

## THE ORAL HISTORY OF JACK BINION

Jack Binion is one of the most well-known figures in the casino industry. Mr. Binion was the face of Binion's Horseshoe in Downtown Las Vegas for close to 40 years, and has since taken the Horseshoe brand to new levels of success across the country. With such a longstanding connection to Las Vegas, you'd be correct in thinking Mr. Binion has quite a few interesting stories to tell. We are honored to present a few of those stories to you here in The Oral History of Jack Binion.

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I'll tell you how gambling really got started in Nevada. Nobody acknowledges this, but it was two guys in Reno named Bill Graham and Jim McKay.

Graham and McKay had all the gambling and all the bootlegging around Reno. These guys were basically complete outlaws at the time. In fact, they had the fix<sup>1</sup> around there so good that Babyface Nelson hid out in Reno for 18 months and would drink nightly with the Sheriff. The Sheriff knew he was hiding out there! So they really had things their own way. In fact, the place they had was right next to the railroad tracks. The property was in a Chinese name that was totally fictitious, but it was just their way of getting around everything.

They realized that a new administration could come in and close their gambling place down, but at the same time, the state was completely broke. There were only about 90,000 people in the state at the time, and McKay and Graham pushed and got gambling passed. That's how it really got passed. And a guy named George Wingfield helped them do it. Wingfield was a young guy who had a gambling place in Tonopah.

How Wingfield got his money is a story too. Now a lot of places would pay the miners off in stock. Wingfield won a whole bunch of this stock in his gambling house when the stock was pretty much worth nothing at the time, but the stock ended up making it big. So Wingfield made a whole lot of money, and he wrote a guy named Bernard Baruch, who was a financial genius of the time, and said, "Listen, I'm a young guy like you, and I made all this money. I want your advice on how to invest it." Well, he ended up buying some banks. Back in those days, I don't think there was branch banking. Now this is going back to around 1910, but George Wingfield became the most prominent guy in the state of Nevada. He had a lot of political connections and everything, and he lived in

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<sup>1</sup> The fix refers to someone having rigged a system in such a way to ensure they receive favorable results.

Reno.

He helped them get it passed. What actually happened to him later was the Depression broke him. The banks had all sorts of trouble and everything. He was probably the most prominent guy in the state of Nevada at the time. So that's how they got gambling passed in Nevada.

Later, Graham had some kind of a lottery thing going on, and they convicted him on some kind of mail fraud.<sup>2</sup> He was given a year in prison, but his lawyer said: "I can beat this thing." So they had another trial, but then he got nine years! Nowadays, you can't get more time than you originally received, but then you could. He ended up having to do like six or seven years. Well it kind of shows that these guys were roughly on the edge of the law.

And another thing that really helped get Las Vegas going was planes that could go a long distance. Before that, it was just little puddle jumpers, and more people actually drove and rode on trains than they did on airplanes. This was pre-jet, but the planes still got big enough to hold over a hundred people. TWA was big at the time, and that helped Las Vegas because people could come here from the East.

The Third thing that happened was the Kefauver Committee.<sup>3</sup> But not every town cut illegal gambling. They used to say that a town was "open," which meant that you could go and play behind closed doors. The fix was in, but the police tolerated the gambling. So certain towns always had illegal gambling. In other words, Kansas City, Dallas, New Orleans, and there were even some places that were wide open – Hot Springs, Arkansas you could walk in just like you could at any of the casinos in town here. But there were very few like that; also Phenix City, AL, and right across from Cincinnati in Covington and Newport Kentucky. So people tolerated it and knew they were there operating.

But when Kefauver came, he was the first person to say: "This is organized crime," and then a lot of people started closing down. So here come all these people from different cities, and here came all the dealers from those cities. When I first started out, my dad had come out here, and he brought a lot of his dealers with him. My dad started the Horseshoe, and he had a bunch of gambling charges in Texas. In fact, he later went to jail for income tax evasion. They tried to extradite him in 1948, and they didn't get him extradited until 1951 or 1952. In those days, any judge could give you a 30-day stay, and you could go from judge to judge to judge and keep getting 30-day stays. That's what he did.

So when he left, he sold out to Joe W. Brown, and it was kind of under-

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see DWAYNE KLING, *THE RISE OF THE BIGGEST LITTLE CITY: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA HISTORY OF RENO GAMING, 1931-1981* 57 (2000).

