An Interview with
BETTY-JO SMITHS BOYD

An Oral History conducted and edited by
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Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
1987

Betty-Jo Smith Boyd
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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 incoherency. 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 known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and southern 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. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have became a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

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--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
June 1990

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end 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 much 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 for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) 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, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

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. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored 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). 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 James R. Dickinson Library at the University of Nevada, 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 flaw of life and events for a part of Nevada that- as 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 interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts 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 a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. 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.

Robert McCracken interviewing Betty-Jo Boyd at her home on the T&T Ranch in Amargosa Valley, Nevada - March 27 and 30, 1987

CHAPTER ONE

RM: OK Betty, just start by saying where you were born and who are your parents and a little bit About them.

BB: I was born in Wood County, Ohio, the town of Bradner, a small town of probably 800-900 then. Now it's about 1200. My parents were both of that town for the second generation. They were Hisers.

RM: Do you want to say when you were born?

BB: No, it doesn't make a bit of difference. At my age I can say that. March 17, 1921. I lived in Bradner until I was 18 years old, went through school, had my first job there. Then I left, going to Toledo to work after high school. From there, I married at the age of 20.

RM: What was your father's occupation?

BB: My father was a farmer, a horticulturist, and he worked in the greenhouse and in farming.

RM: Did he have his own farm?

BB: Yes. We had our own farm, and he and his father and brother had the greenhouse, and they operated a vegetable and fruit business during the oil boom period in that area. Bradner is an oil-boom town.

RM: And when was the oil boom?

BB: Well, I've seen pictures that had 1908 on then and others to the 1920s. There's still some wells or pumps there now, but not as many as then, of course. My mother's family was from the neighboring town of Wayne, a generation before, and they were farmers and horse raisers. I came from one of those families that is an all-around family, one side very religious and the other real....

RM: Which side is religious?

BB: My father's side. My mother's was the horse-racing group, with all the fun to fight and everything else. When I was 18 I went into Toledo to live, and I went down to the corner to catch a bus one morning, and a fellow there who had the drugstore on the corner asked who I was and who I lived with. I was living with my uncle at the time, and he said, "Oh, Ostrander, I've been wanting to ask you if they're part of those Ostranders from that horse-racing group."

Ostrander was my mother's maiden name. He told me a story about the five brothers. Their dad raced the sulkies with a winning attitude on the track and the boys took care of adverse opinions on the outside of the tracks with their fists. A group that was hard to beat. They were a fun-loving group. So I have a good background on either side of it.

RM: What did you do in Toledo?

BB: In Toledo I first was a waitress and then I went into a candy store. Quit the candy store and was an assistant manager for Mary Lee candies.

RM: How far away was Toledo?

BB: Oh, 30 or so miles. Well, it was a long way. In that day and age and for girls to go and work, it was a little unheard of, but my uncle already lived there so it wasn't that bad, but it was an experience. You come from a small town, walk into a restaurant in the city and start working, and you learn a lot and you learn fast. So I worked there until I was 20. At 20 years of age I was married to Tracy Smith, who was a second lieutenant in the Air Force--it was the Air Corps then. That was in 1941, prior to World War II.

When we were married we went to Charlotte, North Carolina, to live. And, although I'd been across the borders from north to the south, I had never lived away from there, or known people away from there. So living in Charlotte, North Carolina, proved to be quite an experience for a 20-year- old.

And, from there on, when war was declared it became--well, you learn your United States one way or another. When World War II was declared, we were home on leave and were sent from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Buffalo, New York, in December.

RM: Where was your husband from?

BB: He was from the neighboring town, 5 miles away. Very typical of growing up and marriages in that area. Yes, you married someone from home. You may leave, but you always seem to care back and marry someone from there. It was very typical for the day.

RM: And he was in the Army Air Corps? Then, you went from one base to another.

BB: Well, yes. Of course he was shipped overseas pretty quick. We went to Buffalo and from Buffalo I went hare, and then he went overseas.

RM: And then you stayed at home all through the war?

BB: Yes, I stayed in Wood County. We had a little boy. Kept him right there.

RM: What was his name?

BB: Tracy, Jr., born May 24, 1942.

RM: And then did you work during the war?

BB: No, I stayed at home and took care of the little boy. I missed the war years as a working woman. Then my husband came home in a full body cast.

RM: Did he get shot down?

BB: No, he was in a jeep accident. When they went into Italy, he and his colonel were surveying for an air field and the jeep lost its steering and went into a stone wall. Then it was called "recuperation time." He did very well; he came back, went back to school, took his physics and engineering and went to work in the business of that day and age, I guess you'd call it. He was test engineer on gas turbines for rockets at Packard.

RM: In Ohio?

BB: Well, Packard is in Michigan. So anyway, from Michigan we went to northern California; from northern California we came here. He worked on the Minuteman and Aerojet and came over here for Westinghouse.

RM: He was working on the solid rockets, development of the Minuteman, and meanwhile you were still a housewife and taking care of your son.

BB: Two sons and one daughter.

RM: When were the other children born and what were their names?

BB: Beverly Jo and Thomas, and they were born after he came back from overseas, and don't ask dates. This is something a mother isn't supposed to forget. My daughter is exactly 25 years younger than I am, and I am 66.

RM: My parents can't remember how old I am, either.

BB: Anyway, they were born, one of them in Ohio and one in southern California because that is one of the places Tracy went to school after the war. And we came here with Westinghouse after he had been with the Minuteman at Aerojet.

RM: OK, then, your husband, in the course of his work was transferred into the area. When did you first come into the valley?

BB:. Probably it would have been Easter. The first time that we came into the valley was during the winter of '62. We came to look at the valley as a place to live.

RM: What did you think when you first saw the valley?

BB: Well, I'd driven through it once. During World War II we had driven through the valley going on our way to California. I had seen it, but I didn't recall the size of it. I think the size was one thing that really boggled my mind. Caning into this valley and you could see desert for so far. I think that was my first impression. How could there be so much arid land in one spot in this country. So that in itself I think was scary. That you would go out and you would live in the middle of this and you would be so far from anything that wasn't just plain desert. So that was why my request was that I could not live without trees.

RM: OK, so you came through in the winter of '62 and where did you go? Southern California?

BB: No, Sacramento.

RM: But you knew you were going to be transferred in here. You were just kind of checking it out.

BB: Yes, and then my husband started looking for a place where he thought I could possibly live because of my great need for greenery. And this place was then the only one really established in the valley.

RM: By "this place" you mean what exactly?

BB: This T&T spot. This is a 40-acre section of the T&T ranch that was owned by Gordon and Billie Bettles at that time. One thing that people ask is, "How did you split out 40 acres from the T&T at that time?" When we were negotiating to buy the place Billie Bettles told me it had been split out from the T&T when they had come in here as developers in the '50s. They were given their choice of a 40-acre plot in return for their services, and this is the 40 acres they chose after deliberation and living on 2 or 3 of the others. They chose this one and set up their headquarters, their home.

RM: The reason you moved into the valley was because of your husband's war injury?

BB: Yes, his disability. He couldn't ride a bus every day from Las Vegas where everybody else that we knew was. He had to be close enough so that he could drive to and from.

RM: What was he doing on the Test Site?

BB: He was a physicist-engineer in charge of tests on nuclear reactors at Jackass for Westinghouse.

RM: Oh, was that the nuclear engine?

BB: Yes, that was the Jackass project.

RM: OK, what did you think about the prospects of living here then when it finally came down to a reality that you were going to be living in this vast valley?

BB: Well, I have lived all over this country, in many different places and at many different levels, because I have lived in all sizes of houses and had a few war experiences that I'd rather forget. Actually, with the children away to school and the prospect of them leaving home, it was going to be a big change. Coming into a little tiny house from a nicely spread-out ranch-type home in California into this it was.... We brought our furniture in and it filled this roan as tight as you could stack it, and this room was all this house consisted of when we moved in.

RM: Just this one room?

BB: Well, this side over here, and the little tiny kitchen which we built on to. So it was just a room and an alcove big enough to put the bed in. And it wouldn't have taken one of those kingsize either. So it was a challenge. I think mostly I looked at it as a challenge. Of course that's the way I look at life. In my philosophy you are supposed to have a challenge or it isn't worth living.

So, all I could do was say, "Well, this is what has to be," but one thing that I had learned was that whatever was necessary you did, and you didn't think about why am I doing it or why should I be asked to do this. I don't believe in that in the first place. You just do what's necessary, but you make the most of it. Use your ability to make it the best situation possible. So, that way you can look at it, you can do it, and that's the only way I could have done it. When you have your books on the floor for 4 or 5 years, and you have, you know, your china packed and....

RM: Yes, I've had my books in storage for ten years.

BB: That's a way of life anymore, isn't it. Well, they were just stacked on the floor against the wall because there wasn't room for the boxes, and a good jet would knock them over. The first time they had an atomic test after we came in, we took all the dishes out and laid them on the beds, because you didn't know how much it was going to jar things. They were doing their tests over there.

RM: Yes. By then it was underground, wasn't it?

BB: It was underground. We didn't know how much it would shake.

RM: Some of them really shake?

BB: Yes, yes. The lights go round and you hear the pans clatter. Never had any breakage from it. Just had one the other day, though, knocked a clock off the wall. But there's places in the valley where it has knocked the plaster off the ceiling.

RM: OK. So you came here in 1963 and the house was much smaller than it is today. And you established a home here in the middle of the valley. BB: In the middle of the valley, referred to as the valley, and I think it probably always will be that.

RM: That's what it's called, huh, the valley.

BB: Yes. That's how we refer to it. You go to town, and you'll say, 'Well, where are you from?" And you'll say, "Well, from the valley." "Oh." That can mean anything away from here, you know.

RM: And the town is Vegas, isn't it?

BB: Yes, the town is Vegas. Now we still buy everything there. We used to buy more in Beatty than we do now. They had a grocery store there and a good hardware. Any repairs that you wanted, that was the closest you could get. But the supply was not as good as Las Vegas, so the truck trip to town was a necessity.

RM: How often did you go to town in those early years?

BB: Probably twice a month. When you're working a full schedule you didn't take off and go as lightly as you do today. I don't think we were used to the traveling. A lot of people, I think, went more often. Now I can cut it down to once a month. It doesn't bother me at all. You learn to cook what you have and you learn to buy what you need, and you know how to do it, and after that many years of practice you can live pretty well. RM: There was power in the valley by then?

BB: There was power in the valley, but we didn't have power.

RM: Then you moved into the house with no power?

BB: With no power. A little generator; and, what I recall, we'd come [from California] by night because I'd pick up the kids from school or after their activities, and I would drive. I would usually hit the valley at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. Now you see the valley alight. In those days you didn't see the valley alight. There's a pole out here, and my husband used to take a 60-watt bulb and screw the light in there. And, interestingly enough, from Lathrop Wells you could see that light. When the Bettles came in, they put roads into this valley. From the air you can still see it. Coming right from Lathrop Wells Corner, the road comes right straight over to here.

RM: So this was like the hub?

BB: Yes. It was their hub, and that's what they designed it to be, the hub of the valley. And they put these roads in every direction, and you angled out. I don't know whether you've ever been in the valley at night, but there's a lot of low spots. There's one that was particularly bad and particularly large that you'd go down into and you couldn't see any lights. It gave you the same

feeling as being on the water at night and not being able to see a light in any direction. I can remember going through that.

