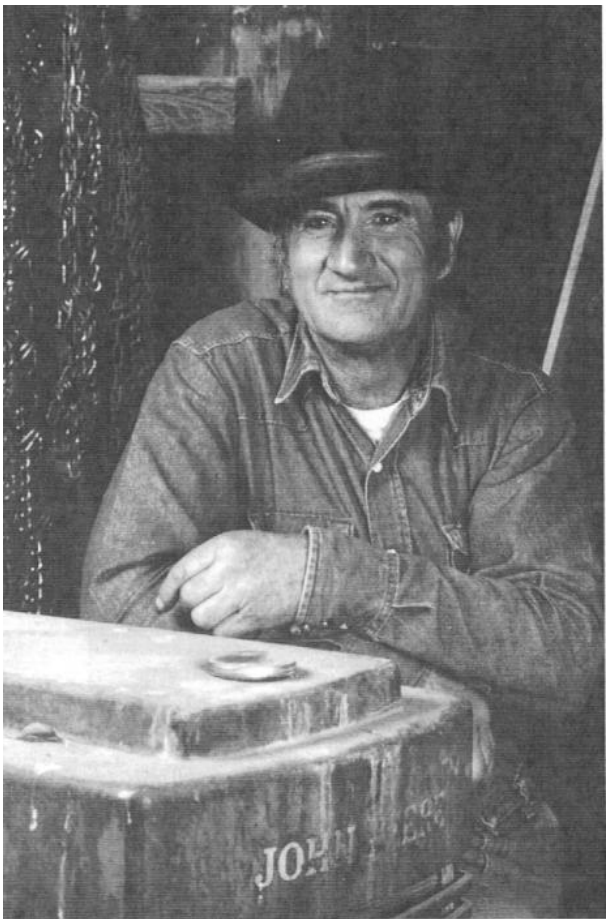
An Interview with
JIM
BERG

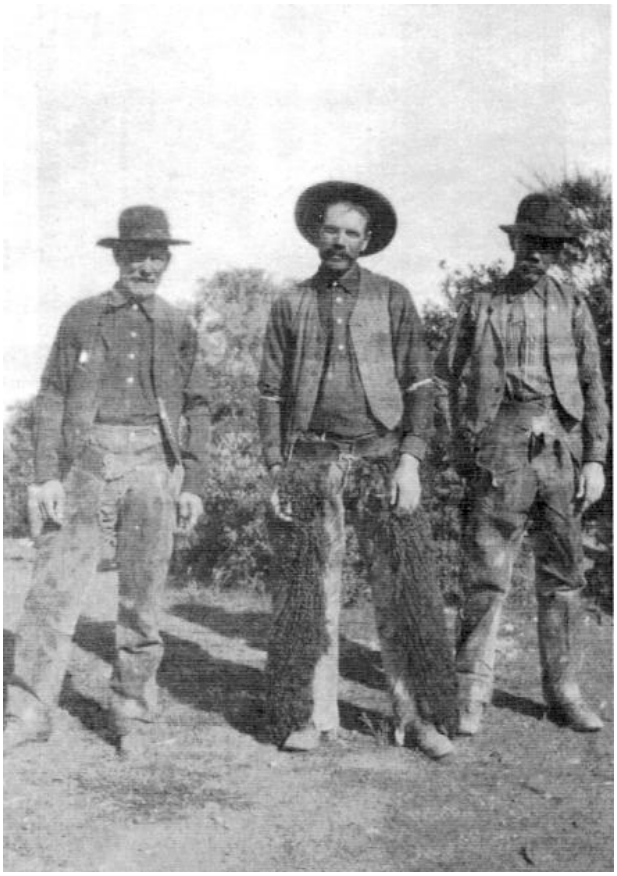
An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
2009



Jim Berg, circa 1995

Dan Berg, Jim Berg's father, as a young man,
with a four-point buck he had just shot.



Ben Rogers, Jim Berg's maternal grandfather (Rene Roger's father). Others unidentified, probably McCanns. Ben is wearing angora chaps.

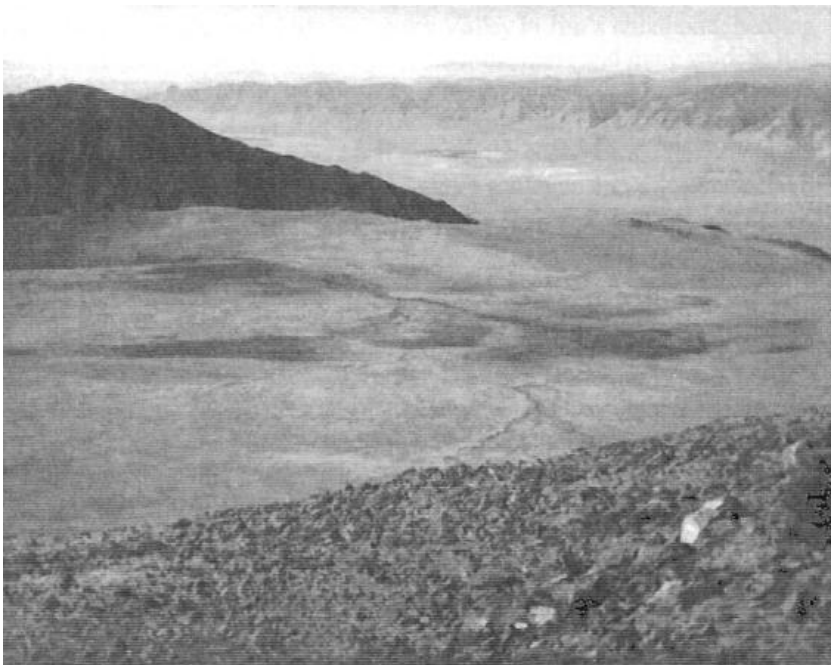
Dan Berg roping, Armando Francisco on the head and Pete Rogers working the branding iron. Wine Glass Ranch, Smoky Valley, Nevada, circa 1945. Francisco owned a ranch south of Carvers.

Pete Rogers, born and raised at the RO Ranch, later owner of the Wine Glass Ranch, Smoky Valley, Nevada.

Jim Berg roping at the Cloverdale Ranch, Smoky Valley, Nevada.

Crew that works for Jim Berg off and on. Todd Chambers roping, Russell Berg, Jim's son, talking to Chambers; Danny Berg, Jim's other son, on the head and Jim Berg working the branding iron. Berg Ranch, Smoky Valley, Nevada, circa 1998.

Willy Rogers, brother of Ben Rogers, at the RO Ranch, Smoky Valley, Nevada, circa 1922.



Big meadow near the summit of Mount Jefferson, elevation 11,941 feet (the highest point in the Toquima Range), Nye County, Nevada. The east side of Smoky Valley can be seen at the base, looking south-southwest.

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PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will, in preparing a text:

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and

e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes—in many cases as a stranger—and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have long known and admired; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada—too numerous to mention by name—who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project in 1987. Subsequently, Commissioners Richard L. Carver, Dave Hannigan, and Barbara J. Raper provided support. In this current round of interviews, Nye County Commissioners Andrew Borasky, Roberta "Midge" Carver, Joni Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Peter Liakopoulos provided unyielding support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the program within Nye County in its first years. More recently, Darrell Lacy, Director, Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Project Office, gave his unwavering support. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Lacy's office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioner Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Mr. Lacy for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Lacy.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Kimberley Dickey provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Jean Charney, Julie Lancaster, and Darlene Morse also transcribed a number of interviews. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Marilyn Anderson, Joni Eastley, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people's names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Long-time Pahrump resident Harry Ford, founder and director of the Pahrump Valley Museum, served as a consultant throughout the project; his participation was essential. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Office, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of Nye County or the U.S. DOE.

—Robert D. McCracken
2009

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while most of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region—stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County—remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890, most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be so for at least another twenty years.

The spectacular mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), Rhyolite (1904), Manhattan (1905), and Round Mountain (1906) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, much of it essentially untouched by humans.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. The Rhyolite Herald, longest surviving of Rhyolite/Bullfrog's three newspapers, lasted from 1905 to 1912. The Beatty Bullfrog Miner was in business from 1905 to 1906. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All these communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities once their own newspapers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, published as part of the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 resides in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) in 1987. The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history

interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the Lied Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique—some are large, others are small—yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 700 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral histories as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories have also been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impact of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by the repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for a long time and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided at the site. And in the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

—R.D.M.

Interview with Jim Berg and Midge Carver conducted by Robert McCracken at Mr. Berg's home on the Berg Ranch in Smoky Valley, Nevada, April 15 and May 20, 2007 and December 14, 2008. In the final session they are joined by Todd Chambers, a young friend of Jim's who sometimes works with him.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Just to get it going, Jim, why don't you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate and when and where you were born?

JB: My name is actually Russell William Berg, but I'm sure not called that. In the valley, everybody knows me by Jim. If they call me Russell, they think it's my son; we were named the same. They call me Jim, so that's what we'll go by.

RM: And when and where were you born?

JB: I was born in Tonopah in 1939; August 1st.

RM: And what is your mother's full name—her maiden name and married name?

JB: Her maiden name was Irene Katherine Rogers. She was born in Round Mountain November 13, 1914.

MC: That's where "Rene" comes from.

RM: What was your dad's name?

JB: Daniel Sanford Berg. And he was born, apparently, in Tonopah. I'm not sure what year he was born. Dates never made a whole lot of difference to me, really.

RM: Where were the Bergs originally from—the Berg brothers?

JB: They came right from Canada, probably because of the mining. As I understand it, they were involved with mining in Canada. All four of them came here and then only two stayed.

RM: Can you name the four brothers?

JB: Will and Jack and Karl and Elmer. Will was my granddad. He's the one who bought this place. Jack stayed in Round Mountain and he built the shop up there; he was a mechanic and sold gas and what have you. My granddad bought this in roughly 1928, and had a truck garden.

RM: Who did he buy it from?

JB: People by the name of Logan, I believe.

RM: You don't know what he paid for it, do you? (Just out of curiosity.)

JB: No, I don't; probably not very much.

RM: How many acres were associated with it?

JB: There were originally about 750 acres and then one of my brothers and I kind of split it up.

RM: He didn't raise cattle?

JB: He just truck gardened. He had a huge orchard and three or four gardens—a potato garden and what have you. That's what he did for a living.

RM: Now, tell me about your mother's folks—where did her people come from?

JB: As near as I know, the Rogers came into Smoky Valley out of Reese River in 1865; they came to the RO Ranch.

RM: Did they homestead it?

JB: Not to my knowledge. Years ago, lots of these ranches were two or three real small homesteads and then they put them together. There were probably two or three at the RO, although I do not know.

RM: So it had been existing ranches that maybe he consolidated?

JB: Yes, but not too many ahead of him. I mean, there weren't many people here prior to 1865, really. Most of the ranches started around 1860 to probably 1880, and it was to supply the miners with meat and vegetables.

RM: What was Rogers's first name?

JB: Ben.

RM: What was he doing in Reese River?

JB: That we don't know, or whether he was originally from Reese River at all. That goes back quite a few years.

RM: Now, he would be your mother's grandfather; and what was her father's name?

JB: Her father's name was Ben.

RM: Did Ben grow up on the RO? And he spent his life there?

JB: He spent his life there. So we've been around for quite a few years.

RM: Okay. One thing I want to get straight in my mind . . . start at Carvers and tell me the names of today's ranches as you come north. What's the first one north of Carvers?

JB: The Wine Glass; Carl Haas's. The next one north is Darrough's. Then myself. And then we've got the RO. And as we go on up we've got Millett's, and there's a farm or two in between. I'm going back, now. I don't know what they call the ranches now, but there's Breen Ranch, McCleod's ranch . . . the RO's about four miles from here. It's the next ranch. It's a big outfit. Young's is the last, at the north end.

MC: Down off the highway there's a big "RO" right at the gate.

JB: Right off the highway. There aren't many ranches left in the valley today that actually make their living with cows. Most ranchers subdivided and sold out and what have you. There are probably three or four of us left and that's about it. A lot of the old families sold out because they didn't have any kids who wanted the ranch, and I don't blame them. Then they've consolidated some of the ranches into bigger places. The RO is much bigger now than it was when my family owned it; they've added a considerable amount to it.

RM: And what were the ranches going south, starting with Carvers, when you were a young man?

JB: Going south? There weren't as many because there isn't the water. The Carver Ranch was the first one south, and then the old Francisco Ranch, which is owned now by my uncle, Skook Berg. Then you went clear to Peavine before you ran into another ranch, the Upper Peavine Ranch, which was operated by Bertolino. The lower ranch changed hands three or four times. Connolly was one, I believe. And now its range is owned by the RO. The deeded property is owned by individuals out of Tonopah; there are a lot of homes there. They've subdivided some of it and some of them still have a few cows, but they have no federal grazing land.

RM: Was what is now Carvers originally part of the Francisco Ranch?

JB: No. They had the Carver Ranch, and then they had the Crowell field. I don't know any history on that. Whether Gerald Carver ran cattle outside or not, I don't know. I don't think so.

MC: He didn't. What I do know is that he bought that from a man by the name of Turner in 1938. He came here from Winnemucca; that's where Gerald was born. There were 200 plus acres, plus that Crowell field and a 40-acre piece in Ash Meadows that went with that place.

JB: But I don't think he ran cattle and there was no federal land with it that I know of.

RM: How far down the valley did the Francisco Ranch go?

JB: They ran in common with other ranchers to the south. They don't have any federal ground at all, just a deeded property. Skook has got an alfalfa farm there. The RO controls the biggest part of the federal lands within this valley. They ran clear from here to Tonopah, about 80 miles. There's a small allotment in there; Donnie Osterhoudt got what they call the old Francisco allotment but the RO owns most of it.

RM: What was the big ranch at that time, when your mom was growing up, do you think?

JB: I don't know how many cattle my granddad ran. It wasn't a big outfit; there were a lot of small ranches with 200 to 300 head.

RM: And they were grazing not only on their own home base property, but also on federal lands?

JB: Yes, and we still do that.

RM: When did the Taylor Grazing Act come into effect?

JB: The Taylor Grazing Act came into effect probably around the late '30s?

MC: In 1939, I think.

RM: Did that change the game here?

JB: Yes, it did. Before, everybody in this valley ran their cattle together.

RM: Oh, and in the fall or whatever, you would separate the cows. And nobody tried to hog it all, or did they?

JB: Oh, I'm sure over the years there were a few, but here in the valley, everybody got along. After the Taylor Grazing Act came into effect, everybody had specific areas.

RM: And you guys had your specific areas—the Berg Ranch? Where was your land?

JB: Right out in back—what they call the Smoky Valley allotment. It hasn't changed a whole lot. Naturally, when the Taylor Grazing Act came into effect, you had a lot more control by an agency that had nothing to do with running cattle. So the disputes were settled, I guess, quicker or easier.

RM: Does your allotment go up into the Toquimas?

JB: Oh, yes. I still run cattle on the Toquima. You've got BLM land for winter use and the Forest Service land for your summer use.

RM: Are the other ranches running their cattle on federal land now?

JB: I think there are four of us in the valley doing that now; there used to be 20 of us.

RM: But basically you can't make a very good living doing it now—is that true?

JB: Well, you can live. You can live and pay your bills. You don't have a new pickup every year and what have you, but it's a quieter life. I don't know any different, although I have worked at mines in order to support my cows. [Laughter] In tough years, I have had to go out and go to work.

RM: Now, William Rogers came out of Reese River and then he married who?

JB: It would be up to my mother to discuss that. We're going back a little before my time.

RM: Okay. Then they had a son named Ben Rogers; now, who did he marry?

JB: Ben married my grandmother, Grace; she was an Anderson. They came out of Belmont, actually. What year, I do not know. There are lots and lots of Andersons buried in Belmont. She left Belmont when she was nine years old and moved into a ranch across the valley over here—Anderson Creek, through Moores Creek. Apparently, that's where they met and started courting.

RM: Were the Andersons originally miners or shopkeepers or . . . ?

JB: That, I don't know.

RM: And then their daughter was your mother, Irene "Rene" Berg Zaval. Did they have other children?

JB: Yes, one son—Pete.

RM: Pete is deceased, isn't he?

JB: Yes, he passed away five or six years ago. Pete and my mother owned the Wine Glass Ranch and Carl Haas bought it from them.

RM: Do you have any stories about your mother growing up on the RO?

JB: No, not really. Just that you're just kind of proud of your family for sticking in one place for so long. There are not a lot of families that stay in one area.

RM: No; you've got roots that go a mile deep.

JB: For 130 years or so.

RM: You take great pride in your rootedness, don't you?

JB: I do; definitely.

RM: So you can't think of any stories about your mom's childhood on the RO?

JB: No, not really. She did have some pretty horses.

RM: Was she a good horsewoman?

JB: I never had a chance to ride with her, but apparently she was; she buckarooed right along with her dad for years. He rode some awful ugly horses.

RM: By "ugly," what do you mean? Nasty or not pretty?

JB: They were probably cold-blooded mustangs. From their pictures, they were ugly but my mother's horses were pretty. I know of two pictures of her and her horses and one of them was a real pretty palomino horse. So apparently, he spent a little money on her horses but his own, no.

RM: What does an ugly horse look like? [Laughs] Does it have a long Roman nose and a swayback or straddled legs or . .

JB: Not the swayback. They're awful narrow chested and they've got kind of a Roman nose. And their head's usually a little bit bigger.

MC: Out of proportion, with a skinny neck and [inaudible].

JB: There's nothing wrong with them. If you don't have a lot of money, that's what you end up with. Especially today; you can't buy a horse like that for a price that I can afford.

RM: What would a horse—a decent horse—cost? One that's not ugly and can work?

JB: Well, that depends on what you want. You can easily pay $5,000 to $10,000 and a lot of them are higher than that. The ropers that participate on the rodeos have brought the price up. I don't pay that much, I'll guarantee you. Mine are ugly and cheap.

MC: I don't see anything ugly about those horses that are out there. They're old; that's why they're ugly. [Laughs]

JB: Well, they've got hair—their fetlock's about ten inches long.

RM: And your horses come out of mustang bloodlines?

JB: Oh, probably, yes; they're ugly. [Laughter]

RM: Why does the mustang get ugly like that?

JB: Well, a lot of real ugly horses, that are even unusable, are from inbreeding. Years ago, the ranchers took pretty good studs and put them out with a mustang bunch and improved the herd. Today, the BLM isn't managing them, in my opinion, as well as they should and we have a tremendous amount of inbreeding. I asked one old-timer why I had so many pure white horses on one of my areas where I run cattle. He said with really bad inbreeding, horses turn white.

RM: Now, can your ugly horses, with a narrow chest, you say, work well? Or are they a little bit on the weak side?

JB: No, they're not. They're real good because they're cheap so you don't have to get as much work off them. [Laughter]

RM: But they can pull their own weight in the roundup?

JB: Oh, definitely. They do more. The type of work that we do here, there isn't a lot of inside work so you don't have to have an A-1 reiner horse. We do a lot of our work outside. They have endurance; they're gentler than a blooded horse.

RM: How's their intelligence? Are they smart enough?

JB: Oh, definitely.

RM: Are they as smart as, or maybe smarter than, a blooded horse?

JB: I've got a couple out here that I'll put up against any other horse except in your show ring. As far as participating in some of the cutting contests, they can't hold up because they don't have the intelligence. But as far as our work—the roping, the work we do—definitely they will. I don't care how ugly they are. And your blooded horses are more high-spirited, I guess you would say; and for me, they don't work.

RM: And that would be a quarter horse—a blooded horse.

JB: Well, yes, and lots of outfits use thoroughbreds.

RM: Really? Thoroughbreds for cow horses?

MC: Well, that's where quarter horses came from—a cold-blooded horse and a thoroughbred. You can turn any horse into a pretty good cow horse if you know what you're doing.

RM: Now, what about the size of your cow horses?

JB: Most of the horses we ride are probably 900 to 1,100 pounds.

RM: And above 1,100 they're too big; and below, they're too small?

JB: Well, they just don't get that big.

RM: Now, you were born in Tonopah. Were your mom and dad living in Tonopah when you were born?

JB: No, they lived here on the ranch. We also had a house in Round Mountain because when I went to school, there was no way to get me back and forth. And they were trying to support a little bunch of cows so they started a small grocery store up there and they had to run that, so they used the house in Round Mountain. It seemed like lots of your small ranchers had to have a second or a third job to keep your cows going.

MC: And still do.

RM: Even then?

JB: Yes, even then.

RM: Do you have any memories that stand out in your mind of when you were living in Round Mountain?

JB: Well, I didn't like it. There was nothing up there and I wanted to be home.

RM: You wanted to be down here; you called this home.

JB: Right, although I lived there off and on for about six years during the winter. The roads, at that time, weren't blacktop, and when I was going to school, you couldn't drive back and forth. It was a dirt road and sometimes it got pretty bad.

RM: How many kids were in school up there when you were in school? This was in the '40s, right?

JB: At first, there were three. And then my wife's family came in—I don't know, probably they were in third, fourth grade—and it went up to about seven. And then Dick and Gary Carver started, so it went up to about ten.

MC: I showed up then, too. [Laughs]

JB: And you showed up. We've had as many as 35.

MC: Oh, yes. I would suggest that in 1949, there were about that many kids.

JB: Yes. When the mine ran, the number of kids went up. And actually, the mine ran for two or three years. Then everybody left and it went back down again. They had a high school there, too.

RM: So we're talking grades 1 through 12 at that time?

MC: Yes. You had first through sixth in one room, then eighth through twelfth in another. RM: Where was the school?

JB: It was on the upper end of town.

MC: The gym is still there.

JB: The original schoolhouse is down here at Skook Berg's place now. He bought it and moved it down to his property about ten years ago and made a museum out of it. RM: Did you go all the way through school in Round Mountain?

JB: I went eight years in Round Mountain. For high school, I spent three years in Austin and one year in Fallon. I lived in Austin during the week. My mother rented a small apartment and there were two or three of us living together. I went to high school my freshman and sophomore years in Austin; the third year of high school I went to Fallon, and then I came back to Austin and I graduated from Austin.

I was the only eighth grade graduate up here at Round Mountain. We didn't have too big of a graduation ceremony. I think the last day of school, the teacher walked back, gave me my diploma, and I walked out the door. [Laughter] And boy, was I happy.

