

**Sun Cities Area Historical Society**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Case # 202**

**Interview with John Edward ("Buzz") Ellis**

**August 20, 1991**

**Date of Birth:** 1909

**Place of Birth:** Pershing, Iowa

**Synopsis:**

- Father born east of Tracy, Iowa in 1880s; mother born on a farm in Crawford County, Kansas, in the 1890s
- Parents farmed until father got job with railroad; neither parent graduated 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Two brothers and 1 sister... grew up in Pershing and completed H.S.
- I met wife at age 19; married her at age 25
- I went on to barber school; was barber nearly 42 years
- First heard about Sun City from fellow barber; visited AZ with friends, loved the climate; decided to move here
- Worked as a barber at Williams Air Force Base
- Opened first barber shop in Sun City in 1960 – before town opened – when there were only 10 houses built; spent lots of time in Rec Ctr
- Stopped barbering and started working for Del Webb Corp in 1968; paid for first house with bank loan; made double payments; paid cash for second and third homes;
- Also sat in Open Houses for Del Webb Corp. to meet new visitors
- Ladies helped sell Sun City by scheduling bus tours to the site
- Houses sold themselves; were built at a rate of 12 per day
- Webb built first homes himself... then contracted out
- Sun City was everything I had hoped it would be.

**C-202**

29 August 1991

Release Form

This interview agreement is made and entered into this 29 day of August, 1991, by and between John Edward "Buzz" Ellis (herein after called "Interviewee") and Melanie Sturgeon (herein after called "Interviewer".)

I agree to participate in a tape-recorded interview with Interviewer in association with her research on Sun City, this research being done under the supervision of the Arizona State University Graduate Program in Public History.

This agreement relates to any and all materials originating from this interview or subsequent interviews by the Interviewer, namely the tape recordings and the indexes and abstracts of the interview, and any other written materials, including but not limited to notes, transcripts, or any other materials prepared from the tapes.

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation, co-owners, all his/her copyright, title, literary property rights, and interest in and to the Interview.
2. By virtue of this assignment, Interviewer and the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation will have the right to use the interview for research, educational, and other purposes, including possible publication.
3. All materials from the Interview, including but not limited to transcriptions or other finding aids prepared from the tapes, may be copied, reproduced and/or published.
4. Interviewee acknowledges that he/she will receive no remuneration or compensation for either his/her participation in the Interview or for the rights assigned hereunder.
5. Interviewer and the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation agree to honor any and all reasonable restrictions on the use of the Interview, if any, for the time specified below as follows:

Signed John Edward (Buzz) Ellis Date 8-29-91  
Interviewee: John Edward (Buzz) Ellis (name)

10509 Signal Butte Circle (address)  
Sun City, AZ 85373

Signed Melanie I. Sturgeon Date 29 Aug 1991

Interviewer Melanie I. Sturgeon (name)

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intrvw

**SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**John Edward "Buzz" Ellis**

**Interview was conducted on August 29, 1991 by Melanie Sturgeon**

**Transcribed by Belva McIntosh on 29 July 2007**

**STURGEON:** This is Melanie Sturgeon and on behalf of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation I am interviewing John Edward Ellis, more commonly known as Buzz Ellis, a barber in early Sun City. I am interviewing him in his home in Sun City.

**STURGEON:** Mr. Ellis, can you tell me the approximate dates of your parent's birth and where they were born.

**ELLIS:** My father was born in the late 1880's. Mother would be a few years behind him, probably 1890. Dad was born on a little farm east of Tracy, Iowa. Mother was born in a rental. Her Dad took the family to Kansas so she was born in Crawford County, Kansas, on a little farm acreage.

**STURGEON:** What did your parents do for a living?

**ELLIS:** All they did was farm work till Dad got big enough he got a job on the section. Main line went through this little town and he got a job keeping the tracks in order.

**STURGEON:** Did he keep farming when he was doing that?

**ELLIS:** No. His parents did. They lived on a farm and soon as he got big enough he was out on his own. I got a picture of that house. It was only two rooms. How they raised eight or ten kids there is beyond me.

**STURGEON:** What kind of education did your parents have?

**ELLIS**: Not too much. They didn't go through the eighth grade. As soon as he got big enough to work he had to go to work. They had a big family, both of them. Mother told us when they went to Kansas to live that her and her sister drove the extra stock and cows and horses but not the wagon. Mom and this older sister, she was ----, they walked and drove those cattle and horses clear to Kansas. I don't know how long it took them.

**STURGEON**: That is when your Mother was young?

**ELLIS**: Yes, she was just a little girl. She hadn't met Dad yet. She was only 10 or 12 years old.

**STURGEON**: Can you tell me something about yourself, where were you born and when?

**ELLIS**: I was born near Tracy, Iowa on the river, Des Moines River; they called it Bell Town near the cemetery there up on the hill where most of the people were buried. Born in 1909.

