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**Henderson Historical
Society**

Jennilee Thayer

Oral History of Jennilee Thayer

conducted by

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for the

Henderson Historical Society

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Jennilee Thayer: Well talking about the start of Henderson, it was built with – the main houses were on one side – the Black Mountain side of the highway – and on the other side were Victory Village and Carver Park. Victory Village housed other regular white families; Carver Park was for black families. And then after a while, when they needed space for Nellis Air Force Base people, they also lived over there, especially in the Victory Village. And there was a road that went under Boulder Highway that you'd go on to get across the highway to the other side that went into where the Catholic Church is now.

Interviewer: *Now, was that for foot traffic or could cars go through that?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, just foot traffic. I never heard of anybody getting assaulted or anything in that area. They kept it patrolled, and it was fun to go under the highway when there were cars going on the top of it. But, we moved there in 1945 because our landlady sold our house in Vegas that we'd lived in for ten years. My dad was one of the executives with the BMI, Basic Magnesium Incorporated. It was building the new plant, so we were able to move there. And that was different for me because I was used to – the Vegas schools were really large compared with Henderson. We had just wandered through the whole high school. An elementary school, a lot of it, met over in Victory Village and Carver Park in the administration buildings there. So that was fun for me. I made friends that I still have in this year of 2012 or whatever it is. There was one lady that I met the first day of school – I was in the seventh grade – that was Ruth Ball. Her daughter is Tina Smith.

Interviewer: *Oh yeah.*

Jennilee Thayer: And Tina didn't grow up in Henderson at all, her parents moved there after she was married. But Ruth Ball was the main secretary for the school, for the superintendent

and the principals. And she was wonderful. She looked out for every new kid and made sure they made friends. Then later, the house where we lived, in Henderson, where my husband and I lived, was close to hers, so I was good friends with her for many, many years. I had a pretty good turn in Henderson because I'd gone to school in Las Vegas and the schools were very good then and I had a good background in school. The classes in Henderson were with kids from all over the United States. People had been lucky enough to come out there to get jobs. So we had some very, very good teachers. I guess they were probably out there for the same reason that the husband was working in the mines or on the Dam, or whatever. And then the women were excellent school teachers and very strict. Now what should I do next?

Interviewer: *That's really good information. I was just thinking there's probably not a great many years in between when you were in school at Basic and when I went to school. I'm remembering Lyle Burkholder.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: *Do you remember Mr. Burkholder and his wife?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, I knew his wife very, very well. And I knew him. She was wonderful. She was one of the main teachers. She taught chorus and she would move the piano around the school from room to room when you had music class. Then at some times she would have the whole school population in the gymnasium: the bleachers filled and the floor filled with school kids, all ages. And then her piano would be there. And she took charge of the whole thing; there was no problem with discipline whatsoever. Everybody loved Mrs. Burkholder. If she looked at you, you'd do what she wanted. You didn't play around at all; she had perfect control.

Interviewer: *I remember that. So you remember a family by the name of Church? Their last name was Church.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: *See, I was friends with their little boy. We went to the Catholic Church together, St. Peter's Church, and his name was Foster, their little boy.*

Jennilee Thayer: I remember my little brother John was about that same age, too, John Gibson. Yeah, there were some wonderful people, but Ruth Ball, she made life better for everybody that she met. She cared about every kid, I think. She was wonderful.

Interviewer: *There was a school nurse there by the name of Thelma Sturm. Do you remember that name?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh yes, I remember her too.

Interviewer: *We're trying to find out something about her. Can you remember any details?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, I can't. I'll have to think about it, and maybe I'll remember.

Interviewer: *Or maybe you'll come across the name of somebody that knew her and then you can call me.*

Jennilee Thayer: Right, that would be good.

Interviewer: *Because we're doing a history of health services. Katie Lee Butler was one of the Henderson nurses. And then there was a lady by the name of Gilbert that was a nurse down in Carver Park, and Thelma Sturm would be the other one.*

Jennilee Thayer: Thelma Sturm was very good, yes.