RM: Why didn't you go to high school in Tonopah?

JB: My two cousins, Pete Rogers' kids—he had a son and a daughter—went to school in Round Mountain, and when they got to high school, they went to Austin, so I followed. Why they went to Austin, I have no idea.

MC: You would have had to board out in Tonopah, too, because you wouldn't have been able to travel back and forth.

JB: For a little while in my freshman year, I rode the stage back and forth. I'd go in to Austin Monday morning with old Snooks Streshly and come back Friday afternoon. MC: He was the local news carrier and gofer.

JB: He'd pick me up here at the mailbox Monday morning and I'd stay in Austin during the week, then I'd ride back with him Friday afternoon. I missed a lot of school because we didn't get there until 10:00 or 11:00; Friday, I had to leave at 2:00. And boy, did. . . .

MC: Boy, did that make you happy! [Laughter]

RM: So you and two or three other kids were batching, as they used to say. I did that in Ely.

JB: Yes, it was all right. We didn't have a lot of supervision, but it was a very uneventful life. I mean, there was not much activity, I'll guarantee, all the time I was growing up. It was rather quiet. You worked right along with your family.

RM: When did you start working?

JB: I was about seven.

RM: Before that, you were just a kid doing what you wanted to do? Did you have chores?

JB: I always had chores—maybe a couple of leppie lambs or whatever. But I went to work with the old folks when I was seven years old.

RM: What would you do?

JB: I did everything I possibly could with the men. I rode, I put up hay. . . .

RM: How old were you when you learned to ride?

JB: I don't really remember when I started; it was just always there.

RM: So at seven years old, you're out riding with the men. . . .

JB: And haying; you were expected to do it. You weren't paid, either. My dad always told me, "You've got a house over your head and you're not hungry. Be thankful."

RM: I interviewed Bart O'Toole, a rancher in Reese River Valley, and he told me that there was nobody to take care of him at home when they went on roundup so he had to go along and they would strap him to the horse so he couldn't fall off. And he said to this day, he hates horse riding. [Laughter] Is that you? No? You love it?

JB: Yes, it's my life. One of the families up here—the McLeods or the Breens—he had cattle outside. His wife passed away; he had two little kids and they were strapped in saddlebags on the side of the horse and they went with him. They were apparently real young and he'd take a pack horse with him and the kids went with him because he had to get his work done.

I don't think I was ever strapped in. I know when they fed cows in the winter, I was just a little tiny kid, and we fed with a team. They had a box they put me in and they'd put me in a corner of the wagon and then kind of tromp hay around me. I don't remember that; my mom told me that story.

RM: When you went on roundup, did you go out for days or whatever and camp out with the chuck wagon and all that?

JB: When the cattle went to the mountains in the spring, we had a cow camp at the mouth of the canyon and you stayed there until the cattle were pretty well settled. But we never had a big enough area to run a wagon or anything like that. We were mostly gone during the day; you'd leave early in the morning. We didn't have trailers like we do today. When we moved cattle from here to the mountains, we would leave at daylight, take the cattle across, and then they'd meet us with a pickup over there at the mouth of the canyon and we'd turn the horses loose and all come back in the pickup and the horses would come in that night; you'd have a gate open for them.

RM: The horses would come home because they'd know they were going to get fed?

JB: Yes, you'd have a gate open and have hay in there. A lot of times, they'd just about beat you home. We rode that way for years. Today, we have horse trailers and pickups and we can be home a lot quicker.

During the summer, we had a cow camp. We lived in Jefferson up there at Herman Schappell's mine. The old corrals that are up there, they were our corrals. That's where we stayed.

RM: Tell me about rounding up cattle. How do you find them and what do you do and all of that?

JB: It just depends on what you're going to do with them. You start at one end of your permit, or your range, and either take them to a well and do your work there or bring them home or whatever. You know where your cattle are because you've done it for quite a few years.

RM: What if they don't want to come with you?

JB: Oh, they go. Most people have a routine—the cattle go from your deeded property outside in the winter. They'll winter out there and then in the spring, they come back into your deeded property so you can brand your calves. So the cows kind of know what to do—when you turn them out in the fall, they go. And in the spring, they kind of know to come back to your deeded property for 30 days or a couple of months.

RM: Why would they want to come back?

JB: After you do it with cows for a number of years, they kind of get used to it.

RM: Are any of the cows up there hiding behind trees, acting like "No, I don't want to go down there; I'm not coming with you?"

JB: Oh, definitely. You have cattle that don't agree with you—they're, like, "I'm staying here," or whatever.

RM: How do you deal with that?

JB: Well, just knock the hell out of them. [Laughter]

RM: What do you do?

JB: Get behind them.

MC: Get your dogs.

JB: For years, we never used dogs. Most of the ranchers had dogs but they were totally worthless, including ours. But some years ago, a cowboy named Ed Dunlap came in here. He was a cow boss at the RO for a while and he brought dogs. All the ranchers watched that guy and thought, "That's the way to go." All of us have dogs now. In fact, I think my two old dogs out here are relatives of his; he had an old stud dog called Jack.

MC: Rough and Tumble?

JB: Yes; they're from him. But the dogs can smell the cows. If you get wild cattle, they'll stop those wild cattle until you can get close to them. If you have cows that maybe saw you coming or smelled you and are leaving, all you have to do is show those dogs the tracks and they will eventually find them and stop them. They're worth about three men. I don't know how far a dog can smell a cow. They're not like a bloodhound; the track's got to be two or three hours old or they can't follow it.

RM: When did Ed Dunlap come in with the dogs?

MC: I don't know. I know Dick brought dogs back with him from California.

JB: I think we've only been using dogs for 15 or 20 years. Before, everybody had all kinds of dogs and they were worthless. They caused more trouble than they were worth. These dogs, that's what they're raised for; they're bred for cattle. There are two different kinds of dogs. One kind, the blue heelers, stay behind the cattle. Then there's your border collie, which we use—

they're head dogs; they work the cow's head. They work on the opposite side of the cow from you so they'll hold it for you. I mean, you're on one side and your dog's on the other side. RM: And they're nipping, kind of, at the cow?

JB: Oh, no; they do more than that. My son's got five and oh, they bite.

RM: And the cows will respond?

JB: They respond after their nose is extremely bloody.

RM: Is that right?

JB: Oh, yes; they draw blood, either an ear or . . . my dogs aren't that aggressive. They're kind of babies.

MC: They're old.

JB: My two are old but they never were that bitey.

RM: In a nutshell, what makes a good cow dog?

JB: One that's real aggressive and will mind you. When you tell them, "That's enough," they'll stop. Your aggressive dog is, naturally, harder to control because he's so gung-ho. You can have a dog that bites and a dog that's tough and a dog that will come back to you; it's hard to get all three together. A more aggressive dog doesn't like to mind very well—he's too intent on the cows. I mean, that's his life. One of mine sits up there with my cows all day. Of course, my old dog sits with the chickens. [Laughter]

RM: Does he hurt chickens?

JB: No, he sits there. He'll watch them all day. He's a good dog but he's old and he can't catch a cow, but he can catch a chicken. [Laughter] In fact, see him up there?

MC: I wish you could've seen him this morning. The chickens were climbing the fence; the babies were climbing on top of each other and he was jumping at that fence to get them down because he knew they were going to get out.

RM: Does the pup tend to have the characteristics of the parent?

JB: Yes. Usually, that's what you look for. You look for a real aggressive female and an aggressive male and breed them.

RM: Okay. In a nutshell, what makes a good cow horse?

JB: Well, there are a lot of things. Tough, meaning a lot of endurance. For me, gentle; it doesn't buck. [Laughter] I'm too old.

RM: Is that a problem for a cowboy?

JB: Oh, yes. Well, not for me, because I don't ride that kind of horse.

RM: How do cowboys handle getting bucked off?

JB: A real good cowboy doesn't get bucked off.

RM: Because he's a good cowboy or because he picked the right horse?

JB: No, he's a good rider.

RM: What is it that makes one guy able to stay on a horse where another guy can't?

JB: Balance. Probably eye-leg coordination. No fear.

RM: Will fear inhibit you?

JB: Yes. If a guy will just climb on the middle of a horse and say, "I'm sticking on him," they have a hell of a lot better chance than I do, saying, "Maybe I'm not going to stay on this one." Certainly, fear has a lot to do with it.

RM: Can a horse tell when you're afraid?

JB: Oh, definitely.

RM: And they'll give you trouble if they know you're afraid?

JB: Well, a more aggressive horse will, sure. He knows when you're afraid.

RM: How do they know you're afraid?

JB: I have no idea how they know. I think any animal can sense a hell of a lot more than people can. A cow, a dog. . . .

RM: Cows can sense well?

JB: Well, they've got a sixth sense. I mean, a dog knows when a person's afraid. You're more apt to get bit if you're afraid. I don't know how they know it, but definitely. . . . There are some people that just flat can't get along with horses at all. They're nervous around any horse, whether he's gentle or not.

RM: How long can you use a horse? At what age would you take one out on the range and then at what age are they just getting too old?

JB: It depends upon the horse. If he stays in real good shape, not being crippled, 15. Then they start getting a little stiff. But if they're used real hard when they're young, their knees quit. I've got two old horses out here now, retired horses, and they're right around 20. I haven't ridden them for five years.

RM: What's too young to use one?

JB: It depends upon the work you do; but three years because you can hurt them. Although they ride two-year-olds. Lots of people do corral work, training. They never used to even start riding them here, years ago, until they were five. They never put a rope on them.

RM: Why was that?

JB: Because they're not mature.

RM: So horses mature at five.

JB: Yes, five, six.

RM: Does it make a difference whether they're mares or males?

JB: To me there is; and to a lot of people.

RM: What is your preference?

JB: Well, going back to the female side [MC laughs], they cause a lot of trouble. We haven't got a mare on the ranch; there hasn't been a mare here for years. I wouldn't have a mare.

RM: Why?

JB: Because they make your geldings obnoxious Almost every outfit I know ride all geldings. They may have a mare and they might raise their own colts or what have you but they're separate.

MC: A mare will break down a fence to get to a male horse.

RM: She doesn't mind if he's a gelding?

MC: No. It probably isn't going to happen, but. . . .

JB: If I turned a mare out here with that 12 to 14 head of horses out there, nobody's going to get along. The most dominant gelding will take possession of that mare and keep everything else away.

RM: I did not know that. I thought when they gelded them, that was it.

JB: Well, it stops 90 percent of it, but it's still there.

MC: And if you have someone who hasn't done a proper job of castration, then you really have a problem.

JB: I don't know quite what it does. They're sterile, but they keep their aggressive nature.

RM: Do you ever have a non-gelded horse, a stud? Would you use them as a cow horse? They wouldn't be too rowdy?

JB: No, they're not. I have one here I rode for probably ten years and he was very quiet. When I sold him, he was still a stud. And we ran him with the geldings, as long as there was no mare. If you put a mare in there.. .

RM: Then he's another personality?

JB: Yes. Pete Bertolino, who owned the Peavine Ranch, rode a stud for years and he was a little more aggressive, so he was quite often knocked on. But the old stud of mine, he wasn't.

RM: By "knocked on," you mean hit?

JB: Yes. They had to whip him a little bit.

RM: How would you whip a horse?

JB: Well, Pete got a little . . . it depended on what the horse was doing.

RM: Would you hit him with a quirt or smack him on the head with a club?

JB: The only time that he ever become aggressive . . . we had a stock truck and we'd load horses to go someplace. He'd start fighting in the back and Pete would just knock on him a little bit. I don't know what he did; I was in the middle. [Laughs]

MC: You were the real cowboy?

JB: I was in the middle of the truck so I never got out.

RM: You were in the middle with the horses?

JB: No, I was in the middle of the seat.

MC: You know "Cowboy Logic?" Have you ever heard that song by Michael Martin Murphy? He's talking to his son and he says, "If you have three men dressed alike from head to toe in the front seat of the pickup, which one would be the real cowboy?" The kid says, "Well, Dad, don't I get more clues than that?" He goes, "No. Here's the deal. The one in the middle is the real cowboy because he doesn't have to fool with the gate and he doesn't have to drive." [Laughter]

CHAPTER TWO

RM: It seems that you would have a bunch of ranchers get together and go to the roundup because they're all running their cows together in the old days. Were all those guys riding geldings or were there guys riding mares?

JB: I don't know of any mares; they were all riding geldings.

RM: Well, what would happen if a guy showed up with a bunch riding a mare? Would they say, "Get the hell out of here," or what?

JB: Well, it would cause a little problem. I'm sure there are people that ride mares; we just didn't, here.

RM: And you didn't keep mares for breeding?

JB: A lot of your outfits do but we didn't, no. Like the Pine Creek Ranch, Wayne Hage's (prior to that, Arcularius), had a bunch of mares and the stud would go there but they were always in a separate field as far away as they could get them from their saddle horses.

RM: And you mentioned that a mare, when she's in heat or whatever, will get very aggressive and go after the geldings and the studs?

JB: Well, it makes your geldings a little more aggressive, too. Females always cause problems [laughter], whether you're humans or whatever you are. Sorry about that.

MC: And men don't?

JB: Men don't. [Laughter]

RM: What about other animals on the ranch?

JB: Years ago, my family always had a few hogs and a few sheep and chickens and a mule or two.

RM: Why would you keep a mule?

JB: A lot of people like to ride them. They're supposed to be more intelligent. But I hate mules.

RM: Why?

JB: Well, the only mules I've had were mean. Maybe it was me; maybe they just didn't like me. I've only had two and they were mean.

RM: Would a person ever use a mule for a cow horse?

JB: They do; definitely. In fact, they have these sales where they show them as a cow mule. They bring very high money.

MC: You need to go to Mule Days in Bishop. They also have one in Winnemucca.

JB: I don't like mules, myself, and I've never ridden one. I don't know of any of the ranchers here who actually rode mules. They had mules for packing salt and other things.

RM: Did ranchers ever keep burros?

JB: No, burros are worthless for a ranch. They're not big enough.

RM: When you're out working a horse—out rounding up and so forth—do you feed them grain?

JB: Most people do; grain them in the morning before you leave. Get up early and put them in the barn and feed them grain.

RM: Is that all year or just when you're working them?

JB: Usually just when you're working them. You've got them in the corral and you catch the one that you want and take him in the barn to saddle him up and feed him. We almost never feed grain.

RM: Why?

JB: Well, mice always get into it and you have to go someplace and buy the darn stuff. We've got a big manger in the barn and we feed alfalfa hay. Other than that, they get grass hay. So when they go into the barn, the alfalfa's just like grain to them.

RM: Can a horse work better with grain?

JB: Well, I guess. I don't know whether it can.

RM: Can they work better with alfalfa than grass?

JB: A lot of people feed straight alfalfa to the horses. I wouldn't.

RM: Why wouldn't you do that?

JB: It screws up their kidneys; it's too much protein. You can take a horse that's had alfalfa for 30 days and they start sweating immediately.

RM: So you don't even supplement with alfalfa.

JB: Except when we catch them and put them in the barn. And people do; they feed straight alfalfa. What they're looking for now is an alfalfa-grass hay mix, and that's good.

RM: I heard that in the old West, a meat-fed man can out-walk a grass-fed horse. Is that true?

JB: He can out-walk any horse, grass-fed or not.

RM: Because you'll wear him down?

JB: Definitely. You can take a man and a horse and the man will eventually, over a period of 30 days, catch the horse because it takes a horse so long to get filled up. It gets hungry after a day and it takes it eight hours or whatever to fill back up, where a man can almost keep walking. Now, whether to believe that . . . that's probably another old wives' tale.

MC: Well, you could.

RM: Are you a good walker?

JB: I used to be.

RM: What could you walk in a day?

JB: Oh, I have no idea; a long ways. My family were walkers. We used horses but, like, deer hunting and everything, my uncles and my two boys. . . . But today, I like that little ATV. [Laughter]

RM: So it sounds like a man can out-walk a horse if he's got time.

JB: Yes. Naturally, the horse is going to walk off and leave the man at first, but he will catch up. Now, I don't know about that. I never tried it.

RM: Let's talk a little bit about your life growing up on the ranch.

JB: Well, it was uneventful; probably kind of boring. You didn't see many people except your family. You worked seven days a week.

RM: What time would you get up in the morning, typically?

JB: It depended on what you were doing. If you were haying, you were up by 3:00. [Laughter] If you were moving cows, you were up at daylight. Today we don't do that because of our trucks and trailers. But years ago, with the cows, you left just at the break of day if you were taking them any distance.

RM: When you were haying, you were working in the dark.

JB: Well, yes. We get so much wind here, and we used what we call an overshot stacker, so any wind would literally screw up your whole day; it blew your hay all over. We'd start before daylight and work till about 10:00. The wind came up so we'd quit until in the afternoon, when the wind has the habit of going back down; then we'd go out and work till dark.

RM: Typically, how many meals a day did you have on the ranch?

JB: We ate three.

RM: What was a typical breakfast?

JB: Well, big—bacon and eggs and hotcakes and sausage or ham. And then lunch, I don't know, probably just a cold sandwich; it was mainly meat. My family's big meal was at night, and we'd have meat again.

RM: What would the dinner consist of?

JB: Meat and potatoes—roast, steak. potatoes, gravy, and some green vegetables. But it was meat almost every meal.

RM: Was there a lot of canning?

JB: Yes. My granddad had a garden here and they canned everything.

RM: I talked to a guy who grew up on a dairy farm, and he said his mother hated to see the spring come because she was going to be canning from late spring till fall.

JB: It was a job, because you had to can quite a bit of stuff I don't know what all they canned, but my granddad built a great big cellar at the back of the old house, the one that burned down. It adjoined the kitchen and it was always full of the vegetables that would keep—potatoes and carrots—but there was a lot of canned stuff A lot of minced meat. They were probably pretty busy in the kitchen. I don't know; I didn't go in the kitchen much.

RM: What kind of social life did you have on the ranch? Did the ranchers get together and have hoe-downs and things like that?

JB: They did here; my family did. They had lots of dances and potlucks. During the weekend they danced at Darrough's Hot Springs out here. They traveled to Monitor Valley to the Potts Ranch and also the Millett place; they danced there. They even went as far as Reese River. I didn't have any social life till I was in high school, and then I made up for it. [Laughter] RM: When you were a kid, you didn't have playmates, then?

JB: I didn't have anything

RM: No, because you were older than your brothers, so you were alone.

JB: I was alone. At the Wine Glass I had two cousins—the ones I went to school with in Austin—so we stayed pretty much together. And then Dick Carver and Gary; of course, I'm older than they were. So there were six or seven of us. The kids didn't do much, actually. But after you got in school, if you had enough players, you had a baseball team.

RM: Did you feel lonely, or you didn't know the difference?

JB: No, I didn't know any difference. I grew up pretty much by myself.

RM: What would occupy you when you weren't actually working?

JB: For a number of years, I herded sheep for my dad; he had a bunch of sheep here.

RM: In the hills?

JB: No, on the flat. Most of our sheep went out. I would open the gate at daylight in the morning and leave with them. They would come into their bed grounds somewhere around noon and take their nap, and so would I. Then about 3:00, they left again and I would go with them and then at dark, they'd come back into their bed grounds.

RM: Did you have to worry about coyotes and things like that?

JB: Yes, I stayed with them because of the coyotes.

RM: And you would run the coyotes off or shoot them?

JB: As long as you were with the sheep, the coyotes wouldn't bother them. We can't have sheep here today because of coyotes. But it was an uneventful life. Nothing exciting happened as a kid here that I can remember. We had a lot of fun; I wouldn't trade it for anything.

MC: Can you tell us about the fun?

JB: The whole way of life was what was fun; not any specific thing.

MC: How about fishing?

JB: Yes, we'd go fishing. And in later years, I can always remember my family on a picnic— the Fourth of July, there were big picnics.

RM: Did you hunt?

JB: Well, after we got a license, yes. We'd leave the day before open season and be gone, usually a week.

RM: Would you hunt in the Toiyabes?

JB: Yes, in the same old canyon. My family's been going into there since my family came here, I guess.

RM: What's the name of the canyon?

JB: Twin River; North Twin. (We hunted a few years in the South Twin.) My granddad started going up there in the early '30s.

RM: Well, tell me about family life. Did you feel a bond and a closeness or was there very much arguing like there is in a lot of families? Did they talk much?

JB: We had to have a lot more communication, I'm sure. There was no TV. There were games like Monopoly. . . .

RM: You and your mom and dad would play Monopoly?

JB: I don't remember them ever playing Monopoly with me, but we did; maybe my grandma. My family played cards quite regularly—penny-ante poker.

RM: Did you feel a closeness and a bonding with your family members, say, that some people don't feel now? Nowadays, it seems like the kids grow up and leave and everybody assumes they're going to leave as the kid's growing up. That was never part of your life, was it? Was it assumed that you were going to stay on the ranch?

JB: I felt I was going to stay on the ranch; oh, definitely. Maybe not on this ranch, but I was going to stay with the cows. That's been my goal for a lot of years. Probably a lot of people back in those days didn't because their folks sold the ranch or whatever. For instance, they sold the Wine Glass and my two cousins left when they sold it and never came back. But as far as being closer, I guess we were closer than the families are today.

RM: What did you do, say, in adolescence when you started getting interested in girls?

JB: Well, I had trouble [laughter]. There weren't many around. I don't remember any for quite a while until the Manley family came in. I married into the Manley family. They owned a home in Round Mountain. They were here probably when I was in the sixth and seventh grade. We didn't get along worth a damn with the girls. Then she came back when I was about 17 and things changed rapidly. [Laughs]

RM: And so you fell in love with her?

JB: Oh, yes; and I got married when I was 19.

RM: What was her name?

JB: Patricia Manley. The Manleys are still around.

RM: What was her family's background? Were they ranchers?

JB: No, her family worked down at Mercury. They did an awful lot of trapping as well as cutting posts for the ranchers.

RM: Trapping what?

JB: Anything to survive, actually. They were living in Round Mountain. She went to school here off and on—also in Tonopah.

RM: Let's talk about survival here and in Round Mountain during, say, the '40s and '50s. It was tough, wasn't it, to survive financially?

JB: Yes, because the mine was one of the only employers, and they'd run for six months or two years and the people who needed to, went to work. Other than that, you did what you had to do. I've worked at some real small mines throughout my life.

RM: Did you? Which ones?