**STURGEON**: Did you grow up in Tracy, Iowa?

**ELLIS**: No my father got a job at a coal mine west of that about 6 or 10 miles. It ended up being a place called Persian, Iowa. That is where I grew up.

**STURGEON**: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**ELLIS**: Two brothers and two sisters, and one left besides me.

**STURGEON**: And what were your educational backgrounds?

**ELLIS**: We went to grade school there at, we went to Attica, not to Persian, to high school. Then about four months after I got out of high school I went to barber school, had four months of that.

**STURGEON**: How old were you then?

**ELLIS**: About eighteen.

**STURGEON**: Then after that you just became a barber.

**ELLIS**: I got a job and I worked here and there where I could, until I could finally go back and get my – I had to work as an apprentice for eight months under a barber who had a license. Then I went back to Des Moines and took the exam and passed it and then I had to take it again here when I moved here to Arizona and I passed it. So not too much of a hullabaloo about it.

**STURGEON**: About how old were you when you met your wife or your future wife and then got married?

**ELLIS**: I was about nineteen.

**STURGEON**: Was that when you got married or was that when you met her?

**ELLIS**: I was working at ----- when we got married and she was working in Persia at a grocery store. I was about 25 when I got married.

**STURGEON**: What about your wife's education? Did she graduate from high school?

**ELLIS**: She went to Persia grade school and then she went to Attica high school.

**STURGEON**: Did she have any college?

**ELLIS**: No

**STURGEON**: Have you been a barber most of your life?

**ELLIS**: 42 years. Then I went to selling houses for Del Webb.

**STURGEON**: Can I ask you some questions about the kinds of towns you lived in when you were younger and as you were maturing. After you moved out of Tracy and moved to that little town, what kind of a community was that?

**ELLIS**: Persia? There was a coal mine there, deep mine. There weren't too many businesses, one or two stores, one restaurant, two or three filling stations and that was it.

**STURGEON**: Was this a town that was owned by the coal company?

**ELLIS**: It was started by the coal company.

**STURGEON**: So was it a company town when you lived there?

**ELLIS**: They owned some of the homes but you could buy your home.

**STURGEON**: What kinds of people lived in the community? Were there people of different ethnic backgrounds? Were they all Americans, were they---

**ELLIS**: Seems like there were a lot of Italians. Very few negroes to start with then after a few years then the negroes came in too. Rest of us was American.

**STURGEON**: Were there old people and young people living in the community?

**ELLIS**: Oh yes. I know some that worked in the coal mine, but mostly young people.

**STURGEON**: You had mentioned that your father worked on the railroad, did he work before or after he worked in the coal mine?

**ELLIS**: Before. He worked on the railroad, they called them gandy dancers, he would go as far as -----Missouri with those motor cars working on the tracks. When he left that he took care of the -- they had a -- at the coal mine and they had a shaker that this coal would come and dump on a car and they would take the cars out of the mine and dump them. Then the chunks would go the furthest, the

little stuff would sift through. So they had two or three grades of coal there as far as size was concerned. He took care of the machine that ran those shakers.

**STURGEON**: Now did your father retire?

**ELLIS**: He didn't retire from there. That coal mine played out. He moved to Tracy and started taking care of the school house there. He lived right close to it. That is where he ended up at.

**STURGEON**: He was still working even though he left the coal mine he was still working?

**ELLIS**: Oh, yeah, he had to work. I don't think they had social security or anything back then.

**STURGEON**: How old was your father when he finally stopped working?

**ELLIS**: Sixty two or three.

**STURGEON**: He died in his early sixties?

**ELLIS**: Yes.

**STURGEON**: Now when you lived in these communities, when you were growing up in Persia did you, were you involved in the community in any way or were your parents involved in the community in any way?

**ELLIS**: No, not really. I played softball. She played with the girls softball team. We had a lot of fun with that but that is about all.

**STURGEON**: What about your parents? Did they get involved in anything? Were they involved in any church groups or anything like that?

**ELLIS**: No, they just made sure we was. I asked them once how come we have to go and you don't have to go. But I didn't carry that too far either with my dad.



**STURGEON:** What kind of occupations did your brothers and sisters end up going on to?

**ELLIS:** My oldest brother worked in the coal mine and went down in and dug coal. My older sister did housework if she done anything. My younger brother was in the Navy. He went back to Tracy and worked in Maytag's. My younger sister, she just married a farm boy in Tracy and they still live there. His folks owned a little place and sis and him took over when they got too old. In Tracy they have a Methodist Church and she is the back bone of that church. Anybody dies she sings at the funeral, anybody gets married she sings at the wedding, plays the piano. She is pretty handy. I don't know what they would do if anything happened to her.

