

Life is just a

## Roll of the Dice

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Las Vegas is many things...The Entertainment Capital of the World, Glitter Gulch, the Strip, topless shows, legal prostitution not too far away, home of white tigers and dolphins, where pirate ships re-enact battles and a volcano explodes every hour. Las Vegas is all this and more, but to me, it's home.

I was born and raised here, have spent all 27 years of my life in this crazy, sprawling, growing city. We're getting some 5,000 new residents each month, according to some figures--60,000 people a year. I don't quite remember when Las Vegas only had 60,000 residents, but close. When I was a kid, Tropicana Avenue was a two-lane road and McCarran International Airport was the end of town. The Strip ended pretty much at Flamingo Road with what was then the MGM Grand and the Dunes. The Aladdin and the Tropicana Hotels were the only other major hotels, and then way the heck on down the road was the Hacienda. On the west side of town, Rainbow was the end of it--Spring Mountain Ranch was quite a drive outside of town, and "deadman's curve" was a steep downgrade that wiped out more cars than I care to remember.

"Master planned communities" didn't exist back then--there were neighborhoods. And neighborhoods without owners' associations or the like. People could paint their houses whatever color they wanted, and there were no restrictions on how many cars could be parked on the street, for example. My block was a lively jumble of cars under repair, almond trees, basketball hoops, and a salmon colored house that I was sure had to be a coloring mistake. Or else its owner was completely color blind. Of course the yellow house with the green trim wasn't exactly refreshing to the eye--but at least it was better than the salmon.

It's not just physical things that have changed, though--the people have, too. When we went into the grocery store, the checker there knew us by name and always had a smile or a laugh. And, yes, even then there were slot machines in the grocery stores. People weren't afraid to let their children play outside alone after dark back then, and neighbors were more often neighbors than people who shared a street or a block. There weren't quite as many transients then as there are now--which meant a whole different attitude: one more of community than of a place to flop for a while.

The problem with the wave of new residents is that too many of them don't really belong here. They don't understand the climate--and the changes in the climate in the last ten years and they don't understand the attitudes that made Las Vegas so attractive to them in the first place. My friend Ellie moved here just two years ago--but she belongs. We were driving back from Los Angeles one afternoon, and she raved about the desert landscape, how beautiful it is, and how she feels settled whenever she takes a long look at it. I said, "You have it. You know. You belong." It's the feeling of belonging to this place that's missing now in too many people, the feeling of community I mentioned earlier. Oh, yes, people will still come here as long as they think there's a job to be had or money to be made. But, no matter how long they stay, they'll never really live here. (And worst of all, they brought Howard Stern with them. Lck!)

I went to dinner with a friend who was visiting from Louisiana and thinking about moving out here. Knowing I am a native, he talked enthusiastically about how fast Las Vegas is growing and how residents must love the growth. I said, "Some growth is good, but I really miss my home town." He said, "If you don't like it, move." At which point my Celtic temper flared a bit. "Why should I have to leave the town I was born and raised in because of people like you moving in?" I asked. Admittedly, I was rude--but that pretty much sums up how I feel.

I love Las Vegas--if I didn't, I wouldn't have stayed here as long as I have. I just wish more of the people who live here loved it like I do.