RM: You said that you picked up the kids. So your children were still going to school in Sacramento?

BB: Oh, yes. That's why we kept both places going for 2 years.

RM: I see. And you stayed part time in Sacramento?

BB: I just spent my time on the road, I think. But, no, I'd just bring them down for the weekend whenever I could get away.

RM: So you'd bring them down on the weekend and take them back? That was a long drive, wasn't it.

BB: Yes, it was a long drive. You know, in those days we didn't have that 55-mile-an-hour speed limit. You got out there and you rolled. I used a big car and I used to roll out of here and roll into Sacramento in 8-1/2 hours. I never made it in less than 8, but I could do it in 8-1/2 in my car.

RM: What road did you take?

BB: Well then you just took 95 up and cut across by Gardnerville to Luther Pass and dropped down into Sacramento. You could find a pretty direct route. You could do it in a half-hour.

RM: What do you think of the speed limit now?

BB: It's a killer, frankly, as far as we're concerned. Fifty-five is too slow to drive these roads. First time I drove back from Sacramento with that speed limit on, I almost went to sleep three times, and almost cracked the car up because you're not used to driving that slow and you can't concentrate. Anymore you get a little used to it, but still it's a little slow to concentrate.

RM: How did you look at living in a place without even any power after being used to the modern life?

BB: Well, you learned not to turn on anything but the iron. With a little generator it would take the iron, but it wouldn't heat it up. You managed to do things very simply.

RM: Did you have a gas refrigerator?

BB: Yes, a gas refrigerator and a gas stove. And a gas hot water heater, which is still there, the same one.

RM: So who was living in the valley at that time this side of Ash Meadows? BB: Down on the next farm, I can't think of their name. They'd come in there, somebody had turned over, it was a Helen Orr Watson ranch at that time. They had a man there with a family. Only his family was in California too.

RM: There were a lot of womenless men living here. The wives lived someWhere else. Is that true?

BB: Yes, there were quite a few men who didn't have women around.

RM: Either they weren't married or their wives lived elsewhere?

BB: Yes, their wives lived elsewhere, with kids in school like the people next door. But there were families here. There had been five families: the Selbachs, Danbys, Mankinens, and Cooks. I can't tell you what the other one was right now. Hank Records was here, then. Hank was working the T&T then.

RM: Were the Bettles still here?

BB: She was still here. He had died.

RM: When did he die, do you know?

BB: He died about two years before we came, about 1960 or '61.

RM: Was he an old man when he died?

BB: Well, not terribly old. He had some kind of an attack. He was driving somewhere, and I don't know whether he had a stroke or something of that type. She remained in the valley to some extent. She went and lived with her daughter in town for a while. In fact, when we took over the place and all, she was living in town with her daughter, but later she came back and lived down there at the house behind the Mecca.

RM: OK. That house is still there. How long did she remain in the valley? BB: Oh, she remained in the valley until about maybe 5, 6 years ago. She stayed around. First one of her properties, then the other. Maybe it was less than that, but then she went over to Pahrump for a couple of years. Then apparently her health went bad and she went up to Washington with a granddaughter, they tell me, and that has just been lately, in this last year.

RM: Then, she's still living.

BB: She's still living. I don't know how good her health is. I wish she was in Pahrump - she could give you so much material.

We were talking about who all lived in the valley when I came. I'm still trying to think of this other one. It begins with "M"; Mankinen?

RM: Yes, they lived here.

BB: Mrs. Danby says that in those days they could tell who was caning down the road by the sound of the car because there were so few.

RM: Then, there were people living over in Ash Meadows at that time?

BB: Yes.

RM: They are really two communities?

BB: They were really at that time. There were the Tubbs.

RM: Peterson was probably over there.

BB: Yes, Pete Peterson then and Tubbs. Those are the two that were there and had always been there.

RM: Was the State Line there at that time?

BB: The State Line, yes. Well, how much of it?

RM: It was a lot smaller, wasn't it.

BB: The Mecca was where they usually went to the bar. That was the bar, and so was Lathrop Wells. Those were the two bars that they went to; and, as far as State Line, I don't remeMber too much about it. That's just About as far as you went. You'd either go to Mecca or you'd go to Lathrop Wells, and Lathrop Wells was, of course, at that time quite a hub.

RM: In which sense was it a hub?

BB: Well, it was a hub because it was 100 miles from Las Vegas, basically. People couldn't go and get to Las Vegas without making a stop there.

RM: Was the post office there?

BB: Oh yes. There was the Lathrop Wells post office, and the post office. Jane Bonberg was in the post office then.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: You mentioned the bar at Lathrop Wells and a man who worked there.

BB: Yes, Harry Pepping was the bartender there. In fact, he had the bar on the north side of Highway 95 first, then was bartender at the Lathrop Wells bar on the south side of 95. Jane Bonberg was the postmistress and she seemed to be the ramrod. Harry was on the bar at night for all the years up until, my goodness, about 9 years ago.

RM: So that bar was one of the social hubs?

BB: That was the social hub. Yes, definitely. When you left the valley, you stopped and told him you were leaving, and when you came back, you stopped and reported in. It was sort of a place where you reported in, and they knew if you were gone, and they pretty well knew all your business with the post office right there.

RM: Did people spend quite a bit of time there, as opposed to just checking in and out? For a few beers or something?

BB: Oh yes, they spent quite a bit of time there. And we ate a lot of meals there. There was a fellow named George Wagner who worked in the kitchen who was a real character. The fun thing was the first time you came in and, as American people do when you don't know a place, you decided to just have a hamburger. If you wanted a hamburger, pretty soon you'd hear the clatter and bang and carrying on from the kitchen that he went through because someone had dared to order a hamburger. It was a show. And you sat there and said, "What did I do wrong. Why shouldn't I order a hamburger; they're on the menu." All in all, I think he liked to make hamburgers, but he never let on that he did. I remember the first time I went in and I ordered a hamburger. Pretty soon I heard this noise, and I thought, "My goodness, what do we do now." In the first place, coming from where I do, I wasn't used to going into a bar; and in the second place, I wasn't used to hearing that kind of carrying on. But it was always something interesting, and kept it lively.

RM: Was it mainly people from the valley that patronized it?

BB: Oh, no. It was really a truck stop, a good-sized truck stop then. And Harry was such a personality that he developed many friends that still today go up to see him. He's really quite a character as far as this valley is concerned. He's in a nursing home in Reno now.

RM: Can you tell me more about the social life in the early days that you were here. Did the women get together or did you have like community get-togethers, or did you go to church?

BB: You have to realize that when we came in we were an influx. When we came in, the Nickells came in, the Gareys came in, and there were two or three developers, like Joe Long lived out here. That all came in at about the same time that we did.

RM: What brought the influx about?

BB: Well, Tommy Nickells and Garey and my husband came in to work at the Test Site.

RM: It was mainly Test Site people?

BB: Test Site people came in, yes. Some developing, but basically all Test Site.

RM: So, developing was for the people moving in with the Test Site? BB: Well, not so much that; they were developing lands; here you must plant your land to obtain water rights.

RM: Oh, so it was Desert Entry.

BB: Yes, Desert Entry. But the majority of them were earning their living at the Test Site. And then over by Highway 373 an area developed. It's over where the post office is going in. All of these homes on acre-and-a-half lots were the first ones that ever truly developed that way. That's where David, my present husband, lived. So that was really an influx.

At that time AVIAs came into being. Well, AVIA stands for Amargosa Valley Improvement Association. They had no meeting place, they had no place for church, they no place for anything, so they banded together and went to the district attorney and had an organization drawn up, a legal organization. With their own labor, the people worked over the weekend, and built that building. Not the big one, but the tan building that's on the righthand side of the Farm Road. It's been built onto since then, but that was the original building.

RM: What year was this?

BB: Well, they started organizing the AVIA in 1964. I can get you the papers on it.

RM: I don't need them now. Were you involved in setting that up?

BB: No, I was not. My first husband was antisocial, let's say, to the point that most of our friends were in town, and most of our company consisted of people coming from town, and from our former homes, rather than the local people.

RM: So you were kind of socially isolated for a while, or he was anyway.

BB: Yes, I think more or less. As far as business went, we worked with them, went to some of their meetings, but socially we were busy other places. With everybody that he worked with living in Las Vegas, our only communication with them off the work site was having them visit us here. We used to have wall-to-wall people for weekends.

RM: Tell me a little more about the creation of the AVIA.

BB: The AVIA could legally own land and organize and build a building. It was a non-profit [corporation] to provide the community with some social life. From that can the Amargosa Valley barbeque that they have had over Memorial weekend every year.

RM: What were some of the projects that they did? The first one was the building.

BB: The building, basically. They had the little building that's at the back now that they moved on there. It's not in very good shape anymore, but they used that. The idea was the land was given to them and that they would always maintain a place to have children's activities. NOw it's pretty well--as you heard last night--become the racing association. RM: By then, there were families moving in with kids.

BB: Oh yes. The kids were bused to Beatty to school. Sherry Danby was bused to Beatty all her life.

RM: Who was the moving force behind the AVIA?

BB: I think Danbys were very definitely involved in it. Tommy Nickells and Mike Gilgan were involved in it. You heard him last night.

RM: So they went up to the D.A. and got this legally established. And then they acquired some land; how did that go?

BB: They were given the land where the buildings are.

RM: What was the role of the AVIA over the years?

BB: Over the years, what it was, it was actually our government, our everything. They actually were the only contact we had with our county government. The county talked to the AVIA.

RM: OK. Would you send a representative up to them?

BB: No. We didn't very often send representatives up then. We organized the town because we were a no-win situation. We were paying taxes, but we had no legal way to ever get the taxes back. So that's why we became interested and did then organize the town. I was involved in that. I always worked for the AVIA, but I wasn't really involved. We became a legal entity, so that we could have communication, dialog with the county commissioners.

RM: Did you elect the representative at the AVIA?

BB: Well, they had an election. Whoever was the president that year was the spokesman for the valley. When they wanted a school here, a group of us went under the auspices of the AVIA and demanded a school be brought down. Our first school was in the AVIA, building. We furnished that building for them to have classes in, and those two little buildings sufficed as our first class rooms. So it has played a very, very prominent role in the development of this valley.

RM: Oh. Tell me as much as you can remember about the AVIA, it's formation and its role in the community over the years.

BB: Well, it was the social center.

RM: OK, what happened socially?

BB: They had community dances. They had records part of the time and sometimes they'd have bands. It all depended on how much money they could afford.

RM: How often do you think they had bands?

BB: Halloween, New Eve, and then Memorial Day weekend were the ones that you could pretty well count on them having bands.

RM: And the Memorial Day, that's the "biggie," isn't it?

BB: That's when we had the barbeque.

RM: How did that get started?

BB: I think, Cooks were involved about that time, L. C. Cook who lives east of 373. I think he and his wife were pretty involved about the time that they started having a big celebration on Memorial Day weekend. It was a little too far to go from here to any place else--for a family. So everything developed because of a need, a need to have a celebration. RM: That's really an interesting point.

BB: Yes, it is. Everything developed from the social needs of the valley, because you didn't have a church.

RM: Did people go to church or did they just kind of not go?

