

## THE ORAL HISTORY OF KENNY EPSTEIN

Kenny Epstein has spent a lifetime working in the gaming industry. Beginning in 1966 at the newly opened Caesars Palace as a Baccarat shift boss, Epstein eventually purchased a stake in Jackie Gaughan's El Cortez Hotel and Casino in the mid-seventies. Partnering with Gaughan and his son Michael, he helped build the Barbary Coast, Gold Coast, Orleans, and Suncoast. In 2007, Epstein purchased the El Cortez and continues to work as the casino's chief executive officer today.

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### I. EARLY LIFE

*Will you tell us about your life growing up, starting with where you were born?*

Well, I was born in Chicago, Illinois, July 10th, 1941. My father, Ike Epstein, was a gambler, a professional gambler. He started out as a horse-book banker at first. He had guys at the racetrack, then he got to be a layoff book banker. So that's how I grew up in the business. Mostly with horses, but later on with sports.

*As a kid, did you have any particular hobbies or things that you would like to do for fun?*

Oh, baseball. Baseball is America's sport. We played a game called pinner, which is baseball with no bat. You take a pink Spalden and you throw it on the stoop. You have lines on the street for single, double. Later on we played with a bat and a ball on the street. You know, we had plenty of parks but that wasn't the game we played. We played stickball. That's just what it was in Chicago, it was stickball. When you got a little bit older you played sixteen-inch clincher baseball. It was with a sixteen-inch baseball, no gloves, on a field.

*Who was one of the most influential people in your life growing up?*

I have to say that at least since I was ten years old, I wanted to be exactly like my father. How can this be bad? You go to every restaurant and everybody knows him. You go to World Championship fights, World Series, All-Star

Games — how bad is that?

My mother, Adele, was also a big influence on me. She was a renaissance woman, she could do anything, and was very talented. She taught me how to cook, about style and culture. She took me to museums and libraries to make sure I knew about more than just food, sports, and gambling.

But it was my father, absolutely my father. I wanted to be just like him. I am seventy-six years old and he died when he was seventy-one. He didn't make it to seventy-six, but I did. And I'm still in the gaming business — I wanted to be just like him.

*What are some of your best childhood memories?*

We lived in Chicago and my father had a place in the summer time up near Eagle River, Wisconsin. It was in Minocqua, Woodruff, and right next to it there was a roadhouse. The roadhouse was owned by this old Irishman, Marty Guilfoyle, who was a racketeer but he was retired. The place was called the Plantation. My father had a horse-book there. The local police would only allow blackjack on the weekends. It was a bar and roadhouse and poker games; we would have poker games all the time. I was nine years old and it was 1950. My father had just bought me a Winchester .22 rifle for my birthday and we would shoot on targets. I also had gone to summer camp and learned how to shoot on targets. So my dad went and bought me this rifle and I was pestering my dad, "Dad, I want to go shoot this gun!" My dad said, "Not right now, I'm busy." This fellow that worked for my dad named Hogan said, "That's alright, Ike, I'll take him." My dad says, "Well watch him, watch him." To which he replied, "Oh, I will, I will."

So Hogan puts up a target on a tree. I start shooting at the target. As I'm shooting and looking at where I hit, Hogan says, "Look at that!" There was another tree — we were up in Wisconsin, where there are a bunch of trees — and there were all these chipmunks going up and down the trees. There were forty of them — and you know how hyper they are. He says, "Go shoot those chipmunks." I start shooting at chipmunks and next thing I hear my father is yelling, "God damn it Kenny put that gun down!" I'm nine years old. I can't believe he's saying this. .but guess what happened? Behind the tree was the roadhouse and I shot a customer in the leg. It was a .22 and it went through the wall and ripped his pants. It cost my father \$500 to square that thing. The old time guy who owned the place had a mock trial. I was scared to death, because I was nine years old. They gave me a trial. The old time guy was the judge and I had a real attorney that was up there. To make a long story short, we went through this mock trial and I thought it was real. I was nine years old. They gave me nine years' probation, which meant that I couldn't use the gun until I was eighteen. I'm seventy-six years old now and still have the gun, but I haven't shot it since.

