was going because his wife wanted him to. He was an older Italian dude. I started telling him about needing a job and everything. He was a boss at the Marina, the Marina hotel. He got me on as a slot floor man. Unfortunately, they had the dreaded strike where the change girls walked out. As a slot foreman, I ended up being a change guy for about a week. After that, they had to let some of the slot floor men go. That happened by seniority, and I was the one to go.

It was really funny—I mean really funny—to see all the guys that wore suits every day to work. When the strike came and the women walked out, we all told our boss that we drew the line at wearing the belts. We were not wearing the belts. [The boss said,] “You can push one of the change carts. I don't care, but I need change people.” We got heckled a lot. Of course, you had change girls outside with their picket signs and everything.

**They were part of the Culinary Union?**

Right. It was very funny. You would pull into work, and you got five or six ladies saying, “Hey, baby, you going to be a change girl today?”

**You guys crossed the picket line.**

We were management; we had to. Slot floor men are managers.

**You were not a part of the Culinary Union?**

Not at all.

**You started the job as a slot man, slot floor man?**

Slot floor man. Like I said, it wasn't what you knew, but who you knew.

**How long had you been there when the strike started?**

Eight months. That's why I was one of the first to be laid off.

**Tell me what the job of a slot floor man is.**

If you put in a quarter and it jams, we had the key to the machines. We'd open it and clean it through. We also found slugs in the machines, so we had to be on the lookout for people who were using the slug coins. Catching one of them was really hard. We had people who would drill a hole in a quarter, drop it in and then just pull the string up and down.

**Oh, and it would continue to register like they're dropping in more.**

Right. They would trip it. You'd have to watch them very carefully to see it. But it was a great job. In fact, I used to get ribbed. Most people had to go to the employee cafeteria, and they would rib me because I would eat at the restaurant.

**Why was that?**

I was management. When you're management you don't have to eat at the cafeteria—that's for the employees. Management goes to the restaurant and we just sign the ticket. A lot of my friends said, “Oh, you think you're uppity now.”

I just said, “Hey, I'm doing a job. Just because I don't have to eat with you guys, don't take that personally.” I used to go into the cafeteria and eat with them.

**Were you promoted?**

No, I was hired as.

**So why did they think that?**

That's the whole point. I told them, "Man, this is just a job to me." I got hired as a slot floor man. I didn't work my way up to anything.

**Were there lots of black people working at the Marina while you were there?**

No. I know on the shift that I was on, about ten change girls that were black, and I was the only black slot floor man.

**Any other black men in any jobs?**

Porters. Black porters and black maids.

**Any bartenders?**

No, not at that time.

**Okay, not yet. So after the eight months they had to let some people go.**

Right.

**Were you able to stay in the gaming industry at that point?**

No, because if a hotel goes under—

**Oh, so the whole hotel went under?**

Right. They had to let people go when the strike ended because the Culinary won. They had to let go of some of the guys at the top, so that they could pay the salaries of the new contract. I was released then. But it didn't take six months after I was gone for the whole thing to go under. In a way, the Culinary Union wasn't winning. Once they did win the contract and forced the Marina—which wasn't doing that well in the first place—to abide by this contract, it sent them into a tailspin. They didn't win. That's really the funny part—winning at one contract and costing the hotel. But in those days, you couldn't tell if it was really the contract or was it somebody skimming off the top. There were a lot of people got caught skimming in these hotels, believe me.

**Is that the only job you've ever had in the gaming industry?**

Yep. Later I found myself going from small job to small job, but then I got to working as an aircraft fueler. First I cleaned airplanes, but that company went out of business as well. Sometimes you have bad luck. But we were cleaning planes. The bad luck was it was Pan Am. We all know what happened to Pan Am. After that job, I just went along and really struggled trying to find another one. But when I got back, I worked for AMR, the parent company of American Airlines. I started out in baggage screening because we did international flights.

**This was which year now?**

Ooh.

**Approximately.**

Eighty-eight, '89.

**Between the '77 job and the '88 job, you just did all kinds of work?**

Right.