BB: No, they didn't go to church for quite a while. Now they've become quite church-conscious, and that we've seen evolve over the last 12 years, I would say.

RM: So do they have a church here now?

BB: Yes. They have a church, and there are two different denominations that use it.

RM: Who owns the church?

BB: It's down on Danbys' property. I think they call it the Amargosa church, and I don't know how it's set up. I haven't been involved in it. RM: You lean toward your mother's side of the family.

BB: [laughter] No, no. I wouldn't say that. I think I probably lean more toward my father's.

RM: When did they build the church?

BB: They built the church about, I think, 12 years ago when they became conscious of religion--'75 or '78.

RM: So there was a rise of consciousness then. What do you attribute that to?
BB: People getting older. I would attribute that to that, although we had younger people now involved with the church. I would say that people became conscious of having the lack of religion as they age. Yes, most of them my age. Now we have the Catholic church here too. There's a beautiful Catholic church over here near 373, you'll probably see it during your wandering.

RM: Is there a priest in the church?

BB: He comes out. I think that now they have one that has here and Pahrump, I believe.

RM: He is headquartered in Pahrump and cares over here for services?

BB: Yes. TO watch the evolution of a valley, that's what we really watch.

RM: That's the heart of the whole thing.

BB: It's very interesting to watch it go from a bar society to a church society. Here we've watched it all. There was no place to go, you never saw anyone unless you went to the bar--but they had food too so you didn't necessarily have to drink--but that was where the food was, with the bar; and you went to the bar. Then, as they evolved and they filled the need for the social with the AVIA. From the AVIA they went to the churches. And now the majority of people go to the churches.

RM: So that you have less people going to the bars now.

BB: I believe you have many fewer less people who regularly go to the bar.

RM: And that's because their social needs are being filled in other ways.

BB: Yes. And you have your town meetings, most people are involved in some way in the government services.

RM: How often are the town meetings?

BB: Once a month. And then they have the VFW now, an auxiliary. We have of course the PTA. We have four churches. We have a group of Mormons. I don't know where they are meeting now. We have the Catholic church. We have the Amargosa Valley church with two meeting in it. What they do is they are referred to by the names of the men who act as ministers. They have either Earl Selbach's church or Bob Fox's church. They both use the one church.

RM: How many people attend the services? For example, how many people go to the Catholic service?

BB: Well, you know we have a lot of Mexicans, though we had a lot more Mexicans than now. The Mexicans were working at ABC. But the ones that we have now are the ones that work at IMV. So we still have, oh, about a third of our Mexican population that we had.

RM: About how many families?

BB: Forty maybe. We had such a high percentage of Mexican children in the school that they had a translator, as long as the law allowed.

RM: Are they new immigrants into the country, do you think?

BB: Some of them are, but basically I'd say that they are far from being new. A lot of them have been here long enough that they've raised their children here and had children graduate from high school.

RM: And most of them are involved in mining? Are there farm workers?

BB: Well, there are some farm workers, but not many because we don't have that much farming anymore. You know that our water situation has pretty well knocked out the farming. It's not just water, but the price of pumping water is so high you can't farm except on a very large scale. Now, the one down here they call the Helen Orr Watson farm is the farm with the Oasis on it, and they keep that going, but I don't know how lucrative a business it is. And then what Hank [Records] has going and a couple things down in there. But we don't really have the farming that we had.

RM: Let's get back to the social again. So you have seen this evolution from a bar society, to an AVIA and those types of things, into the church. Is the church kind of the focal point of a lot of people's lives now? BB: Yes, I would say it's the focal point of the majority of people, especially

those who have children and then the relatively older people. RM: But the middle-aged not so much?

BB: I don't know if you can even say that. I can just say that a lot of the people in my age bracket have started up the churches and then those who are raising children. Well, I would definitely say that if I was raising children, I would be over there in that church; but being here without my children, I've never got involved. But I can see that it has changed. They have definitely made it more of a center of their lives.

RM: Do you have any idea of about how many people were involved in the Catholic congregation?

BB: Well, they tell me there are very few any more, and I....They were largely Mexican. A lot of, well, of the Catholics I know, very few of them go to church down here because they like the service in Latin. They do give the service now in Spanish.

RM: Giving the service in Spanish tells you that it's serving that community more How many would you say are involved in the Mormon group? BB: I'd say there's 25 or 30 people.

RM: And how about the Selbach and Fox churches?

BB: I'd say the Selbach has about 50 people, and the Fox is the larger congregation. Whether it's a larger attendance, I don't know. It's people who go occasionally. Probably, could be at times 70 or 80.

RM: How many people are in the valley?

BB: According to the post office, there's near 1,000 people because that's the number she [the postmistress] gives.

RM: Yes, so we're talking, maybe, under 200 people actually involved in the church, would you say? In all denominations?

BB: Oh, I don't know. Sate Protestants go to Pahrump for church. Probably 20-some people go to Pahrump for church.

RM: Yes. But it's a thing that has gained in importance.

BB: Growing, yes, from a mostly non-church-going group to a....

RM: And it's not just that there's new people coming in?

BB: No, these are the people who were here, people who were raised here as children and now go to church where they were raised. One of the girls said to me when we were talking about

reading the Bible, and some people get off on that, you know. A big thing, having read the Bible. Well I read it before I graduated from high school, so it doesn't really mean anything to me. We laughed about it, and she said, "But I was raised without any religious training." So I got thinking about it and I thought, well, we have a whole generation here of people who were raised without religious training. Those people were growing up here 15 years ago grew up without religious training when they grew up in this valley, and they are all good, staunch church-goers now, taking their children to church, because you see they basically missed it.

RM: Yes, so now they're caning back to it. Tell me more about how the Memorial Day thing got started and how has it changed over the years. BB: Well, we're hoping it works better this year than last. It didn't work last year very well. With the changes right now coming in, it just, as you say, evolved, the evolution of the car races. You see that changes the Memorial Day weekend.

RM: Tell me about the car races.

BB: Well, they have a real good club going. It's a good-sized club.

RM: It's through the AVIA, right?

BB: Right. Like they said last night, the only thing they have enough people to do right now is to cover the races. Because so many people have dropped out of it, the AVIA. And I guess we've all dropped out of it and then gone back in it. You go in and out. Well, somebody has to pick this up and do it, so you go back and do it for a couple or years, and then say, "Heh, listen, I've done all I can do now. That's all I can handle." So you drop out, and then you go back. At least that's what we've found that we do. So anyway you have your down times, and I think that now we have our down time because we have the new building. The AVIA, building is only used once a month for their meetings. I don't think it's used for anything more than that, because with the big building [the new community building] we don't have the need for it right now. But it's something that will have to be picked up.

RM: It seems to be mainly car racing, now.

BB: That's all it is now, yes. Usually somebody was practicing baseball, but last year we never had a baseball team, which is unusual because they've had baseball teams, 3, 4, and 5 for some years before that. And then that suddenly died out. I'd guess you'd call it sort of gradual. Then they went into the car racing about 3 years ago.

RM: So it's something relatively new. Are a lot of people interested in racing?

BB: The young people.

RM: What do they race? Do they make their own race cars?

BB: Yes, they race their own. They do mud racing, you know. Mud bog races.

RM: They wet it down, and race it.

BB: Yes. They have a great time. It's a very good--it's pretty violent, I feel, a pretty violent kind of racing, but I think it's what they need here. I think you're living in a world of extremes, and I think they need that extreme kind of activity.

RM: So what about the Manorial Day. When did that begin?

BB: Must have begun in the 70s.

RM: Was it associated with the AVIA?

BB: Yes, you see, it was the AVIA activity. Yes, the activity of the AVIA. And they had their bar, and they had their dance, and they had their barbeque at the AVIA building. Also they used to have dramas, these one-act dramas that they played over and over and over during the day. And they had children's activities, where you could take children. They had all kinds of games set up for them so that it was actually a very good family day. And by the time the day was over you could take the kids home and put them to bed and go back to the dance, or else they stayed for the dance by the time they were 12 years old. It was a real family situation. RM: And it was always well attended.

BB: Oh, yes, it was just mobbed. So, I mean, until it started downhill. It's gone downhill, as far as the barbeque, until the barbeque no longer makes money. It's just an expense. So right now it's changing.

RM: It's been going downhill or did it just suddenly go?

BB: No, it has been going downhill. Of course we don't know how much it's gone down or how fast it's going down. Well, maybe there weren't as many people in the for barbeque as you expected, but then you don't know whether you just hit it at the wrong time.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Betty, could you talk About family life in the valley and how it has changed over the years?

BB: Well, from those of us that came in that didn't really bring our children with us, now it has definitely changed into younger people who have come in and have brought their children with them and have raised the children here.

RM: When did this change begin?

BB: Well, I think it probably changed very quickly after we came. Within a year from the time we came, more and more people were bringing more and more children in. So the children came in, and the busing, and then some more children came in. Danbys' and Cooks' children were here before that; they were bused to Beatty. It became a big busload of kids from here to Beatty to school. And I think the problem with that is that those children are gone from home for so many hours. They leave here before 7 in the morning and they get back at 5 or 6 at night; it's a long, long day for little kids. That was the reason that they started the school here. It was just too long a day for little kids, and they couldn't stand it.

So, then, there were more and more families, and people having baby showers became something in the '70s. You had more baby showers than any other get-togethers.

RM: So there were a lot of younger families moving in.

BB: Yes, young people having children. Then of course several of the children who had finished growing up here stayed to have their families here. Now, as for people leaving, people left. You can see the young people leave, and then you can see a percentage of them filter back. We always say that, well, we want you, but we want you to leave and then come back because you want than to feel that they are not so limited. They are able to live in the city. You want them to feel that they can come back, but not because they are limited but because they want this kind of life rather than a city life.

So you can see that working. With this big layoff of ABC, you then had people who had to leave who had no intention of leaving and had to raise their families in Las Vegas or up north. But as soon as they can get employment they seem to be coming back. As soon as they get employment at the Test Site, which is the only place they have employment now. So I assume that, all in all, they do try them and find the other places wanting. I know there's one family who took their children to town for schooling recently, and said that as soon as their children graduate from high school, they'll be back.

But, then there are those who stuck it out. Each family of course varies in their attitude toward the education here, their attitude toward having their children reach their later teens and live here. There's drug problems here like there is any place else. I expect with our children going to Beatty it's too far away. By the time you run up to see how your kids are doing, you have a 70-mile drive just to find out if they really did go to school that day or catch them at what they are doing at noon that they shouldn't be doing. I think they are becoming more restrictive in Beatty than they used to be in keeping them on campus at noon, which is

something that they have needed for a long time. But it's changing; I do think that there is more of a feeling for the need of the people here, by Beatty than there was in the past.

RM: You mean a need for more discipline?

BB: More discipline, more communication with the parents. It was like you were sending your children into a void, I think, at one time.

RM: Is there a lot of support for the schools?

BB: I think we have more. Always before, when we turned out to get the school here in the AVIA, building, just the whole town went. They went to the meeting and said OK we're going to have it down here. Now, as I suppose it should be, the parents have broken off pretty well and are pretty involved in school. You saw that last night. And they were there because of the school involvement with the library.

