

An Oral History of Lilli Moffit

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Bethany Underhill

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LILLI MOFFIT

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Bethany Underhill, Interviewer

Lilli Moffit was born in Germany and raised in Iowa. In the 1990s, she and her husband, Bill, moved to Reno, where he worked for Sierra Pacific (now Nevada Energy). In 1998, the Moffits bought and renovated a former Chinese restaurant at 1229 East Fourth Street and opened Reno Rails, a model train store. Lilli continued to operate the business after her husband passed away in 2010.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

Underhill: It's March 28th, 2012. I'm here with Lilli Moffit at Reno Rails at 1229 East Fourth Street. Lilli, where were you born?

Moffit: In Germany, and we came over to this country when I was five years old. We went through Ellis Island. Right now I'm sixty-five years old. I've been in this country for sixty years.

It wasn't easy for my parents because they didn't know anyone. Our family was sponsored, and that's how we ended up in Iowa. My father was not a farmer, but the people who sponsored them were a farm family who gave us a place to live, My brother tells me, because I can't remember everything, they didn't treat us that well. My brothers went to school with not the best-looking shoes for the cold winters in Iowa, and a teacher noticed it and got a hold of a Quaker church. The church helped us and helped my father to get out of that situation and find employment. Then we moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Underhill: Can you tell me about your schooling and higher education?

Moffit: I have a bachelor's degree, and that was a tough thing to get because in those days they don't help you with the language. The teachers never understood that when I went home I spoke Russian, because my dad's from Ukraine and my mom was German. I mean, I spoke English to my two older brothers, across the table. [laughs] One language, then another language. A lot of teachers didn't know. And then, of course, because what happens, the blacks live in a certain area, the Europeans live in a certain area, the middle class lives here, and the upper class lives over here. So I didn't go to the best elementary schools.

I always feel like I was lacking in that because I'm not a good speller. Good thing we have [Microsoft] Word now. I wish I had it in college, because I did have professors tell me, "Man, you're a lousy speller." Because I didn't take time out to really look up the words. But now with Word, I'm a great speller. Word helps me.

I had a hard time. I really had to work for my bachelor's degree, not like my daughter and my son, who find it so easy. I had to go to the library early in the morning and study until ten or eleven o'clock at night just to get through, but I think it's because

of my lack of education as a young person.

Underhill: What was your major?

Moffit: My major was sociology. I thought I was going to do social work, but I ended up doing computer work.

Underhill: So what brought you to Reno?

Moffit: Actually, my husband's job did. I was married to my husband for forty-one years. Hopefully I don't tear up, because I lost him two years ago. I always felt that when my husband succeeded, the whole family succeeded. We moved around a lot in our forty-one years.

We came to Reno twenty-four years ago, and what was Sierra Pacific at that time—now Nevada Energy—brought my husband here. Before my husband accepted the job, he was kind of concerned because we'd never been to Reno. Well, we drove through Nevada years before. We lived in California for a while; Hartford, Connecticut; Houston, Texas. We moved around a lot for my husband's jobs.

So he flew me out here. Of course, the first thing I thought of when he said Reno, Nevada, I thought of prostitution, gambling, and didn't think of anything else till I got here and I fell in love with Reno. I love the mountains and it's a beautiful city, and we're close to the ocean. So we came here twenty-four years ago.

Underhill: Did you have an interest in model railroading?

Moffit: No, my husband did. I had no idea he wanted to open up this store, which he opened up eleven years ago. Well, actually twelve now. I knew he loved trains. Sometimes he'd set up a train for the kids. When he was a kid he played with used trains, nothing new. His family couldn't afford it.

When we lived here in Reno, one day he said to me he wanted to open up a train store, and I said, "I don't care what you do." I never care what anybody does, as long as we don't go Chapter 11 with our home. I worry about our home that we live in.

So he did a lot of research, Bill. Bill Moffitt was his name. He went out, checked out the malls. Arlington Gardens was a popular little mall, but what he found from the different malls was that you had to have their hours, their janitors, so he decided that we should start looking for a building that we could afford to buy. It was just by accident. I called a realtor. She couldn't make it, but another guy came in her place, and he was great. Sometimes you don't get the best realtors, but he was listening to us.

The piece of property that we were looking at was on Wells, and he said, "You don't want this property." The reason was there was no parking. He said, "I'll find you a piece of property that you guys can afford."