**STURGEON:** After you left and moved to Des Moines and became a barber where did you live after that?

**ELLIS:** I want back to Persia and worked in a barber shop there. Then I went to ---Iowa, that is 35 miles west of where we are talking about. I worked for a barber there. I think I worked for him when I took my State Board. Then I got my license and I could open up anyplace, so I opened up in Persia. I went to Oscalusa, that is when she and I got married. Then I went to Knoxville; that is where Larry, our son was born.

**STURGEON:** Did you stay in Knoxville all that time until you decided to leave? And what did make you come to Arizona?

**ELLIS:** I was working as a barber in a shop in Knoxville, Iowa, and some friends were going to go to Arizona to see some friends, east of Mesa, and they asked if we wanted to go along. Didn't have any money but sure we'll go. So we loaded up and come out with them. It was right at Easter time and all the citrus was in bloom, I said boy this is for me. None of that rain and mud and snow. If I can find something to do I am coming to Arizona so I did. I finally got my State Board here.

**STURGEON:** And where did you set up shop?

**ELLIS:** I had to work at the Air base out at Williams. I didn't need a Arizona license to work there. I stayed there until I got my license. Then I worked in Mesa and Tempe. Somebody came along one day and said, say do you want to take a ride out west of Phoenix. Del Webb who owns the Yankee baseball team has started a town out there. I said sure. He said, maybe we could get the barber shop. He had a shop at Williams Air Base and a Ladies Shop at Luke. So I said yeah, let's go. So we came out here and everything looked good. They was just starting in Sun City. We called somebody in the Del Webb Company said there is a barber in Phoenix had this set up. He was going to put the shop here. So we found who it was and what he wanted was, he sold barber supplies, he was a supply house. So this barber knew him and I had heard of him, so we had a meeting with him and said what's the chance of getting a barber shop in Sun City. Well, he said, if you want to buy the equipment that goes in the shop from me you can have the location. So we took it.

**STURGEON:** Well, before I talk to you some more about Sun City I would like to ask you some questions about the Depression. Do you remember about the depression in the 30's?

**ELLIS:** I can tell you one. We lived in Persia and you just had to live from hand to mouth. There was no work. The mine was shut down. Dad was a company man but when the mine shut down he got laid off too. So we did some fishing in the river as kids with my Dad. My Dad and my brother and I, this may sound silly to you, but one summer my mother canned 100 quarts of wild blackberries. So you know we ate blackberries every other day for I don't know how long. We all had a water bucket and we just about got them full every time we went out. We picked until she canned 100 quarts plus all the jellies and jams. We always had a garden, so outside of that there wasn't too much activity around our place.

**STURGEON:** Did anyone in your family have a job?

**ELLIS**: My older brother he got married and he left home. He was working in the mines and since the mines weren't open he didn't work either. But those people would go out and work on farms.

**STURGEON**: What kind of job did you have during the depression?

**ELLIS**: I was a barber, I had my license. I worked in Oskaloosa. I had a better offer from over in Knoxville which was closer to home, closer to Dorothy. I took it and we went from there. We got married in '34.

**STURGEON**: So you had a job then, you had your own shop during the depression?

**ELLIS**: I was working for a barber. During the depression there wasn't a lot of activity. Saturday was our big day because it was a farming community. If you missed Saturday you might as well miss the whole week. We worked on commission see.

**STURGEON**: Knoxville was a small community?

**ELLIS**: Yeah, Oskaloosa was bigger than Knoxville. They were both county seat towns. Outside of that we just marked time.

**STURGEON**: Were there any colleges or universities in those towns? Mostly the people that lived there were farmers?

**ELLIS**: Retired farmers moved to town and turned the farm over to the kids.

**STURGEON**: So in those farming communities you didn't have a lot of Italians or Russians or people like that, it was just mostly Iowa farmers. Do you remember when the social security act was passed? I'm not asking for a year just asking if you remember when it was passed.

**ELLIS**: I sure don't.

**STURGEON**: Do you remember, well it was passed in 1936, but do you remember ever thinking that it would have any influence on you in later years?

**ELLIS**: No, not really. When we come to Sun City, I hadn't been here very long when a minister came into the shop one day. He said, Mr. Ellis, we are going to start a retirement home for people who have to have help. I want to know if you would like to belong. Well, I didn't have a lot of money and I said what are we talking about money wise. He said \$100 and I said, well I think we can do that. So I figured that the people who were going into that rest home were going to have a barber because it was right across the street from us. So I went that route with them but it didn't work out.

**STURGEON**: You don't remember ever thinking when social security was passed, well, that might be a good thing.

**ELLIS**: No.

**STURGEON**: Do you remember anybody in your family who was helped by it? Was your father helped by social security at all or was he still alive then in 1936.

**ELLIS**: I don't think Dad ever had social security. I know he paid into something and when he died, my mother tried, she wasn't old enough or something, she wasn't eligible and so an old fellow who worked income taxes said you tell me just what you did. I hadn't paid into it but he said I bet I can get that money back but he never did.

