

Henderson Memories:

**City of
Henderson
Living Histories**

CITY OF HENDERSON
LIVING HISTORY INTERVIEW
MARCH 25, 2003
MAYOR GIBSON
PART 1

1 INTERVIEWER: Can you start by telling your name and what you do
2 at the City of Henderson.

3 MAYOR JIM GIBSON: I'm Jim Gibson and I don't do anything here. I
4 just come here and work every day. I'm the Mayor.

5 INTERVIEWER: What is it rumored that the Mayor does?

6 MAYOR GIBSON: The Mayor signs his signature to official
7 documents. He presides over meetings and cuts ribbons and has ceremonial
8 duties. And then he serves as just simply one additional voting member of
9 the City Council.

10 INTERVIEWER: And I guess you and your family both have a very,
11 very long history in the City of Henderson. When did you first come to the city
12 of Henderson?

13 MAYOR GIBSON: We moved to Henderson in 1953. And my father's
14 family, my grandfather and other siblings - - my dad, actually, lived here
15 before that - - but my dad moved our family here after he got out of the
16 military in 1953.

17 INTERVIEWER: How old were you at that time?

18 MAYOR GIBSON: Five.

19 INTERVIEWER: Do you have any recollection of Henderson in 1953?

20 MAYOR GIBSON: You know, I remember things related to school. I
21 remember where I went to school and my teachers and some of my friends,
22 but probably a year or two after that is when I start remembering landmarks
23 and places in the city.

1 INTERVIEWER: What are some of those landmarks?

2 MAYOR GIBSON: Well, I remember the grocery store. The one I
3 remember - - the name I recall - - is Prime Meats, which was a store here. I
4 think we had a Vegas Village for some period of time. And then there were a
5 few other shops that I remember a little later like the dress shop and
6 Van Valey's, which was a clothing store and a shoe store. There was a
7 furniture store. I remember those facilities. And the Victory Theater, which
8 was my favorite place.

9 INTERVIEWER: Why was the Victory Theater your favorite place?

10 MAYOR GIBSON: Flash Gordon was really big back when I first
11 started going to the movies. And I don't know whether it was reruns of
12 Flash Gordon movies; I don't know when they came out. I just remember - -
13 my earliest memories of the Victory Theater were seeing Flash Gordon on the
14 big screen.

15 INTERVIEWER: So can you tell us about the Victory Theater.

16 MAYOR GIBSON: Well, some of my earliest memories of the
17 downtown really kind of focus on the recreation we had. And one of the most
18 exciting places to go was the Victory Theater.

19 The theater seemed so large. And when I look at the vacant lot - -
20 really small vacant lot that that theater was built on - - I wonder if I was really
21 going to the movie at the same place that I know the Victory Theater was
22 located.

1 I remember vividly the snack bar in the front where I could buy candy
2 for a nickel. And I remember that we had to stand in line. I mean, it was
3 really where we went, particularly on the weekends.

4 In my younger years it was the matinee, and I was excited always to
5 be able to see the Flash Gordon movies. And our friends so looked forward
6 to doing it because their mothers let us off to go to the movie. We didn't have
7 to be chaperoned to go to the movie in those days. It was fun to come to that
8 part of the city because we - - I didn't live right in the center of the city.

9 The other place that was always fun was the swimming pool - - the
10 BMI pool next to the Youth Center. And we played at the Youth Center and
11 we swam in the pool. And in those days, we swam in the pool in the
12 summertime almost every day. We came swimming almost every day. And it
13 seemed like our mothers would come up with us when we were younger and
14 our mothers would socialize, or swim, or teach a sibling to swim. It was just
15 kind of a family thing to do back in the early days.

16 INTERVIEWER: A lot of families with kids the same age, would you
17 see them there every week?

18 MAYOR GIBSON: The place would be teeming with children. It really
19 was the place to go. We needed recreational opportunities. We were a
20 relatively small city, and there had not been developed a system of parks and
21 recreation opportunities.

