An Oral History of

Doug Quilici

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Doug Quilici is owner of the Copenhagen Bar at 2140 Prater Way in Sparks. The bar was previously located several blocks to the west, and run by Doug's father, Gino "Bear" Quilici. That location was demolished in 1966 to make way for Interstate 80. Doug became his father's business partner even before Bear passed away in 1997. Longtime customer and bartender Ray Maldonado also chimes in with his memories of Bear and the popular bar.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

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with Ray Maldonado

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Barber: I'm here at the Copenhagen Bar in Sparks with Doug Quilici and Ray Maldonado, and it's the 29th of October, 2013.

What we're trying to do here is get a lot of background information on the Copenhagen Bar and understand not only this business and the history of the people who owned it and who started the business, but what this area has been like over time, with the knowledge that this bar was originally located in another spot. If I could, I'd like to first ask you, Doug, to talk a little bit about your family's background and how far back the family has lived in this area.

Quilici: My grandparents came from Italy, though I don't know the year. My dad was first generation here on that side. He met my mom. She lived in San Francisco and came up here during the Depression, and that's when they got together. But my father was born here. They survived the Depression. My mom had a worse time in the bigger cities, but out here in Sparks, Dad went through all the Italian ranches when he was a young man, then went to World War II, came out of World War II and bartended at the Stag Inn and decided to get into the bar business himself. That's when he opened up the Copenhagen Bar by the Coney Island.

Barber: So where did they live when they first got married or when he first lived here, do you know?

Quilici: They had a couple places that they rented in Reno, small little alley houses, and then he saved enough money to buy a little place on Winston Drive up by what used to be Manogue High School, up in that area. It was right down the street from the rendering works, which is still there and smelled really good in the summer. So that's where I grew up till I was eleven.

Then we moved. He bought a couple acres that used to be the old Mongolo subdivision. It was the Mongolo Ranch and John Mongolo subdivided it. He begged my dad to buy five, ten acres over here, and Dad could only afford a couple acres. So he got a couple acres over there, built a house, and my sister and I and everybody moved to Sparks. It was out in the country at the time by North Truckee Lane.

Barber: How was that for you? I would imagine it was a big deal to move from the city to a country area.

Quilici: Oh, it was great. Well, I wouldn't say the city. Reno was pretty small even back then. There were a lot of ditches. I mean, it didn't feel like the city, but I liked it. We had horses and stuff and it was enjoyable.

Barber: Was he working on ranches, when you recall that, or was that before you were born?

Quilici: No, he worked on ranches during the Depression just to make some extra money for his mom and stuff. And my dad's dad, he worked for the railroad as a greaser or something, when he first came here, but he never learned English. He had trouble assimilating and he ended up actually killing himself, from depression. I guess he missed Italy and stuff. But my grandmother, Rosa, she did really well. She came to live with us, I remember, when I was a little kid, just before she passed away.

Barber: What was your grandfather's name?

Quilici: Joseph. Joseph and Rose.

Barber: Where did they live?

Quilici: They had a little place in Sparks. From 6th Street to about 15th Street, that was the old Italian section. They had a place, and I believe it was on either 7th or 8th Street. It was a little house with a little basement and a wood stove to heat it up. They grew up in that area because everybody kind of went where the language was spoken. It was such a big Italian population from Sparks. Everybody kind of congregated around there and the churches.

Barber: So how would you define the Italian area? Where was it specifically?

Quilici: It was over by 6th Street up to 11th, 12th, 13th Street over in Sparks, but on the other side. You know where Sparks High is on 15th? It'd be on the other side, down. That was all the old Italian section.

Barber: So by the time you moved to Sparks, you were already very familiar with Sparks.

Quilici: Yeah.

Barber: You visited family?

Quilici: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, of course.

Barber: Was your grandfather alive, that you remember him?

Quilici: No, I don't remember him. I remember my grandmother, but not my grandfather.

Barber: What's your earliest memory of where your father was working?

Quilici: The Copenhagen, the old one. I'd go down there with him on weekends or something. He had to go down and stock up or just check things out, so I'd always ride over there with him. I remember when they tore it down and they bought this property and I remember them building this property. Those are my memories.

Barber: What was that area like where the original Copenhagen was? That's the area where the interstate is now. How close was it to the Coney Island? Can you describe that area?

Quilici: We were right next door to the Coney Island. The Chevron station was still there. I remember the gas station and we were just right down from it. It was Highway 40. There was no Highway 80, just Highway 40. You had to go through downtown Reno to go up to the lake, and it was like a big winding road. It took forever to even get up to Lake Tahoe. I would say it was like Fernley or Fallon back in those days.