JB: I worked at Round Mountain years ago. One time, I was a grease monkey for Isabel Construction. I ran the electric shovel the next time around; I don't know who owned it then. Then I worked for Bob Wilson. I worked for the Forest Service, I worked for Basic Incorporated, in Gabbs for six or eight months—I ran an air track drill. I worked for some of the ranchers; I worked two years as a buckaroo for the RO. I just took any job that came along, nasty or not, to help support my bunch of cows and three kids.

RM: So you had three children; or, have three children. Have any of your children stayed on the ranch?

JB: Two of them are in the cow business. One son lives in the trailer up there and he runs his own cows. He works with me and also he's the cow boss of the RO. My other son is a cow boss in the Monitor part of the RO. And then, my daughter is here; she and her husband work at the mine.

RM: What are their names?

JB: Danny is the older one and Russell's the youngest boy; and Treesa Lear, my daughter, is the oldest. She and her husband both work at the mine.

RM: And when did your wife pass away?

JB: In 2005; a little over two years ago.

RM: You have something here that basically doesn't exist anymore in America—you've got a family connectedness. I mean, here you are on the same ranch with your mother and your son. Talk about how that feels and what's that's like.

JB: Well, it makes you feel good to have your family with you. I mean, we work together all the time—with the cows or whatever. Even though both of my sons are employed by the RO, we still work together because that's what neighbors do. The RO's my neighbor, so naturally, you go help. It makes you feel good that you can work with your kids. I also work with my grandsons. One of them just left about ten minutes before you got here.

RM: So there are four generations right here.

JB: Yes. Of course, my grandsons are not too involved with the cows; they wanted to go someplace else. One of them lives in Reno and is working there. The one who just left here (his dad is Russell, the boss at the RO) is still in high school and an excellent cowboy. But he doesn't have the opportunity to work with me because I'm not big enough.

RM: How do you see the future of the Berg Ranch?

JB: I don't know. I'd like to be optimistic but I don't think I can because this place relies so much on federal land. And using federal land is coming to a close.

RM: Why is it coming to an end?

JB: Because of your population explosion, your environmentalist groups do not want cattle up there. They feel that that's theirs. Rightfully, it is; partially, it is theirs. They're fighting to get the cattle out. And naturally, they're the biggest percentage. We don't have too much of a chance of hanging in there for many more years.

RM: So you think the way of life is coming to an end?

JB: Oh, definitely. For a long time they put out signs, "Cattle Free by '93," right?

MC: Yes, "Cattle Free by '93." And then the counter was, "Cows Galore by '94." [Laughs].

JB: Yes, and we're still out there. But this valley is almost completely gone as far as running on the federal lands. There aren't a tenth of the cattle today that used to run on federal lands.

RM: Why?

JB: There are a lot of reasons. Some of the ranchers sold out. Some of them never had the opportunity to keep their operation going for health reasons or whatever. And you have federal control, drought. . . .

RM: Is it hard to get a grazing allotment? And once you let it go you can't get it back?

JB: You don't get one today unless you buy it from somebody. If a ranch has a grazing allotment and you buy their deeded property, then you do get that. But for a number of years, when you bought that deeded property and acquired their original allotment, you were automatically cut a percentage on that allotment.

RM: So the number of cows is being salami-sliced down?

JB: Yes; and for a lot of different reasons. People don't like to work seven days a week; they'd rather see the city lights. I can't blame them. Like, my grandsons, I don't know whether they'll stick with it or not. One won't; I don't think Blaise will ever come back to make a living on the cows. The one who just left here, Rex—he may come back. He graduates from high school this year and then he's going to take off and be a tramp cowboy for a while—until he gets married. When he's married, he'll have to change the tramp cowboy's lifestyle because as far as a cowboy making a decent wage, you don't.

RM: What do they pay a cowboy nowadays?

JB: As high as $1500 a month.

RM: I have to tell you, this is wonderful—it's a real look at the cowboys and miners of the West.

JB: Right. That's all that this country was, the ranching and the miner

MC: But think about this, Bob. It isn't just the West; that's the way it always has been.

RM: That's right. What I like about it is you live very close to the earth.

JB: You do. You make your living off it. You have to, and that's some of the problems with your city people; they don't realize what we do to run our cattle. They think we just put our cows out there on their land, and we don't.

RM: Well, let's educate them. What are the things that you do?

JB: It depends on, actually, the kind of country you're in. This country here is so much desert. We provide lots of water for animals other than our cattle through troughs and pipelines. We make trails. On my permit, I run cattle down by Tonopah and that's about ten times as dry as this area; there is no water. Almost all the water down there has been developed by the person who was in there. We have mustangs, mountain sheep, deer. . . .

RM: They're all drinking at your tanks?

JB: On our water. People don't realize that. We maintain the roads; up to a point. We do more good than harm by a long ways. They don't realize that; they don't realize what we do. They think we just turn cows out there and go merrily about our business and come back next year and gather them. That went out years and years ago. You've got to take care of your land out there pretty well or you're not going to go back out next year with your cows. If you deteriorate it, you overgraze it . . . and there are times that we do overgraze it and harm it. But most of the time, you do take care of it; otherwise, you won't go back out.

RM: A lot of environmentalists claim that the cows have a bad impact on the environment. Talk about what the cows' real impact on the environment is if they're managed properly.

JB: It's up to who's running their cows. They will have a bad impact on it if they're left there too long, definitely. I can't say they benefit it in most ways except for developing the water, which helps everything. Also, they keep the vegetation cleaned up.

MC: They actually suppress fire because they are eating. . . .

JB: True, by keeping the vegetation down. If you let that vegetation out there grow over a period of four or five years without being harvested, it'll eventually start dying. Think about what happens with a real pretty lawn. Don't mow it for four or five years—what's going to happen to it? You mow it and you have a beautiful lawn, right? That's exactly the same outside.

But fire is one of the main things. The canyons around here now are so overgrown that lots of the minor canyons are impassable. If they've got a road they're passable, but some of the canyons don't have roads.

RM: And that's not the way it was when the Indians were here, is it?

JB: No. The Indians were pretty well known for burning stuff out, cleaning it up a little bit.

RM: I've got a tape recorded by an old rancher out in Railroad Valley who contended that in the early days, years ago, they could ride over the Grant Range in one day. He said, no way you can do that now because it's just a tangle of everything.

JB: Well, we have the same problem here. There are canyons here today . . . one of them's right straight across the valley. Years ago, there was a well-maintained trail. Also, there was a road almost to the top of that where they snaked out timber. And today, it's impassable. You can get

up there on foot, but that's it. Of course, it was just not maintained. They maintain the main trails where people have got big campgrounds, but the out-of-the-way canyons . . . of the canyons here that I know—and there are probably 40 of them that I know—years ago, every one of them had a road or a well-maintained trail made by cattle or hunters or loggers or whatever. RM: And the environment wasn't degraded because of the road and all? It was still pretty healthy?

JB: I think some of the timber that they took out on top of Jefferson up there, it'll be a while before it recovers because it was white pine, or limber pine. It's so slow growing that the big stuff is pretty much gone. Also, I think the drought has something to do with that stuff not maturing like it used to.

RM: This is a chance for a rancher like yourself to put something on the record.

JB: I don't want to say what I actually feel because I get mad.

RM: Well, that's good. Remember, this is yours. Legally, this is a work of art between you and me, and nothing can be done with it until you and I both sign off on it. So if you want to let off some steam, fine.

JB: I'm not just talking about this area. It's all over the West. Wherever you have public lands, some of your bigger rivers, or a lot of people, like closer to your cities, there's too much federal control. Not only on the federal lands; you've got too much federal control in every way.

MC: In every aspect of your life.

JB: I don't think most people realize how much we are controlled.

RM: Give some examples of controls that you have to deal with.

JB: Well, with me, it's the Forest Service and the BLM. They're supposed to maintain their trails; they're supposed to be the managers over there. And yet, the last 20 years, we have had virtually no work by the Forest Service. The waters, like on the BLM land, the rancher puts them in himself. Although it is our water, four or five years ago the federal government said the rancher can't own water out there.

RM: You can't own water where?

JB: "We are going to take 50 percent of any new water rights that the rancher applies for out there." That went to court and it said the government cannot own water out there.

MC: Because they can't put it to beneficial use.

JB: Yes, any water the rancher owns, he's got to put to beneficial use, meaning that you've got to put cows on it, you've got to irrigate with it. The government can't because they don't own cattle, they don't raise potatoes.

RM: So you can own the water that comes out of a well?

JB: Right. It belongs to the rancher along with any improvements around it. But it's things like that. Some of that was killed in that court case, but there's always a little bit of a push for more control.

In my opinion, we have way too much federal law enforcement. I may be wrong. . . . I've heard both sides; that the federal marshal does have some law enforcement [authority]. They don't have law enforcement, yet the big majority of people think they do. And they do carry a badge and they do carry firearms. And they do try to enforce the law.

MC: They intimidate people. But the fact of the matter is, the federal marshal's office absolutely came to the state of Nevada and asked for law enforcement authority and were told by the legislature to take a flying leap. So they have no authority in this state unless they come to the local sheriff; the sheriff's office is the one that is the local law enforcement. Now, if BLM or the Forest Service wants something to get accomplished, then they should come to the sheriff's office. The federal authorities have no legal right to law enforcement out here.

JB: But they still do push that. I mean, we have BLM people with trucks with red lights, big signs; they've got the whole uniform, they've got the guns. The Fish and Game do, too. We have an awful lot of law enforcement, like the game wardens.

MC: They need to be able to protect themselves from some rancher out there that can shoot them. [Laughs]

JB: And since some of the public has raised hell—one of them was Dick Carver—they have backed off quite a bit on their law enforcement. In fact, they even quit going down the highway in a green pickup; they go down the highway now in a white pickup. All Forest Service personnel used to have green pickups so you could recognize them way out there. They decided, "Maybe to get back with the general public, we'll use a white pickup." I mean, they knew they were going too far.

So we're losing a lot of freedom; the rancher. And look what they've done to the miners. I don't quite know what happened on the miners' side, but the old prospector and that, that's gone.

RM: Part of what destroyed the miner were economic forces. In that big world out there, only a big mine can make it. You can't make it with a little mine.

MC: You can't make it with a little mine, but they now require such a horrendous amount of money for any small claim. That's what my dad had done since he retired at 55 years old; he's 85 years old now, so for the last 30 . . . well, he did it all the time he was young, too. He had

1,400 acres of claims down in Mina and he could afford it for a certain period of time. And then when they said, "Well, you have to either do this or pay $100 an acre," guess what?

RM: So he loses his claims.

MC: Yes, exactly.

RM: So you see the future of the rancher in this valley and really in the West as on its way out?

JB: Well, it has dropped off in the last 30 or 40 years. As far as running cattle outside your deeded property, it dropped off I don't know how much in this valley; it's dropped down to just about zero, for one reason or another. I don't put all the blame on the federal controls, but it's a lot of it.

RM: How has the price of cattle affected the development or the evolution of your ranch life here? Did you used to get a better price?

JB: The last three years, the price was probably the highest on record. But it went back down. Prior to three years ago, our cattle prices were equal to probably the '60s and '50s so it was a little bit hard to make a living. Then we got a spike in prices. Not wishing anybody any bad luck, but they closed the Canadian border and that brought our prices right up. They cut some of the imports coming in from Mexico, and that also helped. Now they're in the process of opening the Canadian border back up. Naturally, the price went back down.

RM: At what age do you market a cow?

JB: As a yearling.

RM: What do you get for a yearling, roughly? What's a good price and what's a bad price?

JB: Right today, I've got the market report—from $1.10 to $1.25 a pound live on the hoof. That's for a 450-pound calf That's for a steer. The heifers are 10 to 12 cents less.

RM: Oh, really? Why is that?

JB: They don't finish out in your feed yards as fast as your steers. As I said, in the last three years, we've had excellent prices. But that's only three years out of many. Now they are back down; they're off 25 cents a pound, probably.

RM: So they were $1.50?

JB: Oh, they were $1.55. I've heard of some calves bringing in $1.61, which is an all-time high. If they keep the Canadian and Mexican borders closed or limited, our prices will stay fair.

RM: When you bring your cattle to market, are they organic beef—no hormones or things like that?

JB: No, but that's what we're trying to do here.

RM: So in this valley, they give shots to make them grow better and everything?

JB: Yes, quite a few people give them an injection of growth hormones to make them grow. And I give 8-Way, a vaccination for numerous diseases—eight diseases.

RM: I've wondered why ranchers in Nevada and other places don't band together and raise organic beef

JB: They're starting to. My son's going organic with a small amount this year. He's trying to talk me into it but I'm still not there. It's a lengthy process. You've got to have your ranch certified, then you've got to have your range certified—no sprays and what have you. The last article I read, some of the people are having second thoughts a little bit because that article said the price isn't all that much better—it's from sometimes 10 cents a pound up to 50 cents more a pound, but it costs. . . .

MC: It's the butcher that makes the money; the retailer. And regardless of what the rancher does as far as being organic, when he sells that calf, he no longer has control. It goes to a feed lot, and that's where the majority of the chemicals come in.

RM: Plus, the cow is standing in manure and being almost force-fed—fed high grains. Talk about ruining their kidneys with proteins.

MC: They don't care; they're only going to be there for a short time.

JB: To have natural beef in the feed yards, that feed yard has got to be certified. All the hay that's fed, or grain, or whatever that's fed, has got to be certified. Nothing on it; no spray whatsoever.

RM: Do you use chemicals on your fields?

JB: Yes, I do. I spray with 2-4-D. That's a no-no for the organic.

MC: Yet he still has to maintain those waterways, and that's what he uses the 2-4-D on, to keep them clear.

JB: And you've got to watch the minerals that you're feeding your cattle; they've got to be organic. Plus, you have to keep almost a diary on your cattle of where they were, what they did, how you took care of them. The word, they tell me, is "free roaming." It should be a free-roaming animal with not too much interference from the humans.

RM: Just like turning the cow and the calf loose in the hills and coming back to get them next year?

JB: Yes. I run awful close to that way. But then, I have problems with the deeded property; I have to spray there. I could get away with no antibiotics; I wouldn't have to give that. I wouldn't have to give 8-Way shots. I never have given growth hormones at all. I could do it fairly easily, except I don't want to keep a diary. But there are ways to go, and maybe that's a big plus. My son will find out. He's going, I think he said, with a small bunch just to try it and see. Four or five ranchers here are going to do it. But we made a living or we wouldn't be here.

RM: What were holidays like when you were growing up? What was Christmas like?
JB: They made a big issue out of the holidays. It was mainly family—Christmas, New Year's, Easter, Thanksgiving.

RM: Would your mother prepare a nice dinner?

JB: Yes, a big meal—turkey and potatoes and gravy. The holidays were about the only time they saw each other. And the kids were all there.

RM: You mean, because of you kids being off to school and things like that?

JB: Yes.

RM: Was the Fourth of July in Round Mountain a special day or did you guys go to Tonopah, or what?

JB: Yes, they had fireworks. Fourth of July was usually either spent at a picnic up there, maybe gone the 3rd and 4th and the 5th, or a rodeo in Austin.

RM: It sounds like you oriented more toward Austin than you did Tonopah. You didn't go to Tonopah that much?

JB: No, we went more to Austin. Tonopah was mainly for the courthouse and of course, they shopped. But Austin seemed to be . . . .

MC: More fun.

RM: Why was it more fun?

JB: I don't know. I think there was probably more of the entertainment in Austin that the rancher liked—rodeos. And the ranchers from Reese River went more to Austin. I don't know that Tonopah had many rodeos.

MC: No, they didn't. It was all oriented around mining. So they were different communities altogether.

RM: Austin was more of a rancher's community, then?

JB: Yes, it was. On the Fourth of July, they had a big rodeo. On New Year's Eve, they had a big dance with a live band. Easter, we usually spent at somebody's house.

RM: You were really just a kid when Carver's opened, weren't you?

JB: That was in 1948 so I was 10, 11 years old.

RM: Did you go there much?

JB: I never paid much attention to Carver's until I was allowed to drink. [Laughter]

RM: Did they let you start drinking when you were 18?

JB: Not across the bar, no. We always drank out back someplace, out of the car. As far as walking in and asking little Jean for a drink—"I'm 21, Jean." "The hell you are—I know how old." [Laughter] No, actually, I don't remember ever drinking in Carver's when I was under age.

RM: And then, they started having those really great dances, it sounds like, there. Did you go to those?

JB: Oh, yes. They had a big dance hall; it ran lengthwise from the bar. They had live bands and that's where everybody went. Bert and Millie from Austin were one band I remember.

RM: Did you ever go down there for dinner or breakfast? They were famous for their ham and eggs for a long time.

JB: Well, my family may have, but I said I could cook a good breakfast here for a lot cheaper so, no, I don't. The family still goes either to Carver's or The Moon every Sunday. In fact, my mother just came back from Carver's here at 10:30 or 11:00. But I don't go out much to. . . .

RM: To anywhere?

JB: No, not to eat. [Laughter] I don't like to sit in a cafe.

RM: Was there much social activity at Round Mountain? Was that kind of a social center or did Carver's pretty much replace it, or what?

JB: No, they had two bars in Round Mountain.

RM: What were their names? Was one the Palace?

JB: At the time, Al Lofthouse was at the Palace; Danny Daniels also owned it at one time. Then there was a lower bar. I don't know what they called that. But, yes, they had dances up there all the time.

RM: Did you go to those?

JB: Oh, definitely. In fact, the year I got married, that's where the big party was—at the Palace Club.

RM: Was Round Mountain a place that you enjoyed going and could expect to have fun?

JB: Oh, sure. You'd get kind of bored with your daily life and you either went to Carver's or to Round Mountain and would meet a few people. And we still do it today. There are not many of us today in the cow business.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Midge, talk about your background in Round Mountain and in northern Nye County.

MC: Well, in 1949, my dad came to work for the mine because the mine had opened up again; they were offering good wages.

RM: Who was running the mine then? Was that Isabel?

MC: It could have been Isabel. I don't remember because I was only five years old. He worked there for the year. I remember Fourth of July as being a big picnic and . . . I probably shouldn't say this, but I remember an Indian, who, whenever he got in a car, he was absolutely so drunk it wasn't even funny. Mom would say, "Get in this house and stay right in the middle of it because he's on the war path!" [Laughs] But I remember snow, which I don't see anymore, it doesn't seem like. Of course, I was a short kid.

We were here for a year, then went back to Tonopah. I think it was a directive from my mother—my dad had a part-interest in the Town Hall Bar and Cafe in Tonopah; it was where the Central Nevada Newspaper is now. Some of that glass is still there; that was part of the old bar. My mother said, "Eddie Clark, I do not intend to live with you behind the bar for the rest of my life, so let's go find a real job." And so Daddy went to work for Nevada Air Products in Reno.

RM: How long were you in Tonopah after you left here?

JB: Just a year. I went to school here for first grade. Second grade, I finished in Tonopah, and third grade, I started in Reno.

RM: And where did you live before you came to Round Mountain?

MC: Tonopah. My mother was born and raised in Tonopah.

RM: And what was her name?

MC: Jolene Wilson. There's another Wilson family here in Tonopah; we're not related in all.

RM: Was her family miners?

MC: Yes. Her father came to the state in 1902, I believe, for the mining in Tonopah.

JB: He came straight into Tonopah for the mining?

MC: He was born in Waukegan, Illinois. At 18 years old, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and they sent him to Richardson Springs, California. It was then a tuberculosis sanatorium. And they truly sent him there to die. He obviously didn't have tuberculosis. What he had done as a young

man was train grass horses. He met my grandmother at Richardson Springs; she was a housekeeper there.

And he came to Tonopah because of the mining. I think mostly he was involved with the mills, in processing. I have lots of little postcards and things that they sent back and forth. I even have their marriage certificate when he finally got her to come to Tonopah. He was, I think, 13 years older than she. My grandfather was 51 years old when my mother was born and she was the only child.

RM: Did he live to see her grow up?

MC: Oh, yes. In fact, I was a sophomore in high school when he passed away; he was 89 years old.

RM: And your mother married a local guy?

MC: My dad's family came to Tonopah in 1928, when he was seven years old. And for the very same reason; in fact, an uncle of Bobby Revert's was the one who convinced my dad's father to come here. Have you ever heard of Carville and Clarksdale? They are on the Test Site at this point and you can no longer get there. Carville was the Revert family's mine and the Clarksdale was my dad's. They were out at Longstreet for a while, Stone Cabin Valley, and then they came back to Tonopah. His dad had an accident of some sort or other and he died when, I think, Daddy was maybe 12, if he was that old.

And then, during Prohibition, his mother and his aunt moved to Sacramento for a while but they had a home in Tonopah. When they were in Sacramento, they were . . . Daddy said they were called the "Queens of Bathtub Gin.- They made a lot of money with homemade gin. Then they came back to Tonopah. And she never remarried. She worked a little bit for the state in the highway department cleaning their offices and so on. When we moved to Reno I spent all my summers in Tonopah; I came back every year. And then, as an adult, I spent more of my off-time here in this valley with my kids than I did anyplace else.

RM: Who did you stay with when you went back to Tonopah in the summer?

MC: My grandparents; my mother's mother and father. They lived out of town . . . I remember the Lambertuccis and their truck farm. I remember being able to walk through the corn . . . like I said, I was really a short kid and it was so far over my head. And they raised pork . . . if you've ever been in where the gas station was, there still are the meat counters in there. And if you'd go down to the big barn, it still smells like piggies. [Laughs] They used to take me down every time the pigs farrowed and I'd get to go see the baby pigs. We spoke really well together because the one brother didn't speak a word of English and I didn't speak any Italian [laughs]

RM: And then, when did you marry Dick?

MC: Well, we spent a whole lifetime keeping up with each other through family. Jean [Carver] and my mother were exceptionally good friends. And up until Gerald died, which was when

Dick was 12, they came to town for supplies every month. So either Dick would stay at the house or I used to get to go to the Overland Hotel with them and while Gerald was downstairs gambling and having a good time, we'd watch the trains—stay up till all hours in the hotel. When Gerald died, Jean would come into town but Dick never came back alone.

