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**Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI  
Eugene N. Thomeczek (1968 – 1998)  
Brian R. Hollstein, Interviewer  
Interviewed February 4, 2010**

*Edited for spelling, repetitions, etc. by Sandra Robinette on February 26, 2010. Final edit with Mr. Thomeczek's corrections made by Sandra Robinette on March 29, 2010.*

Brian R. Hollstein/

(H): I'll turn on here. Today's date is February 4, 2010. My name is Brian R. Hollstein and I'm speaking to Eugene N. Thomeczek (T-h-o-m-e-c-z-e-k). .

Eugene N. Thomeczek/

(T): That's correct.

H: Okay. Just before we get going, Gene, I have your Copyright Release here and the only thing I would mention on that, thank you by the way, but I don't think I ever mentioned on that it gives the Society the copyright to the material we'll talk about today. That doesn't mean though that you can't be interviewed in the future or if you want to write a book or do a major motion picture, you can do that and this only applies, the copyright only applies to this material.

I ask that you not include informant names when you're talking about people or their administrative designations. If you want to talk about an informant, you can make up a name. We also ask, that if you know material to be classified, that you please not include it in the discussion. The transcript will be reviewed by the Bureau, the Pre-publication review people, for classified information. But that's the only connection that they have with the program. And finally, no sensitive investigative techniques and that's sort of broad so when we get to it I think we'll probably know it if we see any of it here.

To start off, why don't you tell me where you were born, where you went to school and how you happened to find the FBI?

T: Well I was born in western Kansas in a little town called Lakin, Kansas on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941, and upon graduation from Kendall High School in 1959 I attended Garden City Junior College in Garden City. Thought initially I would be an aeronautical engineer because one of my math teachers had told me that was a great career and then I found out that math was a little more difficult in college and I switched a couple of times. I finally ended up, I was going to be a basketball coach; that was my real desire.

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T: I happened to attend a meeting at the college where they had a speaker from the FBI talking about careers in the FBI. Basically, I think at that point they were looking for clerical staff, but they also talked about, you know, working your way through college as a clerk and then applying as an agent. That sounded fairly interesting but I don't know that I really decided that's what I was going to try to do.

At about that time, if you may recall, the murders occurred in a little town just outside Garden City, where I was going to school, of a farm family; a couple of fellas robbed....

H: The Clutters?

T: ... the Clutter, the Clutter murders and Truman Capote later wrote a book about it.

H: Yeah.

T: That trial happened to be going on shortly after the speaker from the FBI. I happened to go to the trial one day and who should be the star witness but a man from the FBI Lab talking about identifying some of the tapes that had been used to bind the victims. I think at that point that's when I really decided, well maybe that was a career I would be interested in.

H: Sure.

T: I put in an application and, lo and behold, six months later I was hired as a clerk-typist in Washington and went there for two and a half years, worked as a clerk, attended George Washington in D.C. Then my father had a stroke and I transferred back to the Kansas City Office as a clerk, worked the night shift and attended UMKC and graduated from there in 1968, February, and in June of that year I was appointed as an agent.

H: Great. That is the root of so many of our people in that, how they got in as clerks and finished off college and in many cases then joined the Bureau. So there were great opportunities.

Just in passing, that Clutter murder was quite sensational and I remember reading the book.

T: *In Cold Blood*.

H: What a great book that was. It opened a whole new literary genre too.

T: If you didn't know Truman Capote, what he was really like. I mean he was not your macho guy that you would expect to write that kind of a book.

H: No, no and then maybe that's why he did so well.

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T: Yeah, it was a good book. I read it.

H: One of my professors in college was a close friend of Capote and I remember him talking about him and at the time he wasn't that well known.

T: Right.

H: Okay so there we are, you're into the Bureau and where was your first office?

T: I was assigned to Birmingham for, I went there in October of sixty-eight and transferred to Anniston, Alabama RA in February of sixty-nine, worked there for another seven months and then transferred to Louisville. Spent the next ten years in, basically ten years in Louisville, then I received my OP back to Kansas City in February of 1979. That's when I was initially assigned to the Organized Crime Squad and to the ongoing investigation that they had going, they called the 'Strawman'.

H: Okay. Just for my own interest, Anniston is that where the....

T: Fort McClellan.

H: Fort McClellan, okay. Our son went through there.

T: I think there was a polygraph school at the Fort that the Army ran.

H: Right and at one point we were...

T: Some of the agents went down there after. I don't think it was there when I was there a few months in sixty-nine. It was good, a fun R.A., and good guys, four-man R.A.

H: Well I'm sure there's plenty of action next to a military base too.

T: It was. One of our agents handled most of the work there and I had three counties south of the city and did most of the criminal investigations. The SRA handled most of the security type related or the racial matters, as we called them in those days '157' matters, in the RA territory and then another agent handled, I think, two counties north and east or west of Anniston.

H: Well Birmingham area, the Birmingham Office and all of the RAs were pretty busy at that time. Weren't they with civil rights matters?

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T: Well it had pretty well quieted down. They had, you know, for a time the state police had removed their radios from the RA's cars and of course that left the agent out in the RA without communication. It was seldom that you would be able to reach headquarters and by the time I got there they had replaced them and things were pretty quiet. Really as far as, you know, still some remnants of all the violence that had occurred after Martin Luther King was assassinated; but not a lot of problems and nothing that I experienced, obviously.

H: Well that's kind of interesting. I hadn't heard of that before; them removing their radios from the cars.

T: Oh yes.