Barber: And were the families close? Were those businesses competitors?

Quilici: Oh, sure. My dad, he didn't get along real well with Mr. Galletti. He had some problems and there's a feud there. Italians, you know, they're fighting somebody all the time. So him and John didn't get along real well, because the Coney Island used to be the tamale factory before they turned it over to a bar. So I'm not too sure what the feud was about, probably money, knowing the Italians. [laughs]

Barber: Can you describe, as you remember it in that original location, what the place was like and what kind of people went there? What was the atmosphere?

Quilici: It was so different then, because in those days the bars were really, really the old-style neighborhood bars. The upkeep wasn't too good on them. It was just a meeting place for 99 percent men. In fact, very rarely did you see women in those days, and I remember that as a kid. It just didn't happen.

You'd get shot now, but I remember going up there, and even here you'd see kids in cars, you know, while their grandfathers or fathers came in to get a beer while they were going to the dump or something, and these kids would be out there for, like, an hour and it was just comic. Kids would be playing out in the parking lot and I'd go play with them because there used to be an orchard back here, and same with the old Cope. There were lots of fields and stuff. Now you'd get strung up. But back in those days, nobody thought differently.

Barber: Did they serve food?

Quilici: No. Well, that's not true, because the Old Copenhagen had a little window because there was a little grill or something, as I remember. They used to have sandwiches, but that gal was only there for a couple years and that was the end of it.

Barber: There was a little kitchen?

Quilici: Yeah, and then it was a storeroom after that. I remember they had this dark storeroom when I was a kid.

Barber: Do you know if your father had had that building constructed or was it already there?

Quilici: It was already there, and it was the same floor plan that they used for the old Spot Bar on B Street, the same builder. It was identical to that. That's what it looked like.

Barber: Which bar are you talking about?

Quilici: It was the Spot Bar and it's called La Morena now It's a Hispanic bar now. That's the old Bowlarium that's called the Oasis now.

Barber: We have the history of how the Copenhagen Bar dated back to the thirties, I guess. It sounds about the same age as the Coney Island, I think.

Quilici: The Coney might be a smudge older. Inez at Casale's Halfway Club, I know she goes back to the thirties, also.

Barber: Now, Ray, had you been into the old bar in the original location?

Maldonado: No, I didn't make it up there. I came over here, what was it, 1969? I was coming here in 1968.

Barber: But it was kind of new.

Maldonado: Yeah, I was in the liquor business, wholesale, so I would work with the salesmen that would come in here.

Barber: Which business did you work for?

Maldonado: I worked for Sierra Wine and Liquor, which was owned by Pete Barengo, and then I went to the McKesson and then Southern Wine & Spirits and back to McKesson.

Barber: Did you work for Barengo when their office was in the old railroad depot?

Maldonado: Yes, the WP, Western Pacific.

Barber: What was that building like to work in? That's a pretty historic building.

Maldonado: It is historic. It was two stories. We only used the bottom of it. It was unique. It was really different.

Barber: I heard it's been recently purchased and might reopen as a restaurant or a brewery or something.

Maldonado: Yeah, they've been talking about that for lots of years.

Barber: Now, Doug, when they decided where to locate the interstate, I guess they must have just decided where the route would be without consulting business owners. Did your dad ever talk about how he had felt about that? Was he upset about it?

Quilici: Yeah, he was because, you know, we got the bulldozer and the Coney and everything did not. In fact, it's a big joke with Inez Stempeck, you know, that we got bulldozed. I just remember that my dad was scrambling around to find a property. In fact, they bought a little piece of property on B Street over here that was, like, 30 feet wide and 80 feet long. It was next to a gas station over here. That was originally where the Copenhagen was going to be, and then this property came up because there was a house here. So I think Harold [Lucy] found it, and they made an offer on it and they got it.

Barber: So there was a house on the property, but there was nothing here? They actually constructed this building?

Quilici: Right. In fact, behind us was an orchard at one time and there was a ditch that ran up behind here, so this was a really open area. Between Reno and Sparks at that time, there were a lot of open fields. It was just open fields everywhere.

Barber: Do you think that even after the interstate went in, Prater Way would still have seemed like a desirable street to be on, even though it wasn't on Highway 40 anymore?

Quilici: Yeah, Prater's always had a lot of traffic and that was one thing they liked. They either wanted to be on B Street or on Prater. That was the ideal.

Barber: So you're saying you remember the construction of this building?

Quilici: Yeah.

Barber: What can you tell me about that?