**STURGEON**: That is too bad. That must have been hard on your Mother.

**ELLIS**: Yes, it was. She lived in Tracy at that time.

**STURGEON**: When you moved out were you in your 50's or 60's or younger?

**ELLIS**: I was about 46 when we moved to Mesa.

**STURGEON**: As you started approaching retirement age yourself, what were you thinking about as to your future. What kind of plans were you looking at as retired people?

**ELLIS**: Just social security was all.

**STURGEON**: I don't necessarily mean financial plans; I just mean what were you thinking you were going to be doing after you stopped working?

**ELLIS**: Like a friend of mine says, I was a born loafer. I didn't even have to work at it.

**STURGEON**: Were you concerned at all about your economic security when you were thinking about retiring?

**ELLIS**: We were both working. I quit a year or two before she did. I worked until I was 65 and she got out at 62.

**STURGEON**: She worked right after you got here. She worked in Safeway. What about health care, were you concerned about that in your 60's? What kind of plans were you making to take care of that?

**ELLIS**: Not really. We joined an HMO and they changed that over to CIGNA, so I have been with them ever since.

**STURGEON**: What about social activities? Were you concerned about future –

**ELLIS**: Not really. I played some golf and things like that. We didn't get too involved in any church. Mainly because when we left Tempe and came over here, we went to the United Church and they had an old assistant minister there and he sent to Tempe to get our cards to show you are a member of a church. They were getting ready to build a church over in Tempe, a new one. So we had to get a notice from them for a donation. So I said I belong to this church in Sun City and I am not about to help a church in Tempe. So I never heard anymore from them.

**STURGEON**: You said you were relying on your social security; you thought you would be using that when you retired. Did you have any other pension plans or anything like that that you used or you were planning on using to help you when you retired?

**ELLIS**: No, I really never gave it much thought. We didn't have a lot of money but we still saved money on social security and hers. We had been able to do that for ourselves. We invested quite a bit.

**STURGEON**: Where were you living when you retired? In Sun City? And how long had you been living in Sun City when you retired?

**ELLIS**: We came here in '60 and I retired in '78.

**STURGEON**: So you lived here eighteen years before you retired. OK, you did answer this question a little bit earlier, but I am going to ask it again anyway. How did you first hear about Sun City?

**ELLIS**: This barber I told you about, east of Mesa, he had heard about it. Del Webb was better known for his baseball activities with the Yankees. So her and this couple came out here to see what Sun City was going to be all about.

**STURGEON**: So when you came out here Sun City was in the building stages. You came out here and looked at it before it was put together. You weren't planning on moving out here at first, were you? You were just planning on doing the barber business, right?

**ELLIS**: Yeah. As soon as we got the barber shop I knew I had to move because I wasn't going to drive from Tempe.

**STURGEON**: When did you open the barber shop?

**ELLIS**: February 15, 1960

**STURGEON**: When did you decide to move out here?

**ELLIS**: Before that, but there weren't no houses finished. We got one of the first ten houses finished.

**STURGEON**: So you came out here and looked at the barber shop and decided this would be a good place to move, if you could get the barber shop. Was it risky setting up a business when there were only ten houses here?

**ELLIS**: We drew some people from Youngtown. I thought we could stop some of the workers from going home, but it didn't stop too many of them. But had a foreman who lived someplace down near Peoria and he took to coming in. Then we got some business from Youngtown. So we got by.

**STURGEON**: Did you think it was risky at all?

**ELLIS**: I never thought about it in that regards. But it looked like Sun City was going to grow.

**STURGEON**: How could you tell it was going to grow?

**ELLIS**: Del Webb mainly. He was offering all these golf courses and shopping centers and recreation areas. So we didn't see how it could miss.

**STURGEON**: So when you saw all these things you thought this would be a good place.

**ELLIS**: It was something new, you know. Never heard of a builder building a recreation area.

**STURGEON**: Did you think that retirees would have the income to be able to sustain a business?

**ELLIS**: Yes, they wouldn't be moving here if they didn't have money to live here. If they didn't have enough money to buy a house or if they were living with their families they weren't going to be moving here.

**STURGEON**: What were some of the problems, if any, that you encountered when you were first starting your business?

**ELLIS**: Customers mostly. But everything was in an expanding, here, no more than there was, was in an expanding deal. You knew it was going to get bigger, you could tell that. It was new, as far as a retirement community was concerned. The fact they were building golf courses, recreation centers and giving it to them.

**STURGEON**: But Youngtown was across the street and they hadn't really grown very much over the past few years. Did you think it was going to be different than Youngtown?

**ELLIS**: They didn't have a Del Webb pushing them; that was the whole story.

**STURGEON**: So when you came out and looked at that barber shop, did you know enough about Del Webb to know that you thought this might be successful?

**ELLIS**: Well, I wasn't too happy where I was at, working for somebody else in Tempe. So it looked like a chance to get started in something new in a new town. It wasn't named Sun City at that time.