Interviewer: *What did you kids do for entertainment in Henderson?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh Gosh, well, we played – I lived down on a circle street – no, that was later – when I was a kid – my kids lived on a circle street – I can't think what we did when we were kids.

Interviewer: *Did you go to the movies at the old Victory Theatre?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, we did. That's one thing we did, we went to the movies, because that was the main thing to do. They always had somebody playing the organ up front when you'd go in, and I think it sure didn't cost very much, maybe twenty-five cents. Well that was both Las Vegas; Henderson didn't have a theater for quite a few years.

Interviewer: *Did you come out to Henderson when you still lived in Las Vegas when they were actually building the town? See a lot of people didn't get here until after they had the houses all up.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, well the original Henderson had – it turned out to be 999 houses. They built a thousand, but one burned down before it got occupied. So they had 999, isn't that right?

Interviewer: *Well, I don't remember that, but I remember somebody telling me that there was a house burned.*

Jennilee Thayer: Unless I got too many zeros on that; I don't know.

Interviewer: *That sounds good.*

Jennilee Thayer: Anyway, one house burned.

Interviewer: *And that house was down by the Boulder Highway.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes it was. So that year we lived in Henderson, when I was in the seventh grade, we lived on Kansas Street, and I walked to school, of course. But it was fun for me to be in a smaller school. We still had real strict teachers. Mrs. Brown was my main teacher. So we

were expected to do good work and then I got to be one of the best ones because I was one of the more stable kids that had had good schooling. And that was fun.

Interviewer: *Did your dad help you with your homework?*

Jennilee Thayer: My mother did more than my dad because he was always busy with his job.

Interviewer: *I was thinking he was probably pretty good in math and science.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yeah. He'd help me when I got into tougher stuff. About every two weeks then, I'd have him help me with a physics problem or math, because he was very good. And he could always explain it. So that's what I majored in college.

Interviewer: *Really, in Math and Science?*

Jennilee Thayer: In Math.

Interviewer: *Oh, really? All right. Where'd you go to college, then?*

Jennilee Thayer: The University of Nevada at Reno. It was the only school of higher education in Nevada, at that time.

Interviewer: *Well, what year did you start up in Reno?*

Jennilee Thayer: I started in '49.

[break in recording]

Interviewer: *1949. Well, how'd you get up there?*

Jennilee Thayer: I rode in the car. My older sister had already gone there two years and she was going back. And then my brother had gotten out of the service and he was married and they had a new baby, and so that was the group of us that went. And we went in the car that my parents had let Ted take, my brother. And it was loaded, so Mother sent my clothes and everything in a trunk, and it had to go by way of Salt Lake City. Go on a train to Salt Lake and

then come back to Reno. And so I didn't get it for two weeks. So there I was, a freshman in college and I only had one suitcase. Just not very many clothes in it at all. [laughter] So it was going to be a funny two weeks. But that's where I went. I went there for four years and graduated and then came down to Las Vegas and taught at Vegas High School.

Interviewer: *Oh, you taught at Vegas High?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah.

Interviewer: *Oh, boy.*

Jennilee Thayer: I taught Math and –

Interviewer: *You know some of the teachers. There's an elementary school in Henderson, Ulis Newton –*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, she was my Math teacher, one of the best teachers in the world.

Interviewer: *That's what I heard, that she was a good teacher.*

Jennilee Thayer: If you turned a paper in to her, your homework or a test, and it was messy, she didn't even look at it. She threw it away and then you had to do it over again until it was done neatly and right. You know, that was really good. We really learned because she did. And it didn't matter to her who you were or anything.

Interviewer: *So you taught at Vegas High. How long did you teach there?*

Jennilee Thayer: She taught there until she died. She taught there about twenty years, I think, all together.

Interviewer: *Did you teach at Vegas? For how many years did you teach at Las Vegas?*

Jennilee Thayer: I was at Vegas just two years, I guess, because I got married and we moved to Henderson, so then that's where I taught. Yeah, Vegas High – that was fun.