Quilici: For years we had all the guys who worked on this place as customers, all the concrete finishers. My girlfriend's dad, Frank Peterson, he did the fireplace here and he

was a brick mason. My dad hired a lot of the old families to build the bar, who were in the trades, from roofers to concrete guys to masons and whatever.

Barber: It sounds like it was a community effort in a way.

Quilici: Yeah, because there were only so many companies. And you knew everybody. Back in those days, Sparks, you knew everybody. You know, Joe's working for this guy, and this guy wanted this guy, and knew the garbage guys. It was all family. Every business was a family. There were no corporations or anything.

Barber: They wanted deliberately to make this look like the old location, right?

Quilici: Yeah, because Dad didn't like change. Hence, keeping the name Copenhagen, a Danish name for an Italian family, I don't know, but, you know, you don't want to jinx yourself. So it's bigger, but where the barbershop is now, is where the pool table would have been at the old Cope, but the doors, the entries were the same.

Barber: So the old location had a pool table in the front?

Quilici: Yeah, in the front. Until a car drove through the wall and demolished the front. [laughs]

Barber: Really? When did that happen, do you know?

Quilici: Dad got a call late one night. Old Irish Charlie was bartending. He was quite the drinker, and he said, "Bear, a car just drove through the front door."

And he said, "Oh, Charlie, you've got to sober up."

He goes, "No, I mean it this time, Bear. A car's in the middle of the place." So it messed up the pool table and everything.

Barber: Were there people who had worked for a long time at the old location who continued to work at the new location?

Quilici: As far as the bartenders, yeah, we had a couple of them. This other guy we called Sarge, he came down here for a while. There were a couple of the old-timers that I remember who worked here when Dad first opened up.

Barber: So at the old location and even here, was your father a hands-on owner, every day behind the bar?

Quilici: Oh, my god, yeah. My dad used to work a lot of hours. He'd work a lot of hours, twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours every day. In fact, he always felt kind of guilty every once in a while that we never got to go fishing a lot. I remember he'd open up every once in a while and he'd kind of feel guilty, but he had to work.

Barber: Can you describe what he was like and what tone he set in the place?

Quilici: Well, my old man was a big guy, but he was probably the fairest—I'm not just saying this because he's my father—he was probably the fairest guy and the most nonjudgmental guy I've ever met. I don't care if you were a millionaire or a guy that was just struggling paycheck to paycheck, he just treated everybody the same and it was genuine. He didn't put airs on for anybody and he was just real fair, but, boy, if you crossed him, you got the little finger in your chest. He'd chew you out. He'd tell everybody to dummy up, or if some guy was screwing up and messing up with his family or whatever, he'd pull him aside and say, "You've got to pull your head out, and I don't want you in here for another month," and that kind of stuff. He was that guy.

Barber: What did he think about running a business like a bar? Did that sometimes mean a lot of challenges for him as far as just running the place?

Quilici: At the old Cope, he used to have live music, Western music. He didn't tell me this, but he told my mom this. He came home and he had five fights in one night, and he said, "That's it. I'm done. There's no more music, anything like that." He just wanted to run a bar. In fact, he didn't even want a pool table when we moved down here. Harold wanted that. Because he just didn't want the drama and all that stuff that went with it. But other than that, he seemed to enjoy it.

Barber: Tell me about Harold a little bit and who he was and what the relationship was.

Quilici: Harold was a real smart guy.

Barber: This is Harold Lucy?

Quilici: Harold Lucy. He was Fitgerald's right-hand man, him and "Fitz." He was kind of the brains of Fitzgerald's, to be honest with you, and you never hear about him. I don't know how my dad met Harold, though I know a lot of dealers and stuff used to come down to the old Copenhagen from the old days of Harolds Club and the Primadonna and all the old joints, so I presume that's how they met. Harold was from around here also, and they just decided to open up the bar when the eminent domain thing went through at the old Cope.

Barber: So they were partners for a while?

Quilici: Down here.

Barber: In this location?

Quilici: Not up there. Yeah.

Barber: For how long?

Quilici: There's a clipping in the office when they opened up the Mint Club, so they were still partners there, and Dad was probably in the Mint Club for a few years and it just wasn't for him. Harold was a casino-background guy, so he took full ownership of the Mint Club and then Dad took ownership of the Copenhagen.

Barber: They just operated them at the same time?

Quilici: Yeah, they did. Dad didn't really care for that. He was kind of a small-town guy, and Harold had more visions than my dad did.

Barber: So that place is a little different.

Quilici: It was a casino, you know, so way different.

