

# **Henderson Libraries**

## **Southwest Oral History Association Mini Grant Project**

**Toni Watson Tibbets**

**Oral History  
Of  
Toni Tibbets**

**a contributor to the Henderson Oral History Project**

**conducted by Fredric Watson, and Toni's grandchildren, Joelyn and  
Cole Miele**

**Southwest Oral History Association Grant and the Henderson  
Historical Society**

**September 20, 2015**

**Henderson, Nevada**

**Fredric Watson:** *Good morning. My name is Rick Watson from the Henderson Historical Society. I'm here at 206 Victory Road in Henderson to interview Toni Watson Tibbets. With me today are her two grandchildren, Joelyn and Cole Miele. They are going to participate in this as the interviewers asking questions of Toni Tibbets so that we can gather a history of Miss Tibbets's life and see how that history helps to explain the history of Henderson. So, without further adieu, we're going to get the camera back to Toni Tibbets and we will ask Joelyn to ask the first question.*

**Cole Miele:** *Can you just tell us a little bit about the time that you couldn't talk and your dance lessons?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Well, I didn't talk until I was six years old. And my mom and dad were kinda worried about what was going on so they decided...the doctor said, "Why don't you put her in dance lessons and that could help her maybe talk." So she enrolled me, my mom enrolled me in Jeannie Roberts Dance Studio. It was down in Vegas, downtown Vegas, on like Fourth Street, Fourth or Fifth Street, and she was...I can remember her just sitting on a stool and didn't let anybody talk for me or finish my sentences and, so I took dance lessons and starting talking pretty good. I still have trouble with some words but I do talk all the time now.

**Fredric Watson:** *Toni, do you remember where Jeannie Roberts Dance Studio was?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** I just remember it was down in Las Vegas off of Fremont, not too far from Fremont Street on maybe Fourth Street and she had gone to the school district and asked to use different schools for our recitals and I kinda remember going to Las Vegas High was...maybe one of our recitals was held at Las Vegas High School. And there was quite a few girls that in later years I found out, in fact I went to school with, to Gorman, Bishop Gorman High School, I went to school with some of these girls that when I looked at my recital page, you know, the little program, there were names that I recognized from the, you know, that were in school with me in high school.

**Fredric Watson:** *That was ten or twelve years after being in...*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Yeah, yeah, it was a long time but anyway we've always thought that she was instrumental in getting me to talk.

**Cole Miele:** *Can you tell us a little bit about the house on Kimberly and who was involved and how it was built and things like that?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Okay, we, my husband, Joe, came to Henderson in 197...1970. He was contracted, well, seven...seventeen guys that the telephone company contracted out of Washington to come and put in our dialing system. We, at the telephone company, we always had to dial the operator to call Vegas or Boulder City or...and so they wanted to put in an

automatic dial system. So they contracted these guys. So Joe, your Grandpa, wanted, was two out of seventeen guys were not married and I married Joe and another girl married Mike Burns. He was the other one. And Joe and Mike had an apartment together and I met him and we ended up getting married twenty months later after he got here.

**Fredric Watson:** *Did you say where Joe came from?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** He came from Oregon. He was born and raised in Oregon. Then he was in the Navy and then when he got out of the Navy he went to work for Northern Telephone Company and they went around the country installing equipment in different telephone, engineering, engineering...oh, what do you call it...the switching booths. And so, anyway, they, he came from there and, of course, loved Henderson, loved the, the heat and never, never went back to Oregon.

**Fredric Watson:** *Liked the small-town atmosphere.*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Yes, he loved the small-time atmosphere, and would go up and down the alleys, and loved our alleys and at that time the alleys, of course, were just dirt. And he just loved Henderson. But anyway, he, he and I got married and at that time Henderson had hardly any rentals, places to live, and so we ended up getting this mobile home in Ballerina Trailer Park after we had your mom, Tonya. And then Father Moran, Monsignor Moran, who was our parish priest at St. Peters Church, had five acres on Kimberly, Kimberly and Long Acres, between Kimberly and Long Acres up by the golf course, he had five acres and so he sold, told me that he would sell me a half acre so we could build a house and, but he didn't want the money for a year. He said, "Don't give me any money until a year, a year from now. You can pay me." And unfortunately Father Moran died before, before the year but I went ahead and, you know, I paid the...I paid his estate and so I, I saw that that was taken care of. But he sold it to us for like \$2,500 dollars so it was a wonderful, wonderful deal. And then, Joe, your grandpa and another friend of his, who was a contractor, started building. They built the house and your grandpa just traded for the plumbing and traded work for...he traded...he had an El Camino, a red El Camino car, and he traded that for these guys to put the plumbing in. And we always said that they did a lousy job because we had a wet bar in the house that backed up and smelt like eggs, rotten eggs. And I think it probably got fixed sometime but probably fifteen years after we were in the house. But, anyway, we started building the house and your Aunt Jill, we lived in this...we had bought another trailer to park up on the site because the city gave you two years to build. You could have, you could live in a trailer right on the site of your building but only for two years. So, I was pregnant the whole time we were building the house, or for the nine months. And this September 24<sup>th</sup> of 1977 I go out and I tell your grandpa that he needs to get the house done because I was having the baby. And, so anyway, it was not done but we went ahead but he did get it done pretty quick after that and that's where, 316 East

Kimberly and now there's...but we were the first house in that five acres and then...now there's several more and it's built up around us tremendously.