He called us, and he showed us a place in Sparks. Then he showed us this building, which was an Asian restaurant. There was parking in the back, it was affordable, and he did a lot of work for us to get it, because it was owned by three different people. I mean, he had to go to a nursing home. He had to do all kinds of things.

We bought this building. What was interesting is my husband worked for a five-

and-dime when he was a teenager—he had a master’s degree in computer science—so he knew a little bit about retail. So we bought this store. We had to gut it out. My husband and I and a person we met who was living next door at this hotel, Kelly, came into our life. The three of us literally removed all the booths, four layers of tile, and five or six layers of wallpaper, but before we got to the wallpaper, there would be three layers of paneling. It’s like people came in here and they just layered everything. So in a way, we were kind of lucky because all we were doing was removing layers.

When we first looked at the building, my husband said, “Oh, I’m only going to remodel the front part.” Next thing I know, we’re remodeling the whole store.

He didn’t really have any idea how to open up or run a business. It just so happened, I read later on, that we did the right thing, because we kept working but we were open on weekends. And I read that that’s one thing that some business advisors tell you: don’t give up your daytime job until you realize that you can run the business or that there’s a need for the business.

So that’s one thing that my husband did at the beginning, and he lucked into a lot of the cabinets that are up front. I think when he first opened up the store, he was thinking that he would sell a lot of used train things.

I do like trains. I think they’re fun to run and watch, and I think it’s a great family hobby, but this was my husband’s passion. After we opened up the store, he started getting a little bit of merchandise in, and then one day he told me that he permanently wanted to come in here and work. Again, I said, “Sure. Do whatever you want.” I kept working.

He came in here, opened it up seven days a week, and came out with a great business. We have a lot of good customers. He was a great person to talk to. [Cries] Sorry, I’ll tear up because I don’t think he realized how he touched people. Kids came in here and they tell me now that he was the person who made them love trains, now that they’ve grown up a few years. A lot of people enjoyed coming in here talking to my husband for maybe three or four hours just about the passion. You know, when you have a passion, you can talk about your love. And my husband always told me that he learned a lot from his customers. He knew some things about trains but didn’t really know a whole lot. You learn by sharing.

My husband didn’t sell a whole lot of old stuff. MTH was just starting to come out, Mike’s Train House. My husband liked their products, so we carry a lot of their product. He even had Mike Wolf [the CEO] come here for a weekend, and a lot of customers from all over California and Nevada came so that they could talk to Mike. They ran trains in between the buildings. I’ve got pictures. He answered a lot of customers’ questions.

It was just by chance that Mike got put up at the Nugget because one of our customers is actually married to the daughter, and he loves to run trains. They put Mike and his family up at the Nugget, and Mike really loved seeing the Sparks train yard.

What MTH actually does is go out and record train sounds, real train sounds, and they put them in their engines. They even have talking in their engines, and a smoke grate. It’s a great product for your money compared to Lionel.

My husband died two years ago, and I’m not a rich widow. The richness is in the store with all of this inventory. I’ve actually lowered the inventory probably in half. He had it so full of stuff. I have two great guys who work for me now, and they interact with

the customers because they love to run trains. I just listen to what they think we should buy and keep the store going because there's a need in the community.

I do have customers who thank me for keeping it open, because we lost another hobby store, High Sierra. We're strictly a train store. He died two months after my husband. He was very ill, and his daughters didn't want to keep it open. Some of it was because they didn't have the best of help, and one of the girls is a nurse, and they're just too busy to make sure it's operated. I had very little to do with this store until my husband died, and then I had to walk in here and figure out what the heck's going on and how he did business.

I keep telling my kids that if something happens to me and the store is still open, they need to be interacting with it. You can't just let some manager run it, because you can't trust them, for one thing, trust them in a way that you have it at stake. They don't really have anything at stake. But otherwise they're fairly trustworthy.

Underhill: How long has Reno Rails been in operation?

Moffit: Twelve years. My husband opened it up back in December of 1998, and he was in here for eleven years. He was a very lucky man and lived his passion. I mean, how many of us can say we lived our passion? He did that, and then he died two years ago. So I've kept it open now for two years.

Underhill: What was your profession during the time that he was working here without you?

Moffit: I was a computer programmer. We've been here for twenty-four years. I commuted to the Bay Area for twenty. I was a data processing consultant. You name it, I worked there. The Gap, Hitachi, PG&E. They were six months to two years that I worked. I commuted back and forth, because there isn't the opportunity in computers here. What I found out when my husband was working for Sierra Pacific was that they do not hire husband and wives. They have that rule. A place where I could first find work was in Sacramento. That's how I got started. I commuted to Sacramento on the Greyhound, on the bus. That was for eighteen months and then I got a job for Hitachi in the Bay Area. I flew back and forth for twenty years.