<sup>3</sup> The Kefauver Committee, led by Senator Estes Kefauver, investigated organized crime by holding public hearings in multiple U.S. cities and interviewing hundreds of witnesses. See *Special Committee on Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce*, UNITED STATES SENATE, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/investigations/Kefauver.htm> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

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stood that he might come back some day. But he ended up never having a license again. Joe Brown was from New Orleans. He had a place in Shawmut, Louisiana, which is in St. Bernard Parish, which is kind of just on the southeast side of New Orleans. On the northwest side of New Orleans was the Beverly Club, and the mob had that one.

Joe Brown also had gas—a huge gas field. If the Forbes 100 would have been in existence back then, he would have been on it. But he always liked gambling places and was a really good guy. So here came all these guys from New Orleans, and when I broke in, I worked with a lot of guys from New Orleans; it was a side show. Everybody was from somewhere else, and they were all on the shady side of the law. You know, it was illegal where they were and everything, so it was a great time, a great time. And it wasn't that hard to get licensed. I remember Cliff Jones, Randall Jones' uncle, was the Lieutenant Governor at the time, and his brother Herb, who was Randall's father, was our lawyer for a long time and he was an excellent guy. Back then, if a guy had a past with gambling, if you'd done it in illegal areas, that didn't preclude him from being licensed. So if you had a background of illegal gambling, you could still get a license. But if you had been financially deceitful, like if you cheated your clients out of money or you defrauded someone, you would have trouble getting your license. It is definitely different today.

*Did you work anywhere before you got involved with casinos?*

With me, my first job was as an office boy. We were in the most prestigious office building in the town, which was on the northeast corner of 3rd and Fremont. It was the biggest law firm: Young, Wiener, and Jones. There were only about eight lawyers, but that was the biggest law firm in town. Most firms then would have just a few lawyers in their firm, or they would be individual practitioners. The divorces kept them all alive.

*You took over operating the Horseshoe at 26. What was it like to be so young and running a casino?*

Well, two things. What happened at first was that the Fremont group really ran it. I was 21 when I got my license. The Fremont group really controlled the Horseshoe at that time, but they got in trouble. At that time, the FBI was just looking to find hidden ownership and things like that. In the Fremont, the FBI not only tapped their phones but bugged their phones. So they had a lot of information that was damaging to the Fremont, and this put some pressure on them.

Now my dad was never what I call "connected." Sure, they ran their illegal gambling, but he never was part of the Mob. Texas didn't really have the Mob. There was only one area in Texas that had mob connections at all, and those guys were all kind of passive guys. Texas was all independent guys. So we never were part of the Fremont bunch, who was very close with the Sands

bunch.

So the FBI had all this information but didn't have a warrant. So what happened? The Fremont guys got ahold of a guy named Edward Bennet Williams. Edward Bennet Williams was probably the best lawyer there ever was. He later became president of the Washington Redskins, but he really was super, super lawyer. So Edward Bennet Williams went to the FBI and said, "Listen, we're going to insist that you indict the agents that were involved in this illegal wire-tapping, and we're going to sue them, then sue the telephone company because they were complicit in all of this." Then the FBI said, "Wait a second, let's sit down and talk." And by the end of the day, the guy that was the head of the Fremont, Eddie Levinson, who, looking back, was way ahead of his time and very smart, made a deal to get his group to sell their interests. But somebody had to go to jail, so Levinson got the sentence. Everyone else got off, including Eddie Torres, and later they let Torres run the Riviera and other places.

Another guy that was part of the Fremont group was Doc Stacher, who was a NJ bootlegger that wasn't even a citizen. He never got his citizenship. Part of the deal was that Doc Stacher would get to go to Israel and get to take his money with him. Now here's an interesting story, Doc Stacher couldn't read or write. I never knew Doc Stacher, but Doc Stacher loved Bryan Burton, and Doc didn't like for people to know that he couldn't read or write. So he would let all of his mail accumulate until he could go by and see Bryan Burton, who would read it to him. And what he would do, for example, if he was out eating, he would open up the menu and say "So what are you going to have?" and then whatever you ordered, he would say "I'll have the same thing," because he didn't want people to know that he couldn't read!