**Okay. So baggage screening...**

Baggage screening is where people have their bags are screened before they go on a flight. You don't want any explosives on the flight. You can't have any contraband or drugs going out. Once we screen the bags, they were taken out to the planes and loaded. These were Mexican, Canadian, and German flights.

After I went through baggage screening, I went to the ground and I tried to do the labs, which is dumping the plane's lavatories. It was a nice job for a minute. But I didn't want to get underneath the wing or underneath the tail and find out if somebody's playing a joke this morning. There were certain ways that you could pull the levers to dump them. After you put the hose on, you pulled the lever and it hooked onto the waste. Well, if somebody wanted to be funny and piss you off, they could pull the levers without the hose up there. As soon as you opened the clamp to put the hose on, you would be drowned, which is not a pretty sight. I got sent home three or four times to change uniforms and take a shower, because I was wearing the blue stuff.

After that, I went into fueling at AMR. I worked my way to lead, and then they made me a supervisor.

**How many years did you do that?**

Eight, eight years. That ended in 1989.

**What happened in 1989?**

That's when they contracted the fueling company.

**Okay, so that ended.**

That ended because then they went with Dynamic Fueling. To this very day, I'm trying to get on with Dynamic.

I had a tragedy. I lost my mother in 1999. I went through drugs, drinking, everything. Six years ago, it's going on seven years I've been clean. All I did was pray.

**Do you go to meetings?**

No. You have to understand—you get tired of something. While I was doing drugs, I was praying to God to take the taste away from me. When He answered, I ran. I ran with Him so hard. Now I can be around drugs. I can be around alcohol and everything else. I can have people offer it. No. No, I want nothing to do with that. Because if God gives you a chance, and keeps you from craving drugs or craving drinking, you never go back.

**So in 1999...and you were on—**

My mother died.

**You were on it for how long?**

Oh, up until six years ago.

**Can you tell me how you think drugs impacted the black community?**

Horribly.

**Why do you think it was so tragic? It was everywhere. How did that happen? What happened?**

A lot of people want to say blacks, but blacks don't have planes to fly dope in.

**So tell me what—**

They don't have speed boats bringing it across.

**Right, right. So tell me what happened.**

You have a new drug that hits the street. It's always going to be in your black neighborhoods. But this is the part that really makes me laugh about it—as long as it was in the black neighborhoods, there wasn't a big outcry for stopping drugs. They didn't mind us doing the dope and killing each other, because they wanted the money behind the dope. It wasn't a far cry. It wasn't a loud cry. But when that dope started hitting home in other neighborhoods—not just black neighborhoods—everybody started crying, “Let's stop drugs now!” It's sad because you see beautiful women get hooked on crack cocaine. They may be 25 or 26, but they look 46 or 47. It eats them alive. Now, they have one that's doing the white people the same way—crystal meth. It not only eats their flesh, their teeth, their bone structure—it makes them shrivel up into skeletons. That's scary.

**What was your most frightening experience while you were using?**

I didn't have that.

**How did you stay alive? How did you pay for it?**

Using. Selling. You can do both. That's when I started to realize I wasn't really addicted. If I could sell dope and use it, I wasn't really addicted.

**What do you mean?**

It was like waking up in the morning—if I didn't have it, I had to find it. That meant collecting cans, cutting somebody's grass, doing whatever, to do what I needed to do. It got to the point where I would steal for it. I didn't like stealing. I'd go to the store and get bottles of liquor because that's what the dealers wanted. They would pay for it. Getting close to getting caught was enough to tell me that this was not the right way to go. I wasn't thinking about doing five or ten years for shoplifting. No, no, no, no, no. You learn very quickly. I learned how to sell the dope and use it.

**And who were your customers?**

People from all walks of life. I had people who were in the hotel industry, some in the airports, garbage men. The people you wouldn't expect to be on drugs were on drugs.

**Are we talking about schoolteachers?**

Now, that I never had. That I never had, thank God. I still believe in the teachers.