I quit work four years ago, two years before my husband passed away, so I feel like I'm just starting to learn Reno. You know when you're working somewhere else, I'd come home on the weekends and do my own thing. I am a hat designer. I do make custom-designed hats, and that's kind of on the back burner. I haven't been doing too much of that. So that's what I was doing.

Underhill: You said you feel like a newcomer. How does that affect how you run your business?

Moffit: It was my husband's passion, and I'm running it for a profit. He made a profit, but I have to definitely make a profit because I have three people. I have Matt, he does my computer work for me, and I have Jack and Bob. They're both retirees. I have to make enough money to pay them.

The bank still owns the building, so I have to pay them. I run it more like a business. Some things my husband priced lower because he could. He didn't worry about paying himself or anybody else's salary except for Matt. Matt did work for Bill for about five years, and he started in here when he was sixteen. So I upped the price of some items—more of an MSRP. I'm running it a little differently.

Customers need to tell us what is it that they want to see in our store, because people don't realize some things that I learned from my husband. When the MTH or Lionel or whoever the manufacturers are, come out with a catalog, if you don't order what's in that catalog—and that item's going to come out a year ahead—if you didn't order it, the chances are you'll never find it. Either they won't make it because they didn't have enough orders, or only the people who bought it, maybe ten guys bought a specific engine, so then people that want it, they go out looking. They look on the Internet, they look all over the place to see where they can buy it. But, hey, I'm sorry, you can't. And that's how they keep the price of engines and cars up, and that's how you don't lose value if you buy a train.

Every time we'd go to a train show, my husband went and looked for Mike Wolf, the CEO of MTH, and he said, "Mike, what would it take for me to convince you to build the Virginia Truckee engine or train set for our area?" Because nobody was making them, or very few people were. This is strictly an O Gauge with a little bit of G, and we will carry HO trains.

My husband convinced him, and my husband actually sold somewhere between 150 to 200 train sets that were made specifically for our area, the V&T. He did do a great job. I don't know if people realize that he promoted that, and now we've got to somehow convince them to make stuff for the Western region, because they make Eastern names.

I learned some things from my husband because we shared information, but I'm learning more and more. I have headaches every other day, or find out things that we didn't do—you know, I make mistakes. But instead of selling the store, I'm going to take it one step higher. We're going to become an online store, because I see how that's we can compete. We can't just sit here.

We have a website, of course. We just signed up for PayPal, and we will have a store where people can come and buy stuff in our store. My husband left me with a heck of a lot of old trains that I know I can't sell in the store. We don't have the customer base here locally in Reno. Our customer base is out East, all over the world. We have customers from Australia, Germany. We've sent things to Japan. By bringing in a lot of the old things, I think the only way I can really sell it will be online through eBay or through our Reno Rails online store. Then people can buy it instantly.

Underhill: People locally purchase more of the new trains?

Moffit: No. They purchase some of the old, too, but we don't rely on them for our business. There are some months we do more business from the East Coast because they've emailed us or called us and said, "I see you have that engine. I want it."

One guy did tell me a year ago, pretty close after my husband died, he ordered six cars from us. He said, "How did you end up getting such nice merchandise in here, and Eastern names?" Because he said he'd been looking all over, and he could find it here.

I told him about my husband. My husband did have an insight after eleven years

what to buy, and what would sell. That's something you learn. You learn it from customers, and my husband had a brilliant mind. He might not remember your name, but he knew he had five customers who loved Alaska cars or the Alaska name. He might buy something with the Alaska name, and then when those guys came in, he'd tell them, or he'd email them, "Hey, I've got this Alaskan car in." He knew out of those five people the chances are one or two of the guys would buy it.

That's what we're missing because he's gone. We don't know our customer base, and I have noticed it's changed. A lot of the people who my husband had had bought quite a bit. I can't imagine they can buy any more. I mean, how many engines do you really want, or cars?

We've got a new base. We've got a lot of families. We have one guy who comes in and he's got his kids making buildings for their trains, and they got their own train cars and they're running them. It's kind of a family hobby. It's better than them watching TV all day.

Underhill: Were trains part of raising your children?