Anyways, this deal really kind of broke up the Fremont group. Levinson was from Detroit; there were guys from Toledo, Minneapolis, St. Louis. All these different guys that worked there and had little ownership pieces, but this broke that up. That's what I liked about Vegas back then, everybody was from somewhere else and they were all basically good guys, even though in effect they had been lawbreakers in the past. So when Levinson and them had to sell, we bought the Horseshoe back, bought them out, and that's when I became President of the Horseshoe.

Everyone was from somewhere else, and it was a great time. Everyone was a rounder. All the bosses stayed down on the floor back in those days. They let the accountants do the work upstairs. Now, it's everybody's upstairs. In those days, they were down there watching and greeting customers, and it gave me a great background.

Was I green behind the ears? Yes. But you have to remember, these places were so much smaller than they are now. In fact, they never kept the figures, but there was only one year where they ever let out the figures of what each place won. In 1958, the biggest grossing place here in Southern Nevada was the Stardust. It had just opened, and it won something like \$10 million. That was \$10 million either for the whole year or six months, but the Sands, which was

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the best joint in town, only had something like \$7.5 million over the same period. The best joint in the state was Harrah's place at the lake, on the south side of Lake Tahoe. In 1958, the whole state only reported around \$168 million win for the year.

Now, even a medium sized place will win that much in 6-8 months. It's very different. It wasn't exactly like I was running a big corporation. I would say that we probably had around 200-and-something-odd employees. Now, obviously it was a great background for me because we had all these old gamblers to learn from, and it really helped around 1990-91 when all of these other places started allowing gambling.

*Did you ever have any memorable stories from running the horseshoe? Any big customers, big wins or losses?*

Oh yeah, naturally. We had one guy beat us for \$22 million. But look, our facility was downtown. We had to do different things to get business in there, so we did. There were a lot of funny things that happened, but they are kind of like inside jokes. People wouldn't understand a lot of the things that happened. It would be like if a lawyer had a story about a trial that would be funny to other lawyers but not funny to someone who didn't understand the law.

Another thing you talk about with humor is that all gamblers are really cynics. They really had a cynical sense of humor. It won't be that funny to you, but one old guy from Detroit, someone would ask him for his name, and he would say "You know, I have the reputation in this town for not giving anyone the time of day, but in your case, I'm going to make an exception. It's 1:51p.m." I mean, he was just cruel!

The gambling business was a whole society, a sub-culture, so if you were part of that culture, you felt a part of something. You weren't a "square john," you were a gambler!

*The guy who took you for \$22 million, was that Nick "the Greek" Dandolo?*

No. But I have a picture of Nick "the Greek" with all five of us kids. I don't know where it is, but I have it somewhere. It's great because he would never let anyone take his picture, and he was very prominent around here when we first moved here. He was the only gambler that was really well known. Back then everyone knew who he was, but now nobody does.

The guy who beat us for \$22 million also happened to be Greek, but his name was Archie Karas, who was one of the most prominent poker players at the time.

*What is it like finding out that you just lost \$22 million?*

Well, we beat him for most of it back, but it took months.

*And what led to you taking the Horseshoe name into other states?*

Nobody else in the family wanted to go anywhere else but me. So when I sold, I made a deal where I could take the “Horseshoe” out of state. I took a number of my grandchildren and nieces and nephews with me. They were stockholders, and we had three places.

A little background information, the Native American Tribe down in Palm Springs was the first to come up with the idea that they were a sovereign nation and that they could have gambling if they wanted to. It was controversial for a number of years, and finally, the Supreme Court said they have the right to have gambling. It worked out that if you had any kind of gambling in that state, the Native Americans had the right to have any kind of gambling they want. So, for example, if a state has racetracks, the tribe could have casinos. Now, if you notice, there are only two states now that have absolutely no gambling: Hawaii and Utah. Every other state has some kind of form of gambling. This is because in 1988, Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act<sup>4</sup> and let the Indian tribes have gambling so long as they made compacts with the states.

After that, the states began making compacts with the Native American tribes where the state gets part of the profits, just to make it easy. But technically, the tribes didn’t have to give the state any money. So pretty soon, other states said wait a minute, why don’t we do that? So gambling started passing in different places. Iowa was the first place I went to look at gambling, and it was riverboat gambling. I said, “Boy, this is for real. These places are going to be big, and this is for me.” So my father and I branched out into it, while my brother was having problems with the state. Gambling had really branched out at that time. I think there were around 28 states that have full casino gambling; there might be more now.