Barber: And you never had any slot machines or anything?

Quilici: We did, but not like the Mint Club. We had the old Jennings machines. In fact, I have two up there that we had restored, but the old single-coin Jennings and stuff, that kind of thing.

Barber: So Ray, you have memories of Bear also?

Maldonado: He just told it the way it was and he meant it too. [laughs] In fact, he taught myself and a bunch of other guys I went to school with handball, and we were playing at the Y. And it would be Harold Lucy and Bear and Joe Morrey, Santino Oppio. So he took about four or five of us and taught us the game of handball.

Well, I switched over and started playing racquetball. So he came and a couple other guys came to see us play racquetball. We were playing over here on Matley Lane, at the Reno Athletic Club. He went downstairs and got my bag and he took out an old racquet that I had and then he presented it to me, and he sewed lace around it because it wasn't the man game, you know, handball.

Quilici: That's true.

Maldonado: He sewed lace around it and he presented it to me. Oh, god. He was quite the guy.

Barber: Did it seem like a lot of the same people would always come in all the time into the bar?

Quilici: All the neighborhood bars were like that back in those days. It's so different now. That's why you don't see too many real traditional neighborhood bars, in my opinion, because, there's so much stimulus now, that people just don't—when I was younger, it was a meeting place. You came down here to either find work or talk to somebody or watch a game or something. It was a genuine meeting place that maybe you'd see in Europe now, that kind of flavor that you just don't see anymore.

Barber: Although this seems to have that feeling.

Quilici: It does. It does, but we're one of the few. I mean, like, the Coney Island and us and Inez [at Casale's Halfway Club] and, well, the Elbow Room, but they just closed up. It's really changed a lot, the neighborhood bar. I'm just going to keep it a neighborhood bar and keep with that tradition, no matter what.

Barber: Did you work in the bar growing up at all?

Quilici: I used to mop out when I went to Dilworth. I'd come in to make some extra money, and the graveyard bartender would show me what to do and what I was doing wrong. But I used to come down and mop out, yeah, when I went to Dilworth.

Barber: Do you have siblings?

Quilici: I have a sister.

Barber: Would she ever work in the bar, too?

Quilici: No, no. In fact, my dad never had a female bartender, ever. A few years before he died, there was an older gal that worked for the Bowlarium and the Spot Bar. I can't remember her name. She was about seventy. I was going to go on vacation. She was just a great lady, and so she worked two shifts here. You know, the first female bartender we ever had and she was, like, seventy years old, but she was really nice.

Barber: I'm wondering if you could describe what it is like in here now and if it's changed a lot since your dad was the owner.

Quilici: It's changed a lot.

Barber: When did he pass away?

Quilici: He passed away in '97. I became his partner. I think I was in my thirties when I became his partner. He was 51 percent, I was 49 percent, because he didn't want me to go apeshit with the business.

We used to have a lot of construction guys, all the trades. We'd have union painters, union finishers, carpenters, and stuff like that. This is when the town was really booming in the seventies and eighties, and then it's just kind of dwindled. We don't get that anymore, or a lot of the trades now go to, like, Baldini's.

The generations have changed in what they want from an establishment. We still get some of the guys I see, but they just don't hang out here. You know, they've got families now and it's expensive. You just don't want to drink your life away, either. So people's mentalities have changed a lot in the bar business, which is a good thing, because I used to see a lot of heavy drinkers back in the day when I was a kid, you know, some serious guys. They were all hard workers, but they were heavy drinkers.

Barber: Would they come in after work and just stay for hours and hours?

Quilici: You bet.

Barber: Because the construction trades are often finished in the afternoon, right?

Quilici: Absolutely. It was a place to talk about the day and stuff like that, and we used to cash tons of checks here on Friday.

Barber: Paychecks?

Quilici: Yeah. In fact, just to show you how things have changed, when you cashed your paycheck here, you got a free pack of cigarettes and two free drink tokens, Lucky Strikes. Whether you smoked or not, you got them. [laughs]

Barber: I remember my dad telling me they used to give away bags of Lucky Strikes on the doorknobs at college.

Quilici: Oh, yeah. That's what you did.

Barber: When do you think things really changed? In the nineties or so?

Quilici: Yeah, I'd say early nineties and stuff. You could see the change coming with the trades and just with the changes in Reno and Sparks. And then, of course, the depression we just went through here in the last four years really took a hit on the trades. And when you're kind of a working man's bar—though we do have a lot more females coming in, but we're still about 70 percent male—it's taken a toll on everybody. I'm going to stick with it no matter what and keep running it the same way my dad did.