As an adult, Dick used to call my dad and talk to him on a regular basis. We'd come through here when I brought the kids out camping and I'd stop and talk to Jean. And when she was in town, she and my mother would go to movies and she'd stay with us. Of course, when Jean got married again, that kind of stopped, although she still came in off and on and they always got together. Dick and I got married in '92; I came back here in '91.

RM: And he passed away in. . . ?

MC: In 2003.

RM: And you still live. . . ?

MC: Yes, I still live in the house. [Laughs] You're going to have to blast me out of here; I'm not leaving.

RM: Tell about what you said when your family wanted to move to Tonopah.

MC: I just remember, when everything was packed in the car and they told me to get into the car, and I was crying, "No, I don't want to go; I want to go live with Dickie." [Laughs] Because that was where I wanted to be; I wanted to be here. I didn't want to go back to Tonopah, even though I didn't get to see much of my grandparents when I lived here and they were really important in my life.

RM: So you've got really deep roots in Tonopah and here in Smoky Valley.

MC: I can remember coming out here prior to moving out here. When we lived out here we used to lock my brother in the dance hall so we could go feed the fish by ourselves. [Laughs] Oh, I got paddled more than one time for that. I wasn't even six years old! So that's my story.

RM: Thank you. Jim, can you talk some more about ranch life?

JB: I think the way I saw the world was pretty narrow. You didn't see much except your life right here. It was small and rural.

MC: Nobody traveled much, did they?

JB: You didn't know or care too much about what went on outside. Sure, you listened to the radio and you listened to the news, but I don't think it really concerned you. You went to bed pretty early because you had to get up early, and we had no TV, no computers. . . it was small.

RM: What time did you go to bed?

JB: You were probably in bed by 8:00. I still go to bed by 8:30.

RM: And then, what time do you get up?

JB: Anywhere from 4:30 until . . . I very seldom sleep any later than 5:30. Although, she called me one morning at 6:30 and I was still sound asleep.

RM: Everybody went to bed at that hour in those days, didn't they?

JB: Most people went to bed extremely early because you didn't have TV. They played the radio, but it wasn't extremely good; a little crackly. Now, you get stuck on a TV program—they don't come on till 9:00 and don't go off till 10:00.

MC: He's referring to my "Dancing with the Stars." [Laughter] I love that program; I just love to watch that.

JB: It was a quiet life. I wouldn't trade it. It would bother me a little bit if my kids didn't want to follow it, but if they chose to do something else, I could understand that. Two of them chose to stay with it and I think they're old enough now that they'll never do something else unless they're forced in some way. All three of us are tied up with the cows. You're kind of proud of that. But the grandkids. . . .

RM: It sounds like they're being seduced by the outside world.

JB: Well, there's too much money in the outside world. Why should you work seven days a week here—except for the way of life—when you can go up to the mine and make, in one day, what it takes us to make in a week. I understand their side. You take the guys who don't have an opportunity to own cattle but they want to work cattle—they're called day workers and they can make $100 to $150 a day.

RM: That's poor, yes.

JB: We get cowboys come through here looking for a job in the spring of the year, and then again in the fall. They don't have anything They've got an old, beat-up vehicle, one change of clothes, a saddle; some of them have a gun. That's all they've got.

RM: How old are they?

JB: Most of your cowboys are young. A lot of young guys today get out of high school and they want to become a cowboy and they might stay with it for two or three years. The ones with any sense will leave because they don't have a future. On that much money, what are you going to

be able to buy? And then, once they get married, forget it. Now, if you've got the guts to stay for a few years and be lucky enough to become cow boss, then your pay goes up, naturally.

RM: What would a cow boss make?

JB: I really don't know what they pay, but probably $2,000 to $2,500, maybe more.

MC: But generally, you have a place to live.

JB: You have a place to live; if you're single, you stay in the bunkhouse. If you're married, a lot of ranchers now furnish you a house with all your utilities. But as far as buying a new vehicle or something, you don't. Over my lifetime, I've known probably 25 guys that I can name who were cowboys here. Almost every one of them was single; almost every one of them was an alcoholic. In later years, for a lot of them, drinking becomes a problem. When they were younger, they could handle it. But as the guys got up into their 50s and 60s, it handled them.

RM: So there are still . . . I guess you'd call them itinerant cowboys now?

JB: Tramp cowboys. Oh, there are lots of them. We get a few through here; Elko County's known for lots of cows and lots of cowboys. And yes, definitely, there are quite a few of them. And that's what my grandson's going to become. He's a good cowboy now, for just being in high school. He's leaving home, he said, the day he graduates and heading north. He's got a couple job offers already in some of the big outfits.

RM: So a guy's only hope of a real future is to marry a ranch.

MC: Well, there you go.

RM: I mean, how's a cowboy ever going to get a ranch? It takes a rich man to buy a cattle ranch.

JB: Young people know that at the price of these places today, they'll never be able to afford them, so the next best thing is to be a cowboy for as long as you can. You can have a wife who'll work with you, but when the first kid comes along, you're not going to survive on ranch wages.

Around here, quite a few guys do what we call day work. They work at the mine and on their days off they'll work for me or the RO on day work. There's pretty good money in that. You've got to have horses and everything, but with most of your day work, the guys earn anything from $100 to $150 a day.

RM: These tramp cowboys don't own their own horse, do they?

JB: Once in a while they might, but most tramp cowboys, that's all they are, is a tramp, just like your tramp miners. When you go to your bigger outfits, they furnish the horses so all you've got is your gear.

RM: If you went to work for a bigger outfit, could you have your own horse? Would they let you?

JB: A lot of places won't.

RM: Why is that?

JB: I don't really know the reason behind it. A few places will allow a guy to come in with one or two horses.

RM: There's no point in having your own horse, then.

JB: No. For one thing, if you're not working, you've got to feed your horse. And you need a trailer and a place to keep it. Most of your big outfits have maybe 50, 75 head of horses and when a cowboy comes along, they give him. usually, seven.

RM: So there's a whole population of tramp cowboys out there?

JB: Oh, there are still quite a few tramp cowboys. We don't have as many here. Here, what we've got is day work. But you get up around Elko, even Eureka, all of northern Nevada; and of course, other states. Elko's known for the tramp cowboys.

RM: Let's say you brought a tramp cowboy in here to do most of the work. What would his job consist of day in and day out?

JB: Well, on an outfit that's small like mine, a tramp cowboy wouldn't stay here very long because I don't have year-around seven-days-a-week cow work, and that's what a tramp cowboy wants.

RM: On a bigger ranch, what kinds of things is a tramp cowboy doing?

JB: It's just taking care of the cattle—moving them from place to place. Bringing in the thin cows that didn't do good outside. Moving your cattle from water to water. Just being sure that the cattle are doing good. And some of the places make the cowboys feed hay in the winter if they've got cattle in. In Elko County, not many cattle stay out on the range in the winters; they just feed there. Here in southern Nevada, cattle stay out year round. It's what the Forest Service calls Wild Cow Outfit. That's what I do here because we stay out year round.

RM: Where is the borderline of Wild Cow Outfit? Is it kind of Austin?

JB: Yes, kind of. It's kind of Highway 50. They get so much more snow that they've got to come in, in the wintertime and be fed hay. Here, the snow helps us because when it snows, then our cattle never come to water.

RM: Oh; so they're not walking off flesh.

JB: No. For instance, down south—I run cattle down there in the winter, my sons and I. And if it snows down there, that's when our cows do good because they go out on virgin feed and as long as there's snow, they'll never come to water.

RM: Where do you run cattle down south?

JB: Lone Mountain. Actually, they call it Sheep Mountain. But those cattle will sometimes be down there two or three months and never have a drink of water. RM: So you have an allotment down there.

JB: Yes, the Sheep Mountain Allotment.

RM: Do you have trouble rounding them up down there?

JB: Yes. It's big; there are no fences at all. If those cattle want to and have got the right papers, they could go right into California. We don't have any fences at all.

RM: Well, how far south would they go? Would they go down to Lida Junction on their own?

JB: Well, they can. They go clear into Death Valley; they're on their way to California.

RM: [Laughs] And do they?

JB: We're missing one or two. But when you take new cattle into an area like that, you stay with them.

RM: When do you take them down?

JB: In November or so.

RM: And when do you bring them back?

JB: About now. They're down there about five or six months of the year. In fact, Danny just brought the last bunch back.

RM: How many cowboys does it take to round them up?

JB: It depends on the cow. If the cattle have been in there before, then they're more able to take care of themselves. If there are new cattle that have just been moved down there, they're going to be scattered. The last few years, it's been so dry and there hasn't been much snow so the cattle are concentrated on the waters; they're closer. But if it snows, you don't even see a cow.

RM: Is it pretty good down there for winter feed?

JB: Some years. Some years it's nothing.

RM: One thing we haven't talked about are the breeds of cows. What kind of breeds were they running on the RO when your mother was a kid?

JB: All Hereford cows. For years and years, that's all they had.

RM: And that's what you run?

JB: No.

RM: What do you run?

JB: Any cross-bred cow.

RM: And what are you calling a cross-bred?

JB: Hereford or black [Angus] crossed with a little bit of Brahma. It makes them more aggressive; they travel farther and put up with heat better. The Angus is completely worthless; 100 percent. If they're pure, they are completely worthless. They've got to have more feed. I have a bunch of black cows down here but they have Brahma in them.

RM: And what are the Herefords' good characteristics?

JB: In my opinion, the Hereford is a good base cow. What I mean is, take that Hereford cow and cross it with something else—either an Angus or a Brahma or. . . .

RM: What does the Hereford bring to that cross?

JB: They're a pretty good desert cow but they have a lot of drawbacks. They get pinkeye because of the white face. Their eyes are sensitive, where if you get something with a black face, you don't have much pinkeye.

MC: And mothering ability, too. They're better than the Angus, at any rate.

JB: They bred the mothering ability out of the Angus completely. The purebred Angus, in my opinion, is just completely. . . .

RM: Why do they keep them?

JB: Because they bring the best price. They finish better in the feedlot. But they've got to be more confined, they've got to be on better feed, better pastures, better hay. They've lost a lot of their mothering instinct. They don't give a damn where their calf is, while your Brahma-influenced cattle know where their calf is. They're good mothers.

RM: And the Hereford's a good mother?

JB: Oh, definitely. Yes, there are pluses and minuses on all breeds, no matter what.

RM: What kind of bulls do you use?

JB: Brangus; Brangus bulls.

RM: So that'd be Angus-Brahma cross? Why that?

JB: Because then your calves are a little Brahma.

RM: But why not use a Brahma with a shorthorn?

JB: Well, people do.

MC: Then you have a Santa Gertrudis.

JB: Of course, Santa Gertrudis is a breed of its own, now.

MC: The one true American breed.

JB: And the Brangus the same way; it's a breed of its own now.

RM: So your cross now is a better cow for this environment?

JB: Well, I'd have to look; the last couple of months; I'd say no. I haven't had very good luck with them. My grandparents and my dad had straight Herefords. If they saw a black one out there or a Charolais, God, they got mad.

RM: That was the cow of the West; the Hereford replaced the Longhorn, didn't it?

JB: Even Elko today. Go through Pine Valley—there are some big ranches in Pine Valley and it's Hereford almost all the way. Of course, there are new people coming in and doing things like I'm doing.

RM: Midge, I wanted to ask you, what are your recollections of Round Mountain the year that you lived there? What kind of a community was it and how did you see it?

MC: Well, living in town, I had two friends, Mary Engelbrite and April Moorehead. And we never could get along, the three of us, in one sitting for very long. I remember snow up to my waist, and having to wear dresses to school. Like I said, I was a little short kid, so that's not saying much. Mary Engelbrite always wore pants and I didn't understand how she could and I couldn't.

I think my two favorite things to do were to come to Darrough's Hot Springs with my parents and to go to Carver's, where you could run all over the place and there were horses that you got to pet and fish you got to feed. And listen to my mother yell when Dad took us into the rafters and jumped down into the pool with us. Oh, she got mad. We stopped doing that when Daddy lost my brother once. [Laughs] He and Shy Heideman were down there in the bottom of the pool looking for this little kid.

JB: Did you go to Darrough's?

MC: Oh, we went all the time; yes.

RM: Darrough's was a big deal, wasn't it, for this area?

JB: Yes, with the swimming pool. And then prior to that, with the dancehall.

RM: In your lifetime, was there a dancehall?

JB: No. In my lifetime they had quit. The swimming pool drew everybody. It's still open.

RM: What would you say was the population of Round Mountain at that time?

MC: At six years old . . . [laughs] There were a lot of people there. The dump is on top of the house that we first had. It was a little stone house. Going up the old road, it was the very first thing you came to. And I remember when we came out to look at it, the blackbirds were . . . you know how sometimes they sound like a rattlesnake?

JB: Which house was it? If you pull up to where the bar was. . . .

MC: No; you never got that far. It was before town. And we had a water pipe but we didn't have any indoor plumbing except for that so we had to go outside to the outhouse. And then we moved to a little house on . . . what's the street where [inaudible] lived? I think it's Union Street. And there were a bunch of little mining houses in a row.

I remember going to Reno that summer and staying a week with my dad's brother and his wife. I flew on Bonanza Airlines and they drove me back. And when we drove back, it was a new house again, a big house. Do you remember where Shy lived—Shy Heideman?

JB: No. I knew him, but I don't know where he lived.

MC: Well, he lived on that one place with a little bit of a hill. That's where I learned to ride my bicycle and skinned my knees up all the time. It was just about a block from the school. At any

rate, it was the biggest house in Round Mountain, except for Skook's house. It had a porch two-thirds of the way around it and a garage that wasn't really attached . . . there was kind of like a door from the house out.

I remember hauling Dick Carver home to lunch every day, and then he wouldn't come back in the schoolhouse; he'd go out and chase horned toads and lizards and snakes, and then said it was my fault. [Laughs]

RM: Do you remember the social life in the community?

JB: Not at that age.

MC: Speak for yourself. [Laughter] I think social was all about family.

RM: How large was your family?

MC: I have a brother and a sister and I was the oldest. Terry Ann was born in February of the year we moved there. And my mother was fit to be tied. She was, "I don't know how I'm going to deal with this."

I remember one thing that was a joke for years and years afterwards. Daddy liked working graveyard. So Mom's up ironing, because she'd wake him up to go to work. Well, one night, he came up out of the bed, "What the hell's in the bed? It's cold!" And there was a scorpion in the bed. After that, somewhere down the line, Mom's ironing, and she says, "Oh, this is going to be so fun." She took a coat hanger—a wire hanger—and just ran it down his leg [laughs]. I remember, because it woke me up. And I said, "Mom, what's wrong? What's wrong?" Dad's up, "Goddamn it, Jolene, that wasn't funny!" [Laughs] It was a good way to get him up, at any rate.

RM: I wonder how many people were employed at Round Mountain at that time. This was '49, right?

MC: Yes, '49 to '50.

JB: I worked up there in '58, but it was never anywhere near what it is.

RM: And you worked for Isabel?

JB: Well, I worked for Isabel once; I worked up there three different times for short periods of time.

MC: When Dick was up there, did you work with him?

JB: No, we never worked up there together at any time. We missed each other, I guess, along the way.

RM: Did you work with Bob Wilson when he was up there?

JB: Yes, Bob Wilson was a mechanic in the shop at that time and I was the grease monkey. In fact, that's where I got to know him. Bob would get off of the night shift and I was just going to work and he'd be sitting in the office in a chair, sound asleep. He'd sleep an hour or so in that chair and then get up and do his day's work and he'd show back up for the night shift. He'd sit down, just for a minute, when he got off work . . . [Snoring sounds] [Laughs]

MC: Maybe that's where Dick learned it. If he needed a nap, he'd sit down and he was out. There was not even a chance to say goodnight. [Laughs] I can do the same thing; I had a good teacher.

RM: How many kids were in the school when you were there?

MC: Probably 30.

RM: So the mine was going. And at one time you said there were three kids there?

JB: Well, there was just me and my two cousins from the Wine Glass. In fact, I think one year, we didn't even use the school in Round Mountain, we used the school at the Wine Glass; went to school down there. I don't know whether I was in the first grade that year. In fact, the little building at the Wine Glass is still standing.

RM: We have wonderful pictures of your mother in different years in front of the little school at the RO.

JB: I think one time there was a school at Darroughs, too, but I'm not positive. I think she went to school there.

RM: Nye County used to be very liberal about schools. I think the rule was you had to have four kids to start it and three to hold it.

JB: I know we had problems here throughout the years because there weren't enough kids. Then the mine would start again and we'd have a big school for a while.

RM: Do you have any other recollections of what Round Mountain was like?

MC: I remember the picnic up Peavine and the Indian driving around, drunk. And then we came home and he was still driving around town. [Laughs] I mean, that's what I remember about the Fourth of July because we were only there the one Fourth of July.

RM: Did you have anything to do with Manhattan at that time?

MC: Other than going to Manhattan trick-or-treating, and scared to death because I knew that pickup was going to fall off that little itsy-bitsy road into the darkness—into the netherlands of the bowels of the earth—no, I don't, except for a fishing derby in Manhattan.

JB: Oh, in those ponds down there? I can remember that.

RM: Where was that?

JB: At the lower end of the Manhattan Gulch. There was a great big pond, and they planted fish in it.

MC: It was the first time I ever fished.

JB: I forgot about that.

RM: This was after the dredge, wasn't it?

MC: Yes, because that was the remnants of the water. We called it the dredge pond.

RM: Oh, it was the old dredge water.

JB: And it was nice.

MC: Yes, it was beautiful. And there were photographers up there, too. The woman was 17 feet tall and the man came up to her belly button. I can remember going up there and having pictures taken.

Like I said, the whole social things we did—we went to the pool and we came to Carver's. Oh, and I can remember being the angel in the Christmas play and forgetting my lines. [Laughs] It was embarrassing.

JB: Not when you're that young.

MC: Oh, yes! It was mortifying. [Laughter] The only good thing is, my wings didn't fall off My halo got cocked a little bit to one side, but . . . I don't even remember Halloween except for trick-or-treating.

I do remember Easter Sunday. We went to church because there was a priest coming out. And we're sitting there, and my brother was three-and-a-half years old. We're sitting there, and we're sitting there, and the priest is late. Pretty soon, in this booming little three-and-a-half-year-old voice he goes, "Mom! When's God going to come?" as my dad's sliding underneath the folding chair. [Laughs]

RM: Where was the church in Round Mountain?

MC: There wasn't. It was in what they called the community center—an old, narrow building. Actually, I take that back; it was held in the school.

RM: Was there ever a church in Round Mountain?

MC: No.

JB: No. We've talked about that for years. That's the only town that I know of with no church.

MC: When you consider Austin, which had more churches per capita than any other town in the state of Nevada 60 miles down the road, you didn't even have a darn church.

RM: Well, what do you guys make of that?

MC: A bunch of heathens? [Laughs] I don't know.

JB: Of course, the Bergs kind of started that town; apparently, they weren't very religious.

RM: It never comes out in talking to any of them.

MC: I would think that a majority of the people that came there to begin with were single men, and church wasn't an issue with them. And as the mine grew and the town shrank, people moved out here, and then it was important to have some place of worship. And then . . . I don't know what year it was, but they had a community church in Round Mountain and they had a pastor. It was nondenominational. That was after they built their little tiny community center; and I don't even know what that building used to be, or maybe it was specifically put there for that purpose. Do you know what I'm talking about?

JB: The community center? Yes. They held dances and. . . .

MC: And potlucks and all kinds of stuff, but they also used that building for services on Sunday.

RM: When would this have been?

JB: I don't remember when it was. I can remember the building; it had hardwood floors, and it had a raised platform or something on one end.

MC: And on one side there was a kitchen and then the bathrooms.

JB: What year it was, I don't know. But as far as a church building, there never was one.

RM: The Bergs were not religious people, were they?

JB: No, to my knowledge, none of my family on either side was. Let's say we didn't go to church, but we were probably pretty religious in a very loose way. I don't remember anybody going to church.

RM: I grew up around miners and I've had discussions about this with other people, and I've never met a religious miner.

JB: Well, no, but you'd better believe they have some beliefs. Like Luther Darrough down here—a neighbor. They never attended service, either, but he said, "As far as I'm concerned, I'm closer to God out there than anybody that goes to church." He said, "Why do you have to have a building to go in and worship?" But, no, neither side of my family was religious.

I've always kind of made a joke—people probably wouldn't think it was funny—but I always said that I probably pray more than most people when I'm out there, a lot of times: "God almighty! I hope everything goes right today! God, I hope that horse won't buck me off and step on my head!"

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Jim, you rope cows, right?

JB: We still use a horse, but the ATV has kind of taken over. You don't have to feed them hay. We still do a lot of horseback work, but we do use ATVs.

RM: Tell me just a little bit about the rancher's view of roping. I don't know much about it but I've always wondered how you do it.

JB: You really can't explain it; I think you have to be there, actually. Like branding—you've got two or three ropers and then a ground crew to wrestle a calf after you drag him in. You rope both hind feet.

RM: Is that hard to learn?

JB: There are some good ropers and there are some that never will be ropers. You just pick up both hind feet and drag it to the fire and you have your ground crew to do whatever work is necessary on the ground. We still do that all horseback; we don't use the chute. A lot of people have gone to what they call calf tables, where they don't rope anything; they're all run through a squeeze chute and branded that way.

RM: How long a rope do you use?

JB: My family and I use long ropes; we use 55 feet. A standard rope, I think, is 32. We use longer ropes because we load quite a bit of stuff in trailers—we catch them outside and tie them down and load them in trailers so we have to have a little longer rope. Some of the cowboys use up to 80 feet of rope.

RM: How much rope, when you throw it, have you got out?

JB: Oh, 25 feet probably goes out and the rest is still in your hand. It depends upon the mood of the animal that's on the end of your rope. If he's a little crabby, then you give him more room.

RM: And ultimately, it's wrapped around your saddle horn and you snap him right up, right?

JB: Right. We do what they call "dally rope" him. Down south, they tie the rope off solid to the horn. We take three or four wraps, depending on the size of the animal. The bigger they get, the more wraps you get.

RM: Do you use gloves when you're roping?

JB: I don't, but a lot of people do.

RM: We used to hear, when we were living out in Reveille Valley, about what they call "mossback" cattle.

JB: Wild cattle.

RM: Have you encountered them, where they're mean and nasty?

JB: Oh, yes, there have been wild cattle in this country. Down south, like around Sharps, there are wild cattle. There are always a few that stay in the mountains and are a little tougher to get out.