So, I wanted to be just like my father and we moved out here [Las Vegas] in 1959. Actually, I moved in 1960, but my parents came in 1959. My dad was an

Winter 2017]      *THE ORAL HISTORY OF KENNY EPSTEIN*

3

executive at the Stardust Hotel and I'm glad we moved here. I was nineteen at the time.

*Did you go right into the gaming business after finishing school?*

Almost. I went to the University of Illinois for a year and then to Santa Monica City College in California. I wanted to come to Las Vegas and be in the gambling business, but my father didn't want me to. He said, "You're going to make more money in the real estate and insurance business. This place is growing, and you will make all the money in the world. That is what you've got to do." What happened — this is another very interesting story — my dad had this friend by the name of Eli Marcus. He was a wealthy guy, and used to be, when he was way younger, a bookmaker. He got into the insurance business with his brother. His brother was in the insurance business for a long time. My dad said to me one day, "This is a Saturday and I don't want you going anywhere. Eli Marcus is coming to town and I want you to meet his brother, Roy." I said, "Sure dad." I'm twenty-one years old, just twenty-one. I know Eli Marcus, but I never met his older brother. He comes to our house — I lived with my parents at the Desert Inn Golf Course. They introduce him to me and I say, "Nice to meet you Mr. Marcus." He says, "I hear you want to be a racketeer?" Geez, I was embarrassed. I said, "No! I don't know where you got that." He explained, "Your dad says you want to be a racketeer." To which I replied, "No. . .no I don't."

He continued, "Let me tell you something son. Sit down, I'm going to have a talk with you. I own the Pennsylvania Life Insurance company plus other life insurance companies. I'm going to tell you a story. A guy comes to me and says to me, 'I want to make a bet.' Guy comes to me and wants to bet me that he's going to die. He doesn't want to win that bet so he gives me money every month. He makes a bet, he doesn't want to win that bet, but he keeps on giving me money every month. Every month. About four or five years later he's still paying every month. Every month he is betting me he is going to die, but he doesn't want to win that bet. You ever hear of a guy who wants to make a bet and doesn't want to win? Well, that's this guy. He pays me every month and about five years later he comes to me and says, 'Mr. Marcus I would like to borrow some money.' Oh you would? I can loan you so much. I take a look at his policy and loan him whatever I can. Would you believe this? This guy is giving me *his* money, every month, and then he comes to me wanting to borrow *his* money back! And he is paying me interest! Now you want to be a racketeer? I am a racketeer."

He convinced me to get into the insurance and real estate business. He and his brother had an ownership piece of Nevada Savings and Loan. I didn't go to work for them, but I went to work for an insurance agency they owned. It was called Southern Nevada Insurance Exchange. We sold life insurance to people that had mortgages. I got into the insurance business, then real estate, which we bought and sold. A good friend of my father — who I knew since I was thirteen

or fourteen — was Jerry Zarowitz,<sup>1</sup> one of the founders of Caesar's Palace. He said to me, "We are opening up a hotel. Forget about this insurance business. You'd be perfect — I want you to come work at Caesar's Palace." That was right up my alley. So they opened up and I went to work there in 1966. I loved it — loved every minute of it, but I did not want to be just an employee. I wanted to have ownership in one of these places.

I met Jackie Gaughan<sup>2</sup> in 1956, when I was fifteen years old. I drove across country from Chicago with my parents and we stayed at the Cal-Neva Lodge in Lake Tahoe. One of the owners was Bert Grober, but there was also another gentleman who was a casino manager whose name was E. Walker. E. Walker said to my father, "Come on, I want to introduce you to this fellow, Jackie Gaughan. We'll go see him — he's got the Tahoe Biltmore." It was a place across the street from the Cal-Neva, so we walked up there and saw him. The Tahoe Biltmore had something like fifty rooms, a hundred slot machines, three blackjack tables, a craps game, and two wheels. Jackie was so nice to me — to all of us. He showed us all around the place — a really great guy for just meeting him. My father says to me, "You know that guy we met today, Mr. Gaughan? He is a triple threat." Well, I know what a triple threat is — it means you can pass, run, and kick. That's football. I asked, "What do you mean by that?" My father said, "He is a go-getter, he's smart, he's on the square." It adds up to a cinch — that's what he is, Jackie Gaughan.