22 I played baseball on a desert, dirt, rocky baseball field. The backstop
23 was made out of concrete that was formed up and poured in place and pipes

1 came out of it and kind of a cyclone-like material was added to it. Today we
2 have a fire substation at the intersection of Lake Mead and Burkholder.
3 Before the fire station was there, an old baseball field was there. And we
4 didn't know what we were missing. We loved it. We had to throw rocks off
5 the infield every time we came to practice. Sometimes the coach would bring
6 a rake and we would rake the infield. The real treat was to be able to play at
7 Timet Field because there was some grass on the Timet Field.

8 INTERVIEWER: Did you go to Friday night dances at the Youth
9 Center?

10 MAYOR GIBSON: I did. When I was in high school, I think every
11 teenager in the city went to the dances there. I - - you know - - once again,
12 scale is kind of distorted with time, but it seemed like such a big place to have
13 a dance. It seemed like you could go into the Youth Center and get lost in
14 there. And I remember that the dances were attended by so many people,
15 we were really shoulder to shoulder as we danced. So it wasn't so
16 threatening. You didn't have to be all that great. You just had to get out there
17 and move around and nobody would know whether you knew how to dance
18 or not. And everybody danced.

19 There were pockets of kids who - - like at any dance - - would sit
20 around the edges, but it seemed to me that most everybody got out there and
21 danced, and the quarters were so tight that you didn't know whether we knew
22 how to dance or not.

1 INTERVIEWER: We were just talking about the Youth Center dances
2 at the Youth Center. My own upbringing was many years later, and it's hard to
3 imagine that kind of a community feel. I think when people think about getting
4 together, it's going off to the movies or going out on the [Las Vegas] Strip or
5 going somewhere. Was there a different sense of community in Henderson
6 then, or do you think that was something that was typical everywhere in the
7 United States?

8 MAYOR GIBSON: I think the times were more, you know, about the
9 nuclear family in those days everywhere. The Strip was not what it is today in
10 the early '50s. It was an attraction, for sure, but it was a different kind of an
11 attraction. It was much more remote from us. Harder to get to. A lot further
12 away. We used to drive the Boulder Highway to get to both sets of my
13 grandparents' homes. And it seemed like it took forever to get there, just up
14 the Boulder Highway, past Four Mile, turn left on Charleston, up to 9th Street,
15 and turn right to go to the Brinley home and turn left to go to the Gibson
16 home. They both lived on South 9th. Out in Henderson, I think that we were
17 far enough away, and given the transportation, and the kind of vehicles, and
18 the pace of life, I think we tended to go to the Lake when we could and do
19 things, pretty much, here in the city.

20 And the desert, of course, was our playground. I mean, lizard hunting
21 and hunting for - - desert tortoises were all over the place. It was something
22 that we did as kids. And we rode our bikes and we played war, and we did all
23 of the things that kids do out in the desert.

1 INTERVIEWER: Would you say you enjoyed growing up in
2 Henderson?

3 MAYOR GIBSON: Very much. You know, over the years we had a
4 complex in Henderson. We weren't, after all, the glitzy city of Las Vegas. We
5 were a bedroom community, if that. And because of the primary industry
6 here, which was heavy industry, there were some who made fun of
7 Henderson. You know, they called it Hooterville and they talked about the
8 cloud, the color of the atmosphere out here. But that never really affected us.
9 We were a little defensive about it, but the fact of the matter is, it didn't matter
10 what they said. We didn't know any different.

11 We were happy and - - you know, for the most part, people were pretty
12 much in the same boat. There were a couple of families that seemed to have
13 a whole lot more in the economic sense than most others, but the doctors
14 lived in neighborhoods that were very much like the neighborhoods the rest of
15 us lived in. And my father was an engineer and a professional, but we lived in
16 Tract 2 and then in Valley View, and those were two of the subdivisions that
17 everyone else lived in. I think that we - - it was kind of lost on us that we
18 didn't have the very best place in the world because I think we thought it was
19 great, a great place to live. There was always plenty to do.

20 And in those days the community had attracted an employment base
21 of people who had kids. So everybody that moved in had kids. You seldom
22 found childless couples in these neighborhoods. And that made it good, too,
23 because we had lots of friends. I think everyone that I know, that when they

- 1 reflect back on their childhood in Henderson, just can't count all of the young
- 2 people that were in their age group all through school. Even though I know
- 3 now those numbers aren't anything like what they are today.