Interviewer: *Did you teach in Henderson, or did you take time off to start raising a family?*

Jennilee Thayer: I didn't teach very long. And then I started a family. And I substituted after that, but I didn't teach regularly.

Interviewer: *So you, let's see, '49, about '53, by '53 you were teaching school.*

Jennilee Thayer: Right, yeah.

Interviewer: *There's a man I talked to, Jim Williams – do you know Jim?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, I know him. I was in college with him and his wife.

Interviewer: *Ah, Margaret? Oh, yeah, all right. Why he'd be excited to know. I exchanged some emails with him just the other day, but it didn't occur to me that you two would know each other.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yes, I knew him and his wife very well. Yeah.

Interviewer: *So, let's see, going back when you were at Reno, at the university, you probably had classes in the Mackay School of Mines building. Didn't they have some of the Math and Science?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah.

Interviewer: *What dorm? Did you live in one of the dorms?*

Jennilee Thayer: I lived in Artemisia Hall, which was – then, it was only women. And Manzanita Hall was the same way, just girls. And the men had their own halls.

Interviewer: *And which one of the dorms – there was a dorm that faced – there was a cemetery right across the street. I'm trying to think.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, that was Artemisia. There were, I guess, was it three stories or four stories including the basement. And the basement was where the washing machines were, but

it was an old fashioned washing machine, and hung the clothes up there. There weren't clothes dryers. So we had to take turns, and then of course you had to iron your stuff, too, but you did that in your room. So that was real different. None of us had enough money to send it out to be done; it'd be way too expensive. But we did it; you needed to and you did it. Nobody complained about it, because that was life.

Interviewer: *How did your mother and father stay in touch with you during that time?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, we – I wrote letters and then we talked. I think Mother would call maybe once every other week, because it cost quite a bit, telephoning did.

Interviewer: *Did you get to come home from Reno very often?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, we went home for holidays, but we never went home for just a weekend.

Interviewer: *Yes, so it would be the big holidays, and your brother had the car up there. That must have been fun, though, driving the old highway.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yes. Sometimes we'd have races, without exceeding the speed limit. We didn't exceed the speed limit because the patrolmen were really out watching for us when it was time for the kids to go home. And that was fun to see who could get to, say, Tonopah first. [laughter] And anyway, you know, that was fun. But that was quite a drive. The first time, we came over in the spring, and in the meantime, Unit [Area] 51, the – yeah, I guess, was it Atomic Energy?

Interviewer: *Oh, Area 51? Sure.*

Jennilee Thayer: Area 51 had been established and it hadn't been there before, and we were going towards Las Vegas in the middle of the night. We saw lights way off over in the desert and we thought, whoever was driving, that turned into California, where we could have done that

instead of coming straight on down into Nevada, until we saw the sign, and then realized where we were.

Interviewer: *Oh, boy, yeah.*

Jennilee Thayer: And there had never been lights over there before. And then that became a regular town because we had hundreds of workers there digging that mine and putting in everything. It was an underground situation that led into the mountain and down, you know.

Interviewer: *Well, did you meet your future husband when you were at UNR?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, I met him at Las Vegas during the summer at church, Methodist church, just like you're supposed to. [laughter] Only, he had come with another girl. He was at Nellis, only it didn't have the name Nellis, but the Armory School.

Interviewer: *Oh, really? Was that during the war, or just after the war?*

Jennilee Thayer: It was after the war, yeah. It was an armory school, where Nellis – not even where it is now, but where the airport was out there – and they didn't fly airplanes; they learned how to shoot guns and rifles. That's what it was before it turned into airport and planes.

Interviewer: *What church did you go to in Las Vegas?*

Jennilee Thayer: I went to the First Methodist Church on, what is it, Third and Bridger.

Interviewer: *Oh yeah, that's a famous old church, that was. I remember that.*

Jennilee Thayer: Across the street from the Courthouse. That's where we met; we met at church. But we weren't married there because it had already been reserved for some other wedding, and so we ended up being married at my parents' home in Las Vegas and had a reception out at the Desert Inn Hotel.