**What about preachers?**

No, I don't believe in preachers. When I was a kid, my mother and father used to make me go to church every Sunday morning. It was a little church right here on Lexington and Blankenship. They've rebuilt the church now. I would go to that church. I would listen to the preacher every day. Then when I got home from church, my mother asked me to go to the liquor store. There is that same preacher, drinking his butt off. A bunch of white people hung all over him. That killed my faith so much as a child. The next week I told my mother I wasn't going to church. My father said, "Well, you'll stay in the room all day."

**Did you tell them why?**

Uh-huh. My father said he's only human. I said, "Not when you're preaching God's word. You're not only human. You've got to live by what you say. My father told me not to talk smart to me and to go to my room. From that day, I resented preachers. I had the misfortune of seeing so many preachers that were preaching God's word and so many people that were saying they were saved. Why did I see them at the liquor store? Why did I see them drinking, drunk, cussing, fussing, cheating on their spouse? Why go to church?"

**What year did you get married?**

Ooh. I was 21.

**Wow. So this was before the Air Force or during the Air Force?**

After.

**When you came back here in 1975...**

I had already been in the military and came home because I went in the Air Force when I was 17; it wasn't like I was 18. When I came back I got married.

**Was this a girl that had waited for you while you were in the military?**

No. That was bad. She was married already and ended up getting a divorce. We got married and I had a son with her. She didn't like it because she was Muslim. I should have known better. She didn't like my religion and I couldn't quite grasp hers.

**What was your church at the time?**

I became Catholic.

**You were going to the Catholic church; she was a Muslim.**

And that didn't mix.

**You guys didn't think about that before you got married?**

No. That was a mistake.

**Right. Did you attend St. James?**

No. I went to the Catholic Church that's right next to Gorman High School.

**Oh, so downtown, down on Maryland Park—**

Right.

**—is it Maryland Parkway? Yes. Which church is that?**

I'm trying to think of the name of it right now.

**St. Mary's?**

I think it is. But you know what? Here's the funny part. After we had the child, her father, mother, and family were moving out of state. She wanted me to pack up and move with them.

I'm said, no, wait. You're not taking my child. I went to work, and she took everything. She took my son, who was only two weeks old. I haven't seen my son since.

**This was in 1970...**

I'm not good with the year.

**You had no way of finding them?**

No, because back then the web wasn't around. I haven't seen him since. But when I get back to work, I plan on finding him. He would be about 35 now. My daughter is going to be 25 in a minute.

**Now, the daughter is by the next wife?**

No, I didn't get married. I learned from the first time. That was a mistake. You live and you learn. But I wasn't making a third mistake again. After two kids, eek. That's that.

**During the time that—your lost years, let's say—did the second child come along then?**

Ten years later.

**Ten years after the first child?**

Right.

**So you're talking about 1995?**

Just about.

**But you are still working at that point?**

Yep, I was at McCarran at that time. Life is funny. When you think things can't go any worse, don't say it can't get any worse. Because it can. It can always get worse. But you have to look at the bright side of life to make sure that it gets better. That's one of my greatest philosophies; I'm not going to live in my past. I'm not going to hate because of my past. But I'm going to try to make sure that it's a better future. I tell all the young guys...when I grew up, I dabbled with the gangs. My father asked me, "Are you going to be in a gang, or are you going to be a man? It doesn't take a man to run with a bunch of other guys, beat up people, and shoot at people, et cetera. It takes a real man to walk by yourself."

I got out of the gang. But I tell young people today that the only people that they are hurting are their families. "The color that you're about to shoot this other guy for is going to be here when you're dead and gone, when he's dead and gone. The street that you're fighting so hard, saying it's yours, doesn't belong to you. Once you're dead, everybody else is going to still be walking down the street no matter what color they're wearing. To kill behind that street, the color or the



name of a gang, you're just showing that you're stupid. On top of that, the only people that you're really hurting—and you better listen carefully—is your mother, your father, your sister, your brother.”

**Did you find that that's what happened to you when you were dabbling in the gangs?**

When I was in those gangs, I got jumped a couple of times. But this was the old days. Today, they shoot you. Then, I would say, “Okay, you can jump me. We can fight all day long. I'll find you one by one and I'll make you regret jumping me.” But today, they kill each other. It's not about fighting, it's about killing. When we were younger, if you got into it with a guy, you could go outside in the park and beat each other black and blue, then go home and make your rooms. If everybody said you lost, and you didn't like it, you go back and you do it again. But you lived. That was being a man. If you didn't like what he said, you went back and beat him. You tried to beat him; he tried to beat you. But you walked away alive.