H: That was certainly not a friendly act.

T: I mean it was a serious blow to the guys in the RA. That was, you know that was the only communication you had with anyone other than from a pay telephone.

H: Yeah. Well I was in an RA down in Florida and right, it was your life-line that was how you communicated because normally you didn't work together in a small RA.

T: Right.

H: And so consequently you needed to have some kind of communication.

T: Absolutely.

H: Wow. Louisville, what type of work did you do in Louisville?

T: I worked organized crime. Of course, Louisville being a rather small office I did a lot of general criminal and, you know, assisted on bank [robberies], I mean. Every bank robbery obviously. In those days we all responded. I did a lot of work with general criminal work with new agents. The fact is when I first got there, although I was assigned organized crime cases I had deserters and stolen car cases. I had picked up a load. I had like ninety cases and most of them were organized crime related. Gambling was a big organized crime activity in Louisville and consequently most of our cases were gambling cases.

H: So that put you in good stead then when you moved to Kansas City.

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T: It was kind of a, and of course I had the background. I was working in the office for about four years, or three and a half years as a clerk. So I was familiar with the cast of characters with Nick Civella and the organized crime family that he headed up. So I had a little bit of background plus two or three of the agents that I had worked with were fairly new agents on the squad when I was a clerk and they were still assigned to the squad so I got to work with them. I picked their brains obviously because they were, they had been around for ten years, twelve years working the same people, the same cases.

H: That was a tendency. Once people got into an office they liked, they would tend to stay as long as possible.

T: Oh yeah. I can't say it was my office of preference. It was closer. Actually Denver was a little bit closer to western Kansas but I knew I had a better chance of getting to Kansas City. I was familiar with the area and you know, I had enjoyed living there as a clerk so it was kind of a natural.

H: Sure you were home by that time.

T: Right.

H: 'Strawman', tell me about 'Strawman'. That's a case designation, right?

T: 'Strawman' was a Kansas City [case], file number was one eighty-three, one, eight, zero, one eighty-three A, one, eight zero and the Bureau file number was seventeen-twenty-six or seventeen oh six, or something like that. So it's fairly new RICO case that they had opened in Kansas City.

It started out before I got here and a supervisor by the name of Gary Hart came to the division. He saw, they had been working '92' cases and gambling cases for years and with not a lot of success. So he kind of got them fired up to, let's go for a Title III, see what we can do. And so there also was some informant information coming in about potential murders of a kind of a rogue group in the organized crime element that was fighting with the mob. There had been several murders committed in 1977, 1978, early seventy-eight. So part of the investigation was aimed at finding out who they were going to murder and who was going to do it and maybe try to head it off or solve it once it happened.

H: While we're paused just a moment, there will be people reading this who may not know what RICO is - Racketeer Influenced in Corrupt Organizations and a Title III?

T: Title III is a wiretap or a microphone installation on an individual.

H: Okay and Gary Hart? Had he been in New York?

T: I don't believe so.

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H: Prior to coming here?

T: I think he started in Macon, Georgia. He also was an ex-clerk in Dallas. I think his first office was Atlanta and I don't recall exactly where he was. Then of course he went back to headquarters and came out as a supervisor...

H: Okay.

T: ... in Kansas City.

H: Okay, so we'll move on anyway. So these murders in seventy-seven and seventy-eight were.....

T: Gang related.

H: Okay, let me get out of the question here and you go ahead.

T: Okay. In the course of putting together probable cause for the wiretap, the obvious, the best thing for them to work toward was the gambling violation because the mob here was, in Kansas City organized crime family, La Cosa Nostra was involved in the very heavily in the gambling. So they established a probable cause to install a wiretap in a restaurant where they met every night, called the Villa Capri. And on the night of June 2, 1978, the agents picked up a conversation between Carl Cork Civella and Carl Tuffy DeLuna. Two of the major characters in the Kansas City organized crime family, discussing a fellow by the name of Caesar and from the context of the conversation it was obvious they were talking about Las Vegas and things that were going on out there. The whole conversation was quite cryptic and they used a lot of code names and obviously they knew basically what they were talking about. So the conversation was, although it was obviously very important, it was very difficult to understand what they were talking about.

Gary Hart sent, made a copy of the tape, sent it to Bear Bryant who was the supervisor in Las Vegas, had him listen to it. Together they put together a package that probably related to skimming from the casinos and perhaps the hidden interest that the FBI had long suspected that the Mafia had in the Las Vegas casinos.

H: Now did this group in Kansas City, they reported to Las Vegas, that was their next level?

T: No. The Kansas City group traditionally reported to Chicago and Joey Aiuppa was the boss in Chicago at the time and Nick Civella was the boss in Kansas City. They were known to be good friends and both had attended the famous Appalachian meeting in Appalachia, New York in 1957. I think Chicago basically covered, you know, had control of most of the western half of the United States except for Las Vegas which was considered kind of an open city.

T: Any way, they used that information from that June second telephone conversation and other informant information. Basically what we had in Kansas City, what Las Vegas had generally and put it together in an affidavit and began wiretapping the home telephone numbers and pay telephones while they were doing physical surveillances. They were catching Carl DeLuna going regularly to a bank of telephones at a local motel. And so they obtained probable cause for his home phone and the four pay telephones at the motel. You know, with the caveat that DeLuna had to be on premises before they could turn on and that sort of thing and they did some physical surveillances with some of these female agents and female employees in the office to actually see him on the telephone prior to, while they were establishing probable cause.