So that was when I met Jackie. I was fifteen years old at the time. I kept in touch with Jackie for some years after beginning work at Caesar's Palace in 1966, when I was twenty-five. In 1975, Jackie says, "I want to sell you 5% of the El Cortez. I want you to come with me." That was the start of me working with Jackie. He was my mentor — I loved him like my father. Through ownership of the El Cortez, and with his son Michael, Tito Tiberti, Frank Toti, and Dick Crane, we built the Barbary Coast. After that we opened the Gold Coast, the Orleans, and the Suncoast. We sold all these properties and instead of me just retiring, I instead went to the Plaza with Jackie. He later sold me the rest of the El Cortez.

Unfortunately, my dad died in 1976, so he never saw the Barbary Coast or my other projects with Jackie and Michael. My father was a great guy. I had two mentors — my father and Jackie.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Zarowitz was one of Caesars Palace's initial owners, who helped open the property on the Las Vegas Strip in 1966. See Matt Kelemen, *The Storied Start of Caesars Palace*, VEGAS MAGAZINE (June 1, 2012), <https://vegasmagazine.com/the-storied-start-of-caesars-palace>.

<sup>2</sup> Jackie Gaughan was a Las Vegas casino owner and operator, most notably of the El Cortez. See David McKee, *Jackie Gaughan, 1920-2014*, STIFFS AND GEORGES: A L.V. ADVISOR BLOG (Mar. 12, 2014), <https://www.lasvegasadvisor.com/stiffs-and-georges/jackie-gaughan-1920-2014/>.

## II. EXPERIENCE IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY

*When you were at Caesars you had the chance to learn the industry from the ground up. What kind of work were you doing?*

Baccarat. Floor man. Loved it, loved every minute of it. The place was so much fun — I couldn't tell you how much fun it was. I started when I was twenty-five. It was a great experience.

*Do you have any stories from your time at Caesars Palace that stand out in particular?*

I could tell the Frank Sinatra story. I was the pit boss at Caesars Palace in the baccarat section. The owners said to me, "Can you handle Sinatra?" I said, "Sure I can handle Sinatra." At least, I thought I could. Frank Sinatra at the time was a big star and had a big following. When he played, you had to go, "Mr. S, does this play go? Is it showing, playing?" Because sometimes he would pretend like he was playing. Chips would be piling up and he would make a show — he wasn't gambling. Other times he would gamble.

One night he came in and he was playing. He was hard to handle and everyone wanted to stay away from him. This was 1970. I said, "Mr. S., does this play?" He said, "Yes." He had an \$8,000 limit at a \$4,000 table since they doubled it for him. He was betting, playing, and then he loses \$20,000, fast. They gave him another \$20,000 and he plays. He loses \$8,000. Now he's got \$12,000. He bets \$8,000 and he wins that bet. They pay him the \$8,000 and he says, "It all plays." I said, "The limit is \$8,000." He says, "Hey Boy Scout, take a walk." Everyone is laughing, "Oh that's Frank Sinatra." But I said, "It plays to the limit, \$8,000." He deals the cards and he wins again. The dealer, our dealer, pays him \$16,000. I have lost all control of this game.

I know this guy is a problem at the table, but I don't know what the hell to do. I go over to him and say, "Mr. Sinatra, if you don't want to play by the rules, there is no game." I took the cards and threw them all over the table. Frank Sinatra was furious. He took the chips and threw them! Now these were thousand dollar chips — customers were picking them all up — it was a madhouse. Sinatra says, "Get Wayne Newton to do the job! I quit! Who do you think you are? If I ever see you again, it will be the end of you!" That was a big scene. The owners said, listen Kenny, take a week off and let us cool this thing out.