Moffit: Just a little bit. You know, you're into Girl Scouts, you're into Boy Scouts. My husband did have trains set up, a little train board in a room, and he'd run them for the kids, and then at Christmastime we'd have one around our house. As matter of fact, my son asked me specifically to make sure as I'm going through the old stuff, that if there's anything he can remember, he wants to keep for himself so that he can remember his dad.

When my husband was in this business, before he opened up, he did a lot of consulting, too, on the Midwest. While he was working there on the weekends, he would go and buy old trains. So some of that he specifically bought to resell in our store. I'm ending up doing more of that than he did, because he was more into the newer stuff. That seemed like what the young kids want. They want something that smokes, talks.

Underhill: How did you and your husband meet?

Moffit: Oh, you're going to make me cry. The first year I went to Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. It was a Teachers College. Then the second year my brother convinced me to commute to the University of Iowa from home. Well, it's a heck of a bigger school.

After a year I said, "You know, I don't know what I want to do." I started working in retail in a Younkers—it's like a Macy's store—and I ran across a young girl who I worked with when I was a car hop. When I was sixteen, that was my first job. I worked at an A&W. She was going to a dance, and I'd been questioning, "What am I doing? I don't know. Do I go back to school? Where do I go?"

So she invited me to go to this dance, and I thought, sure, I'll go to this dance. What else am I doing? So I went, and this young man, my future husband, which I didn't know at that time, asked me to dance, and, of course, I was listening with one ear and not the other ear. He's telling me, "Oh, I just came back from Europe." He had taken a class in England, and he had come back from Europe.

We were dancing and I was listening. I don't know about nowadays, but in those days you don't know if the guy's honest or not. He seemed like a nice guy, and the guy he was with, my friend didn't really like—she said, "Let's ditch them." So I ditched him.

But he had remembered enough information—my name, and he remembered I was from Marion, Iowa, right next to Cedar Rapids, and he called me. Because he was going to school, most of our dates were in the library, and I was taking a class here and there, you know, junior college. Sometimes I just loved to take a class. A lot of our dates were going to the college library and studying.

I didn't know him very well, and he went to his parents—I don't know how long we dated. I think we met in March, and we got married in August. I didn't know him very well. Actually, the first time he proposed to me, I turned him down, because I always wanted to travel, but I was thinking to travel with a girlfriend. I'm outgoing now. My husband helped me to be more outgoing. At first I wasn't that confident or that outgoing.

The second time he proposed to me, he said, "We will travel," and we did.

But I tell people the story, which is that I had to marry my husband. The reason I did, looking back now, is that my husband was very driven. We're both high energy. My husband would leave early in the morning from Mount Vernon, Iowa, and the next town is Iowa City, Iowa, if you look at a map. He would go to school, and after that he would go from Iowa City, Iowa, to Cedar Rapids to do a warehouse job at McKesson, which is another thirty miles.

Then he'd leave his job and he'd come and date me in Marion, Iowa, which is the next town, maybe ten miles. But from Marion, Iowa, to Mount Vernon, Iowa is probably, a thirty-minute drive. So, like I said, a lot of our dates were going to the library and studying, or going to a movie.

When he left my house, after dropping me off and driving from my house to his house—he told me one night he was driving in the ditch. He literally had fallen asleep. So guess what the man was doing? He was actually setting an alarm clock. When he left me, he knew approximately what time he'd come to that curve, and set the alarm clock so that he wouldn't fall asleep. That's why I tell people he was going to kill himself. [laughter]

I think about my husband now—when you're high energy and you're constantly moving, you don't realize it until you sit back and think about it. My husband was always driven. He was driven from the day I married him, and so was I. I've slowed down since I retired. I sit down, have a nice cup of coffee. I don't rush out of the house like he did.

I married my husband and we were married for forty-one years and we have two kids. He was the best thing in my life. When we first got married, he worked at a feed mill and I worked at a toothbrush factory to earn enough money so we could go to Europe. He still was going to school. So we did, we went to Europe in '69. We had a Europass and traveled all over.

When I came back, I had my son and then thirteen months later I had my daughter. I was a stay-at-home mom and my husband worked, and he got into data processing. He'd always say to me, "Honey, you know, if something happens to me, you've got to support this family." So he made sure that I went to school, went back to college, and I got my bachelor's degree. It took me a while.

He would take the kids camping. We lived in a small apartment, and if the library was closed for the Fourth of July weekend, and I had finals, he would take the kids camping so I could sit and study. He was a very supportive husband. He wasn't demanding. Neither was I; we were a partnership. We made sure that he grew and I grew.