RM: Do they ever attack you?

JB: Well, no, until a rope goes on them; and then yes, they will. As far as bothering you, they don't, but if you rope something they will come back up the rope. And most of your wilder cattle are naturally horned cattle.

RM: Will they try to hook you?

JB: Oh, definitely.

RM: Have you known guys who have gotten hooked?

JB: Yes. One of the cowboys here was hurt pretty bad. My son was stuck awful bad—the cow put a horn through his leg and it hit him about here and came out the back.

RM: So how do you deal with that?

JB: He went to Reno. [Laughs]

RM: When you've got a mossback, how do you handle that?

JB: A lot of times you have two guys. Sometimes you're by yourself

RM: How do you protect yourself?

JB: Well, it depends on what you want to do with him. If you want to bring him home and ship him, you tie him down and load him in a trailer and bring him home and put him in the corral and ship him. If you want the cow to stay outside, you might let her go and not have to rope her.

RM: But how do you protect yourself? You never know what they're going to do.

JB: You stay out of the way. And not all of them are that way. Some of them just try to get away but some come back up the rope.

RM: How do you train a cow horse? You've got a horse—let's say you think it's going to make a good cow horse. What are some of the things you have to think about in bringing that horse up to speed, so to speak?

JB: For myself, I don't have real good cow horses. I mean, they do my work for me; just so they don't buck or whatever. Everybody's different. Up north they've got regular cow horses that'll rein real good, stop real good, what have you. Here, with our desert country, you don't need that kind of a horse; all you need is a horse with a lot of endurance. But as far as a real good reining cow horse, I don't have any. I've just got a horse that will go outside and not leave me walking someplace.

RM: I was talking to a guy who knew a lot about horses and he said there are some horses that are really good mountain horses and other horses that are just not good. He also said there are some horses that can go and go in the mountains, and they can find their way.

JB: Just like people, every horse is different. Some horses work better in the corral; they don't have the endurance, but they're better in the corral. Some horses go outside better but they're not worth a damn in the corral. Your cold-blooded horses usually have more endurance. They have better feet—tougher feet—can handle rocks a lot better. Some horses just never learn to go outside. That's what we ride here—they're all cold-blooded horses because they do what we want and they're gentle. I think most of your bred horses are a little more nervous; they're higher strung.

RM: Is it true that a horse can find its way home at night through dense timber?

JB: Oh, yes. I've ridden at night quite a bit; you don't have to worry where you're going. They know. I've ridden a few nights where you had no idea where you were because it was pitch black. And if you were headed home, let the horse go and he'll find his way back.

RM: And how would you let him go—loosen up on the reins?

JB: Just give him his head, like going down a trail or whatever. Pitch black, they can see a lot better than you can. Plus, they've got a sense of direction. They know where they're going.

RM: What do you do about rattlesnakes?

JB: Oh, they don't bother you.

RM: They don't ever strike a horse?

JB: I guess they have, or I guess they would.

RM: But you've never had a snake bite a horse?

JB: To my knowledge, no; or a dog. I don't kill rattlesnakes. If they're close around the house, or maybe at the corral or barn, but other than that, I don't kill rattlesnakes.

RM: Do you have many rattlesnakes in this country?

JB: Yes, there are quite a few. You'll see 10 or 12 a year. Snakes don't deliberately bite. If a snake can get away, he will.

RM: Do they bite your cows?

JB: Not that I know of. Like I said, the snakes know to stay away. They know the cows are coming and will either lie quiet or leave. I knew a couple of people who were bit.

RM: Do you have any recollections, off the top of your head, about living in Round Mountain?

JB: I wasn't up there very much. I stayed up there a little bit during the school year, but we were just a bunch of happy kids, we always had something to do. We didn't have TV or anything so we made games to play. There was a lot of baseball, lots of bicycles. It was just a normal, quiet childhood, I guess you'd say.

RM: Do you remember a teacher named Bessie Holts from Round Mountain?

JB: Oh, yes. She taught me in I believe the first grade, maybe even into second. I don't know what else she taught up here. She was my grandmother's real good friend.

RM: She spent about ten years teaching in Round Mountain. I interviewed her when she was very old and she said they were the best ten years of her life.

JB: Yes. And she came back after she retired and visited with my grandmother. This country kind of grabbed her. She'd come up almost every summer and stay with my grandmother. I don't know where she actually lived.

RM: She was living in a little trailer in Vegas when I interviewed her.

JB: I always felt our schools were good schools. Because they were smaller, the teachers had more time for the kids one on one. Today, you don't have that.

RM: And the teacher was a part of the community. That's what Bessie Holts liked. She said there was a community spirit here.

JB: Yes. And they knew the families, they knew the families' background. They personally knew each kid and they knew if this one needed a little help in English, a little more help in math, or something, and he got it. Today it's not quite that way.

RM: Any other recollections about your batching days in Austin when you kids lived up there?

JB: Not really. We left here and went to Austin. It wasn't unusual; we had to do it and we did. I batched with my older cousins who came off the Wine Glass Ranch. RM: What were their names?

JB: Benny and Joanne Rogers. They moved to Austin a year or so before I did. We had a little house rented and we did our cooking and whatever was necessary; a little cleaning.

RM: Talk a little bit about roundup time on the ranch.

JB: Years ago, everybody kind of worked together. Everybody ran their cattle what we call "in common," and the ranchers all had to work together on roundup. Today, it's not quite that way; everybody's kind of independent, off on your own. You don't run cattle outside as much as you used to so you do your own work and your neighbor does his own work. For one thing, in this country, there aren't many ranchers left.

You do usually get together on a big branding. The ranchers get together for a social time—you brand your calves and have a big meal and maybe a few beers or whatever.

RM: Do you take your calves into the common area, or how does that work?

JB: Well, out here where I run cattle, I run cattle in the Smoky allotment and my neighbors, the RO, have cattle there so there are two of us. Years and years ago, there might be five different irons out there, or six. There weren't many fences. Today, almost all of your allotments are individually fenced so you don't run in common with somebody else.

RM: You mean, you fence your allotments in the mountains?

JB: A lot of them are fenced.

RM: Isn't that expensive?

JB: Yes, it is. But a lot of them are, today, private allotments. They're fenced by the BLM or by the rancher and the BLM or the Forest [Service]. So things have changed in the last 20 years. For one thing, there aren't as many ranchers in this valley. There are four or five of us today where there used to be 15 or 20 of us.

RM: Starting from where up north?

JB: Well, almost to Tonopah. Peavine, through there. San Antonio, Peavine, around as far as into, like, Cloverdale, through that country.

RM: That's technically Smoky Valley, isn't it?

JB: It is, yes.

RM: Do they call it Smoky Valley?

JB: They call it Lower Smoky down as far as Tonopah. There were a few ranchers down there and then clear on up the valley to the north.

RM: Even north of Highway 50?

JB: About to the highway. There's one more ranch to the north; I don't even know who owns that place now.

RM: How do you see the future of ranching here—say, looking down the road another generation?

JB: In this particular valley, in 20 years, I don't think there will be any except on your deeded properties. You're going to have to develop more water to produce more feed and your cattle will be confined to your private property. As far as any of the federal ground out there, in 20 years, there won't be any. The Bureau of Land Management and the Forest, both, in this particular area have cut the allotments down to just about zero for one reason or another.

Today you have the Endangered Species Act which, if you find any endangered species on your allotment, you're in trouble because the cows come off. They transplanted elk in here ¬on some of the allotments, it is 100 percent elk. The general public don't want the cows out there. So in 20 years, I don't think there'll be any cows out there—very few. All I'm talking about is this particular area. Other areas, maybe it'll be there for a long time; I don't know. I can't blame the federal government for it all—some of it's the ranchers' fault.

RM: But even when you do use your allotments, is it tough to make a living?

JB: You can pay your bills. And of course, cow prices fluctuate up and down. If they're high, then maybe you can make a little. If they're down low, then you're going to have to rely on last year when they were higher. You're not going to get rich, but you can pay your bills.

RM: I remember you made the statement, "I had to get a job to support my cows."

JB: In your smaller outfits, if you get a drought or low cow prices, your cows don't pay the bills and you go out and go to work someplace. The bigger outfits usually can get by. But a lot of your big outfits today are supported by something else. I mean, they own a big ranch but they also have a subdivision that they're dividing in Reno. A lot of your big outfits have a few oil wells

out in the back or what have you. But if you just run a small bunch of cows and rely just on those cows, sometimes they don't pay the bills.

RM: Do you see subdivisions being more and more in the future of ranchers in general?

JB: Oh, definitely. People have got to go someplace and you can make a lot more money by subdividing than you can on a cow. It depends on where you are. There have been people here subdividing. I know a few other ranchers who maybe have 100 acres they want to subdivide. And of course, the closer to town you are the better chance you have of subdividing. And, boy, a lot of them do. There's a lot more money in people than in raising cows. I don't think it'll happen with my piece of property.

RM: But you think it might happen in the valley more and more?

JB: Oh, it's happening. There are four or five ranches . . . they might not have a downright subdivision, but they sell off 20 acres here and another 20 acres over there.

RM: Talk a little bit about the flow of the seasons in ranching. How does your life change through the seasons in maintaining a ranch?

JB: Well, every season there's something different to do. In the spring, you've got your spring cattle work—branding calves. You've got water coming that you've got to put on your fields. Dragging your meadows.

RM: What does that mean—"dragging your meadows?"

JB: Well, dragging all the manure from the previous winter, just breaking it down. In the summer you've still got your irrigating but you also have your haying, which, today, is pretty simple with the equipment they have.

RM: How many cuttings do you get here?

JB: All I've got is grass hay, so I get one.

RM: When do you cut it?

JB: We used to start about the 10th of July, but the last few years, I've gone as late as almost the 1st of August because the season kind of changes. This year I'm not going to hay at all because of the severe drought.

RM: What do you get after you cut—you get stubble and you put cows out on that?

JB: Yes. If it's wet, you can get your hay off. If you still have your water, then you put your water back on your grass hay and it'll grow back up six or eight inches, and that's your stubble for winter.

RM: Oh, you put the cows out there in the winter, and that's what they feed on. But you can't do that now, with the drought?

JB: Not this year; I'm not going to cut anything.

RM: How are you going to feed?

JB: I'm going to buy some hay. I bought some last year, but not much; I had hay left over. This year, you've got two choices—you can buy hay or sell cows.

RM: What does a bale of hay go for now? Is this alfalfa we're talking about, or grass hay?

JB: Well, you can buy either. I've bought grass hay and I've bought alfalfa. Your grass hay is getting hard to find today; not many people raise it. It's mostly alfalfa because there's more money in alfalfa because you get more cuttings. Hay is going to be extremely expensive this year.

RM: What is it going to be and how do they sell it—by the ton?

JB: By the ton. Last year it was anywhere from $80 to $120 a ton. This year, they said it's going to be $150 a ton. In this country, when you make a loan from the bank, if you have a loan, they recommend you have a ton for every cow to get through the winter. Now, other places are lower; some places are higher. Up north, they probably feed more than a ton, although I don't know.

RM: So you're going to need $150 of feed to get one cow through the winter. And what's a cow worth when you sell it?

JB: If that cow's got a calf, that calf will bring you $350 to $400.

RM: And you've got $150 of feed in it, basically.

JB: Well, that's just getting you through the winter. You have the whole year of maintaining that cow. The $150 in hay is for just one winter; four or five months. You've got the rest of the year to maintain that cow. You've got supplement, you've got salt, you've got BLM fees, you have death loss, you have your fuel to get out there to them, you've got pumping water, you've got fence-fixing. . . .

RM: So there's not much profit when you sell that calf, is there?

JB: No. That's what I said, it depends upon what that calf is going to be worth. If they keep the Canadian border closed and control the Mexican border, our cattle prices will be a little higher. But if the government's bound and determined they're going to open the borders wide open, our price goes down immediately. They ship thousands and thousands of cattle here from Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil. . . .

RM: So it just cuts your prices down.

JB: Certainly, it does. When we had the mad cow scare here a year ago, that mad cow disease came out of Canada. As I told you, when they closed that Canadian border, our price went up 10 cents or 12 cents or 15 cents a pound. Then they partially opened it—I don't know quite how that worked—and our prices started back down.

RM: How many years do you keep a cow producing calves?

JB: Ten to 11 years. I have cows that are 12, 14, 15 years old and still producing. If they're in a field where they're confined, you have one bull to 20, 30 head of cows. If they're outside, you've got one bull to ten cows because they're in such a big area.

RM: How far can a cow walk to water every day, or do they go every day? Is there a rule of thumb?

JB: In the middle of the summer, when it's hot, a cow's just about got to go every day. Not all of them; it depends upon how aggressive that cow is. But when it gets to 80 and 90 degrees, I have cows going eight miles one way. They don't do as good if they spend time walking. And some cattle can't travel that far; it depends on what type of cattle you have. Angus, a black cow, is damn lucky if she can walk three miles. Your ranger cattle, your little bit of crossbred Brahma, they can travel farther. In the wintertime, they never go to water if you have snow. They'll stay away from water as long as that snow's there. Not all cattle are that way; I've seen some cattle going to water walking in snow about two feet deep. But your more aggressive cow will stay until that snow is gone.

RM: Do they kind of chew it?

JB: No, they'll actually eat the snow. If you find a bunch of cattle where there's snow, you can see big marks where their tongues were licking it.

RM: Is that right? Do you get attached to your animals—horses and all?

JB: Well, you get attached to your dogs and your horses; some people do, not everybody. Sure, you get attached to cows. If you don't like animals, I don't think you'd be in the ranching business.

RM: Is it hard to sell them, then?

JB: Some of my horses, I don't; they stay here until they die. You may be attached to your cows, but you've almost got to sell them. I don't sell all mine

RM: In what way do you get attached to a cow?

JB: Well, you know where she is in the winter, you know where she goes in the summer, you know her disposition, you know where she was born. Some of those cows, I don't sell. Some of them you don't like, so you sell them.

RM: Why wouldn't you like a cow versus liking one?

JB: I don't know. Like mine, you might not know her too much because you don't see her all the time. One cow that you see all the time, maybe she has a good calf. . . . You just get attached to them.

RM: Good confirmation, maybe? Nice looking?

JB: Yes, that, and her disposition. It's just like people—some you like and some you don't. Your bigger outfits can't do that because they have so many cows. Where you're living with them and running a couple hundred head of cows, you know almost every cow.

RM: And you know their genealogy? Her mother's mother's mother?

JB: Not all of them, but some of them. Some of my cows' ancestors go back 80 years.

RM: No kidding. And you know the cow going back 80. . . ?

JB: Well, not really; I can go back a ways, but the same bloodline's been here for about 80 years or so. Of course, I have bought cows, too, but some of them go back that long.

RM: Would they go back to the RO stock?

JB: They go back to Darrough's down here. I bought all of the Darrough's cattle when he kind of retired. That's where the bloodline goes back in mine, and I think Luther [Darrough] told me they've been here since 1910 or so.

RM: Are some cows good mothers and others not?

JB: Oh, definitely. I think your crossbred cattle, especially your Brahma influence, have a better mother instinct than a lot of cattle. Your black cattle, as far as I'm concerned, have that bred that out of them.

RM: They're not good mothers?

JB: I don't think they are, no. Most of your Angus cattle are the type of cattle that are more confined in pastures because they can't travel. So they raise them in a pasture, where they don't have to go very far to water. And if you're confined in a pasture, that calf and that cow know each other in a certain area. If you run cattle outside, she's got to be a better mother. She's got to know where that calf is even if he's five miles away.

RM: They used to say, when we were out in Reveille Valley in the '50s, that if you brought a regular cow in here, say from Iowa or someplace, it dies. Is that true?

JB: Oh, definitely. The southern country you're talking about is 100 percent desert and the cows eat a lot of different varieties of brush and things. If you bring a cow in that's even from northern Nevada, where they have grass about this high, they don't do good. They won't walk as far; they don't know the different vegetation such as your brush.

RM: In your range, what are the cows eating?

JB: We've got a lot of sand grass, I think they call it squirrel-tail grass; and then there's lots of brush. They probably eat ten different types of brush, especially the further south you go. On one of my allotments down south, brush is about the only vegetation there is. There are eight or ten different kinds and they eat it at different times of the year. In the spring of the year, they eat button sage; in the winter, they eat white sage or greasewood and so forth. RM: They'll eat greasewood?

JB: What I call greasewood. It's a bush that grows like that; real thorny. Especially after a rain—a little rain apparently makes that stuff a little softer. My cattle eat greasewood down south quite a bit.

RM: What's the plant that turns real pretty yellow colors along the roads in the fall?

JB: That's what we call rabbit brush; they don't eat that. Then we have the black sage—lots of black sage—like, through Monitor. There's quite a bit here in the bottom; they don't eat that. There's a lot of smaller brush and I don't know the name of it, but they pick on that.

RM: They know what they want, don't they?

JB: They do. And they eat different brush at different times of the year so they're not always on white sage or they're not always on button sage. In the wintertime, white sage is excellent. After the first hard frost, the cows will start on white sage. We don't have much here in Smoky. Monitor's got quite a bit. Further south has got white sage.

RM: What's your dominant one here?

JB: Button sage. That's in the spring.

RM: I'm not sure what that looks like.

JB: It only grows about six inches high. It's just a little bush. It greens up real early in the spring. I've seen button sage come in, in February underneath snow. It'll come in and the cows start on that.

RM: They won't eat cheat grass, either, will they?

JB: They'll eat the shoots. It's only good for two weeks, probably; then they won't eat it anymore. Sheep do well on it when it's real short. Of course, the BLM doesn't like you out there with cows real early in the spring so that cheat grass does not get eaten so our cheat grass has taken over because the BLM doesn't like us out there that early in the year. If they would let the cows go out the minute that stuff comes up, it wouldn't wipe it out but it would help keep that stuff eaten down. You only have probably two weeks where the cows eat that stuff.

RM: Historically, have the ranchers run sheep here too?

JB: All the ranchers here always had a small bunch of sheep Almost every ranch had 20 or 30.

RM: Would they just pasture them?

JB: No, they keep them out.

RM: They don't turn them out in the hills?

JB: Not through here. Now, around Austin, farther north, they had bigger bands. Arcularis in Monitor Valley raised a lot of sheep.

RM: What does a typical workday for a rancher look like?

JB: I think everybody's different. There's always something waiting out there—a piece of fence to fix or a gate to hang, a piece of tin to nail down, a cow to move. As we were saying, it depends upon the time of year. In spring, you've got your field work, you've got your irrigating; fall, you've got your cows.

RM: Is there a slack season where you kind of can just kick back?

JB: If you're 68 years old. [RM laughs] No, you've always got breaks, but seven days a week, there's always something to do, especially if you're by yourself. If you're a bigger outfit, you have maybe a hired hand or two or three and the boss can tool around a little bit more. I'm by myself—if it gets done, I've got to do it. But I take days off I mean, there's no doubt there is a day now and then.

RM: As we were discussing, there never was a real church in Round Mountain, was there?

JB: No, never. And why, I don't know. It's the only town that I know of where there were no churches.

RM: I maintain that miners as a bunch are not very religious.

JB: Well, look at Austin. It was strictly miners and there are big beautiful churches up there; there were probably four, five, right on the main street. Manhattan had a church; Tonopah. . . . There was never a church here. We just never went to church. My family didn't; most of them. The neighbors that I knew that I worked with, none of them went to church. Today, it's a different story. We have lots and lots of Mormons here.

RM: Oh, really—in the valley or at the mine?

JB: Both. The Mormons have a big church past Carver's, right on the highway. A lot of the ranchers are Mormons. My neighbors up here are Mormons, on up there are Mormons. In lower Smoky, they say there are lots of Mormons. So apparently they go to church; I don't know. But the old-timers. . . . I'm sure they were religious in their own way. They didn't have to go to a certain place to worship somebody. I'm sure they were religious.

RM: One theory I have is there are kind of two groups in some of these mining towns. There's kind of the ladies group and the decent people who were going to church and all. Then there are the miners, cussing and drinking and going to the brothels and. . . .

JB: I don't imagine any of the tramp miners ever went to church. They went down and had a beer or a good shot of whiskey and went home. And probably worked on Sunday.

RM: There was a sign in one of the Manhattan bars that said, "Services begin here every Sunday morning at 10:00." [Laughter]

JB: Well, there was no church building up there but there is today. They have the Mormon church here and down there at Hadley there's another.

RM: In talking about the social life of ranchers last month, we didn't really touch on dances. Jean Carver used to have the dances; did the ranchers all go to those?

JB: Naturally, there were dances; still are.

RM: Where were the dances held?

JB: Years ago, the bigger dancers were held in Austin, Tonopah, Manhattan, and at Carver's; they had a big dance hall there. You might go down to Carver's or the Full Moon and have three or four beers and talk to your neighbors, but it's changed. For one thing, you've got the miners.

They are a different kind of people than the residents who grew up here. You don't have anything in common.

Today, your social life has changed quite a bit; I blame a lot of it on the TV. You used to go to a movie once in a while; they had the movie house in Tonopah but they closed it. They had one in Austin; they closed it. So I don't think there's as much social life.

RM: Do you feel a sense of social deprivation because of that? Like, "I'd like to get together with my neighbors more?"

JB: Well, it was kind of gradual coming on. I think really I didn't pay a lot of attention to it. But if I want to meet with somebody, I'll say, "Hey, I'll buy you a beer; let's go to Carver's," which we do. As far as the ranchers themselves getting together anymore, it doesn't happen much. We have new people coming in and out and buying the ranches. You don't really get to know each other that much and there aren't as many get-togethers.

RM: So you're living more socially isolated than you used to?

JB: Yes, definitely. Years ago, there were ranchers who came from 50 miles away for a big picnic or a big dance or a wedding or what have you. Today, no. RM: Do you have those big picnics anymore?

JB: No. I haven't been on a picnic for 20 years.

RM: Where were the picnics held, typically?

JB: Usually in your bigger campgrounds—Peavine, Kingston Canyon, Twin Rivers, Pine Creek—because they had tables and bathrooms and so on.

RM: Do people ever talk with a sense of regret about that?