RM: That was quite an impressive display for the library. I attended the Town Board meeting [of March 26, 1987], and there was an issue of whether to keep the part-time librarian. The support, even though the economy in the area is kind of down at this time, was amazing, the support and pride that the people there exhibited in the library. There was a man from the State library association or something who said it was the best rural library in Nevada, which I would probably agree with.

BB: Well, this is what happens when you start something. The support was there because of a telephone campaign. And the telephone campaigners were against keeping a part-time librarian, so you can see the effect of a negative campaign.

RM: Oh, it had the opposite effect. Why did they want to take it away?

BB: Well, their theory was that with less people in the valley there was less work to be done, and so they didn't really need the half-time librarian. But let's go back a little bit on that because the library was established, one of the first things ever in this valley, as a community activity. Another thing, it started in the AVIA, building. We had Lions Club at that time, and they donated money, and people donated money, and they put up shelves, and everybody brought their books in. They started that library because they wanted a library. So, again, the AVIA itself has served as a nucleus.

RM: What other things have they served as a nucleus for?

BB: Oh, the school, the library, the 4H. We used to have a 4H club. Then we had rodeos. We had the corral out there, and they had their own races, and so forth. We used to have exercise classes there and Boy Scouts. Really, it's been the center of everything.

RM: But after the building of the library and of the new community building and everything, then the AVIA kind of lost its nucleus role. BB: Yes, we became an unincorporated town, taking away the original purpose of the organization, which was to give us a voice in the county. So it took it away from the AVIA and it put it into a formal state. So you can see why it's a down time for the AVIA.

RM: And it sounds like it might not come back if it's lost its role, do you think?

BB: Oh, I think it will come back. It's lost its role, but the use of the building will go for something else maybe. I'd hate to see it lose its role, because after all it sort of is the valley. It's our identity, where we came from as a valley. So, I'd hate to see it go, and I think that other people feel the same way. On that grounds alone, we'll have a rebirth of it. I would say that it would be a little different than it was, but nevertheless there because it's changed its role during the years. There're doing the racing there now because there was the 40 acres of land that they have. The discussion of the acres of the land that they have and getting more land, that's what is bothering some people. Different people have different ideas of what the role should be, and some people would like to see it dead. I heard that said several months ago. I don't go along with that, and I don't think the majority of people who have been around any length of time would go along with it. The buildings weren't built, nor was the town organized, to get rid of the AVIA. It was done simply to get a more orthodox form of government, and to get buildings. We had outgrown the AVIA, building completely; we couldn't hold a dance there any longer. There wasn't room to dance and the kitchen facilities were so limited, and the restrooms were in bad shape. Even though we were sort of forced to build the building against our better judgment at the time, I think that, all in all, we needed it, the new library, and clinic, and the multi-purpose building.

RM: Is there any regret in the community about building it?

BB: Well, we were rather upset at the time that the vote passed because we felt that people who weren't going to be here to pay for them had voted on it. And it was such an increase in taxes. We pay the highest taxes around. I don't think there's any resentment. I think they say that, well, it was forced on us, but we are going to make the best of it. I felt that last night. OK, maybe this wasn't a route we would have taken, but still we are going to make it work and do the best for us that it can do.

RM: How do you see personal relationships in the valley? I mean, do people tend to live pretty much isolated? How do they associate with each other outside of these organizations? Do people just pop over and say hi or drop-in?

BB: No. Very little. You'd think that they would more. Now you meet them any place, and it's hard to get away. But our schedules are all so different, and I think the responsibilities that we have and each place that we live is so different. You don't just live here in the casual way that you live in town. You have to be dedicated to every square inch that you have, or you don't have anything. And if you have a tree you have to take care of that tree. If you have from the

smallest trailer to the largest trailer or house, you have to constantly take care of it. Our maintenance is above and beyond anybody else's, because of the extreme weather—the extreme heat. Then when it rains, then everything will of course leak because everything is dried out too much. It's been too long since it has rained and you have everything that leaks. Your trees need more attention. Your grass has to be watered every day if you have any grass. You are a slave to anything you own out here. It's a very demanding way of life. You don't live here casually. So everybody's life is full, and to take time out we just definitely have to reschedule everything we are doing. Like, I very precisely said to you, "Will you be here morning or afternoon?"

RM: Right.

BB: Because I have to water today, so I have to set aside the time to do it. I'm not working outside the home, so my time is really more limited than if I did. Because more things fall on me--in the community as well as in the home.

RM: Do the majority of women work in the hare here?

BB: I would say the majority stay at hare, work in the home, because it's pretty hard. If I was to work, with David working, we couldn't live here. RM: Because there's too much to be done on the place.

BB: There's too much to leave it that much. Like we went to town the other day and came here and the clock had fallen down. We figure a sonic boom took it down. Normally, other than times I go to town or do other things, go to Tonopah, or whatever, I pretty well know what goes on in this 40 acres and on our other property. So you have to be more vigilant.

RM: Or the forces of the desert reclaim.

BB: Yes, they reclaim very fast. I think that to me is the most astounding thing about the desert. That it is a taskmaster. There's no slighting it. RM: That's a nice way of phrasing it, a "taskmaster."

BB: You don't let anything go. Last summer I broke my ankle, and this is the first that I've been able to get back outdoors again. Everything has gone down so bad that it's really tremendous to try to bring it back again. Our trees grow; anything that grows, grows longer. A long season. In fact, take your evergreens; they just grow like it was summer all the time. It was an unusual year last year, but we had 3 different settings of apples on the apple tree. It warmed up, then it cooled down, then it warmed up again.

RM: They bloated 3 times?

BB: Yes, they bloomed 3 times. I didn't know they could do it. We didn't have large apples, but they all were small. But they bloomed; they overbloomed.

RM: How do people see each other in the valley? Do they make a lot of distinctions like they do in the city: "Oh he's driving a BMW and he's only driving a Chevrolet or something." Or are people pretty accepting of each other and don't divide people into groups?

BB: I think they're pretty accepting. You have to be a pretty accepting person to live out here. I think you have to be very lenient in your attitudes toward other people. Now we don't any of us see ourselves as similar to someone else. I think we see, well, that that's the way they live, that's the thing they like to do, and they did come out here because they wanted to be free of the stigma of, maybe, having to live just as everyone else lived in town. And I think they just automatically give people that freedom.

RM: Yes, there's more space out here, both socially and physically. You've got elbow room here.

BB: You live pretty much the way you want to. There's not the clipped lawn next door. There's not that feeling that you have to live that way. You pretty well set your own standards, you pretty well set your own goals. I think you have to set your own goals much more stringently than you do in town. I don't think that you have the push, you don't have...

RM: Yes, you don't have everything crowding, setting goals for you.

BB: Right. You don't have society doing it so much for you. You have to push, push yourself. You have to push to go to church. I think that they feel it's really a push thing to go out and do the normal things. Push to go to a meeting. I think they really have to push themselves out to do these things. So when you see a turnout like last night, you've got to appreciate the fact that those people pushed to get there. They had an opinion, they had a feeling, they had something they felt was a strong enough feeling.

RM: So people here are more self-motivated.

BB: I think you have to be or you're lost by the roadside. If you aren't self-motivated, I don't think you can live here because there's no one to motivate you. Yes, there's not the stop light, and there's not the crosswalk, and so on and so forth. Oh yes, we have our crosswalk, you know. You're ten miles over it when you find out we have a crosswalk, but I mean generally speaking you have to be self-controlled, self-motivated.

RM: Yes. How do you see the role of the different aspects of the economy in the valley? You know you have the people who are trying to make it as farmers. You did have the people at ABC. You've got the people with the clay operations, and you've got people working at the Test Site. I don't know, are there people that commute to Las Vegas? It's like you've got different economic spheres here. How do they blend in? How do you see the role of agriculture in the valley?

BB: Well, it's just going down so bad that anymore you can't even say that agriculture has much of a place. It bothers me to see that.

RM: It normally had a large role?

BB: It had a much larger role. Of course to begin with that's all there was here until the Test Site came, the Jackass came in, there wasn't anything for people to do but farm. So you take those basic 5, as I call them, 5 families, probably was 7 or 8; but, nevertheless, they did farm. They came in here on Desert Entry and that's what they came here for, and they had to survive on it.

RM: Why is agriculture dropping, then?

BB: Well it's because of our water. They limited our water. The State cut off our water rights. I don't like the State having control over us. I've fought that since the day I came into the valley. I carried and delivered the first injunction against the State engineer to stop the designation on this valley.

RM: When was that?

BB: That was back when we first came, 1963.

RM: So they've been trying to stop the water since the '60s.

BB: Yes. They tried to "designate" us, make us a designated valley back in the '60s. What that means is actually they can come into any home or come to every well here and put a meter on it, and meter your water, and let you have only 1800 gallons a day for a home. That also means that you have a very strict control on the water. And they watch your water table constantly. And they can shut off waters because it's going, it's draining down, which it is right now.

RM: How much is it dropping? Is it a serious drop?

BB: Well, I don't think they know, and I certainly don't because I think that you'd have to study it for a 100 years before you'd know if it was a serious drop or not.

RM: A cyclical?

BB: Yes. So I mean, I don't think that they know, but nevertheless any drop, and they use that as a reason to shut off the water.

RM: So it is dropping?

BB: It is, at the present time. Mine's gone down, I think, about 3 feet. This is one of the original wells. This is a 1907 well. So it's one that they keep tabs on, and it's not a deep well. It pumps at 160. It was pumping at 90. So it's gone down that much in the 20 some years. But one well can

be pumping that off. The one down here below me could be pumping it off at this ranch. So, they haven't looked into that. They don't look into it, in my estimation, in the way they should to see why it's going down. They come along and then they make this up. They write beautiful histories on why. All the things they come up with. So water's a problem here.

RM: Have they just cancelled people's water rights?

BB: They don't cancel. They cut back the amount, and they have the right to do that. Basically when you look at it economics have cut it back. They don't have to. We had one big farm in here that just went under, went out back in here. The T&T doesn't water that much anymore up here above me. As I said, this one down here has a deep well. He's probably pumping off the area. But economics itself does knock out the farmers. You can't say that limiting the water did it, because it costs too much to pump it and you can't afford it.

RM: How do you see the mining economy in the valley?

BB: Well, I think that's probably one of the those things that's another cycle. I think it will come back. They'll bring in something out of Death Valley. What they'll be mining lord only knows; I don't.

RM: Have the miners traditionally been much involved in the community?

BB: Well, when ABC came in, they organized their own little park down there and pretty well stayed to themselves except to go to vote in the multi-purpose building. Socially, they seem to stay pretty well separated. Now some of them didn't of course. You always have a percentage that is involved; they're going to be involved. No matter where they live or how they live, they're going to be involved in their community. But the majority of them were the type of people who weren't too involved in the rest of it. But the ones that are here with IMV, they're quite involved. Always have been. But then they see themselves as a little group, I think.

RM: How are they different? Did many of them come from the valley itself?

BB: No, I don't think so much that. They have a little park down there where some IMV live, but they live out in the community more. And even though they do live there, most of them own their own place, and so they feel a part of the community, whereas ABC had their own park. They were isolated. They were sitting there on government land, and they sat there in a way that they didn't have to associate with any of us.

RM: There was a physical isolation in the way they were laid out?

BB: Yes. So they could get away without associating, and so they did. They had their own community; they had their own swimming pool, their own club, everything.

RM: How about the people working on the Test Site? What is their role in the community?