Barber: Tell me about when he took you on as partner. When did that happen? What were the circumstances there?

Quilici: My mom didn't want me to come in this business at all. I went to college. I was a music major, actually. Even my dad, he never pushed me into it. When I came to work here, I think I worked here for probably seven years before I became a partner, and it was just mainly because if something happened to him, it would just make it easier on the transition with all the legal stuff we'd have to go through.

Barber: But he still worked here full-time?

Quilici: Oh, yeah. He'd come down up until he died. When he passed away at home, he was getting ready to go play handball, and Mom found him dead with his handball stuff next to him. He always came down here. I'd mop and he'd do the register, and then he'd go play handball with the guys. So that was kind of a good thing, really. He didn't linger or anything like that, which would have killed him.

Barber: Who were his friends?

Quilici: God, he had lots of friends. Well, a lot of the old-timers like Ray was saying, like Santino Oppio, and a lot of the old Italian families. But Dad wasn't a real big social guy. He very rarely drank. He'd have maybe a beer with dinner. I never saw my father drunk ever, ever. He liked to go to bed at nine o'clock. He was just a really low-key guy to own a bar, and he wasn't real flamboyant or anything.

Barber: Often that's true. People own bars, they really have a great sense of responsibility.

Quilici: Yeah, well, a lot of them die of cirrhosis too, though. [laughs] I know a lot of bars owners kind of drink themselves to death, but Dad wasn't one of them.

Barber: There's so much character in here. Can you tell me something about the way it's decorated and if it's been the same since you remember?

Quilici: No, it was pretty plain.

Maldonado: We call it Quilici's Museum.

Barber: There's just a lot of stuff in here.

Quilici: When Dad moved from the old Cope, he didn't want a bunch of junky beer signs and stuff, and so it was real plain. Harold had it like a lounge in here, almost. So twenty years ago I just started—I have a lot of fascination with the thirties and forties, so I try to collect stuff that has something to do with Nevada, and a lot of it, because I'm kind of a horsey guy, is horse stuff, and the old Italian wine bottles. That's pretty much how it's centered. A lot of the stuff's given to me, so when somebody gives me something that fits that era, it never leaves. It goes up here until I'm dead and then they can have an estate sale.

Barber: There's something about that combination of the Old World Italian look and the Western decor, the ranching stuff, that seems very local to this area. You were talking a little bit earlier about all the ranches that were up here in this area, especially north of Prater. Growing up, you remember a lot of open land there?

Quilici: Oh, yeah. I used to go out and get hay for our horses at the Oppio ranch just over the hill where Home Depot is. They had two ranches back there. Gary, our barber, he came from Yerington and he's a roper and does a bunch of roping and stuff. So it's always been a lot of cowboys and construction workers and pool shooters and stuff like that, but it's still kind of old Sparks. A lot of Gary's customers are still a lot of the cowboys that he ropes with, who have been coming in for forty-some years.

Barber: Can you tell me a little bit more about the history of the barbershop here?

Quilici: They got Gary, I think, about three or four years after they opened this place up. There was another barber here. Gary just came out of barber school, and Harold snagged him up and they wanted to get him up here, and Gary came up here and he's been here over forty years cutting hair, longer than I've been here.

Barber: What's his last name?

Quilici: Rogers. Gary Rogers. He's a hoot.

Barber: It's just so interesting to have an open door between the barbershop and the bar.

Quilici: Yeah. Well, when he's not mad at me, it stays open. When he's mad at me, he slams it.

Barber: What else is the same or different since your dad ran the place?

Quilici: We still have the same registers from when my dad opened up the bar. That register there is from 1949 and then this one over here is 1951.

Barber: You don't use them, do you?

Quilici: Yeah. I just found a place where I can get register tape and ribbons for them.

Barber: In town?

Quilici: No.

Barber: You have to order them?

Quilici: I think it's in Illinois. But, you know, if I'm hiring a bartender—I've had the same crew for a long time, but I've actually had people come in looking for work. They don't know how to make change without the computer register, and I don't know how to work a computer register. It's kind of odd. It's kind of like going to the Smithsonian.

Barber: They're great. They have some character. Did the bar always serve picon punch?

Quilici: Yeah. Yeah, a lot of the old drinks and stuff, although you don't serve too many Manhattans anymore—

Barber: They're coming back.

Quilici: Yeah, well, not here yet, but— [laughter]

Barber: Are these the original stools?

Quilici: No, no, I've replaced those a couple times.

Barber: So you've done quite a bit of redecorating it seems.