JB: Not really, because most of the people who did your picnics or your dances are gone. There are just a few of us like myself, my mother, my brothers. It gradually kind of faded off. We used to play a lot of cards in the wintertime when it was cold. You had long evenings, and you'd get together and maybe make up a bunch of candy and play poker ante at somebody's house.
RM: Did that also include Round Mountain—you'd go to people's houses in Round Mountain? So Round Mountain was part of this community?

JB: Yes, it was part of the community.

RM: Was Manhattan a part of the same community?

JB: No, it wasn't. It was mainly Round Mountain and the people here in the valley. But those days are pretty much gone. I blame a lot of it on the damn TV. Everybody's got to stay home and watch their favorite hour show or whatever.

RM: It's ruined social life in America.

JB: I think it has; I really do. I don't think the kids today go out and play.

RM: No, they don't. They have no idea what it's like to go out and just play all day.

JB: They've got all their damn video games; then for the smaller kids, they've got their cartoons. As far as going out playing, my dad would say, "For Christ's sake, get out of this house!" If you came in for 30 minutes and wanted to read, "Get out of this house! Don't slam the screen door when you leave!" [Laughs]

It doesn't bother me that much today. If I want to socialize, I put on my clean clothes and I go down and have a drink. And as far as picnics, I never did like a picnic.

RM: What about working at Round Mountain—you told me you worked there more than once?

JB: I worked there two or three different times.

RM: What was the first time you worked there?

JB: I don't recall what year it was. I worked for Morrison-Knudsen, M-K, in the shop. It was a lot smaller operation than it is today; you knew everybody. I don't recall how many men were there, but it was very small. I was a grease monkey there for six months or a year.

RM: You don't remember what they were paying, do you?

JB: No, I surely don't. It was more than I was making on the cows.

RM: [Laughs] Was M-K a placer operation?

JB: Yes, it was; it was all placer.

RM: And they had a pit by then?

JB: Yes. They had a pretty good mill down there, but I was never around the mill so I don't know much of what went on. All I worked in was just the shop. RM: What did you do the second time?

JB: The second time I worked up there the place was owned by somebody else, I don't know who it was, who built a pilot mill. We ran a bunch of ore through that mill just to find out actually what they had.

RM: And you helped build the mill?

JB: Yes, I did. They were real small. I think there were five or six of us. We ran it for a couple of months. We took different samples in the pit and brought them up to run through that little rod mill. I can't remember the tonnage we ran through; it was all for sampling. Actually, it was the beginning of this big operation. Then I worked up there one other time.

RM: How long did you work there the second time?

JB: Probably only four or five months. Usually, the jobs that I went on didn't last very long. I worked for a couple of drillers that came in off and on through the last . . . 30 years ago. I worked as a roughneck on Becker Drilling. Becker came in and did quite a bit of the drilling.

RM: Oh, core drilling?

JB: No; at that time, we were only drilling the alluvial fan for them. I worked for them for a month or two.

RM: And then, when was the third time you worked at Round Mountain?

JB: The third time, I worked up there for these people when they first started, although it wasn't the same company.

RM: Was it Echo Bay?

JB: I don't know who it was because I don't follow it that close. But I was a shovel operator.

RM: How big a bucket?

JB: I don't know the yardage on that bucket. It was big, but nothing compared to what they have today. The trucks were about half the size that they've got today. Boy, some of the trucks that they've got today are unbelievable. But I was an oiler on one of the shovels and I was a Cat skinner for a while. Just any place they could put me.

RM: Did you like working there?

JB: Oh, I enjoyed it. I learned a lot. Yes, it was a good job.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Talk a little bit about a woman's life on the ranch.

JB: I think a woman's life was a lot harder than it was on the men. Usually the women worked outside with the men, but they also had the house. They had the cooking, they had the kids. It was a never-ending job for them. My wife worked with me outside, changed sprinklers and fixed fence, and also had three kids and the house.

You go back a few years, they didn't have the conveniences we have today. You didn't have the microwave, you didn't have all your electric appliances. You go way back, when I first got married, we had no washing machine; she washed on a scrub board. And that's only 40 years ago; she washed on a scrub board. We didn't have electricity at all. We had gas lights. No vacuum cleaners, no TV. Radio reception was pretty poor. So the women had twice the job. Plus, they had their outside chores to do such as the chickens. My wife milked two cows and raised leppie calves. No, I wouldn't want the job.

RM: The Western woman was a strong person, wasn't she?

JB: Yes. In my opinion, the women are what held everything together. They were the glue for a lot of families. Also, even years ago, there were a lot of single women who ran these ranches with no husband to help her. Maybe she was a lot better off; I don't know. My Aunt Emma had the RO.

RM: Talk about Emma.

JB: She never married and she ran the RO for many, many years. She didn't do any of the cowboying part of it—the cattle were brought to her in the corrals where she could see them and she knew cattle as well as any man. There were quite a few women who ran the ranches through the years. They talk about liberation . . . . But, no, my wife worked right alongside of me.

RM: Did she go on roundup and things like that?

JB: No, not horseback. It was all right here with the milk cows, a garden, leppie cows, working with me haying.

RM: Did she can a lot?

JB: She canned quite a bit—fruit, vegetables. Always a small garden (she didn't have the time for a big garden). Going back years and years, almost every ranch had a pretty big garden and canned all that stuff. It was a lot easier to go down to the cellar than it was to go to town. RM: Did your wife make clothes for the kids?

JB: No, Patsy didn't do any sewing. She hated it. I have the old sewing machine of my grandmother's.

RM: Did a lot of the women many ranchers and kind of grow up with the life or did they come in from the outside?

JB: Both. My wife never grew up on a ranch; her dad worked construction. It was a little rough on her for a while. She didn't quite understand the seven days a week, no paycheck every week, which was a little hard. You get a paycheck maybe twice a year and you budget that money; you have to be careful. It was hard for her for probably four or five years.

She was scared to death of a cow until she got used to it. She wasn't by any means a city person; they were always pretty much in the country, but still, she wasn't around cows; she was petrified of them. [Laughs] In later years, she had to milk cows. She did almost all the milking and making butter. I still have the churns. We've got one hand churn and then, after we got electricity, she bought an electric one; it made it a little easier.

RM: What about injuries to a cowboy like getting bucked off, and falling off, and getting gored?

JB: There are a lot of injuries, and a lot of them, we ignore. If you were closer to a doctor, you'd have probably gone, but being out here. we didn't have a doctor. In fact, the Tonopah hospital was always there but it wasn't very well staffed, I'll guarantee. For a serious injury, you went to Fallon or Reno. Today, we're very fortunate; we have a hospital in Tonopah—thanks to Dick Carver, for one. He fought for that hospital. But over the last 40 years, it was kind of up and then down, having a hospital there. You lived with a lot of injuries that you should have a doctor for.

RM: What does a cowboy do if he breaks his arm or something?

JB: Well, if you break your arm, you'd better go to the doctor.

RM: But if you're crippled up for a month or two months, what happens on the ranch?

JB: Well, you either let things kind of drift for a while—and most of your smaller outfits can't hire a full-time guy. So your wife picks up the extra work. If it was only one arm or one leg that was injured, then you kind of did what you could.

Here, we haven't had many serious injuries. A few broken legs or a broken arm, but my immediate family has been very fortunate. You'd get hurt an awful lot, but it didn't put you in the hospital.

RM: You told me once—I thought it was an interesting statement—you said, "I've never been in a car wreck, but I've sure been bucked off horses and fallen off or dragged off or whatever."

JB: Yes, I've had a lot of wrecks horseback or with a cow, none of them major. And as far as a car wreck, I've never been in one (knock on wood). Usually, as old as I am, you end up in one car wreck.

RM: I've noticed that you don't wear cowboy boots, or do you?

JB: Well, Packers. They're a buckaroo boot, or a work boot.

RM: Is that better than a cowboy boot?

JB: For me, it's better because I do other work, too.

RM: Did you know Ed Slavin in Tonopah? He was married to 0. K. Reed's daughter. He told me that a lot of the cowboys didn't wear cowboy boots because if they got thrown off and had to walk 20 miles in cowboy boots, they'd be in trouble.

JB: It's a little rough on your feet. Plus, I can buy a $150 pair of cowboy boots and they'll last a year or two. I can pay about $200 for Packers and wear them for five years. RM: Do you have to have them resoled?

JB: No. These are what they call Chippewa Packer boots. They're just a lace-up boot. They're a good buckaroo boot. Plus, you can get off and walk around.

RM: Do a lot of the cowboys wear the Packers?

JB: Today, I would say it's the biggest majority. Now, you get farther north, where they've got full-time cowboys that do that seven days a week, and they're keeping the cowboy's tradition going. They wear the big, loud rag and the buckaroo boots.

RM: So you wear the Packers, Levi's, a T-shirt, and then a Levi shirt. What would you wear in the winter?

JB: The same thing.

RM: And you've got your hat; would you call that a cowboy hat?

JB: Yes, that's a buckaroo hat, a cowboy hat; it's a John B. Stetson.

RM: What do you have to pay for a hat like that?

JB: I think I paid about $180.

RM: And how long will that last you?

JB: Oh, four or five years. I keep all my hats. I've got hats in there that are 30 and 40 years old. I can't throw them away. You were talking about being attached to a horse or a cow, I've got my old hats . . . this is the one I retired. RM: They're stapled together; yes.

JB: You get attached to them. [Laughs]

RM: I know exactly what you mean; I have a hard time throwing things away.

JB: Yes. You don't throw anything away. You put it in a bone pile, no matter what it is—iron or an old vehicle. Tomorrow you're going to be over there, you're going to be taking out this bearing and the transmission comes out and it goes in this one over here.

RM: Are you pretty good at mechanics, too?

JB: No. I do some— I can work on my bailer or tractors, but my pickups, no. I've got to go to a mechanic if I have a major problem with my pickups. RM: What kind of a coat do you wear in the winter?

JB: I've got a heavy lined kind of a canvas coat; I don't know what they call it.

RM: Is it sheepskin lined?

JB: This one I have now isn't sheepskin, but usually I do.

RM: Do you have a problem with getting cold in the winter at all?

JB: Just my hands. No matter what kind of a glove I put on, my hands are cold immediately. You've always got sheepskin-lined gloves, but they don't help me. RM: And then, you don't wear a kerchief?

JB: A wild rag? The cowboys up north have big long ones; I wear them in the wintertime. But they're a little spendy, some of them.

MC: [Inaudible] who were not necessarily cowboys. My best friend's husband said, "And you don't ever lay a hat on a bed, either." I said, "I'm not too worried about it; I'm not looking for a hat and a buckle." [Laughs]

JB: No, I've seen more fights over a hat than I have over a woman.

RM: Oh, that is interesting. Why?

MC: Because you all are kind of silly. [Laughs]

JB: Your hat becomes . . . I don't know what it becomes—something that nobody else touches.

RM: It's improper to touch another cowboy's hat?

JB: Oh, it most certainly is. Down at a bar, after maybe a beer or two, it seems like that's where the trouble starts. Somebody's always got to just kind of irritate you a little bit. They'll grab your hat or they'll tip it up or something while you've got it on. Like I said, I've seen more fights over hats than I have over women.

RM: A slap on the back, or, "Hey, how you doing?" is okay, but touching a guy's hat. . . .

JB: Bothering their hat.

RM: Is about like touching his privates?

JB: Oh, it is; definitely. For some reason, it's pretty serious. On most occasions, they just don't bother your hat. But I have seen some good fights.

RM: Do ranchers here have many guns?

JB: Most of the people carry a rifle or a pistol with them. It's not for your protection, but for coyotes. Or we have a problem with dogs; and maybe a cow got down in a mud hole and you have to shoot her or something. I would say every rancher carries some kind of a gun.

RM: On his horse?

JB: No; it's in the pickup. I don't know of anybody that carries a gun horseback. I'll say all ranchers have plenty of firearms. I've got eight rifles and one pistol and I carry the pistol with me almost all the time.

RM: You said you knew Bob Wilson. Tell me a little bit about him.

JB: Bob was a good guy. He had a big heart. He would help anybody, any time. He was an excellent mechanic. And he was always into mining; I mean, that was his favorite subject, I think, was the mining. I worked with Bob on numerous jobs at a few of the small mines. He and I even had . . . well, it was his lease that he had at Round Mountain. I worked for him.

RM: When he had that lease, what was he doing?

JB: He was digging down in the old pit on bedrock and he had a little small mill set up outside the pit. He'd haul the ore up from down in the bottom of the pit and I'd run it through his mill for him. That's all Bob wanted to talk about was his mine, but he was a good mechanic; especially a diesel mechanic.

RM: How good was the ore that he was running through the mill?

JB: I can't remember what it was. He made money. He paid for the fuel, my wages, and got by, probably just like I do with the cows. He paid his bills and that was probably about it. I worked for him twice up there. He had a lease twice that I know of. Whenever they shut the mine down up here, then the leasers . . . Norman Coombs was one of them who would come back in. RM: Norman knew where the ore was in the Sunnyside.

JB: And he leased up there I don't know how many times.

RM: He told me that Round Mountain was his bank; whenever he needed money, he knew where to go.

JB: Round Mountain had quite a few leasers come in when the mine shut down. Eddie Critchfield was one of them. Nick Anderson, I think was his name—Nick had a lease up there. Bob had a lease. Whenever the mine shut down, those guys kind of drifted into it and made a living for a while till they did something else.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: Jim, it's December 14, 2008, and you told me you want to include some things in your oral history that we didn't discuss in April of '07?

JB: Yes, I think in the last interview I kind of neglected to give my mother and my wife credit. This isn't all about me. My mother is the one who put me in here. I was 16 years old when my dad passed away and she had a rough time. We actually shut the ranch down; the cattle had been sold and we left here for one school year—I went to school in Fallon—so she could get going again. The ranch was up for sale; my dad wanted to sell it. She called off the sale and said, "We're going to stay." She hadn't wanted to leave to start with, but naturally she went along with my dad.

RM: Oh, your dad was the one that wanted to move? This was before he passed away?

JB: Right before he passed away. And of course, she went along with it. After he passed away she said, "No, the sale is off and I am going back and I am going to make a living somehow."

RM: Why did your dad want to get out? He had deep roots here.

JB: Well, one of the reasons he got out is that my mother owned half the Wine Glass Ranch here; they ran cattle together. Her brother, Pete, wanted to sell out and my family didn't have enough money to buy her share. So they said, "Well, we can't buy out our 50 percent so we'll sell it." Naturally, that cut this place in half because a number of cows were sold. My dad sold the cows along with the Wine Glass and said, "I am leaving."

RM: Pete wanted to sell the Wine Glass?

JB: Yes. So, they thought, "We'll raise some money; I'll sell your share." But they couldn't raise it.

RM: Why did Pete want to get out if it?

JB: I don't know why Pete wanted out. After they did sell the Wine Glass, naturally it cut everything here in half because we could only run half the number of cows. What other reasons my dad had, I really don't know.

My mother struggled like hell to keep this place together and of course, I did what work I could. I pastured cattle here, took half the calves in order to start a little bunch, and bought a few sheep. And she had a little store in Round Mountain. I have to give her a lot of credit for the sacrifices she made.

RM: Was that the old Berg Brothers store?

JB: No, this was later.

RM: The Berg Brothers store had closed down by then?

JB: Oh yes. I don't know what year it was, but my mother and dad operated a store up there on their own to supplement the income from the ranch. Then the mine shut down and they closed that store. My mother had it in the back of her mind after my dad passed away that she could probably start another store, which she did with her aunt, Katie Berg. They ran that store for a number of years. It was an outside income, but it kept the ranch together and it kept the family here, which was most beneficial to me. I don't know where the hell I'd be today if it wasn't for that.

My brothers, Roger and Kenny, were small when my dad passed away. We went to school in Fallon and then came back and they finished their schooling here. At that time I had a few more cattle and was out working for wages and what have you. They worked here with me, both of them, but they decided there was probably a better way to make a living so they left. Kenny went to Tonopah and Roger went to Reno. They worked for a time there, but they weakened and came back home to Smoky after a half a dozen years or so. Each of them has their own business today and made it their living. They couldn't stay away from Smoky, apparently.

RM: It's in their blood.

JB: Right. But I know it was my mother who kept us here and kept the family more together. And of course, after Patsy Manley and I got married in 1958, I had a few cows and worked for wages. We didn't have any money, none whatsoever, but we scraped along all right. As I told you last time, she wasn't a city girl by any means. Her dad was a trapper and worked construction but she had never been around cattle and she wasn't quite used to having maybe one or two paychecks a year. She had a rough time for five or six years, but she stuck by me.

RM: And where was her family from?

JB: The Manleys lived here off and on; they owned a home in Round Mountain. They lived in Beatty; he worked at Mercury out of Vegas as an operator. So she wasn't unfamiliar with the country, but as far as the cows, she was scared to death of them. [Laughs] Then after four or five years, you couldn't have dragged her out of here with a team. She sacrificed an awful lot to stay. We didn't have this house here at that time; we lived up in the bunkhouse and it was colder than the hubs of hell. No electricity. In the wintertime the water froze up. No water. We had three kids.

RM: Tell us their names.

JB: Their names are Danny, Russell, and Treesa. Treesa is the oldest. All three stayed in the valley.

Anyway, going back to my wife, there was no electricity, the water froze up in the winter and stayed frozen. We got a lot of snow and melted it on our wood stove to have bathwater

and wash water. She washed clothes on a scrub board. We finally bought a washing machine with a little gas engine, which wasn't a lot of fun. You'd have to run the exhaust out the back door. You'd have to have something under the exhaust so it wouldn't burn your floor. Once in a while it would fall off and burn a little hole in the floor. Then you'd have to fight with getting it started. It had a foot pedal on it like some of your motorcycles used to have. If your foot wasn't right on it, your toe would slip off of it and it'd jump up and hit you in the shin.

So she sacrificed an awful lot to back me and what I wanted to do. I look back on it now and I don't think it was quite fair, actually. I had my cows—well, I'd have to go out and go to work once in a while. But I was doing what I wanted. It was a little bit selfish in some ways.

RM: Was ranching in your blood?

JB: I guess it's in your blood, I don't know. That was my desire when I was in school—cows and sheep. And, of course, in a way I was kind of pushed into it because we still had the ranch after my dad passed away and my mother wanted to come back, so naturally I had to kind of keep it up and mind those cows. I wouldn't say I was pushed into it because I had the opportunity to leave anytime I wanted; I could pick up and go.

RM: And your two brothers were not that much involved in the place?

JB: They both worked with me until they left. I don't know what their feelings were, actually. Maybe they didn't want to stay with the cattle or whatever but they both chose to do something else. And when they came back neither one of them got into livestock, but they do both have good businesses of their own. They're happier than hell, but they didn't choose to come back and get into the lifestyle, that's for sure. It's a different life.

RM: How do you look back on your career in livestock thus far?

JB: I would do it over. The life that I lived, I would do it exactly the same. Naturally, you'd change a few things, but the biggest part of it, I wouldn't change. I think I would have invested money in maybe a bigger outfit or more cattle or something like that. I was kind of always scared of going in debt. I might have ended up with more, yet I might have ended up with less.

RM: That's right. You could have lost it.

JB: I could have lost it. So I chose to run what I had and it made me a pretty small operator, although I do make a living. You always look back—if you had done this or done that. Well, foresight is. . . there are two different things—hindsight you can't do much about.

RM: Right, except figure what you did right and where you screwed up.

JB: But I wouldn't change my life. My wife worked right with me. She changed, except for riding; she didn't ride. But as far as changing sprinklers, taking care of the milk cows, feeding hay, irrigating, dragging meadows, she worked side by side with me. She had three kids she took

care of and she had to take care of the house. She had to put up with me, cook supper, do this. It's a hell of a lot harder on women than it is on men.

RM: Is that women in general or is that in the ranching family?

JB: I don't know much about the city life. Today you see more men taking more roles in the home, doing housework, doing dishes, taking the kids. I never lifted my finger in the house, never took care of any paperwork, never took care of the kids at all except after they got old enough, four or five, to go with me; after they became where they could kind of get along on their own. That was my wife's job.

RM: And that was the way it was then, wasn't it?

JB: Right, that's just the way it was. And you look back on it today and I don't think that was quite fair when you asked her to go outside and work with you because you had to have help and would then expect supper at 6:00, which we did. That isn't right. That is one of the big things I would change. I might even sweep the floor.

In fact, in later years, she kicked me out of the kitchen. I broke a couple of dishes. I would go to wipe up the counter. She said, "You don't clean it, you smear the damn thing. Go find something to do!" And then after she passed away. . . .

RM: When did she pass on?

JB: It's been almost three years; she died February 25, 2005. After that everything came on my head. I had to do the paperwork and I didn't even know where the damn checkbook was. I never wrote a check in my life, ever.

RM: So you had to make a whole adjustment?

JB: Yes. Today I've got the housework, I've got the cooking, I've got the grocery shopping, I've got to pay the bills and for a year or two I had a damn mess. So I push that on my kids today—"For god's sake, take a little bit more of a role in your home life. Know where you have your money stored. Take care of the kids more; help clean the house" (of course, their kids are all gone from home now).

I think they did more than I did. I was gone quite a bit; I'd just get up and leave for a week or ten days riding for somebody. Finally the wife told me, "Your kids don't even know who the hell you are. I mean, you've been gone. You've been gone two weeks." That I would change; well, maybe. I would definitely work at it a lot more.

I would come in the house and say, "You know, my tractor won't start, get in that pickup and give me a tow!" Whether she was cooking supper or doing the laundry, I expected her to drop it; and willingly she went. And then she had to come back to supper. I'd come in at night, grumpy, supper wasn't at 6:00, but I forgot that she was out there towing my tractor or feeding the cows. I would change that.

RM: Did you ever talk about it with her?

JB: No, I didn't. I regret that.

RM: I think it's a generational thing. I was the same way in the city.

JB: Yes, and it would have been very simple at the time to sit down and go, "Okay, you want me to vacuum the floor for you or something?"

RM: You might as well have asked me to go and sweep the moon.

JB: That wasn't discussed and it definitely should have been. Today, I see lots of the younger people packing a little tiny rug rat around with them. Maybe it's a six-month old or a year old. I didn't ever do that. And it still makes me nervous. I work with two or three young guys and honestly, those little rug rats, you've got to watch all the time; the little bugger might run underneath your horse. I'm too old to change, I guess.

MC: You're never too old to change.