Consequently they began picking up conversations between DeLuna and a fellow by the name of Joseph Vincent Agosto who was a Las Vegas employee or financier or money man that was running the Follies Bergere at the Tropicana. That was really the beginning of a long series of wiretaps from, I believe, the first number was down in the upper twenties. They numbered each of them as they had them and when I got here they were had gone through fifty something wiretaps on different phones in the city including a microphone installation that they had put in a law office where Nick Civella was holding court with his cronies.

He would sit in the lawyer's office and Carl DeLuna and Carl Civella and some of the others would go and report to him what was going on and many, many suspicions of what was happening. They actually had the wiretap up I believe no more than ten days and the federal judge decided that he didn't like the idea of the wiretap on the law office and closed them down.

But they did get two very, very vivid conversations about the Las Vegas casinos and the skimming out there from the Tropicana. And another kind of mysterious conversation about them taking over a group of casinos called the Argent Corporation, which were the Stardust, the Fremont, the Marina and the Hacienda.

H: Just to go back just a moment in terms of the administration of all of this stuff, wiretaps are not easy to get.

T: No.

H: How often though or how many times did you have to apply to get that first one? I'm just curious because in New York we spent a lot of time re-applying.

T: Again I was in Louisville but I know that the first affidavit was from that June second date when they got the first conversation about Las Vegas and got fired up to try and get the wiretaps on the pay phones and Carl DeLuna's home. It was actually signed on August the fifteenth. There was a strike force attorney by the name of Mike DeFeo who was assigned to Kansas City at the time; very, very highly respected attorney and I have to believe that they probably got permission on the first application.

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T: I don't know that but that's my recollection, and that's my belief but more than likely that's true. And then of course the probable cause that they were developing on each wiretap would lead them to a second one, or a third one, or a fourth one and they hit oil on virtually everyone that they had very early. So their track record was very good.

H: Yeah, yeah.

T: You know they didn't have any dry holes where they would put a microphone in and nothing happened, or they wouldn't be able to pick up any conversations.

H: Now, there's something called minimization, how did you manage that?

T: Well of course they, on the pay telephones it's very simple. They had to physically put Carl DeLuna on the premises, then it was just a matter of monitoring the four telephone lines there with any conversation. If it happened to be conversation they didn't recognize the voice then they would close it, minimize it until a new conversation began and then they would listen in again to see if DeLuna was on the phone. Almost universally he was the only one using the phones; you know it was usually late at night, fairly late at night and consequently he was, you know, it was very easy to do.

And then minimization again is a, remember the strike force attorney was telling us many, many times is an art, not a science. You never know exactly but if you start hearing a conversation and it appears not to be related to criminal activity you stop monitoring. Then if it's between two principals, two people named in the affidavit as being involved in this crime, then you could go back up and listen for a few minutes to see if the nature of the conversation has turned to criminal activities.

H: Now it was interesting in terms of the amount of manpower that goes into this stuff. It isn't a matter of being able to go to the judge and say we want to do a wiretap and he signs it and off you go and then you just start listening. There's a lot to it.

T: Oh yes. Just the manpower hours that are put in monitoring. Once the conversation is intercepted and deemed to be a criminal violation or a criminal conversation then you need to transcribe it. At one time during the, well the entire squad was assigned strictly to this one case for a period of approximately a year or a year and a half, monitoring the telephone conversations, transcribing them, support staff was working full time, the support staff that was on the Organized Crime Squad, and then they were borrowing employees from other squads to assist in the investigation.

H: Did it ever go outside the division?

T: Yes.

H: I mean you brought people in to work with you?

T: Not, my recollection is that they were doing a lot of physical surveillance during that period of time. We brought in several agents from the RAs to assist in the monitoring of the Title IIIs and the physical surveillances. You know they used the airplane extensively in their surveillances so that was one pilot and one observer for approximately two hours and they'd switch off every two hours or so during the time the surveillance was going.

And then later we brought in, months down the road, we brought in four agents to assist in just managing an extension of a Title III that we had. Then at one point we were required by the federal judge to transcribe every conversation between named interceptees, people that we expected to intercept even if it was non-pertinent and we brought in about twenty-five or thirty clerks from throughout the country. I remember several from headquarters obviously, then Cincinnati and Springfield and several other divisions sent us a support employee who worked for us for a period of about sixty days as I recall.

H: Well I didn't want to bog you down with the story and we can get back to that right away but, just, you talk about fifty wiretaps for example and they weren't all on at one time over a period of years but the amount of work that goes into these things is enormous.

T: Yeah.

H: It really eats up people. I got you interrupted. Let's go back to the story.

T: Okay. Using the information, obviously what they determined was that Joseph Agosto would call Carl DeLuna's house and ask him to meet me on ninety-eighth street or forty-fourth street and those were the last two numbers of the telephone number at this particular motel. Then Agosto would call DeLuna at that number in twenty minutes or whatever it took for him to get there, basically. Then they would have a rather detailed conversation. A lot of coded references, a lot of coded conversation, but since they were on pay phones, from pay phone to pay phone they were much more open than they would have been had they been on a phone that was designated theirs.

From that information, the Las Vegas Office used the information for probable cause to do some wiretaps in Las Vegas. One of the conversations they picked up was that they were going to have a meeting in Kansas City on, I believe, it was the day after Thanksgiving, 1978. November 26, 1978 was the date and that Joe Agosto was going to come to Kansas City as well as another individual by the name of Carl Wesley Thomas. Carl Thomas was the owner of the Bingo Palace and Slots of Fun Casinos in Las Vegas at the time and he had a reputation among the (phone ringing)...