Quilici: Oh, yeah, yeah, and just general maintenance. I just put on a new roof a couple years ago, and other things to just try to keep up the curb appeal, and make it nice.

Barber: Tell me how the neighborhood has changed. Were there other businesses that were once here that are gone now?

Quilici: Yeah, it's been rough. This area has been real rough. I mean, there was the old Frostop across the street, Oscar's place. It was a drive-in, like an A&W. A lot of people don't remember that. It's a car lot, and the place next door is a car lot. We bought the building next door to us. There just aren't the businesses anymore that you used to see, you know. The neighborhood's still a good neighborhood, though it gets a bad reputation, and I really don't know why. I think it's still fine for me. Like I said, there used to be an orchard behind us and then the apartments took that over. That was kind of nice. That was all open fields behind us there.

Barber: About when did that change? When was that?

Quilici: They built that, I would guess, in the eighties.

Barber: Do you know who owned the orchard?

Quilici: No. No, I don't. I remember we used to use the parking, though. We used to have trucks parked out for two or three acres back there, though.

Barber: Gerald Galletti was telling me that where the Coney Island parking lot is used to be where his grandfather had a garden. They lived in the area around Field Street. He was talking about how, a while back, there had been more walk-up traffic to the Coney. People mostly drive here now, I would imagine.

Quilici: Right, exactly.

Barber: At the Coney, they actually closed off their front door because they didn't want people stumbling out into the street.

Quilici: Right, exactly. That was so close to the street, yeah. I've never seen that door work, never.

Barber: So you said you bought the building next door?

Quilici: Yeah.

Barber: What was it?

Quilici: It was a garage and that was built in 1948. The whole reason my dad bought it is that there was a guy named "Fast Harry" and he was kind of a dubious motorcycle guy. He rented a place just down from us and he'd have the bikes going like this. Well, Dad found out he was looking at this building next door to us, and he goes, "Oh, hell, no." And he bought it for, like, $40,000 or something, so that's how we acquired that building.

Barber: And just leased it out?

Quilici: Yeah. It was a garage. It was a single-car big garage. And now the renter's been there for seven years, but they just use it for storage and stuff. But that's how we acquired it, out of fear. [laughter]

Barber: So were there other bars along this stretch earlier that aren't here now too?

Quilici: The old Pony. It's gone.

Barber: Where was that?

Maldonado: Where the car wash is up here. Where the street makes a Y. And the Wagon Wheel and the Chuck Wagon.

Quilici: The Chuck Wagon, yeah, yeah.

Maldonado: Chuck Wagon. It was a restaurant and a bar. The Pony bar was owned by Dale and Rose Goings. I used to call on them when I first started selling liquor. You know, when you first start, they give you all the small little bars where nobody's doing anything. Somehow, Dale and I ended up good friends, and he used to take me fishing out at Lahontan. I got most of his business, though.

Barber: When did they close?

Quilici: He moved to Wild Horse. He bought a place up in Wild Horse, probably in the eighties, and they knocked it down. It was just a real small bar, kind of like the Spot Bar was, the old Pony. There used to be a lot of bars. On B Street, I mean, there used to be just bars everywhere. Not so much anymore, which is kind of a good thing. You get people moving around. And now the Elbow Room closed, we're the only one around here, which I don't like. I'd like to see a couple of the joints open up, you know.

Barber: And there were little grocery stores, little family markets around, too, right?

Quilici: Yeah.

Barber: What were the closest ones to here that were family markets?

Maldonado: Well, that Mexican Lindo owned by Miller, and the Park Grocery.

Quilici: Park Grocery on 15th.

Barber: Park Grocery was by the apartments.

Maldonado: The Road House, that used to be a convenience store.

Quilici: There was nothing up here until they built Albertsons.

Barber: Did the Pony Express Lodge there ever have a restaurant or bar with it? It was always just a motel?

Quilici: Yeah.

Barber: I've been looking into that one a little bit too. That hasn't changed much over time.

Quilici: No, it hasn't. In fact, I think they had one of the biggest neon signs in northern Nevada. When it was working, it was really cool.

Maldonado: Isn't it still owned by the Keshmiri family?

Quilici: Yeah.

Maldonado: That's another guy I got to know, Joe Keshmiri. We played racquetball together. His boys took over all the properties.

Barber: They took over the Pony Express Lodge. Do you know about when that happened? I can look that up, but it seem like it's been decades.

Quilici: It's been a long time, yeah.

Barber: Was there anything else that got torn down besides the old Copenhagen Bar when they put in the interstate, do you know? I know that was earlier.