What do you think happened the next day? Sandy Waterman was the casino manager and he was Jerry Zarowitz's partner for years. He sees Frank Sinatra and says something to him like, "Take it easy, let's relax — let's not have any problems." And Sinatra says something to him like, "Who are you?" I wasn't there but this is what I heard. He said, "Who are you? You are nothin'. Get away from me, don't talk to me." This old man, about seventy years old, so younger than me now at seventy-six, goes to his office and gets a gun. He sticks it in

Sinatra's face, "What did you say to me?"

Sinatra goes crazy! He leaves and calls the district attorney at the time. The district attorney wants to indict him and arrest him for the attempted murder of Sinatra. It was chaos! And that incident was all in the news.

*Fast forward to when you came into El Cortez. When did you step into an executive role, where you were overseeing the day to day operation?*

In 1975, I came in here with Jackie, right from Caesars Palace. I got licensed in October and Jackie said, "When do you want to start?" I said, "First of the year." He said, "No, come in December because we have a profit-sharing plan and if you start in December you've got two years ahead." I started right away.

I could play to Jackie. I came in here and saw a lot of things. I came from Caesars Palace, but this is Downtown and I was trying to do everything I could. First thing I said to Jackie was, "You've got these porters around here who don't do a goddamn thing. They're lying around, they're not doing anything." Jackie says, "Yeah, you're right. You're in charge of the porters." So I said, "Fine!" He made me in charge of the porters and I took care of them. We weeded out the bad ones. One funny story is about a fellow by the name of Allen, he just retired from the El Cortez a few years ago. One day Allen shows up drunk and I tell him, "We warned you, Allen. You've got to go." He left, we fired him, got rid of him. Three days later he shows up with a suit and tie on. He says, "I need my job back." I said, "Allen, we gave you a lot of chances but you can't show up drunk here. You don't even have enough sense to call in sick! You showed up blind drunk!" He says, "You've got to give me another chance." I said, "Alright." I took him down to the liquor room — it was a mess. Everything in there. . .boxes. . .it was a mess. Jackie's uncle was the bar manager. He was a nice old guy, but he was an old guy. I said, "You straighten up this liquor room. Put everything in order and you've got your job back." He said, "Well, I'd like to do that but I can't read or write." So I said, "Well, you can see can't you?" To which he replied, "Yeah, sure I can see." I continued, "Well you see this bottle here? All the bottles that look like this, you put together. You see the beer?" He replied, "Yeah, I know what beer is." And I answered, "All the beer that looks alike, you put them all together." After that he lasted in his job for 30 years. It's just fun. We've been here a long time, since 1975. That's forty-two years. That's a long time.

*Las Vegas has changed substantially since then. Is there anything that you wish did not change?*

To tell you the truth, even if I haven't changed, I am so glad the town has changed because it's so much better now. I am so proud of Las Vegas. We have the best hotels in the world. We go to New York on vacations, we go wherever we go, Los Angeles — when you stay at a hotel, the rates are ridiculous. And

Winter 2017]      *THE ORAL HISTORY OF KENNY EPSTEIN*

7

they're nowhere as good as Wynn, nowhere as good as Bellagio. Not even close! Nothing is as good. I am so proud of Las Vegas. We have the Raiders now, have a hockey team, and we are going to get a basketball team. This is a great place. We've got the best convention town in the world. I just love Las Vegas and I'm so proud to have some small part in it. Here's another thing, the El Cortez is just like Las Vegas used to be. It's manageable, it's affordable — not only as a customer, but as an owner. We are part of the whole deal and it's something we can manage financially and business-wise.

*What do you see for the future of El Cortez and Downtown Las Vegas?*

The El Cortez is getting better and better. We are getting younger people who are coming down here. That means they are shifting their loyalty from the Strip. The Strip used to be the main deal. But it's too expensive...and forget about the expense, it's also a pain. Traffic and parking...it's just easier to get around Downtown. We also have some good restaurants down here — Carson Kitchen, Le Thai, Eat, Bocho Sushi — we've got a lot of fun places. Fremont is sort of like Bourbon Street where you can walk from place to place to place to place. You can't do that on the Strip. You go to our valet or in our garage and you fall right into to the place. You go to these other places and you have to really walk. You've got sore knees by the time you're inside!