My other phone is ringing but I think hopefully my wife will answer it.

H: Okay.

T: His reputation was that he had learned how to skim money from the casinos and was an expert at it and so that's what the conversation would presumably be about.

The agents got a wiretap authority to put in a microphone in the house that they were going to use that they had in one or two other conversations in the neighborhood of Nick Civella's home. Two of the agents went in and made the Title III installation and sure enough on the morning of November the 26<sup>th</sup>, Carl DeLuna shows up at the house with Joe Agosto in tow. He had picked him up at the airport and they sat down with Nick Civella and Carl Civella for about two hours. Then shortly thereafter Carl Thomas showed up with, being driven by a fellow by the name of Carl Caruso who was a junketeer, who flew people out to casinos in Las Vegas, you know, for a fee. That was his source of, supposedly a travel agency but that's about all he did was those and that was his first real connection with the case. His name was Caruso. They had made frequent references to this fellow named Singer that was bringing money back from Las Vegas. Hence they jumped to conclusions well this must be, this could be the singer, you know the Caruso.

H: (Laughing).

T: So anyway that conversation was most vivid for five hours. They discussed how to skim from the casinos, how they were doing at the time and the safest way and the dangers, how they could protect themselves from other people stealing from them and on and on and on. I mean very, very good conversation.

After DeLuna and Agosto leave they lasted about five hours. Oh I think I said that. After Agosto, and I take it back, after Agosto and Carl Thomas leave, Nick tells Carl DeLuna, "set up a meeting next Sunday", three days later, or two days later, at "Jackie's house" which was another house in the neighborhood of just the 'made' guys. The only time I ever heard that term on a wiretap in Kansas City, the made guys, meaning the members of the La Cosa Nostra, the organized crime family.

H: Right.

T: Anyway they took that information, got a microphone put in; unfortunately they got it in the wrong location and they struck out on getting any information.

H: Well, that happens.

T: About this time it was almost Christmas time. Thanksgiving had gone by and they were working you know, twenty-four hours a day basically; virtually every agent on the squad. I was still in Kansas City, or still in Louisville, fat and happy, did not have my office of preference transfer to Kansas City. I had heard that Kansas City had this great case going on but I had no idea what the details were.

T: They shut down the wiretaps over Christmas and then cranked back up after the first of the year. Began writing search warrant affidavits and on Valentine's Day, 1979, about thirty-one years ago, they did raids on at least, I don't know fifteen, eighteen locations in Kansas City and Las Vegas, seized all kinds of records, guns, ammo. You name it. A bullet-proof vest and an illegal dice table, the juice table with a magnet in it that they used to skim people on who like to gamble. I don't know if it was a carry-over from the roaring twenties or they had used it but it was abandoned or it was not abandoned. It was being stored when they recovered it.

H: It might have been an antique.

T: If it was a little better constructed, it would have really been impressive. But it looked more like something that you would set up, you know as an amateur joint. It looks like just a regular table and people wouldn't suspect that they were being cheated.

H: They can't stand to make big money by skimming. They always have to cheat on something or other.

T: Right, right and gambling. You know the Kansas City mob came up with a term called the 'split line' which was if you, if the normal line was seven points in Las Vegas, you would give seven but you would only get six. You would lose a point. So if it came up on seven, they would win one side of the bet regardless and then pay out the other side. So it was just another little scam that they had.

Among the records that they seized were, Carl DeLuna had drawers and drawers of records. They were actually on the search warrant from the early evening until late morning the following day, cataloging all the evidence they seized from his house. I mean little slips of paper, index cards and things where he was making these detailed notes in code, but detailed notes about what he was doing. I mean most of them talked about the sandwiches which was a term that they used for the skim packages. So you could take; you had a pattern immediately of the dates the skim money actually came.

And then there were two notes, one from his house, one from Nick Civella's house, that matched up with the distribution of the skim proceeds, who got what. If they got forty thousand dollars, Nick got fifteen thousand, head of the family. His two under-bosses got ten thousand. No, I'm sorry they got five thousand, that's twenty-five thousand and then they would break it down among other guys including a fellow that they referred to as Trucker. It turned out to be Roy Williams who was, at that time, was a trustee at the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Pension Fund and eventually became president of International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Anyway it goes on. I guess that was about the time I got transferred in. February fourteenth they did they raid. I came to Kansas City on February twenty-first and I was assigned to the Organized Crime Squad. Gary Hart told me, he said, "What I want you to do is get up to speed on this case."

T: The case agent was a man by the name of Shea Airey who was a long time agent in the Kansas City division and he was eligible to retire and they anticipated that he had burned himself out on this case and that he would be retiring any day. The other agent that was very capable of, and could have handled the case was a man by the name of Bill Ouseley. He had a case that was getting ready for trial that he'd been working for three or four years and consequently he didn't have the time to work on 'Strawman'. So they said, "You organize it, get it put together, assign other guys to handle specific tasks and we'll go from there."

Well that's what I did then for the next eighteen months or so, was go through the things. We wrote prosecutor's reports on every potential defendant from Kansas City. Then the Chicago group that we were able to identify through DeLuna's records. Then eventually a man from Milwaukee, Frank Balistreri who was head of the family in Milwaukee and a fellow by the name of Milton Rockman from Cleveland who was the brother-in-law to the Angelo Lonardo who was the boss of the Cleveland family at the time.