Interviewer: *Yeah right, sure. What year would that have been?*

Jennilee Thayer: That was '54.

Interviewer: *1954, sure. Yeah, the Desert Inn, that was a beautiful hotel.*

Jennilee Thayer: The maître d' lived next door to us, to my parents, on South Ninth Street, and so that's where we had the reception there and it was great. We had – I have a picture of it – we had one of the tallest wedding cakes you could ever see because he knew what would happen. Where the reception was, there was a door right inside the entry door, then you go into that and then you end up where the reception was, right there. They knew there'd be a lot of people there that weren't part of the wedding party, and there were a lot of people that just were there for the hotel, but they saw this party going on, so they went in and they'd never be by us. It was okay.

Interviewer: *Well, that's nice isn't it?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, because he had supplied this huge cake, and that's why, because he knew what was going to happen. So that was fun.

Interviewer: *That's interesting. So you got married and moved out to Henderson then?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, we had a little apartment in the alley between Tenth and Sixth Street, in the northern part of Las Vegas – well north in that you'd go two blocks off Fremont and that's where our little apartment was to start with. Housing was real tough because Vegas had a lot of new people, so we were lucky to get that.

Interviewer: *Yeah, Vegas was a neat town in those days. It was small.*

Jennilee Thayer: It was, and it was so busy. And then before that, during the war, the kids would watch the military convoys going through the town on the highway that would go to Los

Angeles. Those would be coming from the East. And they'd be long, long convoys of soldiers. We loved that. We'd stand there on the curbs and wave at them and of course they'd all wave back. It was wonderful.

Interviewer: *Yeah, those were different times.*

Jennilee Thayer: Real different, yeah, thank goodness.

Interviewer: *Well did your husband have to go oversees or get transferred to another base?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, he was in the Caribbean; he was stationed there. He had been over in the other part of the world a little bit, but he was young enough that he wasn't in on much of the fighting, actually. And then he got arthritis and he was in the hospital for almost three years with that. That's when I met him, when he'd gotten out of the hospital.

Interviewer: *How many children did you have?*

Jennilee Thayer: We had five children. Our youngest son John is the one I see here. He came here to see me at Prestige, and that's where he met the woman that became his wife. She was the hostess and the main person that coordinated the incoming guests in the organization.

Interviewer: *Do your kids all live in Henderson still?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, I have two daughters here and then I have two sons in Utah that – they both are connected with the Magnesium Plant that's there, Pacific Engineering and Production Company. They're both engineers. And they like living in Utah.

Interviewer: *How'd your brothers and sisters – your family has been involved in government in Henderson, and have had really interesting careers.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, they have had. In fact my two older brothers, Fred Gibson and John Gibson, are still effectively connected with the plant that makes compounds and equipment

that go into the military supply and so they run the – it's hard to explain – anyway, they're the bosses that run the place, keep it going.

Interviewer: *How long was your – I'm jumping around here – but I thought that was an interesting story about your father being asked by the government in the late 1930s or early 1940s to go to England to learn the process for [magnesium production].*

Jennilee Thayer: Right, it was the early 1940s.

Interviewer: *How long was he gone?*

Jennilee Thayer: He was gone seven months. And he left, as I said, December 6th, and they locked them on the train December 7th and kept them on that train, this little group of engineers, and then they went on a military destroyer to England to get there safely. And then was when England was getting bombed; London, that whole area, got bombed a lot while they were there.

Interviewer: *Oh, my, I'll bet you were all worried.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, but the man that he had to go see was this German scientist, Jewish, that had gotten out of Germany or France before Hitler could kill him, and he had all this information and papers and everything. That's why they were there. But they got home safely, which was a big relief.

Interviewer: *I bet. So then your dad probably helped to supervise the building of the plant?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, he sure did, yes.