*Who are the best friends you've made in the industry, during the time you've been out here, aside from Mr. Gaughan?*

I've met so many people, how can I choose just a few? Though Kirk Kerkorian<sup>3</sup> lived down the street from us back in the 1960s, so I knew him since I was nineteen. He was always a gentleman, just a regular person. I go way back with him, on a first name basis. I would have to say that I knew everyone here.

And of course, my business partners over the years — Jackie, his son Michael, Tito Tiberti, Frank Toti, Mike Nolan, Joe Woody. Mike and Joe help me run the El Cortez and are as good of guys as it gets — I couldn't do it without them.

*Is there anybody that stands out in particular that has helped you in your business endeavors at the El Cortez?*

When I first bought into the El Cortez, the bank at the time was Bank of

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<sup>3</sup> Kirk Kerkorian was a billionaire financier who founded MGM Resorts International in the early 1990s. See Howard Stuz, *Billionaire Las Vegas Mogul Kirk Kekorian Dies in Los Angeles*, L.V. REV.-J. (June 16, 2015), <https://www.reviewjournal.com/business/casinos-gaming/billionaire-las-vegas-mogul-kirk-kerkorian-dies-in-los-angeles/>.

Nevada — that bought First National Bank, who got bought by Wells Fargo. At the time, it was Bank of Nevada and I told them I needed \$250,000 for 5% of the El Cortez. He said, “We’ll work that out for you Kenny. Give us a couple of weeks. It will be no problem.” They were going to charge me 6.25% interest. When I went to get the money, he says, “Kenny, I’m sorry. It’s out of my control. The bank board says the El Cortez is a non-performing asset and we can’t give you the loan. I’m embarrassed. I am the manager but the bigwigs said no, we can’t do it.”

I tell my father and he says, “Call Parry Thomas.” I call Parry Thomas,<sup>4</sup> I get him on the phone and he says, “Yeah Kenny, what can I do for you?” I say, “I want to borrow some money. I’m buying in with Jackie.” He says, “That would be perfect for you. I’m glad you’re doing it. Come down and see me.” The next day, a Friday, I went down to see him. He said, “How much do you need?” To which I said, “Two hundred and fifty thousand.” He asked, “When are you going to pay it back?” I assured him, “Three years, give me three years.” He then said, “See Dorris, my secretary, on Monday. The check will be on the table.” So I go in on Monday, pick up the check and I see the interest. It’s 9.25%!

That reminds me of Myron Cohen — he was an old Jewish comedian who was on TV and played at the Flamingo. One of his great jokes was Mrs. Goldberg goes to see Schwartz, the butcher. She goes, “How can you charge a dollar forty-nine for lamb chops when Mr. Gluck across the street is a dollar twenty-nine?!” Schwartz says, “Go across the street to buy it from Gluck!” She says, “He doesn’t have any lamb chops.” That was the same thing with me and Bank of Nevada. I got it at 6.25%, but they didn’t give me the loan.

*Did organized crime still have a presence at the time that you entered the industry in the 1970s? And if so, did it pose any challenges to you and your group?*

They had a lot of guys. We had the Stardust deal in the late 1970s. It didn’t really pose challenges to us, but we had a partner in the Barbary Coast who left the Justice Department to be a partner. His name was Dick Crane and he was a crime buster. He left the Justice Department to be a partner in the Barbary Coast so we didn’t have any problems.

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<sup>4</sup> Parry Thomas was an American banker who helped finance a number of Las Vegas casinos, including the Sahara, Golden Nugget, Treasure Island and Wynn-Encore. See A.D. Hopkins, “‘Quiet Kingmaker’ and Las Vegas Banker E. Parry Thomas Dies at 95,” L.V. REV.-J. (Aug. 26, 2016), <https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/local-las-vegas/quiet-kingmaker-and-las-vegas-banker-e-parry-thomas-dies-at-95/>.