What the records would show is that they would get a certain amount of money and send it directly to Chicago, sharing in the skim proceeds with Chicago. Then Chicago presumably was distributing it down to Milwaukee and Kansas City. I think it was also sending money to Cleveland and Rockman actually came to town on one occasion. They had surveillance on him but they didn't know who he was, presumably to pick up his portion of the skim package. And the records show that they were getting forty thousand dollars a month. They had begun in April of 1978 and the last skim package was coming in February of 1979, when they did the search warrant. Bill Ouseley did the search warrant on Carl Caruso, the singer, and seized eighty thousand dollars off of him. Two skim packages which DeLuna's note said, "We expect two sandwiches," which turned out to be eighty thousand. So there it was.

The records also show that they were, that Chicago had a similar operation going where they were skimming proceeds and they were sending a portion of that money to Kansas City via a Chicago policeman by the name of Stompy. Anthony "Stompy" Chiavola who was Nick's son, I'm sorry, Nick's nephew. We had picked him up on surveillance down here and didn't know exactly what, you know, I mean he appears to be visiting a relative but it turned out that he was the courier for the skim funds from Chicago to Kansas City.

So all in all, I mean the records just detail that. DeLuna at one point went to Las Vegas and met with Allen Glick who owned the Stardust Casino and he told Nick, he's reporting back to Nick and when he gets back he said, "I told him, I don't care what you do, you get out of the casino business." He said, "You know we know about your kids and so on and so forth." So he threatened him.

T: DeLuna's notes shows that he went out there and that he brought his wife out later, which we had verified through surveillance. They had bought a Barbie doll outfit for his nine year old daughter and he detailed the, you know, the expense for that. You know that was a personal expense as opposed to his air-fare and the hotel fare that he, you know, the hotel rate that he paid out then.

Anyway that's how vivid the notes were. So we were able to use those and then virtually identified every participant in the skimming activity. It was obvious from the November 26th conversation that they were using a form that the casinos used to bring poker chips or the gambling chips to the table; the tokens as they called them; that they were using the document for that. So the first trip we made, my fellow co-case agent at the time was a man by the name of Ed Humphrey and he and I went to Las Vegas. We had a subpoena for the Tropicana Hotel Casino. We got all their fill slips forms that they used to bring the chips to the table for the period that we knew they were skimming from, April of 1978 through February of 1979 and they filled fifteen banker's boxes.

H: Oh boy.

T: So we had the fun of figuring out how to transport those and where we could maintain a chain of custody on the Grand Jury evidence.

We conducted interviews while we were out there of key people that we had selected. While we were there conducting the interviews, we got calls from two different attorneys. One representing Joe Agosto who wanted to talk and one representing Carl Thomas who wanted to talk. Of course the talk was, "Can you give us some immunity and we'll be able to help you on this case?" You know, of course that's nothing that the FBI would ever be able to offer anyone. We wouldn't have done it anyway because we had the evidence to convict them of the crimes that we would eventually charge them with.

H: But one of his guys was an LCN figure right?

T: Agosto?

H: Yeah.

T: No, he was what we would call a close associate.

H: Okay.

T: He had been a, he had lived in Kansas City for a period of time, was a short order cook in his brother's bar and that was his claim to fame. He had been a developer of FHA homes in Alaska at one point. He basically didn't have a hundred dollars to his name. Apparently when he went to Las Vegas, he had these plans to build this big casino and the next thing you know he's running the Follies Bergere. So he was a very charming, intellectual individual, very outgoing and obviously very successful in a short period of time.

T: But neither one of them obviously, at that point, was going to cooperate. At the same period of time, one of the owners of the Tropicana Hotel was a banker, a man whose background was banking in Minneapolis. I hate to say it, I've forgotten his name, oh Lord. But he and Joe Agosto were kiting checks back and forth to keep the Casino, which was struggling at the time, probably because they were stealing forty thousand a week, or ten thousand a week from the casino. But they were financially struggling and the banker was trying to construct a high-rise hotel adjacent to the part of this hotel complex to bring more people in and therefore the gaming revenue would go up and, you know, they could do all the other things they needed to do. And they were trying to get funding for that.

So they just used a bank account that Agosto established for his Follies Bergere show in the Minneapolis bank and then they would take checks back and forth. So Minneapolis division was working that case as a straight bank fraud case while the 'Strawman' case was going on in Kansas City, Las Vegas and a little bit in Cleveland and Chicago.

After we did all those interviews we came back and I went through the records. I'm trying to see, okay, how are they skimming? Well I can't see anything. You're talking about thousands and thousands and thousands of records so I kind of put that aside.

We still, we had picked up now maybe twenty-five employees at the Tropicana Hotel that we were going to go out and interview, names that we'd gotten off the fill slips. One of those was a cashier who had worked at the casino by the name of Jay Gould. We also were going to interview the people that were signing the slips. I forgot what the term was. I think they called it pit bosses. When the chips came to the table, the pit boss would have to sign it, the dealer would have to sign it.

H: That's called a fill slip, huh? F-i-l-l?

T: F-i-l-l, meaning we're filling the chips onto the table.

H: Right, right.

T: In theory you put twenty thousand dollars in chips on the table, you either lost twenty thousand or there should be twenty thousand dollars in the till, in the drop-box at that table, the box that hooks onto the table where they put the money when you bet; you know when you go and buy chips.

H: Sure.