Quilici: I know they bought a bunch of homes where the overpass was, on A Street and stuff, but no business that I can really remember.

Barber: Just the Copenhagen.

Quilici: Yeah, yeah, just the Copenhagen. Funny how that worked.

Barber: People talk about the area south of Reno and how those ranches and farms turned into housing developments. It's really pretty recent, like the late eighties, nineties kind of thing.

Quilici: Absolutely.

Barber: Is that about when things were changing, or was it earlier, north of Prater Way up here with all those ranches you were talking about?

Quilici: Well, it was the building boom. In the late seventies and eighties, the building boom just went crazy, and that's when the grandkids of these ranches sold out. They were offered so much money for these developments, Di Loreto and all those out in Spanish Springs. There was just nothing there. And, of course, the water rights went with everything. So the kids just skedaddled, which is unfortunate, because we lose a lot of agriculture, which I think is really important for this area.

And that kind of bugs me because during Will James' time, Reno was really noted as a kind of a cow town and a fun place to go to, with Douglas Alley and the old casinos, and people used to move around, and it was a lot of fun. It's such a sterile environment now, in my opinion. I mean, who am I? These guys are gazillionaires. But it's a shame we can't bring some of what made Reno back again. In the last thirty years, it was a huge mistake, you know, to lose some of that Western flavor. Now we're just kind of like everybody else, almost California-ish.

Barber: A lot of people we're interviewing have talked about that. We interviewed Jack Bassett at D Bar M, the Western store. Of course, they've been there since the sixties and have strong connections to all the ranching families, who cowboy and do rodeo and everything.

Quilici: Absolutely.

Barber: They still have those relationships, but those people don't live close by town anymore.

Quilici: Right.

Barber: You can't have the land.

Quilici: No, exactly, and even where the Reno Rodeo is—I used to volunteer for them—it's such a landlocked event now, you know. It's so different anymore. I'm starting to sound old, you know, like an old guy, "I remember when." But to me it doesn't make sense, the direction they're going.

Barber: Can you think of anyone who could help us understand a lot about this Prater Way-4th Street corridor, who we can interview now, who might have some good stories to tell or bring back that history?

Quilici: Well, I would definitely interview Gary Rogers. He's been around. I'm sure a lot of the businessmen, you know. I can't think anybody offhand. I'm not really sure. I'm not familiar with a lot of businessmen.

Maldonado: How about Coney Island—Greg Galletti?

Quilici: She's been up there.

Barber: Yeah, and we'll talk to Greg a bit more, too. We interviewed Sally Loux, who's a server for him. She's been there for so long, and evoked what it has been like.

Quilici: Oh, sure.

Barber: In your memory, when you think about this area from Reno to Sparks, do you remember when they were really separate cities?

Quilici: Oh, yeah.

Barber: Did they seem very separate to you?

Quilici: Yeah, absolutely. There were a lot of open fields, Paradise Ponds, and that was the old gravel pit. But, yeah, there were a lot of fields just like south of town. Once you went pass North Virginia a little ways, that was it. There were just ranches, and you were way out there. Going to Carson was a big deal. Now it's just all kind of blended into one, you know.

I like western Sparks. You still have a lot of the old buildings, which I like, and hopefully the landlords will keep them restored, and keep the old brick buildings that you've seen on 4th Street and Prater.

Barber: Yeah, you have to look a little harder to see that. You go down to Victorian Square and they're bunched together.

Quilici: Right, which is way cool. I like those old places.

Barber: That's kind of like downtown Reno, too. That's what we're trying to do with this project is create more awareness of the historic places. We're going to have a smartphone app for Reno history, and there's one for Sparks already, so you can get on your phone and look at a map and see where these historic places are and get stories about them.

Quilici: That's a great idea.

Barber: It would be really cool if we could get some photos from you of your dad or of the interior of the old place or anything.

Quilici: I was telling somebody yesterday, after I first talked to you, that we don't have one picture of the old Copenhagen. There was a lady—Dad had a painting of it, and her husband stole it out of the Copenhagen. When he passed away, he got a call about twenty years later. I was here when he took the phone call. She wanted to sell it to him,

and he said, "That painting's mine and you can take it to the grave with you," and that was the end of that. So that's the only picture I know of. So you weren't really missing much.

Barber: Did your mother pass away, too?

Quilici: Yeah, she just died a few years back.

Barber: Was she ever involved with the operation of the business?

Quilici: No. When I was here, she'd come down and count the slot drop, the nickels and stuff when we used to have hoppers, but that was it. She was a bowler. She loved to bowl.