*Is there one major issue that came up at any of the casinos that you've run — whether it was a massive loss on some game or a customer that stands out?*

We had many, many big losses that seemed like you can't believe it at the time. We had many losses. Looking back, it was a part of doing business. At the time it was very stressful because you didn't have the bankroll, the money, that you have today. With inflation, you have more money because the dollar is worth less. There was a lot of things we had. We had a woman here at the El Cortez three years ago who beat us for \$240,000 — playing everything but mostly slots — she is still our customer today. She beat us for \$120,000 in slot machines...figure that one out. She beat us in baccarat for \$40,000 or \$50,000. She just hit these big jackpots. She took the money and lost it in the Golden Nugget. There is no way we'll ever get even with her. That wasn't in one day, it was over a year, but she just couldn't lose. There are so many stories.

But I have to tell you one story — you're going to like this. I am the pit boss at the baccarat tables in Caesars Palace. This woman who just died at eighty-seven years old, she used to be a cocktail waitress, real estate broker, and loved to play — it was her whole life. She would come to baccarat when there was hardly any business because it was two o'clock in the morning. In those days, we didn't have twenty-four-hour baccarat. Everybody wanted to leave at quarter-to-three, and close the game down at three o'clock. You were working from nine to five but closed the game early when there is no business. We had a \$20 minimum and she showed up — she always showed up with \$700 or \$800. The dealers were there for their job; they were getting paid. They'd say, "Yeah Marie, you can bet \$5." She doesn't bet \$5, she bets \$5 or \$10, then gets stuck. The dealers want to go home. They are spoiled, making tips. Marie has this little kachina doll and would talk to the doll like this, "[crouches down and murmurs to imaginary doll] What do you think I should do. . .what do you think I should do. . ."

She was eccentric. Today in baccarat, they take the cards, throw them away, and have a new deck. In those days, the dealers would shuffle them. There was a time between shoes that she would go to the washroom. One day, the dealers stole her doll. She came back, started playing, and got frantic. She couldn't find her lucky doll. I said, "Marie, don't worry. We'll find it for you. We'll find your lucky doll." She was crying. I said to the dealers, "Come on guys, give it to her." They were laughing and joking around, saying, "We don't know where it is." But I knew that they took it. They jerked me around for an hour while she was hysterical. The dealers continued to claim, "I don't know where it is." So finally, I said to them, "Here is what we're going to do. I'm going to fix you guys. I'm not going to call Wingy<sup>5</sup> or the owners because that will show I can't handle you

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<sup>5</sup> "Wingy" was the well-known nickname of Bill Grober, who owned the Cal-Neva Lodge and Casino in Lake Tahoe throughout the late 1950s, and helped open Caesars Palace in 1966. *See Wingy, Frank and Jerry Zarowitz*, KIYQ RADIO STATION (Feb. 17, 2017), <http://www.kiyq.org/wingy-frank-and-jerry-zarowitz/>.

guys. But I'm going to fix you up. Give me the doll and we'll forget about this." They wouldn't do it.

The dealers included a relative of Ralph Lamb.<sup>6</sup> There was also Woofter, the county commissioner's guy they put in there. I had other guys who were local characters' sons or nephews. They gave them to me because nobody else wanted to handle them. Another fellow was with Bonanza Airlines as a temporary pilot, and only called in every so often. I said it again, "I'm going to fix you guys up. You'll never screw with me again, I'm telling you." They replied, "Yeah Kenny, that's okay." I said, "Okay. You're sure now?" And they insisted, "We don't know what you're talking about. We didn't take the doll."

So I picked up the phone. "Yeah operator? Get me the Sheriff's department." I got the Sheriff's department and continued, "Yeah this is Kenny Epstein, Caesars Palace. I want to speak to Ralph Lamb. I am a personal friend of his." In response these three dealers said, "No, no, no! What did you do? No!" I replied, "I told you guys."