T: They put the money in the drop box. Jay Gould ... when we start doing the interviews; first of all we're getting these people saying, "That's not my signature. It looks like my signature but I can tell it's a forgery." When we go to interview Jay Gould, he says, "Well I've been expecting you. I've got terminal cancer and I'm dying. I'm going to tell you everything I know." And he basically laid it out and said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. Take me down and show me the fill slips and I'll show you how to find out where we're skimming them, how they were skimming the money."

And then he said, "Personally, a fellow by the name of Don Shepard who was the casino night manager and another casino employee named Billy Caldwell were actually taking cash." He was handing them cash. They would hand him the fill slip, he would sign it, he'd hand them the cash, and no chips would ever go to the table. So now it shows that they lost ten thousand dollars but that ten thousand dollars was actually cash that they were skimming and it was ten thousand dollars, bang, bang, bang, once a week.

So he came back, went through the records with me, and showed me exactly how to find the fill slips. All I had to do then was go back and match up the forged signatures and we sent all that to the lab. It came back with fingerprints of all the defendants, all the Las Vegas defendants.

So you know, the case was laid out when we got ready to go to trial. That trial, or that indictment came down November of 1981. It went to trial in June of 1983. It was about a thirty day trial and everyone that was charged was either convicted or pled guilty except for one guy who was acquitted who happens to be a made guy in Kansas City. But he had a great attorney and the attorney said, "(unintel)." This guy wasn't smart enough to be involved in the skimming. He was just getting his share.

H: (Laughing).

T: You know he was Nick Civella's cousin, that's the way he played it. You know my cousin was blind so he could hardly see so I was driving him around. I didn't know what was going on. You know, his wife got up and testified he was a great guy and he ran this barbecue restaurant in town and that's where he spent most of his time.

Anyway, so out of fifteen defendants, fourteen were convicted or pled guilty and the judge, Joseph E. Stevens who subsequently died, sentenced the key players to thirty years in prison and the less serious violators as much as fifteen years in prison, including Carl Thomas who got fifteen. Joe Agosto, who had decided to cooperate because he had been indicted and convicted in Minneapolis and sentenced to thirty years on a bank fraud case, decided to cooperate and he testified for us.

T: He was an outstanding witness except for one little perjury where they caught him saying one thing and my 302 read differently. He said, "You can't blame me for the ineloquence of the FBI." But anyway he was a tremendous, tremendous witness. In the meantime he's got this huge sentence up in Minneapolis and you know the idea was that he would cooperate down here and they would re-consider his sentence up there.

While I am working principally the Tropicana case and the skimming from the Tropicana Casino, Ed Humphrey was the co-case agent who was also familiar with and been involved with my investigation. But he was targeted. His job task was to put together the Stardust case, the Stardust Hotel and Casino, or the Argent Corporation; one of the sub-files that we had created out of the original 'Strawman.' When I got here was 183, 180 period, plus they had a sub A and sub B for physical surveillances and for administrative. We eventually, I think when I retired or when the case was over with, we were into the double letters beginning with B with sub-files from just any potential criminal activities that were involved in like the murders and the Argent Corporation. The other Fremont, oh I'm sorry the Dunes, there was a tie in with Morris Shanker who owned the Dunes. So we were working all these different aspects of the case.

H: Just the files that you would have, the working files, that sounds like several filing cabinets worth of stuff.

T: It was. Some of them basically ended up with a half a dozen, you know pieces of mail in them, because all the evidence we had was something from the Title III or from the wiretaps or from the evidence that alleged something had happened. When they tried to go further, well there's nothing else you know that they can do. Perhaps the defendants were deceased by that time because these records dated back to the early or the late 1960s. Principally many of them in the early 1970s, therefore a period of time had passed since the allegation of when the potential crime was committed. So it just made many different things.

If I can get back to the Argent Corporation, Ed Humphrey gets transferred to his office of preference, to Omaha. An agent by the name of Bud Hall comes in and Bud Hall then takes over the Argent part of the case. So when the Tropicana case is over, now I am helping Bud work the Stardust case or the Argent Corporation case; the main casinos being the Stardust and the Fremont.

The owner of that was a man by the name of Allen R. Glick who was a San Diego businessman who had amassed a great sum of money in San Diego real estate. Then he had gotten a loan from the Central States Pension Fund of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and bought the four different casinos, the Stardust, the Fremont, the Hacienda and the Marina in Las Vegas and operated them all under the name of the Argent Corporation.

T: One of his initial employees was a fellow by the name of Carl Thomas. Another one was Frank Rosenthal and Frank Rosenthal, if you will recall, many years later, several years later, [there was] the movie *The Casino*. The principal character in that movie was, in theory at least, and probably was, Frank Rosenthal because he was a mover and a shaker. He had a TV show at one time in Las Vegas. He was the quote "casino manager" at the Stardust or at the Argent Corporation but principally at the Stardust. There was a big discussion, a lot of publicity about it at about the time, that this case was going on about him having a gambling connection in Florida as a young man and that he was not eligible to be licensed as a key employee at one of the Las Vegas casinos. Then he tried to pull the same stunt that Joe Agosto did, who also had a felony conviction, to operate the stage show at the Stardust.

Consequently, you know he was quite a character and you know he was married to a show girl and the whole bit. I can't remember the actress' name but the movie was terrible and the book that it was based on wasn't much better.

H: Yeah.

T: That case was indicted in 1983, September of 1983, and charged in that case was Joe Aiuppa and three other LCN members in Chicago. Milton Rockman was the representative from Cleveland. Frank Balistreri and his two sons from Milwaukee and then Carl Thomas was a defendant. The Kansas City group, basically the ones that were involved with the moving and the shaking on the Tropicana were also indicted.