In Oklahoma, there are over 60,000 odd slot machines, and around 100 casinos because every Native American tribe has their own casino, and there are so many different tribes in Oklahoma. Some of those places are huge, too! The Seminoles have a place in Tampa, which is probably the best place in America. They make like \$2 billion a year. When you really look at it, there are some really big places in California, as well. One tribe has a casino up in Sacramento, the Thunder Valley Casino, and that’s what killed the casinos in South Lake Tahoe. People in Northern California didn’t have to travel very far anymore to get to a casino. And you know who had the management contract, the Fertittas. They still might, I don’t know.

It’s a whole different thing when you look at Native American casinos. It changed the whole gambling scene.

Before it got big, the only other place that had gambling besides Las Vegas was Havana, Cuba. Havana had gambling for years, but it was kind of small

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, see 25 U.S.C. §§ 2701-2721 (2012).

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timing compared to Vegas. They really got it straightened out, and they went down there and opened these new joints, mostly catering to the East Coast. So they did so much more business than what the Horseshoe was doing.

I worked with some of those guys that worked in Havana. Something that people don't realize is that Castro did not close the casinos down—just no customers came after he took over. This was just before the embargo. When Castro came in, there was a revolution, and a guy working with me was one of the main guys in Cuba. He told me that on New Year's Eve, some armed guy came up to the cage cashier and said, "We're taking over." They took over the places right then.

So all of the workers came back, obviously, and a lot of Cubans moved to Las Vegas at that time because all the people that worked for a casino down there couldn't find work anymore. So they came out here. But now you don't see them because that was in the late 50's. We had a pretty big Cuban community out here.

*Is there anything that you remember when you were running the Horseshoe Las Vegas that was particularly challenging? Anything in the first few years you took over? Any struggles?*

Well, there was a lot of business, so you didn't have to be a genius, thank goodness! My dad was very knowledgeable and helped me learn the business. He helped me a lot. Obviously, when I went to other places, it did cause me some problems because I had what they thought was a bad background, even though I'd never done anything like that. But they thought my family had, and it caused me some problems. In fact, the State of Illinois kicked me out of the state.

Where I played lucky was that my father came out here with quite a bit of money for the time. And he was kind of the boss of Dallas beforehand. He was kind of controversial, to say the least. I could kind of go around with him to all these places, you know? I was able to meet all the good guys and bad guys and tough guys and not tough guys. Even though I was just a kid, I got to know them anyway. I was younger than everybody, and I went to college for a year at the University of Arizona. I got so smart in one year, I didn't have to go back!

So as soon as I turned 21, I started dealing 21. Then from there, Joe Brown got sick and he sold out. That's when I came back in to the Horseshoe. That's when the bunch from the Fremont came in and bought most of it, but I had a little piece. I actually wrote this thing out in pencil, but I think they might have ended up typing it. I think they might have sent it out on the napkin, which if you folded into fours was just four pages. I never went before any board, although I was only getting 2.5 percent, I never went to a hearing or anything, and they sent me back as licensee.

For some people, say Bill Boyd, he didn't get into the gambling business until he was around 40 years old. He went to law school and was a successful

lawyer, practicing law for many years. His dad had worked with casinos in Hawaii and everything. I kind of played lucky, well maybe not lucky, but I was exposed to this and I didn't really go to school. I just went right into the gambling business. The other guy that is pretty much like this is Mike Gaughan.<sup>5</sup> His father was a great guy, and Mike is a great guy. They are just super guys. They just love to do people favors. Jackie Gaughan, Mike's father, started off as a bookmaker.

*Did you ever get to work with Jackie Gaughan?*

I never worked with him directly, but he and I were great friends. We interacted with each other a lot. He had a place down the street, and he was older than me. But he was always a good advisor and just an overall good guy. I really had a lot of respect for him. He was around here for many years, until he got dementia. That was one of my saddest days: seeing him one time where I knew he didn't recognize me. He could kind of fake it, but you could see that he didn't know who I was. And we were good friends. So it was very sad.