BB: Well, the people who work on the Test Site are a little different social creature, I think. They come from basically different kinds of backgrounds, and I think in so doing they're more inclined to be community-involved than those that are in mining.

RM: Are they a big majority?

BB: Not anymore. Since Jackass was closed.

RM: Are there any commuters to Vegas?

BB: I don't think so. There might be one or 2 of the younger people who are commuting back and forth, but I wouldn't know for sure. They just told me that one family had moved in completely, so I don't know whether there's anybody that's commuting for 5 days a week.

RM: It's a long commute, yes.

BB: It's a long drive once a week. Not as far as Tonopah, but still it's far enough.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Betty, tell me about the individualism and the isolationism of people out here and some observations you have on the character of people.

BB: Well, I think everybody, every person here is a character to his neighbors. I think we all develop our own individual character, and we feel more free to do it than if we were in town. I think one of the interesting things is that we realize we have to have more people to survive as a town. We realize that, but at the same time we are reluctant to want anyone else moving in because we like our isolation, we like our individuality, and we just don't really want to be hampered or pampered by getting used to new people. You figure that everybody that comes in is going to have their same kind of personality thing, and I guess probably everybody is a little afraid if, well, we get too many of them. There just won't be room for that many. When you say that this could bring business in or this could bring people in, and then you'll say, "Well, just as long as it's not too many people." You heard that last night. It keeps coming through. You don't really want too many people. And we like to stay country, and we don't want to become another Pahrump. They really have a fixation about bringing anything in here that's a development. We may need housing, but it can't be a development. We need this, but we don't want to be burdened with a lot of people, because I think they feel that that would force them to.... Well, we don't want laws. We don't want an ordinance. We can't have an ordinance in the town, and it's a no-no. If the dogs overtake us, it won't make any difference, but we can't have an ordinance about dogs. And that's what you heard about the horses last night. It really is, we don't want anything to interfere with things as they are. See, that runs through it. Now we have a good library, and we don't want anybody to tamper with it, but by the same token we don't want somebody to build a big swimming pool. You noticed that.

RM: Yes, so it's a kind of conservatism in a way. Don't change it. BB: Yes, don't change anything.

RM: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. [laughter]

BB: But at the same time their pride in having a good library comes through. Their pride in those buildings amazes me. They are very, very proud of those buildings, and the fact that they didn't want them in the first place has nothing to do with it.

RM: The core of the community, the old-timers didn't want them, eh? BB: Oh no. It was the new people.

RM: At ABC and so on.

BB: Well, like they say, those of us who have to pay the taxes don't want them, but the people who were living in trailers and weren't paying any tax, the land tax, they wanted it.

RM: But, now they've got it, they're mighty proud of it, and they don't want anybody fiddling with it.

BB: Nope. Messing anything up around here. So, they are queer ducks, I think, in a way; but you have to laugh at yourself, you have to laugh at the whole attitude, because you realize that it's your attitude, too. If somebody was to move in across the street from me, I think it would bother ne.

RM: Well, you mentioned that some of the people, or maybe all of them at the meeting last night, were characters. Well, you weren't a character when you moved here, were you?

BB: Oh yes, I feel I was a character.

RM: An interesting thing is that you were raised in Ohio. It's pretty crowded back there, and you don't have much elbow room, and so on.

BB: I was raised basically in the country, though. But I was raised in a town where my parents had been there, and what I did was all right. It took two counties to raise me. It took two counties to keep tabs on me, and I did my thing.

RM: So Nevada didn't change you. Nevada just gave you room.

BB: Room. Yes, it didn't change me.

RM: Maybe the people that come and stay in a ca runty like this are the people who need that. It doesn't reform you; the desert doesn't remake you. It just gives you a chance to spread out. And the people who can't spread out don't stay. Does that make any sense?

BB: Well, yes, they come and go real fast. The ones who can't handle the space, those who feel this is an alien area, they come and they leave fast. They wouldn't stay for any amount of money. Or else they just drive through, and that's the end of it. They don't see it as a challenge; they don't see it as a way of life that they could adapt to. So it takes certain kinds of people. It takes people who like change, I think, or like to do things. Of course I've always been a builder. I like to build things. I worked on the Board of Trustees for a church, to build a new church in Rancho in California. I started a new kindergarten in the town where I grew up when I went back there to live with my children. And, always, to bring in something new and to keep progress moving. I think we all have a responsibility to do that. Whether we like it here or not, we know we have to have progress. And that's why I was involved in setting up the town. You get to a certain point when you realize that, well, this isn't working anymore with things as they are. So with setting up the new town, one thing we wanted to make sure was we wouldn't have any laws. You just are not going to pass any rules, here. Because if you pass rules...

RM: You're in trouble.

BB: Yes. Nobody wants rules.

RM: Let me see how you feel about this observation. One of the things that has really struck me is we're basically dealing with a pioneer community here. It's almost like going back a hundred years or more. And, sure we've got cars, electric lights, and everything, but underneath all of that is a basic pioneer community and a kind of a pioneer spirit. It reminded me of that when you were saying that you like to build, you like to create. What do you think about that?

BB: Yes, it's a basic urge in some people. Other people are followers. Other people say, 'Well, OK, I guess that's all right; you can do it." And I'd rather go out and do it. They had the VFW going and we organized the Auxiliary, because we had a need for it. We don't have any organization here that would take care of the needs of veterans, and we have older veterans. We started the Auxiliary because it's needed.

RM: When did you start the Veterans'?

BB: Two years ago.

RM: Could you tell me a little about setting that up?

BB: Well, Forrest Hansen was the one who started the VFW post, and he started it 3 years ago.

RM: Is there a pretty good membership?

BB: Yes. We have 20-some women, but I think they have 50 men. So we have a pretty good group. We have quite a group of older veterans, of course, World War II veterans. They're getting up there in years, and there's quite a few of them here. Cookie is one of them.

RM: Hank?

BB: Hank [Records] is one.

RM: So you were instrumental in setting up the women's auxiliary. Tell me a little bit about how you did that.

BB: Well, they care out and do it for you. You don't have to. They'll set that up for you.

RM: You just tell them you want it.

BB: Yes. And find enough people to do it. So we found enough people to do it and set it up.

RM: What does the Auxiliary do?

BB: Well, we're going to have a Memorial Day parade. Did you see that little pavilion in the middle of the cemetery?

RM: Yes.

BB: At the present time we're putting a memorial wall on the south end that we will build and dedicate to all the veterans of the valley. We hope to get that done for Memorial Day this year, and then next year we hope to have plaques from the people who have members of the family who are deceased war veterans. So we do that, and courtesies of the flag, uses of the flag, and so forth, is supposed to be one of their main interests. Flag etiquette in the school. Voice of Democracy, which is a contest that they put on. They sell poppies over Memorial Day here. Arai we've taken on having the Memorial Day parade, and this weekend we're sponsoring the Computer Fair We are having a Computer Fair at the big building, and last month the VFW and Auxiliary sponsored the Ms. Senior Nye County. So there's lots of things that we do. In fact there's no end to the things that we do.

RM: Do you put quite a bit of time in on it?

BB: Oh, yes, it takes time, but it's something I think we need, not having any other patriotic organizations. You need some of these areas covered. [Taping is resumed on March 30, 1987.]

RM: OK, Betty. We are picking up now from our last day's work, and you've thought of some things in the interim. What are those things that came to mind?

BB: One thing that was that you had asked me what do they have for social life, and how did the AVIA fit in, and we came up with a list of activities: the dances, and the barbeques, and so on. One thing that I forgot and I think is important is that they had their monthly meetings. At these monthly meetings they made potluck dinners, so that they spent hours together, and that really was a very important part of their social life.

RM: So, what you were doing was combining a social event--the potluck--with a business, community, political event.

BB: And then, of course, there were always potlucks served to the men who worked on the weekends building the building. So actually from the beginning food has always been important, in a new area, and the serving of food served as a very important part of the social life. Prior to that, when there were the 4 or 5 families here, they used to get together, I've been told, and had potlucks. So that that was the way that they went to each other's homes--so again the serving of food, just like the old days when they developed the West. It still was the same pattern.

RM: Yes, I think the valley went through the same stages and the same processes as the founding of a new town in the old West.

BB: Yes, well, I think in a less dramatic way. It hasn't happened as fast. Everything here seems to take longer. You know like starting a town. They used to organize them faster. I see this town as developing, although we've gone behind now with ABC going out; I think it's a slow developing

area, which makes me feel it will be a very permanent area. It doesn't have to depend on any one thing.

RM: Why do you think it's been slow?

BB: Well, in this day and age driving 55 miles an hour when you're 100 miles from your food stores, your basic supplies; that's quite a way. Although distance in the long run is going to be the reason we develop, because Pahrump is pretty filled up, and we're going to get what falls over the mountain We've had a new family move in that works out in the Test Site just this last month that have tried Pahrump in the past and have decided they don't want to go back there again while they work at the Test Site. So they have come over into our valley, and I assume that we'll have a lot more like that because this is a young couple with children. I feel that we're really much more stable and, we hope, not like Pahrump where there's been so much building and over-building and over-developing and lack of organization in it. We want our town to be an organized town, and we keep working on that. I think we've done pretty well so far. It will be the community center and so forth down on Farm Road and really probably the business area will end up down at the Mecca and Highway 373 where they have the big buildings in, although they're emptying out. I still feel that will always be our business area. Then our new post office is going in on 373; they are transferred from up top to over there, which is why I assume that eventually 373 will be our business district. Pretty well up toward Lathrop and then on clear down to the State Line.

RM: Tell me about how the schools were organized here. Originally people came into the valley and they didn't bring their families because of the school situation.

BB: Well, that was only for a year or two that that happened. And at the same time there were some children here in school. First the children were transported by parents and then by the school to Beatty, from the 1st grade to the 12th. Then people got together and decided that it was too long a ride for the little ones, and they decided to confront the school board and demand that the children of the lower grades be left here. At that time the MIA. building, the brown building and the little building behind it were used as school rooms. So we are probably the only school in Nye County, the only town that furnished their own building for a school in their area.

RM: Was it easy to get the county to go along with providing the school? BB: Well, I doubt if it was easy, it was just a case that it was an ultimatum.

RM: What was the ultimatum?

BB: The ultimatum was that our kids will stay in the valley for school. They said we want it, there's the building, you have no excuse for transporting. We went in and filled the room with people. It was called, "OK, the Amargosa has descended." Somebody said that when the Amargosa decides to do something--and you saw it there in the library thing--there's no division. They will be there and they will keep at it until such time as they get it. There are little

altercations and there are differences of opinions from the past which they don't care anything about. We'll just get this done. Really they have a good town spirit basically. It's awfully hard to get them to attend meetings until they feel it's right up against the wall, and then you better believe they are going to come out.

RM: OK, when did the school in the AVIA, buildings start?

BB: Let's see, my son was here after he finished his degree and that was during the Vietnam War--the late '60s.

RM: How long was that building used?

BB: Well, then they brought in one section of the buildings that they now have, one room, and they put the 5th and 6th grade in that, I believe it was. Lisle Lowe taught that. Then they took that down and brought in the school building, the main section, a modular building. Of course you'll be a little disgruntled when you realize that, until we built the 3 buildings there, there was nothing but modular, removable buildings by the county. This was a sore spot. Everything is put in as though, well, tomorrow you're going to be gone. I think basically we probably have one of the more secure and firm types of cultures, you know. It's been steady, slow building, slow developing, and people who come, stay. Those who leave, many come back.