Nick Civella had died in the interim and Carl Civella was the acting boss. He was indicted. Carl DeLuna was indicted.

H: Now, did you break these cases apart in order to manage the prosecution? You didn't do this all in one big trial?

T: No. The Tropicana case, the skimming case which was fairly cut and dry, you know. I mean basically people steal money out of one place, transporting in interstate commerce to another location and then splitting it up between the principals. So it was a fairly simple case where the Stardust was, we could not find a record of the skimming. We couldn't find a witness who could tell us how they were doing it. But that became a hidden interest case where the basic allegation was that in order to get the loan from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Glick had to make certain agreements with Frank Balistreri who was the mob boss in Milwaukee to give his boys an interest where they could buy the casino, all four casinos, for twenty-five thousand dollars. That doesn't sound like a very good deal for Glick.

H: (Laughing).

T: Glick was not, his testimony was that he did not know who Frank Balistreri was other than it was kind of a goofy thing, but he assured him that if he would do this, they would get the trustees on the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Pension Fund to approve his loan so he could buy the casinos. So he traded off what he thought was a nominal, you know, piece of paper for sixty-two and a half million dollars. And sure enough the trustee from Kansas City, named Roy Williams who was in favor of the loan, the trustee from Chicago voted for the loan, the trustee from Milwaukee voted for the loan and they had a majority. The loan was granted and he got the money and he bought the casino.

H: But he didn't know anything about it for sure, just a normal little deal of sixty-two and a half million dollars.

T: He was assured that he would get the money.

H: (Laughing).

T: He didn't, his testimony is that he, you know, didn't know. He was naïve about La Cosa Nostra. But you know, at that time there were many other casinos that had gone to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and gotten loans and so it was just a natural thing to do. They had all this money. They were making loans in Las Vegas and here's the guy that tells him he could get it. The fellow that actually he talked to initially was a runner for Frank Balistreri. So, you know, he's the guy by the name of Frank Ranney. I think is the one that actually took him to Frank Balistreri and, you know where he told him he could get the loan.

He was told, he was then told by Frank Balistreri to make this thing run smooth you need to hire Frank Rosenthal to manage your casinos, and Frank's a good man. We know him and trust him and consequently what he testified was that the, he found out that he wasn't running the casinos. Rosenthal was actually doing more directing than he was as far as, you know, the day to day operations and changing the carpet and that sort of thing; things that you would think an owner would have the responsibility and the idea to do. But obviously he wasn't aware that they were stealing money from him.

That case began in September. It went to trial in September of 1985 and finished on January 21, 1986, four month trial. All the defendants either pled out or were found guilty except the two sons of Frank Balistreri who were acquitted. Joe Aiuppa. Carl Civella had pled out; Carl DeLuna had pled out; Pete Tamburello who was the LCN member that was acquitted on the Tropicana case but was a defendant; he had pled out. Joey Aiuppa from Chicago, Milton Rockman from Cleveland, Joe Lombardo from Chicago, an LCN street boss, Anthony Chiavola, Stompy Chiavola, the policeman from Chicago; all of those were convicted and they got sentences from fifteen to thirty years by the same Federal judge that had sentenced everyone..

H: Well that was a really a heavy blow for them, all over the place.

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T: Yes, it was quite a case.

H: It was quite a case.

T: I retired in 1998, but basically they had never got their footing back and it would be my guess now that they still have not. I know subsequent to that DeLuna was released from prison in April of 1998 after doing about twenty years from the date of our investigation and I retired in June of 1998. He died just a few years ago. His brother-in-law Tony Civella who was not a named defendant in any of the cases, because he was in prison during the time we were doing all the investigation. But he was convicted on two other cases in the interim. He died within the past year and a half. I just don't know any other main characters out there that I think are capable of putting together the mob.

H: Fascinating.

T: There was one other interesting little tidbit. Throughout the wiretaps there's the conversation about the Browns. We come to find out that the Browns are members of the DeCavalcante family out of New Jersey and that they owned an entertainer by the name of Sammy Davis, Jr.

Sammy Davis, Jr. was appearing at a casino in Las Vegas, not the Tropicana. When they built the Follies Bergere Theater, they got Sammy Davis, Jr. to come over and perform at the Tropicana and they renamed the new theater, the Sammy Davis, Jr. Theater.

Well the mob in New Jersey and, I believe, the DeCavalcante family in New Jersey, or Newark, if I'm not mistaken, Elizabeth, New Jersey is where one of the characters lived. They believed that the Kansas City mob had stolen Sammy Davis, Jr. from them and he belonged to them, therefore, they owed, Kansas City owed them money. So that was the nexus of the conversations on the wiretap is that the Browns want that money. Joe Agosto testified; or told us in a debriefing between getting ready to testify and dying in 1983 before the second case ever went to trial; that he had attended a meeting. He was subpoenaed, he said by the Chicago mob and Joey Aiuppa held a hearing between the Kansas City and DeCavalcante families discussing whether or not Kansas City owed the DeCavalcante family money because of Sammy Davis, Jr. Agosto was not, was called as a witness, he was subpoenaed but he never testified because Aiuppa ruled that Kansas City owed the DeCavalcante family a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for stealing Sammy Davis, Jr. away from them. The nexus of the whole thing is that Kansas City didn't want to pay that much because the Browns, the two guys from New Jersey who had been sent to Las Vegas to try to collect their money, had markers (IOUs) at the Tropicana totaling some forty-thousand dollars. So they wanted to deduct that from the hundred and fifty thousand...Aiuppa told them they had to pay.