**STURGEON**: What was it called back then?

**ELLIS**: The first part over on the west side was called New Life. So then Del Webb Company run a survey, for people to write to give this place a name. And the people come up with Sun City. They were trailer people, up in Washington or Oregon or someplace. And they chose that name and gave them a house or a lot. But they sold out in a year or two and left here, they wanted to live in a trailer.

**STURGEON**: Once you got your business off the ground did you have any problems then? Once you were moved in and got customers did you have problems?

**ELLIS**: No, it was a really good business.



**STURGEON**: Did you open up any other shops besides that first one?

**ELLIS**: Yeah, we took in a partner. This guy that I started it with, he didn't work in the shop, he didn't want too. He had a shop at Williams Air Base, Ladies Beauty Shop parlor at Luke out here. He didn't want to work. He would if I had to go back home or something. We had a guy come in one day from Minnesota, he had just got his license, wanted to know about starting to work. So I hired him. So when this other shop down south on Peoria Avenue we had first opportunity on it since we had started the first shop. So we took that one on. We took that guy on as partner and he run that one and I run the one on Grand Ave. So that is how we got going.

**STURGEON**: Has Sun City, now that you have lived here, has it been everything you thought it was going to be? Has it been as successful as you thought it was going to be?

**ELLIS**: Let me quote the head-----, his name was Jack McPhee, he was a Scottish fellow. He come in the shop one day and I said, Jack, how big is this going to get? Of course everything was south of Grand Avenue. He said well, I have seen some of the plans out in front and there is already going to be six or eight golf courses. I said, six or eight golf courses! They only had the first one. That is in the plans for this place. It is really going to grow. You about had to go along with it because they were doing everything possible to get people to come here to look at the place. They gave you a week's vacation in an apartment down there on Grand Avenue.

**STURGEON**: Did they do that when people came out to look?

**ELLIS**: And they had a few people in there waiting on the houses to be completed.

**STURGEON**: When you moved into Sun City were you concerned about moving into a place where there really wasn't a community, just a bunch of houses?

**ELLIS:** They were number one. I knew that the first day we moved into our house.

**STURGEON:** Were you worried about moving into a place where there were only ten houses?

**ELLIS:** We never thought nothing about it, did we?

**STURGEON:** There was no one here, you didn't even know if the community had any character because it wasn't even there.

**ELLIS:** They finished ten houses the first they turned loose on. We got the tenth house. But then -----Jack----- and I was buddy buddy with him. He told me about where they was going to build and all this stuff. We had a lot of fun out of it. One old guy that took care of the golf course he came in said, have you been out over here towards Yeller town, why they are building houses over there. I said don't tell me about it, my wife went to the store the other day and couldn't find her way home. They built so many houses.

**STURGEON:** Are you living in the first home that you bought? How many times have you moved within Sun City?

**ELLIS:** This is the fourth, no third.

**STURGEON:** Why did you decide to move within the city?

**ELLIS:** Had to have more room. We bought a house on Peoria Avenue. Some people had bought it and he was an invalid and she couldn't take care of him, so they put it up for sale.

**STURGEON:** Then the second time you moved was it because you needed more room too?

**ELLIS:** We needed less room.

**STURGEON:** Could you tell me what it was like in the early days of Sun City, what the community was like?

**ELLIS:** They had the rec center there behind the shopping center and they had a swimming pool. We used to go there some with friends we had met. Like the fellow said, if you are going to have friends you gotta be a friend. Everybody was new to each other, so we made friends. Played golf with some of them, some of them we went swimming with.

**STURGEON:** Do you remember Tom Austin? Did you ever get involved with him in the community centers when he was organizing things?

**ELLIS:** Not too much. Tom was a company man of course. When I opened the barber shop I had a back room, one was a rest room and one was a storage room. I didn't have any tile on the floor. Two or three of the company men come in and was looking around. I had the barber shop set up. One of them went into the back room and saw that bare floor back there, and said, how come this floor don't have tile on it? I said I been waiting on them to come tile it. Or if you want me to do it I will. He shut up. Another thing that happened was I opened the barber shop on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1960. We didn't move here till after that cause our house wasn't ready. This guy come in one day and I had been paying rent from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup>. He said, who is the head barber, there were only two of us and I said I guess you can call me the head barber. He said how come you are paying rent on the 15<sup>th</sup>, I said that is when I opened the barber shop. He shut up. I said if you want me to pay on the first, just give me 15<sup>th</sup> days and I will pay rent on the first. I never heard any more from him.

**STURGEON:** Did you get involved in your neighborhood then quite a bit and meet people?

**ELLIS:** At the rec center.

**STURGEON:** Did you like the concept of active retirement? Did that appeal to you?

**ELLIS**: Yes.

**STURGEON**: What did that mean to you when you heard that term?

**ELLIS**: I wouldn't have to go to that barber shop every day. Or Del Webb, excuse me, I was working for Del Webb. I hated to set up open houses.