*How have you noticed the regulation of gambling change over the years?*

I've been many places, but Nevada really has the best regulatory system. The other place that has a really good system is Mississippi. In Mississippi, everyone was straightforward and honest, there was no politics or bullshit going on.

In fact, I just saw that John Grisham wrote a book about gambling and corruption. As you probably know, the old governor of Louisiana, Edwards, ended up doing many years over gambling corruption.<sup>6</sup> He didn't get the gambling laws passed, but he had come in right after. He had been a congressman, and was tried twice before for different kinds of corruption. He beat both charges. The guy that owned the San Francisco 49ers was one of the biggest developers in the country, they had racetracks down in Louisiana and in Oklahoma. When all of this came up, he in effect bribed Edwards, and Edwards was actively soliciting bribes. You didn't have to go to him, he would come to you!

Back in 1940, the government passed a law that every bet you made for a sports bet, there was a 10% tax on it. The casinos couldn't stand that. So different places opened up and they were able to—I don't know how they were able to—but they were able to survive. They obviously got around it somehow. They would show where they made so much of it, but you obviously can't pay a 10% tax and succeed.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Gaughan owns and operates the South Point Hotel, Casino, and Spa. For more information, see *Michael Gaughan*, UNLV CENTER FOR GAMING RESEARCH, [http://gaming.unlv.edu/hof/2009\\_gaughan.html](http://gaming.unlv.edu/hof/2009_gaughan.html) (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see *Edwin Edwards*, BIOGRAPHY.COM, <http://www.biography.com/people/edwin-edwards-21155411> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

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But with that 10% tax, that law was just a shot over everybody's head. All the sports betting and all the race books were separate—their own freestanding places—then years later the government repealed this model and that's when they allowed the books into the casino.

In effect, they were trying to shut down sports betting with that tax. People forget how gambling just wasn't as accepted as it is today. They didn't want you to be an illegal business or a business that was shady. It was almost like the order of things that were the worst to be were a dope fiend, a pimp, and then a gambler. No self respecting gambler would lower himself to do those other things! We were in the gambling business, not one of those other businesses. That was the pecking order.

*Growing up, were you exposed to gambling?*

Oh yeah. My dad was in the gambling business back in Dallas. When you're a kid, I was probably only like six years old, but there is no normal when you're a kid. Whatever your parents and whatever your surroundings tell you, that is normal to you. Even now, when you go someplace, people are often fascinated that you're from Vegas, but that's just normal for you after all these years.

*What was your early life like growing up?*

In Dallas, things were a little rough and tough. My father shot a couple people. So it was kind of different, but I was just a kid. I will say this for my parents: I can't imagine anybody being more family oriented or loving than my two parents. Everything was just normal to me. Just like any kid, there was nothing that seemed out of the ordinary.

One time, an associate of his got killed, and things were a little muddled. I remember we left town for a while, long enough that I actually re-enrolled in school. We were in a place down in Kerrville, Texas, hiding out you might say, and I went to school there for a couple weeks until we came back home. And when we got back, my father told us "You kids lay down in the seat." But we didn't think, "Oh wow, this is dangerous or exciting or anything." It was just the same as listening if he told us, "Look, if the house caught on fire, you go out that exit." We would just say, "Ok." It was things like that where we were probably a little more careful than others.

In fact, another time, when we first came out to Vegas, Kefauver came here and was subpoenaing people to come testify before his committee. Obviously, my father didn't want to be subpoenaed, so we left town. We went to Palm Springs first. Now my dad always wore cowboy clothes. So, to fit in, he bought a pair of regular pants and the like, and we thought that was so funny! He wanted to kind of keep a cover up and all that. But all the while we were in a limousine, with our own chauffeur, a large African American gentleman, standing out front of the limousine wherever we were. So imagine that for trying to

keep up a cover.

I remember they went out and bought a golf bag, yet they didn't play any golf. Instead of buying a whole set of clubs, they bought just a few clubs to save room for a shotgun in the bag, too! And then we went to Santa Monica, which was an ocean house that they later converted into a hotel. Hearst had built it for his girlfriend Mary Davies, who was like a movie starlet. Anyway, we stayed in the suite, and we had cracked crab and lamb chops and room service all the time. To me, the ultimate side of luxury was room service! You could just sit there in the room because as a kid you used to hate to go out to a restaurant. So the guy would just come in and serve it to you, and how great that was, especially while hiding out!