RM: And so when did you get a completed school?

BB: You'll have to look at the plaque down there. I think the date is on it.

RM: And the high school kids go to Beatty. Does the bus come dawn and pick them up in the valley?

BB: They have 3 buses. They pick up throughout the valley. Now, every child has to walk, or has to be transported from where they live off the road. From where we live off the road, that mile has to be transported. Back down in this corner, I know they transport them up to get them up to the substation, Powerline Road. But they go down, and their excuse always is that that's why they pave a road, so the school bus can travel it. They bring them out if there's any aver on the other side of the valley.

RM: OK, can we talk a little bit about how the town was formally organized. It grew out of the AVIA activities, but what happened then? How did you get it a legal town here?

BB: Well, several of us met and we decided that....

RM: Who were those people then; what were their names?

BB: Don Barnett, Susan Jones, David Boyd and myself, and Lisle Lowe then made the map for it.

RM: What were your motives?

BB: Oh, to have a formal voice in our government. We were not an entity in the eyes of the County Commissioners, so consequently we had no formal voice. At that time Don had been a county commissioner. When he was through with his term as County Commissioner, Bobby Revert took over, and so we were getting less and less of the tax money. At that time, ABC was in and we had a pretty good tax base. We weren't getting our fair share of the money back in roads or anything. When we'd ask for things, why they would by-pass us because there was nobody up there taking the message to them, so to speak. So the only way that we figured that we could get that voice was to organize a town. We passed out petitions. We had the petitions, and very interestingly, even though we had a very high percentage of names on our petition to become a town, and that was supposed to be enough. There's 3 ways that you can organize a town in the State of Nevada, and one of then is by petition, a petition signed by a high percentage of people, and the petition is to the County Commissioners to form a town.

RM: What are the other ways?

BB: Yes, one is by the vote of the people in the affected area, within the boundaries that you set up.

RM: And then the other one is what?

BB: By the State legislature. If they want to form a town, they have the right.

RM: What year was this meeting, Betty?

BB: That was in 1981. Our basic problem, the 5 of us, was to come up with a feasible area. Now one group in town wanted to take in everything south of Tonopah that was outside territory, which would have been mind-boggling, but they still had their point. The bad point was that if we were to put in a fire department here, we would also have to put in one for everybody else in the outlying area, you know. And we didn't feel that there was any tax base for it so we couldn't possibly do it. So we brought it down to an area that we figured we already had the moral responsibility to take care of as far as services were concerned. We took the road out this side of Crystal because we felt at the time that Crystal was the responsibility of Pahrump, which we later found out is ours--at least as far as the fire department was concerned.

RM: You do.

BB: Yes, we take care of Crystal

RM: Was the reason you left out Crystal also the brothel?

BB: Yes, the brothel. At that time we had two brothels here already, and we didn't really want to be known as a town of brothels.

RM: The one brothel at Lathrop Wells.

BB: And the one at the corner of Mecca and 373. So this was causing some contention. We were used to having the one at Lathrop, and that was sort of on the edge of our town. So you could sort of by-pass it and not give it too much thought. The one in Mecca was sort of right in the middle of our town, and the children had to go by it. The men went by it all the time, and if you went down to the corner--that was when they built the corner there. It was more of a contention about that.

All right, then. We laid out an area that took in the pit where they take the red gravel.

RM: That mountain there, that cone, yes.

BB: It was a cinder cone. We took in the cinder cone; went down to the California line from there. That takes in the sand dunes, which we figured in the future would become a sightseeing spot, to the California line, followed the California line down, came to the edge of Pahrump's line right there, and back.

RM: Pahrump comes over the mountains, does it?

BB: Oh, no, but down here we go over far enough. Yes, they just unofficially took in, but we officially laid out our town.

RM: You took in Ash Meadows and Devil's Hole, right?

BB: Oh, yes. Ash Meadows and the whole valley.

RM: And then clear up on the other side of 95?

BB: Oh yes; no, in some respects we did, but we cut it off, and that's what Steve Bradhurst is trying to correct. We didn't go up and take the two sections that would take us up to the Test Site right due north of us. And that's what Steve is correcting by the map he's making.

BB (continued): Of course we took in Lathrop Wells, and 95 goes quite a ways through our town up there. Did you notice when you came in from Las Vegas this morning where our sign is?

RM: Well, no.

BB: Well our sign for the edge of our town is way out, and it still is not at the edge of our official town. It goes by section line, and it goes across. So the second time you enter our town, is where we had the State put the sign.

RM: Was there ever any discussion of including Yucca Mountain in your town? I wonder if that wouldn't have been an interesting thing to do.

BB: It would have been an interesting thing to do, but at the time we thought that anything that was the Yucca Mountain situation was something that we couldn't take in because it was already occupied. I suppose that if we had attempted to do that, we might never get our unincorporated area because we might have a federal fight on our hands. We figured we were going to have enough with the county, and that if we went any further we would have a problem.

RM: Now, to move back to where I interrupted you, you got a petition and got a goodly percentage. Was there much resistance within the community?

BB: There didn't seem to be. They could not quite comprehend why we wanted to take in so much area. We said we have to service this. If we are going to service it, then we better take in everything that might be worthwhile later as far as development and tax base is concerned. We were looking for the best tax base we could get. We haven't taken full advantage of it yet, I understand, but still we were going after that for down the road. Anything that we could ever get future taxes from we took in, that was still feasible for us to serve, since all of this over on the other side of 373 and clear up and around, we service already. Of course our police cover it on the highway. It was feasible to use it all, so we presented that to the County Commissioners. Bob Ruud was also on the board at that time.

RM: Bob Ruud and Bob Revert; is that also when Jane Logan was a commissioner?

BB: Yes. They were the 3 commissioners. And Bob Ruud had wanted this years before, 15 years before. He had wanted us to become an unincorporated area because he felt we needed it for service purposes, and there could be more money brought into our area if we did. So he was very happy about it. And he said, "I could not believe that you would ever take in so much area though." I think this was the grounds that they used. If we had just taken in Lathrop and down 95 and this side, they would have accepted it immediately. But I think they had some question about the audacity of it--to take in enough area that we were the largest unincorporated town

probably in the West. I think that that was a little mind-boggling for them. So then they held an election, and we had to go and vote on it again.

RM: Was it just Amargosa Valley voting, or everybody?

BB: Yes, the voters of Amargosa Valley. So it was a special election. Now when the highway people came down, of course they had their legal papers with them on how we became a town when we wanted the town sign. They said that they found it very interesting that there were a lot more signatures on the petition than there were people who came in to vote, and we said, "Yes, because people felt very indignant." They had done everything that they felt was necessary to become a town when they had the petition, so they refused to go back to the voting booth to vote for it the first time, which they thought was the second time. Nevertheless it passed.

RM: Your first town board consisted of whom?

BB: Jim Hudgeons was chairman. Morgan Lynn, Kenneth Garey, Don Barnett, and Susan Jones. They served for 2 years.

RM: They are elected, right?

BB: Yes, I think they were elected. They were elected for a 2-year tern, and then at the end of the 2-year tern they came in and elected 5 new ones, which was a bad scene because the new community buildings were in the process.

RM: The new community complex. So you had had an election to build those in the meantime.

BB: Yes, in those first 2 years. They voted to put in the town complex. First they finished the medical center, then they finished the library, and the time that we came on in the second board, they hadn't laid the foundation yet for the multi-purpose building. We were finishing up and buying the library, and starting the multi-purpose. In the meantime, as always when you're building things, there were a lot of problems and a lot of discussion--well, there weren't meetings of the mind, I'll tell you that much, between the construction company and the architect and the town. RM: You floated a bond to pay for them.

BB: Yes, we floated a big bond. A million dollar bond. It was a confident group, that's all I can say.

RM: But things were looking better then, weren't they. I mean you had ABC going.

BB: We had a good tax base there. We didn't have many people coming in--one or 2 families a year, which of course as far as many people are concerned is all they'd like to see. But anyway we got through the first 2 years there, and they finished the one building and had the other one pretty well done. Then we came into the second board. Well, we split that one in 2 for 3 and 3

for 2 by just drawing lots so we wouldn't again be caught the same way because we went in cold with a whole new board and no knowledge really of what had gone on. There had been problems between the architect and the first board to where the first board had backed away from everything completely. So it was a bad scene, and we can't allow it to happen again. So from there we finished the second building, and finished the third building, medical clinic, library, and the multi-purpose building. The school is completely different.

RM: The county pays for that, doesn't it, or the state?

BB: The county school board takes in everything in the whole county, so when you say county, yes.

RM: Yes, but it's paid for by the county and not the community.

BB: Well I think people would disagree with you there. You have all of our dollars that we have to pay out. But we are administered by a county board, not a local. People don't like that idea. You'd think the county built something for us; they didn't.

RM: Well, you are in the second board. Were those projects completed then under the second board?

BB: Yes, the second board.

RM: And you were a member of the second board. Were you a 2-year or 3- year?

BB: I was a 3-year. The first year I was Chairman, and the second year Doris was Chairman.

RM: Do you remember what year that was that you were chairman?

BB: Yes, 1984.

RM: OK, why don't you look those up. So then what kinds of things has the town done since the construction of the multi-purpose building and the clinic and so on? Have there been any projects?

BB: Well, yes, it's a constant project really when you have a town. I think we've come a long way, and I think we've come fairly fast. We've had a tremendous improvement in our road system. We had Fish and Wildlife come in and take over there at Ash Meadows.

RM: What was the feeling on that?

BB: Very resentful. In the first place, there are lots of pupfish, and pupfish and the desert go together. Yes, the pupfish have been here, and maybe it's something to be kept for historical note, I don't know. But they had been a problem for many years. They were a problem for the

first big rancher that came in when the professor out of Las Vegas came out and decided that pupfish were such an important thing. He had to quit pumping; he had to keep track of his pumping, and a good one to talk to on that is Jean Garey. She worked over there, and as far as the pupfish are concerned she can tell you. She was over this year, and she said that she's sure the count is way down.

RM: The pupfish count?

BB: Yes. The pupfish count seems to be way down from where it was when the ranch was operating.

RM: In Devil's Hole or all over the place?

BB: The ones that are out in the open I suppose are the ones she could see, because she took someone over, and I think she can give you a pretty good rundown. Another thing that Jean can give you a good rundown on is the money that has care back that has been used for the park around the AVIA, buildings since she's on the county money board, parks and recreation. RM: So, in general, there was resentment about the whole pupfish thing. BB: Yes, I think, in general, we felt this was ridiculous. They had been on it to the point that people couldn't stay in there.

RM: Basically, you lost half the valley; not half, but a good chunk of it.

BB: Yes, we lost a chunk of the valley, and I do not feel that Fish and Wildlife and the federal government had put anything into it to the point that it was worth anything to us. It is at a standstill; it has not moved Ahead; it has not been a good thing.

RM: It's not developed so that the tourists will go through there.

BB: I guess some of the Sierra Club went out, but they would go anyplace. The general tourist is not going to go in there.

RM: That road destroys your car.

