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**Valerie LaPorta-  
Haynes**

# Oral History of Valerie La Porta-Haynes

conducted by students of  
C. T. Sewell Elementary School  
with Fredric Watson

for the  
Henderson Historical Society

in cooperation with  
Dr. Carrie Buck, Principal  
and

Edward Savarese, Teacher

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**Interviewer:** *I want a story about your early life. Let's start about when and where you were born.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Well, I was actually born in Henderson, Nevada, at Rose de Lima Hospital, which is over here on Lake Mead and I went to school here as well. I went to St. Peter's Catholic School, which is on Boulder Highway. It's been there for years. There is no school there anymore, though. They've closed that up quite a few years ago. I went into town, into Las Vegas, to Bishop Gorman High School. I went to community college and I also went to University of Las Vegas in the School of Social Work.

**Interviewer:** *Tell me about your family. Who are your siblings?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Oh, my siblings! I have two brothers, one is Peter. And Peter, my brother, my eldest brother, was actually the first baby born at Rose de Lima Hospital.

**Interviewer:** *That's pretty cool.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Yes, that is very cool, isn't it?

**Interviewer:** *Yes.*

**Fredric Watson:** *What year was that?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** And that was in 1947. I hope I have that right. If I don't [laughter] – don't spread that around, but it's pretty close. And then I have a younger brother, whose name is Luke, and they both live here.

**Interviewer:** *What did you do for a living or what did your parents do for a living?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Well, what I did for a living is I actually worked at Department of Aviation at McCarran Airport. I worked there over thirty years in the Department of Finance in the Contracts Purchasing Division. And I retired from there. From there I went to my mother's art gallery that's located on Water Street in Henderson. And my mother is an artist and she did a whimsical type art which is folk art and naïve art. And what that is, is she really got into the biblical art of it, and she travelled through Europe. She went to and attended the School of Arts in Italy and she also studied under many other

artists and professors. And from there she really got into the biblical art and on her canvasses what she did is she depicted the biblical theme and she – if you come over to the gallery or get on-line, you can actually see the clothing, the weapons and the vegetation of that biblical theme. And my father, I can't forget my father, my father, Lou, is an insurance agent, and he actually had his business on Water Street for quite a few years, years ago.

**Interviewer:** *I want to hear about your experiences in living in Henderson. First tell me how your family came to live in Henderson.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Oh, I'd love to say that but I don't want to be here two hours so I'm going to kind of condense it down just to a little bit and maybe at some other time we can revisit it. But my parents came from New York. And my dad always wanted to be in the Army, so what he did is he enlisted. So that's how they ended up here, he and my mother. My dad was brought into Las Vegas and they lived off-base and they lived in a Henderson Townsite home. The street was Magnesium, which is right off of Water Street. From there they moved to on Water Street. It's actually 121 Water Street and we lived there for a while. And my father did his business out of our home. As it grew, we had to move [laughter]. So what we did is we went down which is known today as "The Triangle." We lived on the very first street, which is Church Street. And that street was named after Ben Church. But I'll tell you something, I'm not going to give you all the little clues, because that's going to be for you kids to come to our web site and hunt your history. And then you can come in and tell us about our history as well as finding out all different kinds of legends and topics and news articles and people that will be sharing what they know from the pioneer families.

**Interviewer:** *What year was that?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** That was back in probably the early fifties, mid-fifties.

**Interviewer:** *What did Henderson look like when you first came here?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Oh, I remember – I’m probably going to be telling my age – I remember dirt roads, a lot of desert [laughter]. We used to build forts and tree houses and if we had pets – I’m not saying dogs and cats – I’m saying maybe lizards. Let’s see, what were the other – oh, there was tarantulas [laughter], chipmunks and I can’t remember the others, but we would actually have these little things as pets that we found. And then we would have very significant burials for them, because if our tarantula died – because we had it in a jar – we actually did a burial for it out in the desert by our fort, which we actually called our home. [laughter]

**Interviewer:** *Where did you live?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** When I was growing up, I actually did most of my years on Church Street.

**Interviewer:** *Describe your home and neighborhood.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Oh, our neighborhood. Do you know Church Street to me was the most wonderful years of our lives as we grew up. We are still friends with our friends that we had, that we made, on Church Street. And from that, we all went to each other’s homes for dinner, to play with, build forts. I don’t know if you kids still do this, but we always did our little jacks. Do you play jacks?

**Interviewer:** *Sometimes.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Sometimes, still? And then hopscotch, and we would play basketball out in the streets, we would play baseball. We actually amused ourselves, I mean, because there really wasn’t too much to do. But from that, if you know the property that’s across from Church Street, right off of Water Street. It was nothing but desert over there besides the plants and we would have carnivals over there. And I know you know about carnivals.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** They were great.

**Interviewer:** *Did you have occasions to go to Las Vegas?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Well, we did. But I'll tell you what, since we were own little community, we didn't really take and go to Vegas that often and if we did, we would maybe take the bus, or sometimes our parents would go on a Friday night or a Saturday, or maybe a Sunday drive. But we didn't specifically go down to Las Vegas.

**Interviewer:** *Which schools did you attend and when?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** I attended, oh, I think we just talked about that but I'll repeat it. [laughter] I went to Saint Peter's Catholic School and I also went to Bishop Gorman in Las Vegas and I also went to community college and then I went to University of Las Vegas in the School of Social Work.