*Do you ever get to make it back to the Horseshoe downtown?*

I've been down there a time or two. In fact, tonight they are going to have the hall of fame induction for the son of one of my good friends, Doyle Brunson, who is a poker player.<sup>7</sup> His son Todd is being inducted. I've known Todd since he was a baby. In fact, Doyle and I have lunch about once a week still, and we talk all the time.

*Out of all of your accomplishments, what are you most proud of?*

That when I started the other casino and nobody wanted to go with me, I took in stockholders—my grandchildren, my children, my nephews, and my grandnephews. There were eight of them in Hammond that I made stockholders, and the company wasn't really worth anything originally. But it turned out to be very successful, and they all ended up with a pretty good chunk of money—that was very good. My father and mother were very family oriented, and I am very family oriented also, so that was the best thing I did.

We had a place in Tunica, Mississippi. We had a place in Louisiana. And we had two other places, one in Illinois, which I had to leave, and one in Indiana that was right next to Chicago, right next to the suburbs. That takes the cake. Everywhere we went, our casinos went on to be the biggest grossing casinos in every state we were in.

*You mentioned your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. . .*

My great grandchildren are the apples of my eye. The oldest great-grandchild is seven, and she could take me by the hand and lead me right off a cliff. I'd do anything she wants!

Two grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, a lot of great-nephews and -nieces, one great-nephew has three boys, so they're part of the family, too. Not too many little kids any more, but it's growing. I have another grand-nephew

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on Doyle Brunson, see <http://www.doylebrunson.com/>.

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living in Amarillo, Texas. My sister lives in Amarillo, and her grandson is going to have a son very soon.

*What is it like to see things like the World Series of Poker, something you helped create, turn into such a big phenomenon?*

Well it shows that I didn't recognize the worth of it! I sold that to my sister, and I didn't have a place to take it because it wouldn't have worked in some other places. So I let her keep it. If I would have realized how big it was going to be, and that all of this stuff would have come about from it, I probably wouldn't have let it go. But I'm not sorry, and it's fun and an ego trip seeing that it is such a recognized institution. Poker went from a very small game to very widely played all over the world. I would like to take credit for all of that, but the truth was that I just started a tournament. Nobody had ever heard of a gambling tournament. We didn't either.

It was suggested later to start a contest, but at first, we just had the poker players playing poker, and then we'd vote on who was the best one. Amarillo Slim came up with the idea for a freezeout.<sup>8</sup> People would often play freezeouts, but it was usually heads up. We came up with the round-robin idea and that's the format that is still used today. It's been fun seeing that get so big. In fact, social gaming is getting big now too. Harrah's had a social gaming company that they just sold, which social gaming has absolutely no money attached to the gambling. They just sold that for \$4 billion. It just boggles your mind.

What really made poker was the card camera, the camera that lets you see the hand. That caused a lot of interest, as well as the internet. Those two things really made poker big, and the World Series of Poker was really just a platform for it. The other two things really made poker bigger than it was.

*Did you ever get into playing poker?*

I used to play quite a bit of poker. I wasn't a top player, that's for sure. But I used to play.

*What advice do you have for someone who is considering getting into the gaming industry?*

Well, it's such a different business now. It's so big, and it's another industry. But I'll say the thing that helped me so much was that since the casino was so small, I did everything. As it got bigger, I had this knowledge about all of it, and as it grew this gave me a big leg up. Now, these places are so big, you either go into marketing, or this department, or that. And while you can move be-

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<sup>8</sup> In this context, "freezeout" refers to an elimination-style poker tournament that ends when only a single player remains. That player wins all of the prize money, and no other places are paid.

tween departments, it's not the same. All the people that are heads of these casinos, they're really financial strategists. They're not gamblers. They're managing the profit and losses and balance sheets, deciding what their growth pattern is going to be, they're just strategists. They're not technical people. And the technical people have been relegated to bus-boys! I feel bad about it because when I was growing up, the technical people were the king of the hill!