H: (Laughing).

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T: An agent by the name of, I can't think of his name. He later went back to Quantico and worked in the Behavioral Science Unit. I can picture him but and I know his name, Mike, Mike somebody. Anyway Mike interviewed Sammy Davis and of course he slapped him on the back, called him sweetheart and all that but he denied that he belonged to a New Jersey mob and that he was a free man.

H: Yeah.

T: So it was kind of very interesting. It would have been very interesting if that case had ever been able to go to trial.

H: Wow, yeah.

T: Obviously when Agosto died that was the end of our chance.

H: Well you know I think they all like to have bragging rights.

T: I'm sorry.

H: They all like to have, these LCN characters, all like to have bragging rights.

T: Oh yeah.

H: You know, say well Sammy Davis is our man.

T: Did Frank Sinatra belong to Sam Giancana? Probably.

H: Then they'll go to their show and they'll talk about things afterwards and you know just you kind of wonder.

T: Yeah.

H: How much of this is they're star struck too along with everybody else.

T: Right. Vice versa to this same extent. I mean I think some of those entertainers, you know, they're around the clubs, a lot of the clubs are controlled by that group and they're kind of mesmerized by the, you know, the mobsters.

I mean there was a sequence done on one of the TV shows talking about it, one of the television series talking about Las Vegas and the mob and how, you know, in the olden days they dressed like mobsters because people, they're hicks from western Kansas like me...

H: (Laughing).

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T: ... would like to go out there and hang around with these mob guys and just think about what they'd done, you know.

H: Yeah.

T: You know pink shirts, black ties or whatever.

H: Straight out of *Guys and Dolls*.

T: Yup.

H: Well, good.

T: So basically that's my story.

H: A question concerning these cases. I gather they weren't so complicated that they would not have jury appeal. It worked all right that way?

T: It was, you know, I mean the trials went like clockwork in the sense that we had hundreds of things. Well in the Tropicana, in the Argent case, we had thousands of exhibits but we made huge... I had a big screen with a slide show when we'd talk about a particular record, you know that the record would be flashed up on the screen and, you know, tape recordings were played. The judge would allow the jury to have a transcript as a guide while they were listening to the telephone conversations. And then the evidence on the tape was just so vivid.

Once we were able to explain who they were and, you know my testimony, I testified for about six, seven hours about identifying the voices. How I knew to recognize Carl DeLuna's voice from Stompy Chiavola; and how I knew Stompy Chiavola from Nick Civella. I think people, they just lapped it up.

You know the fact that man it was laid out before their eyes. Particularly the Tropicana case which was very simple. Then in the Argent case, we had Roy Williams agree to testify for us about how he was paid by the Kansas City mob. He didn't know it was skimming money but, you know, part of his job was to make sure that the casinos that the loans that he approved were approved by the Kansas City mob first and that he had to bring the other trustees in line. If there was a disagreement he had to have them go back to their family and check with them. So that was pretty vivid.

Angelo Lonardo actually testified as did Jimmy Frattiano and I don't know why they brought him in because he didn't know anything about it but you know they put him on the stand as Jimmy "the Weasel."

H: With a name like that you gotta be on the stand.

T: One of the most despicable characters that I came in contact with in the whole case. Carl Thomas actually in the Tropicana, or in the Argent case, was granted immunity and allowed to testify about his role at the Stardust because he had been an employee there; in theory that he was already licensed. Frank Rosenthal couldn't get licensed so Carl Thomas was going to take over his role there but you know that never came to fruition. I mean we popped him before all that came to pass.

H: Trying to decide when to stop has got to be a serious problem in cases like this.

T: Yeah. Carl Thomas when he took the, Carl Thomas was another character. I mean, like a typical Las Vegas type guy that you know, likeable guy, you like to be around him, fun to talk to, and he agreed to cooperate with us and all he needed was a grant of immunity from the stand. He said, "I've already worked it out with all the defendants that I could testify because I'm not going to point the finger at them." So he gets on the stand. He's obviously a little nervous and they give him immunity and one of the attorneys in the back, you know the attorneys that attended, says, "I can't hear the witness, you honor." So the judge asked him to just take the microphone and hold it instead of you know leaning over towards the microphone and speak up. So he takes the mike and he puts it in front of his mouth and he says, "You know I kind of feel like singing."

H: (Laughing).

T: And he is. (Laughing) He doesn't realize, and then he realized what he said that he's singing against the mob you know that ... anyway, fun case.

H: (Laughing).

T: Seven years of my life.

H: Well, it sounds like a well spent seven years and a really very, very interesting case. I'm happy you shared it with us. Do you have any more like this around?

T: Well, that's why I would like to supplement with Mr. Hart's perspective because he began the case. What his mindset was as he was getting through all this stuff. Then the prosecutor, you know, why he prosecuted like he did. You know there were five different attorneys handling the Argent case, different aspects of the Argent case as it went to trial. If it was physical surveillance it was, it was this attorney. If it was the records, it was this attorney, and then he was the lead attorney. Then the newspaper reporter who had covered the courthouse for forty years, thirty years prior to this case, and was familiar with all the characters, had lived with the Organized Crime Squad of the Kansas City Office on their different cases over the years. The different trials and tribulations that they had working cases against these guys.

H: Sure.

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T: So I would like to get his perspective and he's a good story teller. That would make it, I think make it fun to play it into our cases. You know, his perspective of what was going on.