BB: They have had time to do that, and they had not shown any incentive. All they want to do is to argue about how much money they are going to give us to get a road through there.

RM: How would you describe politics here and how do people function politically here?

BB: Well, for ten years we had a Republican women's club. It was a minority group, but it was all right because they would let us take care of all the things that needed to be taken care of for free as a political entity. It's basically Democrat.

RM: I noticed that in the '86 gubernatorial election, one of the few areas that Governor Bryan didn't carry was Beatty and the Amargosa Valley. What was the thinking there?

BB: You better believe it. That was on the Test Site. They felt that he had definitely sold us down the river for the more populated areas. He had no feeling about us. He wouldn't know where the Amargosa was if he drove through it; nor does he care what our problems are. I don't think he's ever given one thought to what his actions have done to us, what the repercussions are. His attitude toward the repository has been very narrow-minded I think for the whole state. But for us, I think it hit us extra hard.

RM: And there is quite a bit of agreement in the valley about what you are saying here.

BB: I think so, yes.

RM: Is there any support against the repository here?

BB: If there is, it's so small you don't see it. Really, you're talking to a basically learned area as far as atomic energy is concerned, and I think that's the biggest thing. Many of us came here with a background of the Test Site, and when you've been involved for 20 years and you've learned that there are bad things about it, but you basically learn how to be safe. You've been checked, and everything's been checked and double checked. Basically most people, if they think, in most ways do not like the Beatty low-level on top of our water, but go along with that over there on the Test Site and the repository because it would be under federal direction. We feel we would have the experts of the country in control of the repository.

RM: You feel safer under the feds.

BB: Yes, definitely.

RM: Who controls the Beatty dump?

BB: It's an independent company.

RM: Who makes them tow the line, the State?

BB: The State.

RM: And you feel safer under the feds than the State.

BB: Yes. Well, that changes too. When a Republican was in the capitol building I felt safer. I felt safe because they were constantly checking, and they had a much more thorough investigation and check on it than they seem to have had since Bryan's gone in.

RM: We would call that the Amargosa Valley, the Beatty dump. Let's talk about that. Why did they put it there to begin with?

BB: I think because someone turned their head. Oh I suppose it's financial. They came down and talked to us after they put it in.

RM: They never talked to you before?

BB: Not to my knowledge.

RM: And to your knowledge the community was not consulted.

BB: No, because they consider that the Beatty disposal.

RM: And yet it's really in the valley.

BB: It's really over our watershed. It's above us; it's below Beatty. Beatty has nothing to lose. We are the ones who have plenty to lose if that should ever seep down. Well, you drove out 95 this morning? Did the trucks come down with you?

RM: Yes, just big trucks passing me. They were big semi box tractor trailers.

BB: Oh, boxes that were going into the Test Site?

RM: I wonder; some of them were and some of them weren't.

BB: Did you notice the little signs on the side? The only place that they are marked is a little sign 4 inches high if they have nuclear waste in them. You watch those white ones and those silver ones roll through; you see nothing on the side of them. Look right down in the corner, and it'll tell you what's in there. That's the only place it says.

RM: I know one thing. They were all going 70 or 75 miles an hour.

BB: Yes. Well, they don't work at the Test Site. The workers at the Test Site get picked up the second time and they lose their job that way.

RM: Well, nobody goes 55 on that road.

BB: Well they go below 70 if there're going into the Test Site. Below 70 is considered wasting fuel.

RM: So when was the Beatty dump developed?

BB: Oh, that must have come in the '70s. I really don't know that much About it. I've listened to them talk, and at that time there was definitely the feeling that it was not unsafe, by the RAD people from over at the base. But I think they started at very low level, just hospital things and things like that to begin with. I think it's gotten much hotter, so to speak, in their loads. Yes, I

feel that it must have because of the things that are going in there. We are having load after load of hot stuff come out just open, open.

RM: Open loads of hot stuff?

BB: Open loads of low-level, just open loads.

RM: They're coming from the Test Site?

BB: No, they're coming from across the state line. But they are bringing them out here for burial. And there are things that are taking up a lot of room, and they are coming and it's a daily thing. They stop at Lathrop Wells Corner. They'll be stopped or they'll be sitting there because they've gotten out ahead of the traffic that's coming to the Test Site to get out here and wait to go in to the Beatty dump. So they are sitting right there, and they have sat there morning after morning. And when I go to town, they are there waiting.

RM: Do you believe that your views on the Beatty dump are typical of people in the community?

BB: Well, I don't think they are typical, because I think I am much more conscious of it than the majority of people because we are constantly being reminded of it on a day-to-day basis with the visibility of the loads going in. I assume that I'm a little more adamant about it than most people, because I have taken a more active part in trying to keep it, well, not so much controlled as to keep the government involved, the State government involved in what's going on there. In the past, they test drilled and took readings for radiations, checking any chance of it moving and going down to our water level. Of course, maybe it could go for 100 years, and you'd have no problem with it. But, let's say that we did have a weather change, and we did have rain, and we did have runoff. I don't think that that's an impossible thing when you see the weather shifts in the last couple of years. If you take that over a 100 years, and knowing that this valley has been much wetter than it is now, I don't see that that is an impossible thing. And knowing that the river has run back here at times, so I don't it's an impossible thing to figure that that might seep down and run off down into our valley. But I would say, yes, I'm more adamant than the majority of people. Most people just say it's there, and that's it.

RM: Are there people who work at the Beatty dump who live in the valley, do you know?

BB: Oh, I think a couple of them who were at ABC now work out there. Now whether they all moved to Beatty or not, I don't know, but they were talking about moving.

RM: Most of the people who work at the Beatty dump live in Beatty?

BB: Yes. Beatty reaps the dividends, and I think we stand to lose everything. That's the way I look at it.

RM: Yes, it is interesting that they put it on top of the Amargosa River. BB: I just can't believe that the State allowed them to do it, but that's why I'm saying that I don't think that the State ever realizes that we live here. You know, I think when you see on maps that this is a vacant valley, that they actually mentally see it as a vacant valley. Because people can be amazed when they are driving down 95 and wonder what all those lights are over there. It never dawns on them that there's actually people that live at every one of those lights. Now that can be even when we are at the lowest we've been in many a year. I still think it's a pretty startling sight.

RM: To return to politics, how would you describe local politics?

BB: Well, as to parties? This is basically Democrat.

RM: Basically a Democratic area, but are you divided into political factions in the valley? Is it all pretty smooth or do you split along Democrat-Republican lines?

BB: No, it's just like you could see when you spoke about the last election, where 75 percent are now Democrats. They vote the way they see it. I don't think they're Republican or Democrat except when it comes to registering.

RM: OK. Tell me a little about how the valley participates in and perceives county government.

BB: An uphill battle. Well, I'll tell you how we really see ourselves. think basically we voted for having a 5-man mixture.

RM: The valley supported that. So you'll get your own commission? BB: No, Beatty and we will have one together unless we both grow much faster than we have. Well, they may have two there and they may have two up there, but neither one of us is going to go anywhere if we don't go with them. Neither two are going to go with the other two on many things. RM: But don't you have that now? Basically you have your own commissioner now, Beatty and the valley? You just got more people to persuade now, don't you?

BB: Well, the thing is that, when it comes to election, until this goes into effect you have to run all over the county, and that puts anybody from this valley at a very big disadvantage.

CHAPTER SIX

M: I would like you to talk about the Bettles. You acquired your home here from the Bettles, didn't you?

B: The Bettles, as I understand it, came into the valley in the [early 1950s]. Mrs. Bettles had arthritis, and they came down from the area near Reno to give her some relief from the winter. They were looking for a place to settle, and they were looking for a place that would be good for her and also where they could made a living of some kind, I assume. They came across the T&T area, contacted the T&T people, and it was decided to take them as overseers. There was no one overseeing the T&T property at all at that time. It was an absolutely vacant spot.

M: Did they pay him, I wonder?

B: Well, in lieu of payment or as part of his payment he was to be allowed to pick out a 40-acre plot, whichever one he chose. That was the agreement. After trying several 40-acre plots, each of which had a well on it, he chose to take the one where we're at now. At least that was what we understood from talking to Mrs. Bettles.

M: What was Mr. Bettles' background? Did he do any mining while he was here?

B: He was a mining engineer, and they tell me one of the best around. He has a name for being a terrific person as well as a terrific engineer. I think he did a lot of sampling, because I've found piles of samples around the place. Apparently, he did a lot of exploring too. I doubt if it was just here, but I think over the whole area. I was told that my his boyhood friend up north that is why they came here in the first place. And he was a very interesting person and a very well-liked person and apparently had a very good personality. He seemed to have the ability to sell ideas and went into trying to sell the area.

M: Oh, yes, that map you gave me. But how was he going to benefit from that?

B: I don't know, never having known him.

M: You didn't really know him?

B: I never knew him because he died before we ever came to the valley. So all I know about is what I've been told about him by different people in Nevada. But he was a promoter, in a way; and she definitely was a promoter. Very fascinating people. She was a very fascinating person to talk to. She had a memory that never forgot one little thing and she could sit down and tell you dates, one after the other, of when things happened. Some of them were not maybe absolutely correct but pretty near. They came in and they developed this place and brought in samples; they brought in samples of all kinds of fruit. This whole yard was full of fruit and nut trees--trees that they had gathered of different types that they thought might grow here. They filled their yard with them and developed this corner as, I think, just a spot to try out things.

M: Mostly, a little experimental area.

B: Yes. Now we've had to take out many of the trees because they were too close and killed each other.

M: How did he earn a living? Did he grow alfalfa?

B: I can't say how. They had alfalfa a couple years, but I don't think that it was anywhere near permanent.

M: And you bought the home from Mrs. Bettles after Gordon Bettles died. Did she move over to Pahrump?

B: Well, she had in later years, but at that time she had moved into Las Vegas for a couple of years. Then she came back out here and only a few years ago moved to Pahrump. Her family had another home down there at the

M: And then you bought the home and began fixing it up.

B: Yes, changing it. Then my husband died. M: And then you lived here alone 7 years. What was it like for a woman to live here alone like that?

B: My family tell me I'm very bull-headed and very narrow-minded. If you are acquainted with the desert you know that you can't leave anything any length of time without attention. I had gone back East when my husband died and sold the only home we had back there. It really was the only place we had left that was hare to my family, so I didn't want to give it up. I stayed to oversee it because if you didn't, things just go. They have to watered; they have to be tended. It was hard to do in a way, but I'm not the kind of person that has to have people. So it wasn't really a big thing. My biggest problem was to make a livelihood, which I couldn't do very readily because if I went out and worked 5 days a week, I couldn't do the watering and things that had to be done, especially in 5 or 6 months of the year.

M: You were kind of broke?

B: Yes. Part of the time I was kind of broke. [laughs] But it's an almost impossible job, I would say, for an older woman to live here alone.

M: Though Mrs. Bettles did do it too, didn't she. I wonder how long she lived alone in this place.

B: In this place? She didn't live here very long. It was only a couple years after his death that we took it over. Her health was not too good at the time that we moved in here. But she lived up in the other house [on Mecca Road] quite awhile, but that's not on any land except the acre right around it. She had put up quite a few trees and things when she was there.

M: You mentioned to me that the army was in here in the valley in World War II.