**Fredric Watson:** *You mentioned that Father Moran sold you that property. Who was Father Moran?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Father Moran was the first...well, he actually built, started St. Peter's Catholic Church on Boulder Highway was built...we had a community church here in Henderson but not a Catholic Church so Father Moran went, I think, to the city and said, you know, "We need, we need a Catholic Church here." And so, if I remember correctly, they, they gave him the land or anyway he got, he got to be able to build a church less expensive than he would have had to have spent.

**Fredric Watson:** *In the early 1940's before there was a Henderson everybody who was going to help build the BMI plant and the town came from someplace else. Where did Father Moran come from?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** From Ireland. He was, he was from Ireland and he just was a wonderful priest and he acquired the land at, on up by the golf course from...I think he just homesteaded it. Might have paid \$35 dollars or \$50 dollars, but he, he got it really cheap which a lot of people did too, you know. A lot of different people from that were old-timers, either homesteaded and then sold it off to people.

**Fredric Watson:** *You mentioned that your husband, Joe Tibbets, traded services to help get his home built. You know today people go to a contractor and the contractor takes care of everything. Or maybe they just buy a finished home that had been built by a developer. But in this case Joe was a builder himself. But he must have had a bunch of other people helping him. Can you remember the names of other people who helped build that house on Kimberly? You mentioned the two fellows that did the plumbing.*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Yeah, and I can't remember their names. They, the one lived on Tungsten Street, yeah, but I can't remember Doug. The other, the guy that actually helped him do most of the building, the framing and everything, he owned a trailer park in Pittman and we ended up giving the trailer that we had on the property, he got that trailer. And Joe traded that to him and it's still parked in his trailer park in Pittman.

**Fredric Watson:** *I'll going to have to go down there and take a picture.*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** See if it's still there, yeah. I haven't been there for a long time. Not too far from the Sky...right, not too far from Joker's Wild, it's in back of Joker's Wild.

**Fredric Watson:** *So what services did Joe provide then?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Well, he just did, he just did a lot of, of the help in building. You know, he got right there, right beside everybody and was working just like they worked.

**Fredric Watson:** *Very good.*

**Joelyn Miele:** *Can you tell us when you started "We Care"?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Oh, we Care For Little Folks, we started it in 1978. My friend and I worked with Ron Nevin and his wife was a teacher, Linda Nevin. And she was a preschool teacher and so we decided...the telephone company, our Continental Telephone Company, sold us to Centel. Well, I really didn't want to work for Centel because I would have had to go to Vegas because what I was doing I would have been transferred into Las Vegas. And I just had this baby. You know, I had Jill, and so we decided that, Linda and I decided, we needed a preschool and day care here in Henderson. So, both of us couples, Ron and Linda and Joe and I, bought this property, this old Townsite house on Basic Road right next to Sager's Printing. Sandy Sager had a printing shop right on the corner of Basic and, I think, Oklahoma. And so we bought this property for, I, I can't remember how much it was, but a pretty good deal. And then we fixed it all up so we could have a day care and Linda would teach preschool five days a week. She'd teach the preschool a couple of hours in the morning and then we offered day care for the rest of the time. And myself and Linda and then Marilyn Adou, who is Linda's sister-in-law, Ron's sister, we all three...Marilyn and I took care of the other children that wasn't in preschool and Linda taught preschool. And so we did that for several years. I'm thinking like seven or eight years we did, maybe not eight years, probably about seven years, we did this every day. We were closed on Saturdays and Sundays but we had the nicest bunch of kids and we'd take care of a lot of Dr. Johnson's two boys and Bob and Pat Campbell's one little girl, the other one was older. That was, and we took care of a lot of the kids that your mom and your aunt grew up with them, went to school, and I can tell you now, every child that we had in preschool that we still, we still know, they've all turned out really good, good kids and good students. And still remember us. And...

**Fredric Watson:** *What was the time span, what years did you operate?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** I think we started in 1978 and I think we disbanded about '85 or so. You know, 7, 8, 9, yeah, about '85. Then, and we, we had not...we'd done really good as far as we didn't have any accidents and, and no problems, that everybody was happy with us. And then there was a big write-up, you know, with things happening with children and we just thought we needed to pursue something else. We didn't want to be...we'd been lucky enough not to have anything go wrong or any accidents or anything so we quit doing that and we started up with a gift shop. It's called "Let's Wrap". We used to have wrapping paper. We'd wrap presents and have balloon bouquets and deliver different balloon bouquets to people and had cards and different gifts and stuff. Well, that really didn't go over at all because, you know, it

was just a little home town, little shop, that just didn't make it. We didn't have any foot traffic and so we ended up not continuing to do that. It was costing us more to keep the building open and, so we didn't...we stopped doing that.

**Fredric Watson:** *Now what's become of the property?*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** The property, we sold it to a lady that has a dog grooming shop on one side and then she partitioned it off and the other side is a barber shop. It's still there on, on Basic Street close to Boulder Highway.

**Fredric Watson:** *Okay, very good. Well, thank you kids. We appreciate your participation in this interview. Thank you, Miss Tibbets.*

**Toni Watson Tibbets:** Well, you're welcome.