When gangs started getting out of hand, that's when there were drive-bys. It takes less of a man to pull the trigger. It takes more of a man to stand there and say, “Come on, brother, we're going to settle this the right way, as men.” That's what youngsters don't understand. Today there are babies raising babies, and it's sad, because they weren't taught to be men. They look to their partner to show them the way. If their partner is in a gang, then they think it's all right to beat a woman up or to shoot another man. It's not. In the old days...some of things that kids get away with today would have got me a switch or a belt. You got your butt whipped, but you learned the lesson well.

**So seven years clean.**

Yes.

**Have you been able to go back to work?**

That's what I'm trying to do now. I've been trying my darnedest to get back to work. I want my life back. Getting rid of the drugs and drinking—I did cocaine, smoked cocaine, drank, smoked weed. When God gave me that blessing, I ran for cover. I didn't do any of it.

**How are you going about trying to find work? Why do you think it's taken this length of time?**

The economy. I mean, you've got a lot of qualified people out here.

**Exactly.**

They're not even able to find jobs. It's not about the color of my skin. If you've got more qualified people applying for the jobs, they're going to get it before you do. Now, hopefully when I get my ID together and stuff—because I've been going to z to try to get my ID.

**Good, good.**

Once I get that done, I'm going out to McCarran and apply where I got the qualifications. That should take care of that.

**What does the Urban League do these days to help with employment?**

If you can get a letter of hiring intent, they'll get your ID, Social Security card, health card, and whatever you need to get the job done, to get you hired. Even if you need a driver's license, they'll do that. All you have to do is get a letter of intent signed. Otherwise, you have to go through their program and slowly get your ID.

**Did you go through the Urban League program?**

I'm going to start that next week. I'll sit here and I'll read the want ads and the classified section in the newspaper, but that doesn't cut it anymore. Review-Journal ought to cut the classified out altogether.

**So do you go online? What kinds of things do you look for?**

Nah. I'm going to have these people—

**Urban League?**

No, the library. This library has computer classes. I'm going to get involved in those because those are free.

**Oh, so you're going to take some computer classes.**

Take computer classes so I can go online. With my luck, I'll get with a company and it will go under. Then I'll have to go back.

**But you're not going to tell yourself that anymore.**

No. I'm keeping it positive.

**Good.**

Hopefully when we're done here, I'll make my stay. There's the fueling company at McCarran and I enjoy doing planes. In fact, I fueled the Concorde, the supersonic jet from France, and the Antonov 224, which was here on an aids mission from Russia. It's the largest plane in the world. It took 66,600 gallons of fuel and it took us three hours.

**It can take off and fly in the air. It's amazing.**

Isn't that a lot of stuff?

**It's amazing.**

It's absolutely amazing. But being the largest plane in the world, that wasn't even close to being full of fuel. On top of that, it had three cars in it, along with tons of crates and stuff. Oh, boy. I was sitting in my fuel truck and I went down at the end of the runway and thought, "Is this big old boy fixing to clear the fence?" It was an old, old plane. It's not like the 130s, which are digitalized instruments. It had the old analog gauges.

**Okay. So this was like one of those airbuses?**

Yes. You want to know something? It cleared the fence by maybe three feet. I'm thought, "Oh, boy. I hope it don't fall down because if it does all the fuel that I put on."

**Yeah. So—**

They brought something in that I had never had before.

**What is that?**

Vodka.

**Oh, okay.**

Russian vodka, which intrigued me. I bought seven bottles of vodka, and they gave me some from Russia. They tried theirs and I gave them—and they said, "This isn't vodka." And when I drank theirs, I thought that now I know why they say this is vodka—theirs was much smoother and better. But, boy, it would give you a hangover. It had a kick like a mule. I thought one of these guys brought these little things. They don't know any better.