Interviewer: *Did he bring you out to Henderson, you and the other kids, to see?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh yeah, we got to see a lot. He'd call mother and she'd bring us, whoever would want to go. He'd come out and meet us at the gate so we could go in and play. And there's a huge underground network under the old BMI plant.

Interviewer: *I'd heard that.*

Jennilee Thayer: What impressed me was – one area we saw, it had a whole lot of bicycles.

Interviewer: *Really?*

Jennilee Thayer: But they were preparing for Navy, if Henderson had been bombed, because of the plant, which was really important. They were always prepared for something like that. And then the people would have been moved into this underground complex that was under the plant. And it had facilities and had a water supply and everything, and I suppose it's still there.

Interviewer: *Wouldn't that be fun, to get to go down there and see all of that!*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, it really would be.

Interviewer: *I had a fellow tell me he believed, this is a young guy, quite a bit younger than me, but he works at the plant, and he said he believes that there was a tunnel that went up to the Townsite where the City of Henderson – it wasn't the City of Henderson in those days – but where the city managers or the Townsite managers were. And I always wondered if that was a true story or just a myth.*

Jennilee Thayer: And they did what?

Interviewer: *Well, that there was a tunnel that led from the Townsite, where the city government area was, down underground, down to the plant.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yes, there was. Yeah, that's a true story.

Interviewer: *That would be interesting to see, to see all of that. Well, did you go to the lake from Las Vegas and from Henderson?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh sure, and that was very different. Unless you liked dirt roads and that, you always – you went to Boulder City and then down to the lake, that way. Because the other road didn't exist yet, that was still what we call the Vegas Wash. That was the overflow from any of the little creeks that used to come into Vegas, which they don't now because they've used the ground water so totally and then that little river would run on down into the lake.

Interviewer: *So the Lake Mead road that runs right by Prestige here, that just wasn't there.*

Jennilee Thayer: No, it was a desert.

Interviewer: *Do you remember the Three Kids Mine?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes.

Interviewer: *Did your dad ever have anything to do with that mine?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, but we went to it more than once, yeah, the Three Kids.

Interviewer: *Yeah, they're just dirt trails that led to that, I suppose.*

Jennilee Thayer: Right.

Interviewer: *Lou LaPorta has seen a picture of the Three Kids Mine from, like, the First World War, and wagons and like mule teams hauling oar down there down to the Railroad Depot. I'd love to get a copy of that picture.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, that'd be fun. Yeah, I don't know of any pictures like that, that we have, but there might be and I just don't know now. My brothers would know.

Interviewer: *Let's see, in the old downtown area, you know, the old Townsite area, when you think back on that, do you remember the drugstore and the –*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, to begin with, now it's hard to say what was where because they've changed it so much, but we had one little market, this was to start with, a little market on, what was that, Market Street? I think so, where the Post Office is now, or is it? No. Oh, gosh. There was one little house and then a little storefront. There was hardly anything in Henderson until about 1950 when the stores – people would go to Boulder City to shop. Boulder City had a lot better stores. Or into the roads between Las Vegas and Henderson, coming the other way, you'd have, can't remember now –

Interviewer: *The old Boulder Highway?*

Jennilee Thayer: On Boulder Highway, yeah.

Interviewer: *See, my dad worked at the Boulder Club. Do remember the Boulder Club had that a sign from – the Boulder Dam sign?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes.

Interviewer: *And I hate to admit it, but we did a lot of shopping in Las Vegas just simply because we had to go down there with him when he got paid.*

Jennilee Thayer: Right.

Interviewer: *They just paid him in cash, or silver dollars a lot of the time, so then we would just shop while we were there in Vegas.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, there really wasn't much choice anywhere else. Yep, that was something.

Interviewer: *Yeah, Henderson – well, Boulder Highway's changed, too. Do you remember – I think it was probably four lane. Was it four lane the first time you drove?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, just two lanes.

Interviewer: *I think they built – they had paved it during the time that they were building the dam. Am I correct about that?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, but it was still just two lanes. And then you'd have to out through Boulder City. And then they made that little road around the base of the water thing up there.