As we were moving around, I was getting credits here and there, and came to find out that if I went back to school at the original school that I started with, University of

Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, I had less credits and I could graduate faster. So for two summers my husband lived in Hartford, Connecticut. I went back to Iowa. My mother-in-law, who was the aunt who raised my husband, she took care of the kids, and I went and I lived in a dorm. I spent two summers there getting my degree, but then I'd come and visit the kids.

Meanwhile, my husband had no vehicle. He was rebuilding twelve pillars, twelve concrete pillars. We had this beautiful old home and a half an acre of land right in West Hartford, Connecticut. My husband didn't tell me he was doing that until I came home and he said, "Look what I did this summer, rebuilt all twelve concrete pillars" in a wheelbarrow.

People don't know. If you saw a video of this place, how bad it looked, you would think, are those people crazy? You'd see how bad this place looked and all the work that we did; we scraped by, but that's what my husband and I have always done.

I always worked with my husband. I'd be standing anywhere, if we were rebuilding a porch, any of our fixer-uppers: "Hand me the hammer. Hand me the screwdriver, the pliers." And then, "Hold this, do that." I was the gofer. "Go get this at Home Depot or the hardware store," so he could keep working.

We really had a great marriage. Like I said, we were partners, and it's hard after one goes away, dies. [Cries] Sorry, I tear up still. It's been two years. I had to go see a therapist after he died. She said, "How many people can say that he was the best thing in my life?"

Underhill: You talked about how you two were high energy and driven. How has that helped you in your business?

Moffit: One of our customers—I won't give you his name—when he saw the building in our video—we took a video of it—he said, "You know, Lilli, it's one of those buildings where what you do is you find the nearest fire hydrant out there, you knock it off so it isn't functional. You start the building on fire." He said he would have never tackled it.

We're hard working. I mean, I'm talking about everything in here, the layers. The thing that was weird was my husband and I were going to come in here and gut all this out and redo it, and then this Kelly came into our life, which was a great thing. He wanted some of the lumber that we were throwing in a dumpster in the back. He came in and started talking. We found out that he had the right skill set and that he was cheap.

My husband gave him a key so he could start wall-boarding the ceiling, and he helped my husband and us a lot. The three of us laid all the flooring in here. Where we're sitting here in this office used to be the freezer. They literally took the plywood off, and it was sawdust in there. Everything that you saw, we could not ever have afforded to hire a contractor to do what we've done. We wouldn't have this place if it hadn't been for me and my husband's work and Kelly who helped us. But we've always been energetic.

What happened to my husband is that he had a stroke. He died in twenty-four hours. We bought another business. We bought a rail cleaner. It's called Centerline Products. It's different gauges, N, HO, O, G gauge and standard gauge. Five years ago we bought this business and we moved it here to Reno and my husband was trying to run that, run Reno Rails and everything else. He was getting up way too early.

Every time I came home, I always said, "Bill, you look tired. You know, you need

to rest. Don't be in such a rush to swallow down your coffee or your breakfast." He'd be looking at his watch, and thinking, "Okay, I got to go, go, go." I think he overdid it. Really, he didn't rest his body enough.

Looking back now, I think with his high energy and being so driven, who knows. Who knows what causes strokes, but he had a stroke in the middle of the night. I called the ambulance right away when he accidentally woke me up. That night at five-thirty when our son came to see him, he had another stroke, and he was brain-dead that night. Then the next morning his heart stopped.

My husband was healthy, a very healthy person, never smoked a day in his life. We drank wine once in a great while, but he was a healthy person, but very driven, high energy and driven.

Underhill: Was there a community response after your husband's death?

Moffit: Oh, yes. We're very private, my husband and I. I realized that because I hardly know anybody in Reno. My daughter lives in Vegas and our son lives in L.A.

My husband always said he wanted to be cremated. I had him cremated. I'm sure I was deranged the first year. My son said that since we didn't have a funeral, that we really needed to have something for our customers. So we had one of the guys email as many people as emails as we had. On a Sunday we had customers come into the store. We had food.

My husband always had a garden, and he would take vegetables to Chuy at Fresh Mex. Chuy at Fresh Mex brought in a lot of food and some alcohol, some beer and stuff. Customers did come in to pay their respects and we kind of had a wake. People said they wouldn't be here if it hadn't been for the store, wouldn't have even known each other. So that was kind of nice. That's what we did because we don't believe in funerals. We like to see people alive. Of course, the only people who were there when he died were our daughter and our son.