JB: Yes, you are. [Laughter] In the last year or so Midge has been a big plus to me. She is a good cook. And we bum around together; it has been a plus to me. For a couple of years I had no idea where the hell I was even going with my mind.

RM: From the grief and the loss?

JB: Oh, yes. And so much more responsibility that was dumped on me that I had never had before. And here came Midge from kind of out of the blue and things have changed for the better.

Anyway, that was one of the things that I wanted to put in —to be sure my mother and my wife have a lot more credit. Like I said, to my mother for keeping this damn place together and all of this hardship and also to give my wife much more credit for putting up with me. She sacrificed to no end.

Of course, she got attached to it, too. After four or five or six years, I couldn't have got her out of here. But for the first three or four, she had a rough go. She was scared to death of cows and she wasn't used to the money, being poor and not having a weekly paycheck. I ship loads of calves in the fall and then a few maybe in the spring so you've got two paychecks and you've got to do something with that money.

RM: Just as an aside, did ranchers get credit at the store in Round Mountain in those days?

JB: I'm sure we did have credit. Well, my parents owned most of the grocery stores. And we did a bunch of shopping in Tonopah. We shopped at Coleman's and Bird's.

MC: You didn't shop at Central Market or Clive Markets?

JB: All I can remember is Coleman's and Bird's.

RM: Where was the Central Market? I remember the name.

MC: By the Town Hall Bar.

JB: Of course, we got tangled up with Coleman's—we always had a band of sheep and they would buy lambs to sell. We'd butcher the lambs and take them in there. That was part of the income of the ranch for my dad and also for my wife and me. We sold an awful lot of lambs.

RM: How many lambs would you sell a year?

JB: We sold what the coyotes didn't eat. The coyotes put me out of the sheep business. They killed 120 lambs and I think it was 32 ewes in a six-month period. So I called a truck and I said, "Come and get them. They're going to Idaho."

RM: Was that before they put out the poison for the coyotes?

JB: This was before and after that.

RM: So the poison didn't get all the coyotes?

JB: Well, it did. You would have a period of bad coyotes and we'd have a trapper come in and trap for us—we had a guy out of Austin named Burton; he was a government trapper. We had another government trapper that lived at Round Mountain by the name Glen Hurt [sp] and he trapped for us. But they'd always come back on you, breed back. So when my wife and I owned the sheep, they killed enough that we couldn't make a living.

RM: What would be a good year selling sheep?

JB: Locally, we probably sold 50 to 75 lambs a year.

RM: And the coyotes were getting that many or more?

JB: Well, one year they ate more than I did. Coyotes are hell on sheep. They don't bother cattle much here. In some areas they do, but not here.

RM: Did you ever trap them—their pelts are worth something, aren't they, in the winter?

JB: I tried to trap them, but you've got to know a little bit. I caught one or two, but usually a pup that was so damn dumb he didn't know. They'd come in and dig up my trap and pee on it. They'd grab the damn things and pull them out. That's what they think of you. [Laughter] No, I couldn't get the coyotes. But I trapped quite a bit. I could catch a bobcat.

RM: Did you sell their hides? What were you getting for a bobcat?

JB: At that time the prices were down. I think the most we ever got was around about $60, and that was a good year. Today they're around $300; I think Charlie told me $380. And coyotes are a couple of dollars. They don't want coyotes. Fox are a couple of dollars, and badgers. RM: So you caught all of those animals?

JB: I could catch them, but naturally they were the lowest price. I trapped off and on, and it was additional income for me. I never made much. I probably paid for the gas. I was gone a week at a time. I'd come back and go back again; I would do it when I wanted. We'd trap a fairly long trap line, maybe 50 traps or so, and didn't have enough money to buy gas to get back home so we'd stay.

RM: And then you skinned them out and stretched them?

JB: Stretched them and a lot of times we had a hide buyer come through the valley. He'd buy your hides, he'd buy your sheep pelts, he'd buy cowhides. He had an old probably two-ton truck with stake racks and it was full of hides.

RM: When was this?

JB: It'd have to be the early '60s that I started trapping up until probably '70, through there, and then I quit trapping.

RM: Why did you quit?

JB: I didn't actually like it. I don't like it today. I am all for the trappers, the guys who trap, but I hated going up there to check the traps and I'd have to shoot a poor old cat that was huddled up beneath a tree with his foot in a trap; that kind of got to me. And once in a while you caught something you weren't supposed to—porcupines, a lion now and then, people's dogs, eagles.

RM: Where did you run your lines?

JB: We trapped in Smoky going south to Lone Mountain. I trapped over as far as Fish Lake Valley, north of Cliffords'—over in there.

RM: And you are out in the valley, not up in the mountains?

JB: Well, we usually trap in the foothills because at the bottom you caught your coyotes; the cats were usually a little bit higher. I just didn't enjoy it plus I wasn't making any money. In fact, that was probably the biggest reason I quit.

RM: But you would be out on your line for several days camping out?

JB: Yes, four or five days.

RM: And it's wintertime because you want a winter pelt, so you are camping out in cold weather and in the snow.

JB: Well, I was a lot younger, too. It was snow and cold. Today, the hell with it.

RM: What kind of a camp did you pitch?

JB: We had a few canyons with an old dilapidated house or something where you could camp. In Fish Lake Valley, we had a couple of places where we camped. We stayed at a house, but it wasn't much of a house; you stayed in the barn or whatever. Most of the time we had a roof over our heads, but there might not be any doors or windows. It wasn't any warmer but it was indoors.

RM: You were out doing that in the cold weather?

JB: Yes. Of course, I still work in cold weather but the older you get the less you enjoy it. You take all the skiers—I kind of get a kick out of the skiers up there in Reno, I watched them last night. Those guys are out there—men, women, little kids—and they are happier than hell. They are all bundled up and enjoying skiing, but then you ask that same person, "Hey, I've got a job today for you out here," and there are four feet of snow and the wind's screaming, he's not going to go out there and work for you. He'll go up in the chairs and play, but not to work. "It's cold and the wind is blowing."

RM: That's right. What kind of sleeping bag did you have, or what did you use?

JB: Just a regular sleeping bag wrapped up in a big canvas.

RM: What did you use for padding?

JB: The ground. In the last 20 years, that ground got harder.

RM: Something happened in the universe, didn't it?

JB: I don't know what happened; I don't like it anymore at all.

RM: Does the cowboy put the canvas over his head?

JB: Yes, your bed tarps are built that way. You can buy them in any of your stores. It's a regular bed tarp that's waterproof and folds up on the sides. The bottom folds up and then there is a big flap on the top that folds down and they've got straps on them. I guess some of them even

have small pockets on the inside for whatever you want to store. And a lot of your older cowboys up around Elko—they don't do it here—have little tiny teepees.

RM: How wide would one be at the base?

JB: I've never been in one, but I don't imagine it would be over enough to hold your bed, really.

RM: And how tall would it be?

JB: Oh, enough to get in the flap, and that's it. We never had that here because we never went out like that because we weren't a big enough outfit. And we always liked to come home, where it was warm.

RM: So ordinarily when you were cowboying you were working out of home?

JB: Almost always. If we weren't working out of home we had a cow camp, which I had talked about previously, usually a building that you would camp at. We never ran a wagon, we weren't big enough; and we never camped in teepees or anything. The house looked too damn good.

RM: The teepee that the cowboys are using is poles and canvas?

JB: Yes. Like I said, they still sell them up there at Elko. But we never had nothing like that.

RM: Did the cowboy ever wake up wet from the rain or the snow?

JB: I don't consider myself a cowboy, but I have woken up wet, yes. [Laughter] Maybe I didn't have proper gear, but I've woken up with a foot of snow and wet.

RM: Oh my God; a foot of snow on your bed? I can hardly imagine what that would be like.

JB: That is not fun.

RM: And your head is underneath, too.

JB: Well, if you want, you can put the tarp right over your head. Of course, outside like that, you don't take your wool hat off, either. My first time out like that, I was so nervous I didn't take my damn clothes off because I knew I had to get up when it was 10 below and put them back on.

MC: And 30 feels like 10 below.

JB: Another thing I omitted last time was talking about the wild cows. Some of the cowboys suggested talking about wild cows and one of my sons said, "That stuff has got to be in there because the wild cows are part of this operation." I don't know why I didn't put it in there last

time because this is about ranching in this country and the wild cows are a part of Central Nevada. There have been a lot of wild cattle in this country for quite a few years.

RM: Define a "wild cow." What is the difference between a cow and a wild cow?

JB: They're not even the same animal. There is no deer or elk or antelope or coyote that is as wild as a wild cow. Wild cattle know you because maybe you've been after that cow for a year or two. You can jump a little bunch of deer and they'll run up the hill and stand there watching. When you get a wild cow I'll guarantee, you may not see that cow again for another year or maybe two years. They'll run five or six miles.

And the wild cow was part of our operation here. We still have open range; we don't have a lot of fences here. You won't get to see your cattle every day; they're not like pasture cattle.

We do it every day, and what I say is 100 percent the truth, but I have mixed feelings about putting it in here because I've read some books on the wild cows by, apparently, some good old cowboys. I think they're full of bull, some of the stories they told.

RM: In what way?

JB: I think they exaggerated. I've been around wild cattle all my life and I think some of those stories were exaggerated, and I didn't want to do the same thing; I wanted to tell it like it is. And I know damn well if somebody down the line reads it, they might think, "You know, that old guy, he's 70 and that story he just told there, I think he fell out of bed this morning and hit his head."

We don't deal with them every day. A lot of the wild cattle are gone; I've shipped a lot of them but we still have some.

RM: You said it was 30 percent of your business.

JB: Well, maybe 50 percent four or five years ago. I've shipped a lot of those cattle because they do cause trouble and it cost a little more to get them. But I still have a few.

RM: First of all, what makes one cow go wild and another one not?

JB: About 25 years ago, I bought a bunch of cattle from my neighbor. He hadn't done a lot with those cattle for years; he was getting up in years. They had been in this country for 70, 80 years, the same breed of cattle, and the cattle had become a little aggressive.

RM: Because they get territorial or they think they know it all?

JB: Well, they do know it all. When they see a guy on horseback, they know, "I've got troubles. Here that son-of-a-gun comes and he's either going to rope my calf and tie it down and brand it and leave or he wants me because I'm getting old so I'm getting the hell out of here." Baxter Black, the poet, has some poems on the wild cow—very interesting. And out here we work

alone; most of your northern cowboys always have a crew of two or three guys. We do a lot of it by ourselves, damned if I know why. Pride and cheap wages took a toll on small outfits and good volunteers are hard to get.

I think one of the reasons we still have the wild cattle out there is those damn gooseneck trailers. Years ago, my family used to gather cows on the desert. They made almost 100 percent sure that when they came off the desert in the spring into their deeded property, they got every cow. They got every cow because they rode horseback; they had no transportation.

Today when we go out there and we're still moving those cattle, you think, "I'm missing five head of cows. Aw hell, I'll come back next month or when I have time and I'll get those cows." You've got these gooseneck trailers so you load the horse, you go back down, you load the cows, you tie them down, you stick them in the trailer. Years ago, they didn't have that. When they came out in the desert they didn't have a truck to go back; they did 100 percent. Today if we're missing a cow, we don't worry about that cow. We'll even go back tomorrow and rope that cow and jerk it into that gooseneck trailer.

RM: Because they were on horseback and it'd be a long ways to go back?

JB: They didn't go back, they'd make one sweep through this country and it was a clean sweep. Today if you lose a cow in the mountains or something, "Aw, I'll go back tomorrow and rope that cow and lead her out and load her in the trailer." I think that had something to do with our wild cattle.

Plus myself, I worked with all young people. I have two sons and two grandsons. If you have a bunch of wild cows what's more fun—to gather up a little crew of six guys and a 12-pack of beer and go down and catch those wild cows. It's a day of sport, mobility, plus it's fun. You've got your family. . . .

RM: Because you've taken out the other cows so the only ones that are left are the wild ones. Let's say you miss one this year—the next year, is she even more wild?

JB: No, they only reach a certain point.

RM: Is any one cow predisposed to be more wild than another one? In other words, a cow passes a trait on to her calf?

JB: Oh, yes. The wildness in cattle, part of it, is inherited. Today, if they get a real aggressive cow in their herd, like she doesn't handle very good or balks going through the chute or whatever, the cow is shipped.

RM: Goes to Campbell's Soup?

JB: That's where she goes. McDonald's hamburgers.

MC: Bologna.

JB: You read quite a few articles about going through a bunch of cattle and taking out the aggressive cows and selling them.

RM: So they are continually culling out the aggression?

JB: A lot of people do. But in some of your desert country, the more aggressive cow is your better cow.

RM: Because they can survive better?

JB: Oh definitely, because they know the country, they know the waters; they survive there.

RM: But they are a little harder to handle, maybe?

JB: It depends on the cows and how wild they are. Definitely they are a lot harder to handle.

RM: I remember back in the '50s when we were over in Reveille Valley, they talked about mossbacks. Is that the same thing?

JB: Yes, that's what a lot of people call them, but I prefer "wild cow."

RM: And they would hook you or hook your horse or something.

JB: They don't come looking for you. The only time they go after you is if you've got a rope on them—they will come back up the rope.

RM: What do you do when that happens? Because they might have horns, right?

JB: All of them have got horns. And you do get stuck; and if your horses aren't used to it or if the cowboys aren't used to the cows, you do kill a horse or two. RM: Do horses get afraid of them?

JB: They're very aware of them. They are not afraid of them, but they know to watch what the hell they're doing. In all my years I've only had one stuck. He bled an awful lot, but it didn't hurt him. I know other people where a wild cow has completely ruined a horse. But our horses are used to it.

If you're running wild cows like my family does, you get such a high running wild cows, especially if you are by yourself. One of my sons said, "There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that you get higher on than running wild cows.- Ifs fun. your adrenaline runs, you're shaking so goddamned bad you can't hold your hand still.

RM: But you are liking it? You don't want to get the hell out of there?

JB: No. And what happens is your horse picks that up. He can feel you getting nervous and after you do enough of it, your horse sits high. too. They get just as excited as you do.

RM: Is part of it the danger of it, the sport?

JB: Well, yes, the run, the hard run. They know their job. "If that guy sitting on my back catches that cow . . . oh, she is a nasty-looking old son-of-a-gun. I am going to stay away from those horns." So they get a high. All I have to do with the two that I ride continuously is take my rope down. I am left-handed and my rope is on the right-hand side of my saddle so I switch it to my left hand. The minute that rope goes to my left hand. . . .

RM: Your horse knows?

JB: Oh, yes. He is ready to go because he knows when you catch that cow, he's got a job to do. When you catch that cow, he's got to bust her without getting himself hurt.

RM: What does "bust her" mean?

JB: It's kind of hard to explain. If you want that cow to ship, to move to a different area, or to remove her from where you caught her, you have to get that cow down flat on her side. Then you've got to get off and you've got to tie that cow down, and that horse knows that. The busting part of it is getting that cow down.

RM: How do you get a cow down?

JB: Everybody does it a little differently; just so they go down.

RM: In the rodeo they have two guy s and one gets their hind feet. .

JB: We do that.

RM: But when you are alone. what do you do?

JB: I've got a way of doing it for myself. I like them mad. The madder they are the better for me, especially if that cow will charge your horse—that's what I want. You set a trap with your rope and then you let that cow charge you and then your horse steps sideways. When she goes by you, you take your turns and the rope runs from her horns down under her front feet and when she hits the end of the rope. she's down_ It's a rough way to go, but I like them mad.

RM: What happens if you screw up?

JB: [Laughs] We have.

MC: It's a wreck.

JB: There have been a few guys hurt because once that cow goes down then your horse has got to work with you. He's got to keep your rope tight and you get off within five seconds and tie that cow down. If you screw up just a little bit and that cow gets up and you're off your horse, somebody's in trouble. The cow is going to stomp the hell out of you and run off

RM: You're showing me a work of art—a sculpture with a horse on its hind legs and the cow is. . . .
JB: She's mad.

RM: Yes, she's mad, she is going to gore the horse, maybe. And the cowboy has got the calf down?

JB: This guy has gone out and roped a big calf that he wanted to brand, but the cow didn't run off like she should have. she came back to the cowboy.

RM: Have you seen this happen?

JB: Oh, definitely. If that had been a real wild cow she would run off, but she is a little gentler. By the looks of her she's a little bit agitated because that's her calf and she knows that this guy is going do something. All of us have been in those positions, up to a point; maybe your horse ran off or whatever. That's why he bought me that. He said "That's you."

RM: The guy is tending the calf and the calf has been roped by the leg.

JB: He apparently caught that calf by the neck and then when he got off, he removed the rope from that calf's neck and put it on the hind legs. The horse knows it so he backed up to hold that calf while the cowboy did what he wanted to do with the calf

RM: So to repeat—you've got a wild cow, you're alone, you're on your horse, you're bound and determined to get that cow, right? You change your lasso to your left hand because you are left-handed and your horse knows, "Now we're in business." Then you rope the cow?

JB: Then you rope that cow.

RM: It sounds like you had to get a special loop on her.

JB: Well, everybody gets a cow down differently. The main thing is to get that cow down flat on her side. Like I said, I like them to come back up the rope. And then you might have the rope around that cow's horns or around her neck. If she is standing out there a little ways away, you give your rope a little flip and it comes around and lies right in front of her front feet. Okay, when she charges you, she steps over your rope. When she goes at you and charges you, your horse sidesteps a little bit and that cow blows on by. When she goes on by, that rope is around her neck and in back of her front feet.

RM: Around her neck and it comes down behind her front legs?

JB: Yes. When that cow hits into that rope it hits it hard enough, and with your horse going the other way, that there is only one place for that cow to go.

RM: The horse won't go down but the cow will?

JB: Well, there have been a few. But they know when that cow goes down. Then you turn around. If you've got a lot of guts, you go back and jump on that cow's head. We all carry piggin' strings, short little six-foot ropes; everybody carries four or five piggin' strings. You jump off, grab your piggin' string, and everybody has got a different way to tie them, and you tie them down.

RM: Do you tie her front feet or tie three feet like they do with the calves in the rodeo?

JB: I tie the two feet that are up, tie them together—some people tie both hind feet together—and the cow is yours.

RM: Then what do you do?

JB: Whatever you want to do with her.

RM: Let's say you're going to move her to another pasture by truck.

JB: You leave her there and you go back to find a gooseneck trailer, and you drive that gooseneck trailer to that cow and back right up next to her about three feet. Then you unload your horse, put the rope on her horns and open the tailgate and thread it through your trailer. Your horse is up there by your pickup and you tie a rope to the saddle horn and you go walk back around the back of your trailer and untie your cow real quietly. Untie that cow, go back and get on your horse, and then wait until that cow gets up. You put the dogs on her or whatever, and the minute that cow moves and the horse hits her, that puts her in the trailer.

RM: Is the cow pissed after that? When you unload her, will she attack you for revenge or anything?

JB: I wouldn't want to try and hold her. [Laughter]

MC: That's not a good time.

JB: This guy on the statue has got his knife out so apparently he is going to castrate that calf and let that calf go. We do exactly the same thing. If we let this cow go, she'll be gone five miles down the road.

RM: She'll abandon her calf?

JB: The wild cows will abandon a bigger calf. We tie that calf down and then we go back and get the pickup and load that calf in the trailer and he is up here in the corral or he goes to town.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RM: What would happen—you're doing your lasso, getting this wild cow and all of that. What if you fail to get your lasso around her right? Or let's say you get your lasso around her and you're getting off your horse and she gets loose—are you in trouble?

JB: Well, I've done it for 25 or 30 years and I've only been stomped on three times. Twice, it hurt me pretty bad.

RM: But it didn't make you gun-shy?

JB: For a couple of hours. [Laughter] The next time—"Is that son of a gun going to stay down or not?" I bailed off to tie that animal down; I wasn't quick enough or she was quicker and got back up. And here I was there—well, I was fair game.

RM: What did she do?

JB: Well, mauled me pretty bad. stomped all over me. I only got hurt bad once and I am not over it today.

RM: Were you out there alone at the time?

JB: Yes.

RM: So you could be injured with no help.

JB: You can. That's why m) wife said "You'd better do something with the cows. You've got to get rid of the wild cows, buy some gentle cows, because you're not a young man anymore and you are going to get hurt."

I said, "I know that.- I did buy gentle cows, but I've still got my wild cows, too.

RM: Why do you keep them? Do you enjoy the adrenaline rush?

JB: That's part of it. And if you know, you've got a pretty good little bunch of cows that you want or a bunch of calves in that little bunch of cows—maybe you've got six calves that you want—then you'll go get your relatives or a good friend and go get them. If I've got two that I've got to go get, I go by myself. I've caught as many as four by myself in one bunch. But we usually get three or four guys and go for a day of running cows. Yes, it's a rush and it's good for the kids.

RM: It's good for the kids to get that action?

JB: They're better than I am now. My wife always said, "You're going to have to get rid of those cows because you are going to get hurt."

RM: And she was right—you did get hurt.

JB: Yes, of course I was hurt when she was still here. I haven't got hurt in the last three or four years but it's coming and I know that.

RM: And you're not trying to cheat your fate?

JB: I am a little more cautious, I think, today; I might bust them harder.

RM: So they don't get up?

JB: Kind of. "I wonder if I should get off'—and that's a mistake. When you bust them, don't hesitate because that gives that cow an inch. If that cow is down . . . now, I have hesitated a little bit and that's when you are in trouble because she's back up. Once a cow is flat out it doesn't take a whole lot to hold her down.

Or a bull—we've loaded lots of bulls that way. Never by yourself because the bulls are too heavy to pull in. Somebody might have tied that bull down, but as far as loading him in a trailer, they are too heavy for one horse to pull in. We've had as many as three horses pull a bull in.

If I'm by myself and I've got something that I think is a little bit heavy for one horse, I tie a safety rope on it. It's just an extra rope—I put it on the horns, go to the front of my trailer, and then if my horse can't pull that animal in. the animal is not going to go anyplace because it's still tied to the back of the trailer. And a lot of times with stuff that's real heavy, they'll just sit back on the rope and pull and it's almost impossible to move them because their front feet are out. So you just get ready and you might to have to stand there for four or five minutes. You watch that cow and pretty soon she'll start relaxing just a little bit, just kind of splay out her legs; and the minute she relaxes, then you get her.

RM: What would be the weight of a cow?