Interviewer: *Sure, there was a water tank there. So that's how you got to the lake to go swimming?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, we'd take my dad down there to get to his boat or his barge, whichever. And then we'd watch the boat or the barge, pull it out to the Lake until you couldn't see him anymore. Then we'd leave and go, climb up that hill back to that point there where the water tank was and we could see his boat, way, way far away.

Interviewer: *Was that boat associated with his mine?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes.

Interviewer: *So he was going to work?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, he had two. He had the barge that was flat that just carried heavy equipment and ore. The boat had a covered area on it and an open area.

Interviewer: *Was the mine on the Nevada side or the Arizona side?*

Jennilee Thayer: I think, I'm not sure now, technically, I think it was – no, it was Arizona. It was Arizona.

Interviewer: *Did they take much gold out of the mine?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, they did. Gold, silver, lead, and zinc are the four minerals that occur together. That's common. The lead, silver, gold, and zinc – and then they had a refinery right

there at the mine so that the ore was ground up and refined and separated into the different minerals, roughly, no detailed separation, but, yeah, that was very important.

Interviewer: *Do you think your dad knew – do you remember the name Merle Emery?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh yes, we knew Merle Emery very well.

Interviewer: *What recollections do you have of him?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, well, he was real important on the lake. He could help with the boats going. He'd come to our house pretty often. I'm not exactly sure – now I can't think – but yes, we knew him very well.

Interviewer: *Yeah, he would want to be friends with your dad because your dad had a barge and all that stuff.*

Jennilee Thayer: Right, yeah, I suppose he probably was in charge of the other two. But yes we knew him very, very well.

Interviewer: *So he used to come and visit at your house?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes.

Interviewer: *Yeah, that's interesting. As I remember, there were no swimming pools in Henderson until maybe around '55 or '56, so if you wanted to go get in the water, you had to wait for it to rain, or [laughter] –*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, even Las Vegas, across from Las Vegas High School, there was a girl that lived there, Margo Goumond – she lived with her mother there – and she had a swimming pool – it was one of the very few, and I think the only one for quite a while in Las Vegas.

Interviewer: *Right at her house.*

Jennilee Thayer: At her house, right across the street from the high school. But nobody ever went there without being invited. And then they also owned a ranch, Harmon Valley – it kind of ran up towards Sunrise Mountain, you know, towards those other mountains – anyway, a big ranch – and he had a big pool there. But Margo was raised – I guess it was her mother – she was a poor little rich girl. And who was it she married? It was some famous person.

Interviewer: *I'll have to look that up. I've seen pictures of her. Somehow or another I think that her dad had something to do with the Boulder Club, because I remember my Dad talking about him.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, he did. And he lived down on that ranch. It was on the road of – you'd go out towards Reno and then turn towards the mountain, and that's where that ranch was. I don't know – can't think of the names involved. But Goumond was his name, was her father's name.

Interviewer: *Let's see –*

Jennilee Thayer: But I can't remember the name of the famous guy she married. I don't know. Then at one point, when I was teaching at Vegas High, it was Bugsy Siegel. He had moved to Vegas and he took a whole planeload of kids back to Texas for a birthday party for his son.

Interviewer: *Oh, really. Oh, see, I didn't even know that he had kids.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, and we were so jealous, the girls, because it was just the boys that got to go – a whole planeload of boys.

Interviewer: *What year would that have been?*

Jennilee Thayer: Gosh that would have been, unless I'm really confused, that would have been about 1952. No, '54.

Interviewer: *Bugsy Siegel, I think he had something to do with – early on had something to do with the El Cortez, and then, of course, the Flamingo.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, our house was just on – the house on Sixth Street was two blocks down Sixth from where the El Cortez is now. But it didn't exist to start with.

Interviewer: *Can you think of any other names of people from Henderson, that – you know, names from the past? Who were the folks who were managing Henderson when you guys first moved out here?*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh gosh, I should know. I can't remember. I'll have to think about it and write it down.