Underhill: You talked about your relationships with the other businesses in the area. Can you expand on that?

Moffit: Not a very good relationship. [laughs] Well, one other reason my husband opened this store, not anything against any of the other hobby stores that were open, one thing my husband did, was not only look at buildings, but he looked at other stores, his competition, and the guys weren't friendly. People told us that. When we first opened up the store, they told my husband, "You are so friendly," and my husband was. My husband was very people-oriented. He'd say, "If I don't have it in the store, I'll go find it for you." He did a lot of that. He would go get things that he didn't have in the store for people, and people appreciated that.

We tried not to compete. My husband liked O Gauge, and that's what he understood. There already was the hobby store, High Sierra. One of the other ones on Moana, I forget the name of it, I think, was getting up there. I think he either sold the business or closed it, and one of the other train stores Reno had when we originally moved here, got smaller and smaller too. But we never tried to compete with High Sierra. High Sierra carried the N, the HO. We complemented them. Somebody came in looking

for HO, we said, “High Sierra has it.” Or if they went to High Sierra, they would say, “Well, Reno Rails has O that you’re looking for.”

Reno is kind of strange, and some of it was strange, too, because Bill and I were kind of loners and we spent time together as a family, and we’re not social butterflies. So we didn’t really get involved in the community. I may be very talkative but I’m really an introvert. I don’t like huge groups. I had this one lady try to convince me to go down to the downtown fair. We did that kind of stuff when the kids were young. I don’t need to do that now. I need to rest, sit and have my cup of coffee, do my thing, read, and then help run the store.

We tried to start a club. My husband actually helped start the G Club that’s in town. I guess they run trains. One group of people runs trains; the other group likes to socialize. My husband tried to start that. We started having like a place for people to come and meet each other.

It didn’t go too well, because those people were kind of in it for themselves. I mean, they’re very nice people, don’t get me wrong, but they weren’t as willing to share their hobby with somebody else because they were already way ahead. I’ve had a couple people who are new to the community ask is there a club—because other communities do have a club. They could come here. They could run their trains on a train layout. I would provide pizza or whatever food and soda pop and water, and let them sit around and talk about or share their knowledge about trains.

We are going to try that again. I keep saying that, that I’ve got to walk my talk. My boss used to always say that to herself. “We’ve got to walk our talk.” I need to do that. I keep thinking we’re going to do that. We just need to pick a Sunday afternoon, send out emails and see what happens.

Underhill: You talked about the community. Has Fourth Street’s location affected your business practices, and if so, how?

Moffit: It hasn’t really. One thing I disliked about the *Reno Gazette*, when they wrote about Fourth Street is that they didn’t walk down here to see that there are businesses. There’s a nice fabric shop not far from here, there’s the mattress place across the street, we were here. They didn’t talk about that. What they talk about are prostitutes and bars. If you walk down here, sure, anywhere in town you’ll find a bar and prostitutes, but there’s more to Fourth Street if you walk down here and see the businesses.

For one thing, we could afford this building. I hate that commercial I hear on the radio right now. “Location, location is important.” Nuh-uh. Location is not important to your business. We are kind of unique. It’s a unique hobby, and people will find you. They will find where you are. If you’re the only train store, if you are a doll shop, if you are a unique shop, they’ll find you. They’ll look in the Yellow Pages and they’ll find you. A lot of it is word of mouth.

The only reason we’re on Fourth Street was that my son came down, saw the building, and said, “Remember, guys, this is a good business between Reno and Sparks,” which I never thought of until he mentioned it, and it was true. People drive on Fourth Street to get from one to the other, and some people will spot the store. If they’re interested, they’ll pull into our parking lot and come in, and they’ll say, “Oh, I just recognized your store is here.” That’s the reason we’re on Fourth Street, because we

could afford it twelve years ago.

Underhill: Has the location allowed you to expand in any way?

Moffit: You know what? We cleaned up the neighborhood, in my opinion, because we discovered that under all the dirt, there was some kind of blacktop. My husband started sweeping and he realized it. So we had it blacktopped.

At first it was where people were leaving their trash. We put a fence between our building and the Mercedes repair shop. It's really narrow. People could go in there and use it as a bathroom. They can't get in there anymore because it's fenced off. When we were working here, there were people lying on the back door. I mean, they had to wake them up and say, "Keep on moving."