**STURGEON**: So active retirement to you meant that you weren't going to have to work and you were going to be able to do all these things you wanted to do?

**ELLIS**: We can pay our dues to the rec centers and we can play at any of them. Or we can belong to one golf course or four, five or six. But we didn't because she was still working of course.

**STURGEON**: Did you remember going to the community center, were you ever there when they had meetings and decided to organize different clubs? Did you ever do that?

**ELLIS**: Oh yeah.

**STURGEON**: What were some of the clubs that you joined?

**ELLIS**: We didn't join any. They used to have a picture down there of the pot luck suppers. They had a picture on the wall of me getting ready to build a fire or something. But Dorothy has a story she likes to tell about Sun City.

**STURGEON**: How did you become involved in the community itself?

**ELLIS**: Well outside of the activities at the rec center we didn't get involved too much with anybody because we didn't want to get involved to where we would be serving on some board or something.

**STURGEON**: So you didn't want to get involved with the boards.

**ELLIS**: Right, still don't.

**STURGEON**: Do you remember, were you involved in that early debate they had about incorporation?

**ELLIS**: Just where I was working was all. We didn't take sides or anything.

**STURGEON**: Did they have a city wide vote on that or how did they do that? You just decided not to vote because you didn't care?

**ELLIS**: I still think we should be incorporated. Well there is two or three angles to it. One of them is the, we have to depend on the county. We don't have any say about what goes on. The county board makes all the decisions. I think truthfully that you can't ride the go-cart all your life and let someone else make all the decisions. I can see things happening now that I don't like. This water company. They run a water line over north of Sun City West. They run one down to Surprise. Del Webb dug these wells for Sun City not for some place way up in there. Now they are talking about how they can cut down on the water we use. We don't waste water, but I don't want somebody setting down in Phoenix telling me what I can or can't do.

End of tape, side A.

**STURGEON**: Did they have things pretty well organized here?

**ELLIS**: Of course I am not an expert on organization or a town like this but they didn't seem to have too much problem with anybody.

**STURGEON**: Has your perception of Sun City changed over time?

**ELLIS**: Well, the only thing along that line is that the bigger it got the less people you knew. You had your group of people that you are acquainted with, you knew your neighbors and there were more of them all the time.

**STURGEON**: Did you have friends who moved out here because you told them it was a great place to live. So most of your friends were people you met here. You didn't have people coming from Iowa because you went back and told them about it. I know that when they first built Sun City they didn't put in any hospitals or medical facilities. Can you explain to me how they got the hospital? Did you know how they got the Boswell hospital? Actually it was the citizens of Sun City that got the money up for that and you don't remember participating in that? Did you see any problems in Sun City that you were aware of in the early days?

**ELLIS**: No I really didn't get involved in that. I was busy working. Even after I went to work for Del Webb Company we didn't have too many problems.

**STURGEON**: What are your reactions to the changes that have occurred in Sun City over time, going from the small tight knit community to this great big one?

**ELLIS**: In a retirement community like Sun City to me the main thing is the repetition, in other words they built so many houses around the rec centers, then they had more land so they moved the sales office out there and started selling houses out there. Just one thing after another. It just snowballed, I guess you could call it. They done the same thing in Sun City West. Of course I'm not too well acquainted over there.

**STURGEON**: You don't see that as a problem that the city has gotten larger and larger?

**ELLIS**: No not really, but I still think it should become a city on its own and not depend on the county to make all their decisions.

**STURGEON**: As you moved from house to house did you keep in contact with the friends that you made in that very first house?

**ELLIS**: Mostly, yes.

**STURGEON**: How were you able to finance your first home in Sun City?

**ELLIS**: Oh, that's got a good answer. First National Bank, George Swanson, of the First National Bank on Grand Avenue, we were paying so much a month on our house. I'd been picking up every time somebody moved in we had another prospective barber customer. So one day I was making my payments to George at the bank. I got to know him real well. He says, Buzz, maybe I shouldn't tell you this but I have an amortizations sheet. Let me show you what you can do if you have a mind to. You can pay your monthly payment and right below it you can see the principal and -----, you can pay that and you can cut this down from thirty years to about ten years. So I did it every time.

**STURGEON**: So when you bought that first house you made a down payment and then got a mortgage on it?

**ELLIS**: Yeah.

**STURGEON**: Was it an FHA mortgage or do you remember? Then with your second house, after you got that one paid off were you able to pay cash for your second house?

**ELLIS**: Yes

**STURGEON**: I am going to ask you some questions about Del Webb since you have done everything here as a resident, owned your own business and worked for Del Webb. When did you start working for Del Webb?

**ELLIS**: 1968

**STURGEON**: Were you still doing barber shop work at the time?

**ELLIS**: I worked at the barber shop and then went to work for Del Webb, then, as I sold a few houses I got rid of the barber shop.