Out of all the guys, Steve Wynn is probably the only one who is left-over that didn't come from a big corporation. Jim Murren<sup>9</sup> came from Wall Street. The CEO of Caesars came from Hertz—although the guys at Caesars that really run that show are the Apollo/TPG guys. But then, they are just financial strategists. If you go down the line, that's basically the whole design for a lot of the casinos now. I hate to see it go, but I was also the recipient of this avalanche of money from all of it. I used to say, and it's the truth, that Vegas made a lot of average people geniuses. They sat there, and here comes this avalanche of money to hit them. And some of them got to thinking that they were the one setting off the avalanche, but they were really just at the right place at the right time. The one that benefitted from this the most that was probably the most ordinary of the bunch was me! I couldn't have gotten away from it.

*Say you hadn't gotten into the casino industry. Do you have any idea what you might have done?*

If it hadn't been for my father, I'd have probably been delivering mail! I don't know, maybe I would have gotten into real estate. My father was always very entrepreneurial, so that was easy to follow. But without him, would I have had 1/100 of the success that I've had? No. I don't delude myself with that!

A guy like Steve Wynn,<sup>10</sup> he's the smartest guy ever. Steve's father ran bingo games, and he made good money. Some people like to act like Steve bootstrapped onto his father's success, but no matter what Steve would have done, he would have been successful. Another guy I have to take my hat off to is Mike Gaughan. He doesn't have the biggest corporation or anything, but that's by choice. He's a really smart guy. You know that old saying, you can tell a trapper by his pelts? Anybody with money around here, you've got to say they did something right. Like Sheldon Adelson,<sup>11</sup> he recognized his opportunities very well. All of these guys are very smart. Another is Phil Ruffin.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jim Murren is the Chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International. For more information, see *Jim Murren, Chairman and CEO*, MGMTHINK, <http://www.mgmthink.com/JimMurrenBio> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Steve Wynn is the CEO of Wynn Resorts, Limited. For more information, see *Steve Wynn*, FORBES, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/steve-wynn/> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Sheldon Adelson is the CEO of the Las Vegas Sands Corporation. For more information, see *Sheldon Adelson*, FORBES, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/sheldon-adelson/> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Phil Ruffin is a real estate developer and owns the Treasure Island Resort & Ca-

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Another good guy, Kirk Kerkorian.<sup>13</sup> Everyone says he was a corporate raider and everything, but that's not true. He was solid as a rock—a good guy. Now I never knew him really well, but everything he did was class. He also loved to gamble. He actually got his start flying. Right after World War II, they were scrapping out planes. Down in Kingman, he scrapped a couple of them out and kept a couple of them, and he started what was sort of like a freight airline. Once, it was him and another guy flying to Hawaii, and they had a bunch of drums in there on the back of the plane. And the way the plane was tilted back with the weight, the gas couldn't get to where it needed to go, so they ended up starting to sink. So he put it on autopilot, and they opened the back up. They were rolling these drums out into the ocean, and the plane got to about 300 feet before they got it leveled out. Kerkorian was definitely a force around here and a very classy guy. I really admire people whose word is good and who are classy. Today, that's hard to find.

Jackie Gaughan, or Mike, if they tell you they'll be there at a certain time—even if it kills them—they do what they say they're going to do. I admire that a lot.

I came at a unique time. One last story: on Moe Dalitz's 89th birthday, they had a celebration for him.<sup>14</sup> I said, oh good, all these old tough guys and gamblers will be there—Irving Devine, others, and it would be so good to see them again. I went up there, and I was so disappointed because one guy that I was going to see recognized me, then the next time I saw him at the same party he didn't recognize me. Then, Peter Lind Hayes, who was an entertainer who had entertained a lot at the Desert Inn was the master of ceremonies. He went up and introduced Moe Dalitz, saying, "Here he is, the greatest guy ever, Moe Dalitz!" And Moe had fallen asleep in his chair! All I could think was paradise lost! Disillusionment yet again!

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sino in Las Vegas. For more information, see *Phillip Ruffin*, FORBES, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/phillip-ruffin/> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Kirk Kerkorian was a famous Las Vegas real estate developer and movie studio owner. For more information, see *Kirk Kerkorian*, FORBES, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/kirk-kerkorian/> (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Moe Dalitz was a legendary Mob figure who later became a prominent businessman and philanthropist in Nevada. For more information, see *Moe Dalitz*, THE MOB MUSEUM, [http://themobmuseum.org/notable\\_names/moe-dalitz/](http://themobmuseum.org/notable_names/moe-dalitz/) (last visited Feb. 9, 2017).