Like I said, we could afford this street. The building, everything that we had, and the parking lot was good. We've had a few little stupid incidents, like somebody broke into a car, but, otherwise, we haven't had any bad incidents.

We did have one incident, after my husband died. Someone was thinking about pulling the wires out of our electric box, and that set the alarm off and it scared them away. They did do it to somebody else really bad. But we haven't had any really bad incidents.

I've got good customers who shoplift here, and I caught them. One guy had been shoplifting probably for five years. I asked him not to come in here, and my husband played cat-and-mouse with him, following him around. Well, when my husband died, I put in cameras because a car was broken into. I thought for all of our safety, for the guys who work for me, we need to have a camera on the parking lot and in the store, and we did catch the guy.

He's a great big train enthusiast, and I hate to say that his friends came in here to make sure it was his picture and not somebody else's. They said, "Well, we had him in our house. He's been to our house."

"Well, I don't know what he did in your house, but he shoplifted here." The best thing is the man can't come in here anymore.

Underhill: Talking about some issues that you have had in the area, do you remember when the Record Street Homeless Services opened?

Moffit: Yes, I kind of remember that, because my husband used to go to the meetings, political meetings. It was set. Whatever they were going to do, there is a Fourth Street group of people. I don't know if they still meet or not, but they were meeting pretty heavily at that time and my husband would go to the meetings. Of course, the politics and what they were going to do were already set. They just want people to come in there and breathe heavy and scream and holler and get nowhere. My husband realized that, so he didn't attend any more meetings.

Really, it hasn't impacted me because it's far enough down. If anything, it's these fly-by-night hotels that bring in the riffraff that might affect me. You know, they removed some of the lights off of the building over here on this one side. But I think it has something to do with somebody in the hotel room who doesn't like the light on or something. But that doesn't really bother me—it's never impacted me being around, the

homeless shelter. We're far enough away from it.

Underhill: Did your neighbors in the businesses next door share these opinions about the homeless shelter?

Moffit: Well, yes. Like I said, my husband went to the meetings. I'm sure we were all there complaining about not having it there.

Underhill: I meant the attitude about the meetings being pointless?

Moffit: No, no, they all did. You know, the politics is pretty well set. They're going to do whatever they have to do. But it hasn't really impacted us in any way, really.

I had my mower fixed and that business owner was impacted. He's right across the street. He was impacted. Somebody broke into his building from the roof or something, and then he always has people laying there breaking his window. Knock on wood, we haven't had the problem.

Underhill: Can you talk about what traveling on the street is like and whether it affects you or your business?

Moffit: There is an effect. The bus stop used to be closer to our building and then they moved it further down, which helped. People do come in once in a while. They want work. I did have one guy wash the windows. He seemed real—he bought his own bucket and stuff. People do want work, they want change. We did have one guy at the very beginning who shoplifted. But they're not shoplifting; they're more looking for work or handouts. I think that's happening not every day, just once in a while. I think it's consistent probably all over town. The unemployment now is pretty bad in our whole country. People, once in a while, do stuff. That's the only thing.

Underhill: Do you think it would help your business to have more pedestrians?

Moffit: No, no. But I did tell you, some of the people, because we're on Fourth Street, tourists who come to Reno and don't have a car, they figure they can stay downtown and stay in one casino, and they will take the bus to our business. My husband would tell them which bus to catch. I hate to tell them I don't know the number now, but my husband did. My husband knew the exact number. "Catch that." It's right across the street, actually. Every once in a while, some people come and take a cab down here. But no, not off-the-street traffic. Really, the people who come here are the ones who are looking for trains.

Underhill: Do you think transportation issues play a big part in this corridor?

Moffit: I don't. Well, I don't see that many people. I see a lot of people on the bus going to Meadowood [Mall] when I'm driving around. If anything, I see maybe one or two people. No, it does not.

Underhill: Do you think there are any needs for improvement for this area for transportation?

Moffit: I couldn't say yes or no because I don't take the bus. I took mass transit when I worked in the Bay Area, but I've only taken it once or twice. I don't know. I think what people probably need, especially with the price of gas, is to be able to get to a job, not so much to get to somewhere to shop. I don't think we need it—I think it's adequate, from what I see.

One thing I do have a little complaint about is that I don't know that they ever clean our street, Fourth Street. I will sweep the sidewalk and sweep the gutter because there's so much dirt, and I've never seen a street cleaner here. I was going to call the city and see. I've seen one around my home, where I live, but here I notice the sidewalk just gets terribly dirty. It must be from the traffic, but there is quite a bit of traffic that goes down this street.