B: Yes, it was a training area. I don't exactly where it was, because by the time we came there were no physical signs of it. They had troops in here for desert training. A brother-in-law who's since passed away said that he was positive this is where they had their tents and so forth when they took their desert training here. So apparently they had then down or up through here somewhere, and it would have had to have been on what was BLM land, I suppose. At that time all this through the center, through here on over towards the east, would have been BLM land and free to be used in that way.

M: You mentioned that there's a building on your property here. What did you tell me it was?

B: It was an army barracks, the kind that where they have screens and the roll-up canvas in the upper half of it. That open-air type that they used to have.

M: You also showed me a building that you have out back that was an a original T&T building that doesn't have studs in its construction.

B: Yes, we assume they are old T&T buildings. It's nothing but a straight 1 by 8, or 1 by 12s and between the 1 by 12s there is a cross of metal that is attached, a little metal stripping that's nailed. Because when they built the T&T buildings it was so hard to get things brought in. They would have had to come by wagon because we presume that they were built before the railroad came. Most of the things were brought in from down south here. These buildings were put up, and they were apparently for people. They are apparently for personnel. The roof is constructed on top of these walls, and that's the full construction of the building. These sides probably could be rolled and brought in by rolls. If not they could come in by sides if they would lay flat on a wagon and each side brought in. They're 8 to 10 feet high, and that's a pretty high wall. I think it's 14 feet long on one side, that is, one continuous roll of 1 by 12s.

M: And you also mentioned that part of the central room of your home, the big livingroom-diningroom, you have reason to believe might have been a station house.

B: No, I won't say that. I'll say a commercial type building. It is constructed all the way around with studs, full 2 by 4s, full, unfinished 2 by 4s. And of course that will date back to 1905 to 1907.

M: As you presently have it, it's got a false ceiling; it's got a high ceiling.

B: Yes. The ceiling is a full wooden ceiling that's up at 12 feet.

M: And then you've added on. You've added several rooms on to it, various people have as they've lived here.

B: The Bettles had added on the west utility and bathroom wing and a small kitchen and a small sleeping alcove on the one end and the kitchen on the other end. We've enlarged it for 2 bedrooms in lieu of the alcove.

M: It's the oldest dwelling in the valley, isn't it.

B: I would assume it would have to be. There might be more of these buildings around; I don't know, but this is an old one. I know that, because it has the old original redwood siding of the railroad, the same as a little building that we have that is without studs. It has the same trim; it has the same paint. When we came in here, the roof was still a painted green shingle roof, which was indicative of a railroad property. And that building out there has always been yellow, except we sprayed it over with white paint.

M: Could you say a little bit about the role of minority people in the community, racial minorities and ethnic minorities. When you came in here, what was the ethnic make-up?

B: I think they were all Caucasians when we came.

M: Were there any Mexican-Latino people working over in Ash Meadows on the ranch?

B: I think that they had a few over there on that spread at that time, and then when the big developer came in he did hire a lot. Then IMV probably hired some of them when that project closed down, because some of the Mexicans have been here for many years. Then we've had the newcomers; some come and go. But we have a pretty permanent group of Mexican background people.

M: How about Blacks in the community?

B: Oh, I think there's probably one family that are part colored.

M: Are the minority members pretty accepted in the community?

B: I think they are pretty well. I noticed when we had the carnival fair yesterday and there was the one boy who was part colored, and then Mexican background children and the Caucasian. They seem to have no problems. Now we had the one family that are part Indian.

M: There is an Indian family. Just one?

B: The Nickells are part Indian background. Their 2 boys grew up here. I don't see any big problems with them. Of course you are limited here for friends. I don't think our children are inclined to pick and choose as if they were being raised in the city. So they learn to appreciate each other and to get along with each other because they spend a lot of time together--on the buses being transported and then a full day in school. I think probably they're so lonesome for each other at the end of a vacation that they are very happy to be back with each other. They

seem to be pretty close, the whole group of them. When you go to the school you don't see an ethnic group off here and another one here. You see them pretty well all interrelating. I always feel that where children are concerned, you take away the barriers and you have less of it. But I think the less that we have Mexican translators and so forth in our schools, the much better you will see the children getting along. You know I don't have anything against people having their culture, but I do believe that when you come to the United States we do have a basic language and that's number one and they must learn to communicate in that. And I think our state's made up their mind to that finally, at least I hope so because I think it's very important.

M: You made an interesting comment about L.A. smog.

B: Well, that came up when we were talking about the fact that I resented very much having people from L.A. come up and demonstrate against our nuclear tests when I feel that we are contaminating the air much less, contamination underground and above ground, with the nuclear tests on the Test Site than they are doing with the smog in L.A. At this point their smog comes up past Eagle Mountain and enclouds it and comes into our valley every once in a while when the wind shifts. I feel that their way of life is definitely endangering our way of life. We may be a minority there. I feel the majority has gotten out of hand. [laughter]

M: How do you see the future of the valley when you look into your crystal ball?

B: Oh, in my crystal ball, I don't know, unless the government comes and moves us out.

M: Do you think there's a move on to do that?

B: Oh, I definitely feel that many things that they do would point in that direction. Ever since I've been here, I've always felt there was an undercurrent that would say, "You really don't belong there." And if you don't really belong there, someday you're not going to be there. Sometimes I think the people who live in trailer hares are really clever because they might take a little of it with them when they leave. [laughter]

M: You don't have any wheels on your house, do you. [more laughter]

B: I don't have any wheels so I'll have to leave it. No, you can always feel that when you are having them survey you constantly, when the helicopters come over and you see them laying out your whole valley, and mapping it again, and taking the mineral readings, you have a feeling. Of course we have a lot of BLM land. I know that, but it doesn't give you much of a secure feeling because they pass right over the top of you too. You're mapped also. No, I think there might be something like afoot. I wouldn't know why.

There's more to this deadness than meets the eye. I've always felt that. Nov whether it's minerals, which I assume it would have to be. I think there could be oil under it.

M: What evidence of oil have you seen?

B: Well, for instance, they go down drilling and they go down about so far with the big rigs by the government, and suddenly overnight they just pull up and they're gone. They've done that right up here, between here and Lathrop Wells. So we don't know what they hit. They either had to hit geothermal or something else.

M: What things do you see in the future here?

B: I think that, if the government doesn't intercede. it will be a slow developing but a very healthy area. I think that over the past 20 years we have seen that. We've laid out our town. I think that basically people will stay with that layout. I think that we can have a well-organized town. I think it will always be the kind of people who want to not brush shoulders with the rest of the world. They'll be people who want to live more or less alone, have their own little spot. When anyone comes in to buy, they want to be as far away from people as possible. There's always a certain number who would want to be a little closer, but still not be completely inhibited by people. I think with the ELM the way it is, we will always have vacant spots. So we will keep the country feeling. I don't see that ever disappearing, because I don't think there's enough water unless we go into the lower aquifers, to maintain a big town.

I don't see it as a fanning area because I don't think that our water problems are ever going to be over as far as the State's concerned. I think they will always keep close guard on it.

So I think it could be a very pleasant, rural type living, basically rural type, and still have the services for 2,000 people.

M: One thing we haven't touched on is health care. Could you tell me a little bit about the evolution of health care in the valley.

B: Well, we used to drive clear to Las Vegas. I don't see Pahrump as much help. It's too far away in emergencies. We have our own health clinic, which is part of the regular set-up of Rural Nevada Consortium.

M: Is it staffed with physicians?

B: No, a physician's assistant with a physician that comes in once a week, who writes all your prescriptions for you, and it really is very similar to the kind of care you get in the military. But people don't quite see it that way, I guess, and they don't feel quite as secure with the P.A. I think that if you've gone for health care a 100 miles away for years and years, it's pretty hard to bring it back to a local P.A. It seems to be like the local grocery, there are only about a half of us that used it. The rest of them were so used to traveling to Las Vegas and buy groceries. Actually, it becomes your social outing, the center, the focus of your life.

M: Do people worry about emergencies and things like that or do they just kind of accept it?

B: Well, I think so. We have a pretty good staff on our emergency ambulance, and the kids have taken training. Oh, yes, they have their radios and everything now, and they can keep in touch

with Las Vegas, and we also have the helicopter for the emergencies. The young people have done a real good job of it; they keep upgrading.

M: You mentioned the young people and the emergency staff. How does that work?

B: That is a volunteer program, and they take their different levels of emergency care, and quite a few, I feel, are very competent.

M: Then you have an ambulance.

B: Yes, we have a well-kept-up ambulance. They pick you up and take you in to Las Vegas.

M: When did this program begin?

B: About 15 years ago. I went in with the first class when we took our emergency care, and it's been going ever since. It has always improved. We thought that when ABC left that we might have trouble keeping the staff. Those that left, yes we miss them, but others seem to have come up and taken the place. It isn't as big a staff as we used to have, but they seem to be able to cover. And they are all on radios, so they are constantly available just like our fire department. Our fire department is also volunteer, with a paid assistant fire chief; the county pays $18,000 for his wage. We have 2 fire stations. He's at one or the other all the time for an 8-hour day.

This house burned right after we moved everything in it. We just had the telephone put in and had a thunder and lightning storm and lightning came in on the telephone and set it on fire. My husband had pretty well put it out, but it was up in and through the studs and the rafters and all. It ended up that Mercury picked up the call from the Sheriff and brought the Mercury fire engine over. Now when we first can the only fire protection we had was Mercury.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RM: Betty, we were just talking about the evolution of fire protection here. You began with just protection out of Mercury. How did that change over the years?

BB: Between 15 and 17 years ago, they were given a fire engine. David Boyd and Tom Ruston went up and drove it back from up north. That was all volunteers, and then we had a water wagon. Because the house pumps in lots of places were not adequate for water. We've lost several trailers in the valley, so I think probably all in all we are a very fire conscious group. When you live out like this, you smell smoke and you just react. You figure you are supposed to be able to find out what it is and take care of it right away. We now have 2 fire stations and 4 fire trucks, 2 in each one; they are different types. And now we have an emergency vehicle, and that's about to be replaced with a new one, because now the fire engines beat the emergency vehicle to the fire. But it's all volunteer fire department, and they're pretty well organized and they're doing a good job, I think. They had 4 call-outs last month. I assume that they were grass fires.

RM: Is that a problem, grass fires, here?

BB: Well, yes, it's a problem because anything that starts a fire close to an inhabitant's is a real problem. I assume that these were maybe burning piles that got out of control. They are getting a little more touchy about when you burn now. You must call the sheriff's department and tell them before you start, which is not a bad idea. In case there's a problem they can be more alert to the situation.

RM: You can't think of anything else that we've forgotten?

BB: One more thing we did. For several years we had a junior college from Clark County Community College extension. We held classes here. It was successful to a point, but it wasn't something that seemed to be gaining momentum as fast as the college thought it ought to. The college quit giving us credit courses, and they wanted us to have noncredited courses.

RM: Adult ed, yes.

BB: The noncredited courses went out fast. If you can't get credit courses, forget it. We never had big classes but we had adequate classes to qualify. At that time it was more than 10, but we could get first-year classes so we covered math and business and so on.

RM: Was that when ABC was here?

BB: We didn't really get many people from ABC, but it was after that that they decided that we were not progressing as fast as they thought we should. We were one of the less inhabited areas, so they quit giving us classes.

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