Barber: So this was his business.

Quilici: Yeah, he didn't really want Mom, you know—see, it was just different. You didn't have women like you do now hanging out in bars. It just wasn't done. So, yeah, it was pretty old-school.

Barber: So what are your hopes for the place?

Quilici: Keep it open. I'd like to keep it going and have a resurgence of people who kind of appreciate the older-style environment that is old Sparks, which I really like. And if it doesn't, that doesn't matter because I'm not going anyplace. The place is paid off, so I'm going to keep it running the way this is and do it like that.

Barber: That's good because it is really distinctive. Ray, why do you like coming here?

Maldonado: It reminds me of the old days. Like Doug said earlier, it was a social thing. People came down here just to enjoy each other's company and conversation, and it hasn't really changed that much. Like Doug said, people came down here who needed a job here or something, "You know where I can go get this done or that done?" It was all communication, and Doug hasn't lost that now. I mean, I come down. I enjoy working here on Sundays because everybody comes down. They all talk and have a good time, play pool. We put out a little bit of food on Sundays and other occasions.

Quilici: We just had a Columbus Day deal that we do every year. We make a bunch of Italian food, and you help yourself to wine and stuff like that. That's what I like, the old-school parties. We used to have the bagna caudas out there on the deck.

Barber: Used to have what?

Quilici: Bagna cauda. It's an old Italian feed. We would do it standing up. It's anchovies and olive oil and garlic, and everybody cooks their own. Everybody has a skillet in front of them. But it's just gotten wild, a little too wild.

Maldonado: That's where all these bottles came from.

Quilici: Yeah, a lot of these wine bottles came from those.

Barber: Do you have a kitchen? Do you make the food here?

Quilici: No. No, you cook it outside. Everything's raw. I have a snack-bar license. But you just cut everything up and everybody cooks themselves, and you just drink wine and eat all this garlic-, anchovy-flavored food.

Barber: What about that last event you had? You just bring in the food to do it?

Quilici: Well, I cooked the sausage here and stuff a couple days before, and I make all the sauce and then we throw it out. We have Italian music playing all day long, which everybody hates, but I don't. I tell them they can gut it out for three hours once a year. [laughs]

Barber: Do you advertise that at all or is it just word of mouth, something like that?

Quilici: No, just word of mouth, put it on the chalkboard. It's just real family oriented.

Maldonado: He's playing Dean Martin music and—

Quilici: Louis Prima.

Maldonado: Louis Prima.

Barber: I love it. It does seem like you've got this little group of places. You have the Coney, you've got the Halfway Club.

Quilici: Absolutely.

Barber: Anywhere else that's operating now that you'd put in that category?

Quilici: I was thinking that because there's only—I mean, a lot of the Italians had the neighborhood bars, you know, the old Crystal Bar. Now that's the only three I can think of right now.

Barber: And they're all on the same street.

Quilici: Yeah, that's still the family-owned, you know—

Maldonado: Adolph.

Quilici: Adolph Burgarello, yeah.

Maldonado: Right on 15th.

Quilici: It's called Burgs now, but it used to be called Adolph's. Tony, the nephew, is running it now, and he could give you some insight because that's a real old Italian family, the Burgarellos, Burgarello Alarm is part of his family.

Barber: That whole area on 4th Street was very Italian. A lot of Italian families lived in that area. I was talking to Spencer Hobson. He owns the Reno Brewery Bottling Plant Building. He's got a whole side of his family that's Italian, the Bevilacquas.

Quilici: Oh, sure, the house movers. They used to move houses.

Barber: A lot of those buildings were torn down for an urban renewal project in the sixties. They seemed to have been single-family Italian houses for the most part.

Quilici: My sister and I, we just bought a little rental over here on 4th Street, and it's one of the old Italian places.

Barber: In Sparks?

Quilici: Yeah, in Sparks. It's got the basement in it, two bedrooms. They're old railroad houses. Lot of the railroaders owned those homes over there. That's when Sparks was an actual railroad town, because we used to have a lot of railroaders coming through, but they're all gone.

Barber: You said that your grandfather worked for the railroad?

Quilici: Yeah, he did. He was a greaser, something to do with greasing wheels. I know he tried to get my dad on there. He remembered his father coming home just smelling like this diesel and he said, "I'll never do that job. Never."

Barber: Gerald Galletti worked for the railroad. He was a railroad guy for a long time.

Quilici: When we had the roundhouse down there and stuff.

Barber: Well, I won't keep you any more today, but this has been so great.

Quilici: Oh, it's been fun.