Interviewer: *That would be good. You know, the first names that I can remember were, like, Bill Byrne, maybe Dr. French. I think Dr. French treated my dad, but he was a mayor. Of course I remember Lou, because I went to church with Lou LaPorta.*

Jennilee Thayer: Well Bill Byrne was always a little crooked; that's the impression I had.

Interviewer: *I knew Father Moran from St. Peter's Church. He had an interest in politics.*

Jennilee Thayer: He did. Wasn't his first name Peter?

Interviewer: *Yeah, Peter V. Moran, an Irishman, from Ireland. He worked hard to get – oh, you know, I guess when the government began to withdraw from the City, or from the project here in Henderson, the BMI Project, he worked to get, oh, to get the Hospital turned over to the City. He had a hand in that, I understand, and got the Dominican nuns to come. Did you have, when your kids were born, were they born in Las Vegas or were they born here at Rose de Lima?*

Jennilee Thayer: The three older – my daughters, Sherri and Jennilee, and my son Andy – they were all born at Vegas Hospital. And then Lucille and John, let's see, they were both born at the old hospital here in Henderson.

Interviewer: *The hospital in Vegas, was that the hospital that would have been just north of Fremont Street?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, it was on Eighth Street. And our house, not then, but the original house I lived in was on Sixth Street, 301 North Sixth. Yeah, that was on Eighth Street.

Interviewer: *So then your kids went to school. Did they go to the Townsite School?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, they all went to the Townsite.

Interviewer: *But by that time, let's see, when they got to high school, they would have gone to the Basic High School which is now Burkholder Middle School.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, it was just Basic, of course, and we were lucky because that's when the School District – the county's – whatever they called the big school district – decided put all those sixth grade classes together in a sixth grade center, only they excluded Basic High School, and maybe Boulder City. I don't remember which other. Because we didn't have the trouble then with gangs, or whatever, that they were beginning to have in the other schools. So they put all of the sixth graders around there in that center, but our kids didn't have to go it, which we were glad about.

Interviewer: *You know, we were talking about the Burkholders, Lyle Burkholder and Mariam – now, did they have kids?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, they had a daughter, and then, see, Mrs. Burkholder was adopted – she was left as a foundling on the steps of – I guess it was a nunnery, and they had no clue as to her

birth parents, whatsoever. And then the family that adopted her were wonderful. And later people would say, "Well, didn't you want to find out who your real parents were?" And she'd say, "These were my real parents." She had absolutely no desire to dig into that at all.

Interviewer: *Just lucky, lucky to go to such a good family. Well, I wonder what became of their daughter.*

Jennilee Thayer: Connie? I can't remember right now, but I have known.

Interviewer: *It would be fun to talk to her, too.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, it would be. Yes, very much. And I don't know why I can't remember what I know.

Interviewer: *Well, you know a lot. You have a lot of good memories. How are you feeling? You know, I don't want to wear you out here.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, I'm okay.

Interviewer: *You're doing good? All right. Well, that's good.*

Jennilee Thayer: I was just thinking about this Carver Park picture which is really interesting because Victory Village was much the same to start with, and the housing was so tight in Southern Nevada that they brought him in to be Superintendent of Schools, of the Clark County Schools, in a huge paying job, and he lived in one of those original Henderson apartments, like this.

Interviewer: *Really? And was that Lyle Burkholder, or was that somebody before him?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, that was before Lyle. I can't tell you now the name.

Interviewer: *Mr. Church, Foster Church's dad, he worked for the schools.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, Ben Church, but he had –

Interviewer: *There's a man named Petrie that I think worked for the school, for the Henderson Schools. Do you remember when they called it the Railroad Pass School District?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes.

Interviewer: *See, and that was what I read, that it was – before it was the BMI or Henderson. My mother believed that Lyle Burkholder worked for the School District, the Henderson Schools, but he also worked in the grocery stores, part time, there in Carver Park. You know, the Gilbert brothers had a grocery store there.*

[end of recording]

[Editor's note: The following is a transcript of a short video segment that was corrupted and could not be processed for online access. The transcript follows directly from the previous recording.]