**STURGEON**: So you stopped being a barber in 1968. What did you do for Del Webb?

**ELLIS**: Sold houses.

**STURGEON**: How did Del Webb sell houses?

**ELLIS**: We had about 15 or 20 salesman. We had a wagon wheel office. Leading off from that was office buildings. Some of us was in one part of the building, some of us in another one. The color department was in one place where people could pick the colors they wanted. All of those things with regards to making a house were done in that complex right there. Although the plumbing and all that stuff was made out west, to Sun City West even. They had -----for women soldering copper tubing for the different lines under your house. They were made for certain houses. In other words a two bedroom, one bath house wouldn't have the same as a two bedroom, two bath. That is what they were doing out there. They had to double check to see if it didn't leak. Once they put that slab on it would be pretty hard to get that copper tubing out of there. They took us out there and showed us what they were doing and why they were doing things. So then we knew what we were talking about when we talked to people.

**STURGEON**: Were the hostesses still in the model homes at that time?

**ELLIS**: Oh yeah.

**STURGEON**: What did they do?

**ELLIS**: Main thing they did was offer them a price sheet for the homes they were showing and pointing them to where they were. In the rotunda they had all these pictures and things on the wall.

**STURGEON**: Tom Austin told me that in the early days of Sun City they would have women who lived in the community who would go to the model homes and rather than selling the house like a salesman would do they would tell them how wonderful it was in Sun City, because they liked it here, and a lot of people bought houses just because of the hostesses and the salesmen were in the offices and the hostesses would send them over to the office and because the people were



already enthusiastic the salesmen didn't have to do much except fill out the form. Was it that way by the time you got there?

**ELLIS**: No. I told you that every week they would have people come in and stay in those apartments; that was when the apartments were built. But they didn't do anything but rent those out to the people of the United States to rent and come in here. Like 50 dollars for a week. They would take them on a bus tour. Those gals that were on that bus would show them the different things and tell them all about it. They didn't try to sell any houses of course. They were pitchers so to speak. They were letting people know what things were all about.

**STURGEON**: So you were in the office and people would come in and you would try to sell them a model?

**ELLIS**: We had what we called the -----, the people would go out into the models, and if you weren't on the floor, if it was your day off, you could be in your office, some of the salesmen cheated that way, they wouldn't go out, they would be working in their office, writing the people, doing this and that, calling the people, they would have to have somebody to call first, so we had to work into that. They would talk to these people and if they weren't interested today they would get their name and show them a bunch of pictures on the wall and tell them all about Sun City, also about the State. They had a picture of an old monastery down in Tucson, things like that you know. Then when they got through they would have the people's name, address and telephone number and what they had to say while they were here. Then if they were home and hadn't made up their minds what they wanted to do we would send them a notice. In six months there is going to be a price raise on these models. That was another gimmick to get people to buy. There was a price raise whether they changed the models or not. Fellow I worked with said, I got a file on prospects and a file on suspects. We could call any place. I don't know how many people I called in Chicago.

**STURGEON**: Did it work?

**ELLIS**: Oh yeah, you would catch them.

**STURGEON**: Was business still booming when you went to work for him, were they still selling houses like hot cakes?

**ELLIS**: I think the first week the sales in Sun City after inspections from the public they sold, I was going to say three hundred the first month.

**STURGEON**: I think the first weekend they sold that many. So by the time you were working was it still selling like that?

**ELLIS**: Oh yeah, we moved right along.

**STURGEON**: I asked you earlier about a survey that in the early days of Sun City they said the salesman took surveys of customers that come in. Did you do a survey, you would write down all kinds of information about them like what their occupation was, where they lived, what they liked about Sun City.

**ELLIS**: That is what they did when – when they come out of the models – like I said, there would be eight or ten people on the floor. There could only be one up there at a time. If some guy came in the door and says he was a prospect or a suspect, why you would talk to him. Do you like the models? That was a pitch they had us give. Did you like one better than the other? Who furnished these houses? Well, there was an outfit that furnished the houses. They all looked good. There wasn't anything cheap in them. That is what sold them.

**STURGEON**: Were they about same price as a house in Glendale or a house in Phoenix of comparable size?

**ELLIS**: I wouldn't know.

**STURGEON**: So you weren't trying to sell them on the basis of this cheaper than if you moved to Phoenix. You were selling them on the basis of this is a retirement community.

**ELLIS**: Nope.

**STURGEON**: How long did the Del Webb Company stay involved in Sun City? You know, where they were actively involved in supervising things?

**ELLIS**: Well, as far as the property is concerned they never have quit. They are still taking care of things. I'm not over in Sun City West but I am sure the things that proved to work here-----.

**STURGEON**: Tom said they did that in California, they took the best from here and set them up in California and Florida too.