The next day I went to work, and Ralph Lamb was waiting on me. Ralph Lamb was the "Big Fix" in Las Vegas. He was the Sheriff, but he was more than the Sheriff. He said, "Kenny, you will never have problems with these boys again. If you do, although you won't, I will take care of it." I never had a problem again. Ralph put them in their place. Las Vegas was a small town back then — that's just how things got done.

I got Marie her lucky doll back and she remained a loyal customer of mine for sixty years, until her death.

### III. THE FUTURE OF GAMING

*What are your thoughts on eSports?*

I think eSports is probably a great thing. Though I don't know if it's any different than when they have a tournament for darts. You have a bunch of people throwing darts, some people get eliminated, another guy comes up with darts, and you can bet on it. Or pool tournaments — there are eliminations. I think that's great! If people like it, then it will be a big draw for Las Vegas.

*What do you think about the prospect of betting on eSports through sports books?*

My concern is in regard to who will monitor these people if they are throwing eSport games? Is there a commission? Are people watching this? Any time there is any money involved, somebody is going to cheat. That's the way the Gaming Commission works and why we have cameras — all these things are to protect

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Lamb was the longest serving sheriff in Clark County history, serving a total of eighteen years. See A.D. Hopkins, *Ralph Lamb*, L.V. REV.-J. (Sep. 12, 1999), <https://www.reviewjournal.com/news/ralph-lamb/>.

Winter 2017]      *THE ORAL HISTORY OF KENNY EPSTEIN*

11

yourself. Who is going to watch all this stuff? I'm not saying it's a bad idea. I'm saying that you need to have a whole organization in place.

*What about Internet gaming?*

If I was into Internet gaming, I would love it. I am a brick-and-mortar guy. I'm against that because I want people to walk in here and come into my place.

*What do you think about the legalization of recreational marijuana in Nevada?*

It's very bad. Is alcohol any good? I'm not saying alcohol is any good. You have alcohol and it's by different tastes — someone might like red wine and that might go with meat. White wine might go with fish. Beer might go with hot dogs and hamburgers. What about this marijuana? It's prescribed for different highs, lows, ailments, feelings, depression — it's a different story. It's a drug.

It's even more than smoking marijuana. It's the candy, the edibles. Gummy bears, chocolate kisses, anything you want. It's the same thing. How is anybody going to know the difference? They're talking about kids — a four-year-old kid shot his finger off. And that's a gun he's playing with. What about marijuana candy? How is he going to know the difference?

*What is your position on a Nevada lottery?*

We've always been against it because we have keno, we have slot machines that pay off big. We didn't want to compete with that. But there is no reason for people to go to California to buy tickets. They should be able to buy them here.

*What advice would you have for someone entering the gaming industry today?*

I think it's a great business. It's like any other business. My father gave me good advice and it may be simplistic, but he said to me, "If you want to be in this business, show up on time and stay honest." I said, "Dad, what's so important about that?" And he replied, "If you do those two things, you'll be the only one."

It's pretty simple: if you show up on time and do what is right, you are going to advance. We're always looking to advance. I don't care where you are. If you're at school, a teacher — if someone is doing the right thing, you are going to advance them.

Stay on task, show up on time, don't cut corners.

*If there was one thing that you could ensure would never change about the El Cortez, what would it be and why?*

You're going to ask me this question and I'm going to tell you something that I really can't change. We've got a history here. If we took the El Cortez and

ripped it down, built a brand new place, it wouldn't be the same. We're like the Alamo. We've got a history.

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

Without question, my family. My wife, Diane, and my children. I have four great children. My son is the best son I've got — he's the only one. He is the chief operating officer at UFC, an attorney, and the president of this hotel. He and his wife Michelle have three children. My older daughter Dana is a mother of two daughters and married to a surgeon here in town, Ron Hofflander. My daughter Alex is the executive manager of El Cortez, she just had a baby, Charlotte Adele, and is married to my son-in-law Jonathan Gudai. My daughter Katie, is also involved in the operation of El Cortez, she is our director of guest relations, and married to another Jonathan, Jonathan Fine. I've been very lucky, and a big part of it is because of my parents. When you have good parents, you probably have got your future set for you. How many people don't have that opportunity? That was a big, big lead.