Jennilee Thayer: Did he sell shoes?

Interviewer: *Van Valey. See, I read that the Gilberts had a store in Carver Park, and they had one in Victory Village.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, they did, because I remember those. The quality of people that lived here, and especially Victory Village, they were important men that worked in important jobs all over the county. They were just thankful to have a place they could call home, with a bathroom and a kitchen and a bedroom. It didn't matter where it was or who they were living by. It was neat.

Interviewer: *Yeah, absolutely. Oh, sure, when you think of – a good many of them, when they first got here, they lived in the tent city, the men that were building the plant, building the Townsite houses.*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh, yes, they sure did. Yeah, my dad was lucky when we got the house we did for that one year. They used an executive at – but he had to be in good telephone contact. Now, in those days, it was long distance to call from Las Vegas to Henderson, or to Boulder City.

Interviewer: *Really?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, that was a long distance call.

Interviewer: *Did you know Herschel Trumbo, or Mr. Urga? The people that ran the original phone company?*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, and when we moved back into Vegas after being out here for many years, if I were to call my old Henderson friend, it was long distance, and I just – you did it and you talked only the three minutes and hung up. That was it.

Interviewer: *Because it was expensive.*

Jennilee Thayer: Because it was expensive, yeah.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I can imagine. Yeah, I remember the phones. Did you ever ride the bus back and forth between Henderson and Las Vegas?*

Jennilee Thayer: Just a couple of times. I remember one time my friend and I – I don't remember now who it was – we went all the way into Vegas on a train to the depot, the train depot, and then it turned around and it let out people there and got other people, then came back. And we did that just so – because we were curious however it went. [laughter] We just went for fun.

Interviewer: *Did your kids ever, or your brothers and sisters ever hitchhike on the Boulder Highway between Henderson and Vegas?*

Jennilee Thayer: I don't know that they did. I know my dad – because then we lived in Vegas, my family did – and my dad would go back and forth, and waited for my friends. These kids, these boys that were like a football team or a basketball team or whatever, they'd be walking home and they'd meet someone on the highway or Carver Park, or from that area, and if my dad saw them, he'd stop and pick them up – and take them almost nearly home. I met some later – I wouldn't have known it, but I met some later in life that told me, yeah, they knew who my dad was because he used to pick them up and give them a hitch. [laughter]

Interviewer: *So your dad worked at the plant? What years?*

Jennilee Thayer: Well, they started the plant, let's see, I'm not sure, I have to get it straight in my head what year he had to move out here, 1945. I think they started in '43. And then we lived in Las Vegas in '43. Then '45 was when we moved out here. We lived on Kansas.

Interviewer: *Did he work in the magnesium refining part of the plant?*

Jennilee Thayer: He ran the whole plant. He was one of the bosses that ran the whole plant.

Interviewer: *Oh, all right. Yeah. That's quite a responsibility.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yeah, it was.

Interviewer: *They had a lot of men working there.*

Jennilee Thayer: Yes, well that's why he was sent to England, to learn the details of the manufacturing. The scientist was a German Jew, and he would have been killed by Hitler if Hitler had gone in quick enough, but he got out of there and got into England.

Interviewer: *I'm trying to remember the – do you recall, oh some of the historic Henderson events? I'm thinking back on things when – like when they first started testing the atomic bomb. Did you ever get up early in the morning to watch the –*

Jennilee Thayer: Oh yeah. We knew about it; we always got up. Except for one time that there was going to be a test blast in Area 51 – that’s way, way over there, but we could feel it here, the vibrations and everything, and I could feel it in the vibrations from the floor.

Interviewer: *Shook the house?*

Jennilee Thayer: Shook the house, yeah. And we’d watch them. We’d watch the dirt and everything fly in the air way over across the desert.

Interviewer: *Those big, yeah, big mushroom clouds. Ok, well, maybe we’ll call it good for this session. Would you mind if I came back to talk to you some more?*

Jennilee Thayer: No, that will be fine. It was great.