Underhill: Are you aware of any transportation issues that involve safety or are there any things that you think are unsafe?

Moffit: No. It's terrible, because I did something for my own mental health. Since my husband passed away, I do not watch TV. I do not read the newspaper. I kind of live in my own little world because I have so much going on. I'm afraid that—I'm a very emotional person—with some of the things that have happened in the world, I would have been sitting in front of the TV bawling. So I've literally shut some of the world off. I hate to say that, but I have to for my own sanity right now. I do pick up the newspaper, but most of it's not happiness in the paper. I've done that. So I'm not really aware of what's going on.

Underhill: But even with your knowledge of right outside your front door.

Moffit: I don't feel afraid. My daughter keeps telling me, "Mom, take mace in." You know, we only had one incident in the twelve years that we've been open. Two men walked in, one from the back door, one from the front, and hit my husband, knocked him to the floor. Didn't hurt him real bad, but knocked him to the floor where they could take the store wallet, which didn't have a lot of money.

We do take safety precautions here. We keep the back door locked now, and I've always told the help that if they don't feel comfortable with a person in the store, you ask them to leave if it's somebody who walked off the street. Some of the times people walk off the street, and they've got a backpack, and they have a true interest in cars. They can't afford to buy it, but, boy. I've had customers come here off the street, just looking, and they're harmless. I don't know, maybe I'm naïve, but I don't think we've had any really bad safety issues here. That's good, because Fourth Street is known for I don't know what stuff.

Underhill: Do you think the number or arrangement of lanes for cars and buses should be changed?

Moffit: No, I think it's okay. It's four lanes; it's two lanes going both ways. I've never really been down here when I thought the traffic was jammed. Every once in a while, though, I'm in front of the building and I'm making a left-hand turn into our parking lot. One of my customers actually was doing that. A car behind them was waiting for them, then the next car actually hit that other car. So I'm a little concerned about that. I think that's double yellow, where you're not supposed to pull in. So the customers do need to be cautious about that.

Underhill: What about the inclusion of a turning lane in the center of the street?

Moffit: That would be nice. Reno's doing a lot of that, and that's kind of nice to have. There are a lot of accidents at this intersection [Fourth and Sutro], but that's because people are running red lights.

I don't know if that's important. There was a car accident here. We were never notified. My husband was never notified by the police department. A guy got pushed by a drunk driver, hit that streetlight that's in front of our building, and hit the corner of our building. No one told us about it, except for the gentleman who got pushed and hit. He came in and said, "A guy pushed me." Oh, and they broke the window of our store door. I had to fix it. I got tired of seeing a broken window. But that annoyed me. Somebody, I think, the police department, should have said this had happened. I mean, I paid for the glass myself. I think the insurance company of the person who caused the accident should have paid for it all, and I thought that was mishandled.

So when you talk about community, that's an incident that I thought somebody should have expressed to us. We shouldn't have had to find out through a customer. We would have never known who broke it. The only other incident that irks me, too, that's happening all over town, it's not just Fourth Street, is where people are writing into the glass, where you can see the writing. That annoys me. We have a little bit of that, and eventually I'll have it fixed if there's enough of it. But that's not just Fourth Street; that's all over town.

Underhill: What would you like to see for pedestrians or bicyclists? Would that be anything you're interested in?

Moffit: No, that really wouldn't. I notice we're getting more in the community, which is nice. Actually, my husband walked a lot of times home just because he wanted the exercise or he wanted to walk the dog. Sometimes he would walk home from here, which is quite a ways. He would cut through some of the area.

No, you know, bicyclists are not going to come down here. We're not attracting bicyclists to our business.

I go to that artisan movie night on Tuesdays. They will give you a reduction if you ride your bicycle to the movie. No, that wouldn't impact our business in any way.

Underhill: You guys have really good parking.

Moffit: Yes, we do.

Underhill: But would you like to see parking in the area changed in any way? Would you want it diagonal or parallel?

Moffit: No, we need to see the traffic going through. No parking in front of our business. As a matter of fact, we'd have the Fed Express park on the sidewalk, and I've had a customer do that. I think, "Wait a minute. You don't park on the sidewalk." We have parking in the back. I think the parking should be left alone.

Underhill: Thank you so much.

Moffit: Thank you.