**Interviewer:** *Describe your memories of going to school in Henderson.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** School in Henderson, if you can actually believe this, and I'm not sure about the distance but I know it wasn't that far, but from Church Street which if you know where St. Rose is, I lived right on that first street. From there I would walk over to Saint Peter's Catholic Church where the school was. And we walked effortlessly to school and back home. And we would cross Boulder Highway. I don't know anybody that would be crossing Boulder Highway because there were no lights at that time. But we did have school guards that would help us across the highway.

**Interviewer:** *What did children do for fun?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** For fun? Well I'll tell you my experiences what our friends did, and I'm sure everybody else did the same experiences because everybody was there when I got there. [laughter] But what we would do on a Saturday afternoon is we would walk again from our homes, and we would walk up Water Street, and there might be a time before we go to the movie, we thought, "Oh, let's stop at the Cake Box," which was the bakery here in town and let's get a cookie before we go to the movie. And so we would stop in there. Then we would charge over to Victory Theater and – this is the fun part. You're probably a little bored.

**Interviewer:** *No.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** But I don't know of anybody that would go to a theater and actually have games before the movie came on. One of the games that we did, and we were picked out from line or when you were just coming into the theater, standing there ready to get your seat, the owner would come by and pick out a few of us, and you would go up on stage. And what do you think we did on stage?

**Interviewer:** *Performed?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** I didn't perform. [laughter] But they would take – for one of the little games, they would take bubblegum and from the string, they would wrap it, wrap it around the bubblegum and there'd be ten of us lined up on stage. And then what the trick was is you'd put the string in your mouth and you would try to bring it, without your hands, and you would bring it all the way up, that string, into your mouth until you could get ahold of that bubble gum. And the first one that could make it won. I did not win. [laughter] And what did you get for a gift? Maybe a free movie, a ticket to come back, or you would get Jujubes. Do you know what Jujubes are?

**Interviewer:** *No.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Milk Duds – I know you know about Milk Duds. Okay. Well Jujubes are like little pieces of hard fruit, who I know dentists loved it, and they must have had a commission in there, because when you chew, your teeth got stuck together. But it was great, and they lasted through the whole movie. So you know what Milk Duds are don't you?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Okay. And do you know what Little Nickles are?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** You do? Good for you. Good. So those are some of the fun things that we did.

**Interviewer:** *Was living here dangerous in any way?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** You know, when I grew up, I can't think of one thing that was dangerous. Not one thing comes to my mind at all. We lived in a very safe environment I have to say.

**Interviewer:** *If you got sick, where and how did you get health care?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Well, if you remember what I said, I lived on Church Street, and then I mentioned about St. Rose, which is right there. I used to go right through my back gate to the hospital.

**Interviewer:** *Really?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Sure did. And guess who would greet us there when we'd first walk into the hospital. A nun! And their habits were this big. [laughter] They were like saucers. And boy, when you saw them, I don't know why I was scared, but I was. But they sure took care of you. They took care of everybody when you walked in that door.

**Interviewer:** *What changes in Henderson have you observed?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Oh, my gosh, there is so many that I have observed. Well, let me first start – when we grew up, it was nothing but dirt streets and we were lucky to have a light, okay? We had stop signs. I can tell you, today I am amazed of how this town and how it came to be from what it was to today. We have expanded so far. We did the Anthem, Green Valley, Lake Las Vegas, it's just enormous. We have grown from maybe 3,500 people back in the '40s to how many people today? I couldn't even tell you how many people. We are one of the biggest, littlest cities in the U.S. I think we are one of the top ten.

**Interviewer:** *What did you enjoy most about having lived in Henderson?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** I think the most thing that I enjoyed was the way we did. It was so simple. It was wonderful; it was clean. We knew each other and we made our own fun and you couldn't do anything that the other person didn't know. [laughter] And the one thing that if I needed something and I was walking home and I walked into a business or an eatery, I would say, "I need to call my parents," do you know they probably knew the number and would call it for me.



**Interviewer:** *Really?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Without hesitation. Everybody knew everybody.

**Interviewer:** *Is there anything else you would like to share with us?*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Well, I'd like to at least say why that Henderson Historical Society came about and how it happened. And my father, Lou, was interviewed by Nevada State College and a student came. He came to the house and he interviewed my father like a biography. He ran out of tape and he ran out of paper, so they made an appointment for him to come back. So they did it again. They continued it because there was so much history and so much to say. So when he left, my mother said, "You should do your biography." So he thought about it and then Alice Martz, who was the president of Chamber of Commerce, said, "Lou, I'm sending somebody over to do your biography." He said, "Oh, Alice, oh, Alice, let me think about it." So he thought about it and thought about it. In the middle of the night, he woke up and he told my mother and I the next morning, "We are going to do the Henderson Historical Society. There is no one other than the pioneer families that can tell the story themselves. And the schools and the people that move here can learn the history." And that's how it really happened. Wouldn't it be wonderful when you go back to the fifties and the forties and the sixties, and you bring up an article in the newspaper and you read it. What promoted that article? Why did that reporter write it? And I got to thinking it's the families that can talk about it. It's our generation if the other family has passed. We can tell that story why the reporter wrote that. And even afterwards we are the ones can tell you what happened after that was reported. So that's how it all started.

**Interviewer:** *Do you have any questions, [name of second interviewer]?*

**Second Interviewer:** *No, she answered all my questions.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Well, thank you.

**Interviewer:** *Thank you for coming.*

**Valerie La Porta-Haynes:** Thank you for the interview.