**ELLIS**: What's he doing now?

**STURGEON**: Not much. He is just mostly at home. He's not doing too much. How did you know, maybe you can't answer this question, but how did a salesman know retirees were going to have enough money to buy these houses and stay here for long periods of time?

**ELLIS**: You mean after they bought them?

**STURGEON**: Before they bought them.

**ELLIS**: Well, the only thing I could do and I wasn't a hard hearted salesman, if people weren't interested, I didn't push them. We had people that did. They would sell a house whether you wanted it or not. And I never was a successful salesman for that reason. If you got them in your office, after they been in the models you got them in your office, and you say I want to show you some pictures. Then you shut the door and you turn this thing on and they would set there, and you explained every thing to them about the state of Arizona, Sun City of course. You would write where they was from and all that on a card. That was your file on these people. Had their telephone, blah, blah, about everything you could find out about them you had on that card. We just worked that way to take care of them.

**STURGEON**: Let me ask you again, how did you know people could afford to buy the house once they had come through?

**ELLIS**: Well, after they had been in the models and looked them over, everything was nice, there wasn't any cheap stuff in there, in the way of furniture, decorations, etc. it was all nice. Del Webb wanted to sell houses and that was the way he thought to do it. We had what we called the – position, the salesmen did in the rotunda, where they had pictures of all these different houses and apartments. They had a door that went out to the models. They couldn't get out there any other way but through that door. And they couldn't get out only coming back through that door. So we was there eight and ten at a time and only one should be on the up position. You took your turns. After you talked to them about how did you like the models. They always said fine. Which one did you like best, any one in particular? Two bedroom, two bath? Three bedroom, two bath, duplex. And you found out what they liked and you would say let me take you back to my office, I want to give you some literature about Sun City, floor plans if you are interested. That was when you got them back to your office. You had this little thing to show them on the wall. You went through your routine with them there.

**STURGEON**: How much did they put down? If they wanted to buy a house and they didn't have cash how much did they have to put down?

**ELLIS**: If they bought a new home it was \$500 down. Then they had 30 days to close. I don't know if they paid a third down or what, but they went from there, worked it out with Del & Company.

**STURGEON**: You had mentioned that if you paid cash you got like a 5% discount.

**ELLIS**: Yeah, if they paid cash when they signed the contract they got a 5% discount.

**STURGEON**: Do if know if Del Webb contracted out his houses? You said there was a carpenter, did he contract those houses out like sub-contracting and things like that??

**ELLIS**: He had –a –hmm, I was going to say, Jack McPhillin was foreman and he had 8 or 10 foreman under him. In other words the guys that dug the ditches, what it was an assembly line deal, and he would have a foreman in charge of digging the ditches for the plumbing and stuff, he would have so many people doing that. Then he would have another group coming along behind them and they would get things smoothed out and pour the cement, a slab they called it. They knew what house was going to be on there because they had the plans, whether the people bought it or not. If they built ten houses here in a row and three of them hadn't been sold, Del Webb Company would put three houses on there and sell them. Because they knew somebody would buy them the way they was going. So then you just get this little card index on people. I don't know how many I had. Had a little file cabinet and you keep a record of these people. Like I told you a while ago one guy called them prospects and suspects. That was a nice way to do it but anyhow. That is how they kept in touch with these people. Periodically, usually about every six months they would say "due to cost of material, or due to this or that" up would go the prices on these homes. You would notify the good people if they were interested or if they were interested or not. You might interest them by telling them about it. There would be a price raise of about \$1,000 or whatever.

**STURGEON**: Did these construction work for Del Webb, not the foreman because they did, but the people under them? Were they employed with Del Webb?

**ELLIS**: Yes, they don't do that and haven't done that for quite a while. All that stuff now is contracted out. He had about 1100 people working for him. I said to him one day, Jack, how do you keep track of all these people? He said I don't keep track of them, only my foremen.

For each part of the job I got a foreman there, if it is putting up the rafters, or putting the roof on, that is another outfit and there is a guy in charge of them. He said we have so many we are going to finish -----, they got to going real good and he said, I think we are-----twelve a day. They was finishing. They didn't do that at first. They didn't do no twelve a day because they was starting out and they didn't have that many sold. But after they got to going and doing 8 or 10 or 12 a day. Some foreman, say the guys putting the wall board up was falling

behind. They wasn't keeping up because those guys wasn't finished with there job. That foreman got fired and another one took his job. He said I don't talk to the men at all nowadays. If somebody isn't holding up his end I give him his time sheet. They are out – I put somebody else in charge of them. That is how he kept them rolling.

**STURGEON**: So he was very efficient then.

**ELLIS**: Yes he was. Jack drank himself to death. He was a real nice guy but that was his problem, he liked the booze.

**STURGEON**: Ok, was there anything that we haven't talked about that you think is important to put on here?

**ELLIS**: Well, not really I guess. I suppose there are things that you might be interested in if I can think of them.

**STURGEON**: Well, thank you.