JB: About 900 pounds.

RM: And what would a bull weigh?

JB: My bulls are a little smaller than mustang bulls; a big bull is 1100, probably.

RM: What is a mustang bull? Is that a wild bull?

JB: It's just a calf that might have been born out there and you left him for a bull because he knew the country.

RM: And he's never been handled or anything, basically?

JB: Right. I've brought most of my mustang bulls out.

RM: Did you get rid of them, you mean?

JB: They were old and I've got to improve some of my cows; better bulls or whatever.

RM: How long do you leave a wild cow on the range? I mean, how long is she good for?

JB: Until she dies. Outside cows live a lot longer than inside cows, about 18 years.

RM: A cow can be 18 years old out there and still be useful? Why does an outside cow live longer than an inside cow?

JB: Inside cows, cows on pasture. eat grass, like your meadows. The grass is very abrasive to their teeth. Outside cows eat lots of brush and stuff like that; their teeth last another three or four years.

RM: Why is the grass more abrasive?

JB: That I can't answer you. That was told to me by a vet. I asked him the same question. I said, "How come my old cows outside, they've still got good teeth but they're 12, 15 years?" He said, "Your meadows will wear their teeth right out."

RM: At what age do you get your first calf out of a cow?

JB: I like mine to be three, but a lot of people want two-year-olds.

RM: And then you can go up to 15, 18 years old?

JB: I have cows that are 15, definitely. I've had one or two a little bit older; their calves weren't good.

RM: Were they kind of scrawny?

JB: Yes. But I kept the old cows.

RM: You kind of get fond of them?

JB: Yes, certainly you do. I am not going to ship that old cow.

MC: Besides which, he's is a softy. In my next life I am going to come back as a dog because I know where the best soft touch in the neighborhood is. [Laughter]

JB: I don't like to ship the old cows.

RM: But you do eventually?

JB: I ship some, yes.

RM: And some of them you just leave out there to let nature take its course?

JB: Well, the older cows know where to go. They know where to go in the winter, they know where to go in the summer. You know where to find them any time of the year if you know the cow. Like this old cow comes out of Moore's Creek and she goes down around . . . she'll be around Barker Creek so you go to Barker Creek and you'll find that old cow within four or five miles.

RM: So you've got them down to individual personalities?

JB: Well, up to a point. So if you want her calf, say in the fall when they come out of the mountains, then you know where to find her. "I'd better go wean that cow's calf. She is getting a little poor and I need some money," so you jump in your pickup and trailer and go over there and you catch the calf.

RM: Does it give you a little bit of problem to have to part with the cows?

JB: I usually don't sell those old cows much. Maybe I know the general area where she died, so I go get her horns and put them on the wall. My son has a room about half this big and it's from the floor to the ceiling with nothing but horns.

RM: Of favorite cows?

JB: Or maybe it was the neighbor's cow and he found the horns, or whatever.

RM: Which heifer calf gets to stay on the range and become an old cow versus which one gets shipped, or do you ever ship heifer calves?

JB: Oh, you have to. If you have a good calf crop, you've got to ship some of them.

RM: How do you decide who gets to stay?

JB: I do it a little differently, I guess, than most people. Most people look at the cow and take her heifer calf by her breed and ability over the last ten years, how good she did in the winter, because that's inherited. My son does that all the time—"If I've got a cow out here that doesn't have a calf but every two years. I don't want her heifer calf because there is a chance that she will carry on the same thing.- My son knows every cow; in his mind he knows her history going back. So he picks that cow to keep his heifers off of. If he's got a cow that gets real poor in the winter, maybe doesn't do good. he won't keep that heifer calf; she goes to town.

RM: Do you kind of know the history of each cow?

JB: Danny knows his; I don't. I keep any heifer calf that I just happen to like.

RM: And why would you like one versus one you didn't like? So they're habitual? They develop a lifestyle, so to speak.

JB: Oh, 100 percent. They're here in the summer in this little area, and then in the fall you'll see them in a different area but it is almost the same every year. RM: Really? And you as a rancher get to know that?

JB: Oh, yes. Mine have their areas that they want to stay in summer and winter.

RM: Are they individualized areas or do kind of a little bunch follow it?

JB: Usually there is a small bunch—maybe only four or five head.

RM: And then maybe four or five head have got a different plan?

JB: Yes. That's how they use the range so efficiently. There are never 100 head right there, there are maybe ten or four or five. I have two or three different bunches that go to the mountains, come out, and I can always find them.

RM: So you know right where to look based on the bunch and the season, or pretty much?

JB: Within an area. I've got one bunch that go to Moore's Creek; I know how they go, I know where I can find them, and in the fall or in the winter I know exactly where those cows are.

RM: If I was younger and I said, "I am going to be a cowboy up there on Jim's property"—let's say I bought the ranch—I would have hell, wouldn't I? Because it would take me years to learn all of this.

JB: And if you don't have it. you never will. I've ridden with guys that have been trying to be a cowboy for 20 years.

RM: And they don't understand the cows?

JB: Well, they just won't see: they just won't make it. They don't have it here.

RM: In their heart?

JB: Yes. They just don't have it.

RM: Are they dumb or they can't figure the cow out or what?

JB: Well, that's part of it; they don't have something. Like very few people can play professional football, basketball; not many people are an excellent mechanic. And the cowboy takes years to learn. We do it a little differently here. We work alone and if you're scared or don't know how, you're not going to get the job done. Both of my sons work alone or can work alone.

RM: What is the difference between somebody who works alone and somebody who doesn't? Is it a personality thing?

JB: I don't know. For one thing, you enjoy it. You've got to do things a little differently than with a crew. You get maybe a bigger high out of working alone. We don't work alone all the time. Hell, I get help quite a bit, but I get the high by myself.

RM: So you're out there and you've got an aggressive cow on your hands and you are getting high?

JB: Yes, you do; you have to do something with that cow.

RM: And it's not, "Oh God, now I've got to deal with this beast." It's like, "Boy, this is going to be neat."

JB: In the last two or three years, I don't get the high that I used to when I was 50. I think my high kind of slipped a little.

RM: Why do you think that is? Are you less confident of your ability, a little more conservative?

JB: Age. I still have the ability. Some of it is, when you are 70 you don't get as high on anything as you did when you were 40. do you? You just don't. Plus, I'm just a little bit more scared.

Todd Chambers and I worked together—my two sons and he and I have worked together for 15 to 20 years so we don't have to communicate much if we all four ride together. If the four of us are riding together and we are going to do something and we've got one guy that hasn't spent that time with us, it irritates him to beat hell. He'll say, "You guys never talk. You each know what you're going to do and where you're going to be." And we don't talk when we work.

MC: Not unless you're in close proximity and then it's like listening to a comedy show. [Laughter]

JB: I'm damn near 70 and I still have the ability. I can do what I want to do, but you're much more cautious. You're aware of what you're doing and don't take as many chances as when you were younger. For one thing, I would rather tie something down than untie it and let it go. Say you found a two-year-old heifer with big horns that you had to brand. I don't mind tying them down, it's letting them go that worries the hell out of me. Like I told Blaise, my grandson, "You

untie that cow, I'll head back to my horse, sometimes I make about three stabs with my foot to get it in the stirrup and then when my leg comes over, I kick my horse in the butt. By that time the cow is up and you're in trouble."

RM: You mean, the cow might take you?

JB: Once in a while. I've only been hurt a couple of times, but it's coming.

RM: You see your fate waiting for you out there and it doesn't bother you?

JB: Well up to a point, yes. You're just a little more cautious.

RM: Have you thought about not doing that?

JB: No. I'm going to work right up until I can't. As far as retiring, there's no way in hell.

RM: To me, what you're saying is real history—this is life. Are you kind of the last of a breed or near the last of it? Will there be other generations coming along that know what you know?

JB: In the last 60 years of my cowboyine. I've ridden with some of the best cowboys, the old time cowboys—my dad, Dan Berg; Uncle Pete Rogers, Roscoe Latham, Bertolino, Max Alred, Ed Fisher, Luther Darrough. I've ridden with some good ones in my lifetime. In later years, I've ridden with some of what I consider top cowboys that are even younger—Todd Chambers, Danny Berg, Russell Berg, Tom Shaffer, Tony Latham, and my two grandsons—that are coming up, but there are not many of us left. Almost every old cowboy that I used to ride with is no longer here; they've all died. I can sit here and name 20 of them. Another one just died here a couple of months ago, a good friend of mine and an excellent cowboy—Tom Fogerty. They're all gone.

RM: Do they have their own ranches?

JB: Some of them owned their own place; a couple of them were tramp cowboys, just going through. The cow business is changing. Like the four of us here, I consider—I'll include myself—I consider myself still capable of running cows like they did a hundred years ago, but there are not many. Because people are moving into their pastures; the BLM has cut the permits; the Forest Service has cut the permits because of environmental reasons, the Endangered Species Act. So there isn't the opportunity for the young people to come up.

We don't have any tramp cowboys come through here anymore. Every year, in the spring, you would have two or three tramp cowboys come through. They'd hit each ranch, go to work for two weeks or a month. And in the fall they might come back again. They'd start kind of in southern Nevada and work in the spring and they would gradually go north. In the wintertime they'd go back south and it'd be a cycle. Our way of running cows is dying, definitely. There are very few year-round outfits now.

RM: What is your way of running cows?

JB: The way I was just talking about. More relying on BLM land and Forest Service land. A lot of the big outfits, even up north. go outside for six months of the year, then they've got to come in because of the deep snow.

In southern Nevada and Arizona and I guess a lot of Texas, they don't because we don't have that much snow so you can stay year round if you have federal lands to go onto. When you get into Arizona and California, they've got lots of brush. Here we use a 55- to 60-foot rope and we take what we call the dallies on the horn to hold the cow; these guys don't. They use a 32-foot rope just tied to that saddle horn permanently. And they've got brush unbelievably thick—how they get the wild cows out of there, I have no idea. If I have a tree, maybe ten in an acre. I've roped more trees than I have cows, trying to get them out of the damn trees. Down there, it's unbelievable brush. And how the hell they do it, I don't know. They're excellent cowboys. I guess they wear longer chaps to protect them from . . . one guy called it "cat claw," a brush. Todd, what kind of brush you have down in your country?

Todd: Manzanita and chamisa.

JB: And it's bad.

RM: Where is that? Todd: Central California.

JB: How do you get the cows out of it?

Todd: Same way as in the mountains up here.

JB: If I get in a thick forest with ten trees per acre, I catch more trees than my cows and I'd probably say, "That cow will come out by itself; I don't have to get her." I mean, how do you?

Todd: It's just like yours; you just tuck your rope under your arm.

JB: I don't like it.

Todd: I don't either; I hate the trees.

JB: Some cowboys tie off solid.

RM: Why do they tie off solid? So the cow can't get away?

JB: They are just hard and fast cowboys. Sometimes I tie, too. It scares you; it scares them. I rode with an old cowboy—Ed Fisher was out of Arizona. He tied hard and fast and he got me to tie hard and fast. I do it quite a bit. You're tied to that cow; you don't get away. If you take your dallies, just like I was just saying, you could drop that rope if you get in trouble and that cow will run off. You just try to get out of trouble.

RM: You've given some great discussion on how you do your ranching. How has it changed since the '50s?

JB: Mine hasn't changed much.

RM: So you're doing it basically like they did 50 years ago?

JB: Yes, roughly the same. Well, the haying that I do years ago took seven men; today I do it by myself because of the equipment. We're a lot more mobile today with the pickups and such. But actually, not a whole hell of a lot changed for me. I think one of the things that's changed, and I don't know why, is when I first started in the cows there were quite a few more ranchers and we seemed to work together a lot more. We always had two or three guys, neighbors or somebody who worked for you. Today, that's changed to a lot more work by yourself. Why, I don't really know.

RM: Well, like you said, there are fewer ranchers.

JB: And there are not the tramp cowboys that come through that you can hire. My dad never worked by himself. There was always a tramp cowboy or a relative or something. That's changed, but the way we run cattle hasn't changed much in the last 50 years. RM: Is it because you can't afford it or is it because there are no tramps?

JB: I can't afford it and there is nobody available; they're not coming through like they used to.

RM: Would it also be true up north. say around Elko, that they run the cattle basically the same way they did?

JB: I think Elko is probably the same. but it's different than it is here. They probably do things up there like they did 50, 60 years ago.

RM: Where do you see it going in the next 20, 30 years?

JB: Well, my way is going out, there is no doubt. I think anybody that relies on your federal lands has got a very limited time. Not just because of the Forest Service and the BLM themselves, it's your environmental groups, your endangered species, your wild horse people. fish and game—none of them like to see cattle out there. Fish and game is bad on account of they want elk and they want the mountain sheep. The wild horse people want the whole West covered in these wild horses. So definitely, we're not going to be out here much longer. It belongs to all of us, but there is also a place out there for all of us. We can have the horses and the elk and the antelope in the Endangered Species Act, but it seems like each individual wants all of it.

Right now, the wild horse people are probably our biggest problem. They want the whole thing; they want to take all the mustangs they have trapped over the years and are

feeding and they want to turn them back out. They're fighting like hell for that. It wouldn't surprise me in five years if they don't start doing that.

RM: Taking all of those horses that they've got corralled and putting them back out?

JB: I don't quite know their number; there's something like 15,000 that are being fed, some of them back in the Midwest in big pastures. They want to turn every one of them back outside. Which doesn't make sense, but that's what they want.

We don't slaughter horses anymore because of the environmentalists and the Wild Horse Association. If you've got an old dying horse on the ranch, you don't slaughter it. The people in the city are up against this law; what are they going to do with that horse? You wait until it dies or have it put down and then you pay $100 dollars or whatever it is to dispose of it to a rendering plant. They cannot be used for human consumption. There were only two slaughterhouses in the United States, I believe. They closed both of them.

RM: Could you butcher one of your horses and eat it legally?

JB: Well, we could but we can't even butcher them and ship them overseas.

RM: Is ranching undergoing the same kind of changes in Pine Valley and north of there?

JB: I am sure it is.

RM: They depend a lot on federal land up in Elko and that area.

JB: During the summertime. In the wintertime, 90 percent of them go into feed properties. But I think we're all being affected the same way if we rely on federal lands. If they pass some of these bills they have going today, we're going to even be affected on our deeded properties. Like what you call "navigable waters"—if that goes into effect that is going to affect a lot of ranchers around with deeded property that have a river going through their land. They'll shut her down.

RM: Why?

JB: Because they've got to protect their waterways that go through your deeded property; they're not going to use it. We have too much federal control.

RM: What kinds of changes in the climate have you seen in your ranching career over the last 50 years or 60 years?

JB: Well, it's totally different; we don't have winters anymore. It's dry. It's kind of coming at different times of the year, too. It used to snow in October; you'd get a big snow in October and now we don't get any snow until December. It's definitely warmer, by far. It's a lot warmer and a lot drier than it was years ago.

RM: And how has this affected your ranching?

JB: Well, if it keeps getting warmer and drier, it will chop you off completely. You won't be in the cow business. You won't be putting up any hay, you won't have mountain water. A lot of the wells have dropped in depth. If there is nothing outside to eat, definitely it has a big impact on your operation.

RM: So your wells are dropping?

JB: Mine aren't but some are.

RM: What about the springs that the cattle are using in the mountains?

JB: Some of them are dry.

RM: In your lifetime?

JB: Oh, not in my lifetime—in the last five years. A lot of the springs are fed by your snowmelt and they never get any; a lot of the springs are dry.

RM: In your opinion, is this just a temporary change or is it pretty long term?

JB: I have no idea whether it is permanent, whether it's man-caused or temporary.

RM: But if it keeps up it's bad for ranching.

JB: Yes. They said right now that the Colorado River is at the lowest level it's ever been. They said within the next five years there will be more court cases over the water rights of the Colorado River than there have ever been. Right now, even with what they said three dry years, there is not enough water in the Colorado to supply all of the users and this year is going to be worse than last year. That's not only going to have a big effect on the agriculture, that's going to have a big effect on everybody.

RM: Is there a lot of groundwater in Smoky Valley?

JB: A tremendous amount.

RM: I wonder if places like Vegas will be wanting it.

JB: They will; they are already moving for it. Vegas is moving as far as Elko, eastern Nevada. In fact, they might be looking right now; we have a tremendous amount of underground water. And once they start pumping that. then we're in trouble. And they will get it if they want. Midge says, "Oh, no, they won't get it all.- The hell they won't.

RM: They have the power.

JB: They have the power; they have the people. They're not going to worry about somebody who puts up a thousand ton of alfalfa when they've got 50,000 people down there getting thirsty. That's where it is going, no doubt.

RM: So that is another thing that is not a positive in terms of the future of ranching.

JB: And the young people don't want to stay with us. They want to go make big money someplace.

RM: In your 50-odd years of ranching here as an adult, are there springs that you used to water at reliably that you can no longer use where you run your cows?

JB: Some of the springs that I use now, where a small amount of water flowed year-round, are drying up periodically. Throughout the year they dry up for two or three months and then if you can get a little moisture and it cools off, that spring will come back up and run maybe another month or two months and then dry back up. Years ago they would run year round, continuously.

RM: Are you seeing quite a few springs in the territory you cover that are like that?

JB: I don't know what the percentage is, but yes, there are numerous springs like that.

RM: So cows can't stay there if the spring is dried up and that reduces their feeding options, doesn't it?

JB: Yes, so you've got to remove the cows; you only have one way to go.

RM: This material you're talking about is so fascinating.

JB: I think the only people that really will be interested in it are people that are tied up with the cattle. I don't think any of your city people will be.

RM: I think there'll be city people who are very interested. I can just see the kids at UNLV poring over this. They'll be writing term papers and talking about it in class and everything.

JB: I hope so.

RM: I've seen it over there. I've even been to the library there and they've got a special area where they put these oral histories. I hadn't been there in two or three years but recently I saw a girl sitting at a desk with a stack of these histories in front of her. It's cool. It tells them who

they are. This is Nevada. This is the real Nevada. Can you think of any good stories? I love stories.

JB: Someday I'll get a tape recorder and sit there by myself. I have a lot of stories. People wouldn't believe some of them; some of them are humorous, some of them are spooky.

RM: Tell me a spooky story. I like spooky stories.

JB: I'll make a tape someday just on wild cow tales. But I won't get into them now because you sound like you're exaggerating. We'll make a special tape. RM: I'd like that. And do you have one you can tell now?

JB: I was riding for the RO, probably 21, 22 years old, with an old cowboy named Max Aired. At that time the RO ran a lot of cattle in Indian Valley up here on this mountain, way on the other side. The cow boss came along and said, "I want you guys to go to the head of Reese River; we've got a bunch of cows up there." It was along in the middle of winter, probably December or January.

Goddamn there was a lot of snow, and it was cold. I didn't want to go. Max said, "Well, we've got to go." At that time we had a truck so we went around by Austin, headed up Reese River, and got up above the narrows where that measuring tank is that used to be in the river. And there was about two or three feet of snow. We were plowing through that snow and there were no cow tracks at all.

The snow was blowing across this goddamned ridge and we looked up on the hill and Max said there was a cow standing up on that hill. "Damn it, it has to be one of them HIP-0 cows." He said, "I'll stay here at the bottom of the river and you go around that cow." It wasn't very far but it was blowing like a son-of-a-gun.

So I went up around that ridge and came over and I could look right down where that cow had been and I could see Max from the bottom periodically. There was not one cow track, so I went back and forth and back and forth—not one goddamned cow track. I came back down to Max and I said, "Where did that cow go? I can't even find a track, Max. there hasn't been a cow up there." And it was a Hereford cow and we were close enough, she had pretty little tiny tipped-down horns, just an ugly little cow.

Max said, "Well, one of them little wind storms came though blowing snow, and when it left that cow was gone."

I said, "There is no cow up there." So I came back down, we discussed it, and went on. I know I saw a cow on that ridge, yet she never left a track. It was an old HIP-0 cow—there hadn't been a cow but she was standing up there. It made my hair stand up on my goddamned neck. It's not a spooky story but there was something funny.

RM What was a HIP-0 cow doing up there?

JB: Well, the RO bought what they called HIP-0 cattle; they had a big "0".

RM: Yes, right on the hipbone.

JB: From John Casey.

RM: Casey? He had HIP-0 cows? That was O.K. Reed, wasn't it?

JB: You're going back too far. It might have been; that was during the early '60s when I buckarooed for the RO, I was 23; the RO bought all of the HIP-0 cattle that were in this country.

RM: That Casey owned?

JB: They bought them from John Casey. And I was in on the gathering of those cows.

RM: How far south did you go in the gathering?

JB: I went in this country all through here and to what they called Silver Bow and Golden Arrow. I rode with Joe and Roy Clifford and a guy by the name of Wes Witley that was at Five-Mile; he owned the PTP. I rode with them for a week and gathered what we could find of the HIP-Os.

RM: And that would have been in the '50s?

JB: It'd have been probably in the early '60s. I was married. At that time it was on the bombing range and we'd go through the gate. They called it Silver Bow.

RM: Yes, we used to live at Silver Bow.

JB: Nixon Lake was the farthest south. I didn't know quite where I was, but I rode with them.

RM: That was the brand of O.K. Reed's United Cattle and Packing and they were bust by probably 1940.

JB: Yes. Midge's great-uncle was the secretary or some goddamned thing for O.K. Reed. RM: I've got to talk to Midge about that.

JB: Don't quote me, but somehow he was tied in with O.K. Reed.

RM: O.K. Reed's headquarters were on the west side of the Kawich Range up in what they call Hawes Canyon. Did you know Ed Slavin in Tonopah? He was married to O.K. Reed's daughter and that's where I got a lot of information about Reed. I have a whole album of pictures that they took of their ranching operation in the '20s.

JB: That was a big outfit.

RM: They went clear over into Lincoln County and down the bombing range and they went north, too. I did not know that brand was still going by the '60s.

JB: Just ask Midge; I can't remember what she told me.

RM: I'd love to hear some more of your stories. It's good to collect them because they are part of our heritage. We used to live at the south of Warm Springs in the Reveille Valley; my dad was a miner and we were mining out there. And these old miners would come through in the early '50s and they'd all sit around the table bullshitting, telling mining stories, Christ if a guy would have just had a tape recorder on to get all of those tales!

JB: They'd make a social event out of it. We do it all the time.

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