**Wow. So now, how long ago was that that you did that fueling? This is when you—**

Ooh. That's 1994.

**So this was before—okay.**

Yes. I'm sad to say that during the years I was doing the drugs I lost all the pictures that I had. I had pictures standing in front of the plane with the nose up, where you could see just how big this plane was.

**Where did you live during those years?**

I stayed on the south side of town. It was crazy.

**How did you pay your rent?**

Working. When I fueled that plane—

**No, no, no, I'm talking about after that.**

After that? I came back—

**I'm talking about during those years, during the lost years.**

I came back on this side of town. Like I said, when I got hooked on the drugs, it was just one place to another. Sometimes I even went homeless and slept on sidewalks. That's how far you can go down. When someone tells me it can't get worse, I try to tell them, yes, it can.

**Tell me about the homeless population. One of the things that I see...the Westside School is being renovated; they're trying to renovate it and do all kinds of things to it and homeless people have camped out on the property. And we have the mission right there at Bonanza and D Street. What do you think the solution is for the homeless people in a city like Las Vegas? What should the city be doing?**

As much desert as there is out there, they should build something for the homeless.

**When people say there are some people who want to be homeless, when they make that statement, what do you think?**

They do.

**I know. Okay.**

They do because they want to stay off the radar. If they owe so much, it doesn't do them any good to get back in the system.

**If they do what so much?**

If they owe so much.

**Owe?**

Owe. If they owe so much money, getting back in the system and trying to work, it's not going to do them any good.

**Child support or taxes or something like that? Okay, something that they can trace.**

Right.

**Okay, I see.**

Something that makes a man want to stay off the radar. I talked to a youngster right in the back of this library. He said he doesn't want a job or anything—he wants to stay homeless, because if he starts working, he won't make enough to pay off his bills. That's sad. But that's the

economics of today. You have people who want to be homeless, who don't want to be on the radar because they owe so much money.

**What do you think cities or agencies should do? There are a lot of homeless people who don't want to be homeless.**

Right. That's why I say there's so much desert in Las Vegas, they could get funding and build camps or rooms. The small shelters that they have here, like the Salvation Army, they can only take in so many. They need a center for homeless. And hopefully that center will be over six, seven hundred rooms. A lot of people come here and they don't intend to be homeless. But they get addicted to gambling—which that's something a lot of cities don't have to deal with—they can be working and still be homeless because they spend every last dime putting it in a machine.

**How do you feel about the church now? You grew up having to go to church.**

I loved church at an early age. But seeing the preachers and the people that were going to church doing the things that they said they weren't doing...it was so bad, I just stopped going to church. I felt like I didn't want my interpretation of what God is to be ruined. The preachers saying that they are God's messengers...When you go out and get drunk, and do all the things that you're doing, what do you think that's going to do to a person? I stopped going to church, but I didn't stop believing in God. My church is right here in my body. It's my temple to Him. That's why six years ago, when I started praying to get off drugs, I pledged my life inside to Him. My body is his temple. This is my sanctuary.

**Yes. What do you do all day now?**

I come here and I read. I try to look at the paper, find an application, find a job that I want to try. I will do that. But most of the days I come here, I read. I read the books and expand my mind. I educate myself instead of destroying myself.

**Oh, yeah. This is a great place; this is a great room.**

It's the best kept secret here.

**Oh, yeah, I love it. I love it.**

This one little lady came in here and she said, "This room is the best kept secret in the whole library."

**Tell me what you see for yourself three years from now. What do you see?**

Working.

**Give me the whole scenario.**

I'm working. I have my own place and my own car. I'm just watching my TV. I'll come back to the library like I usually do. Oh, no, I'm not giving my library up. I can't do that.

**Okay, good.**

This is solitude. It's an escape, because you can live in any century you want. The library is great. When you get into a book and you read, you lose all track of time. You can go back to the days of slavery. You can go back to the days of the Bowlings. There's endless stories here. All you have to do is use your mind and you can be anywhere in the world you want to be.

**Perfect. That's a great ending. Thank you so very much.**

You're welcome.

**[End of recorded interview]**

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