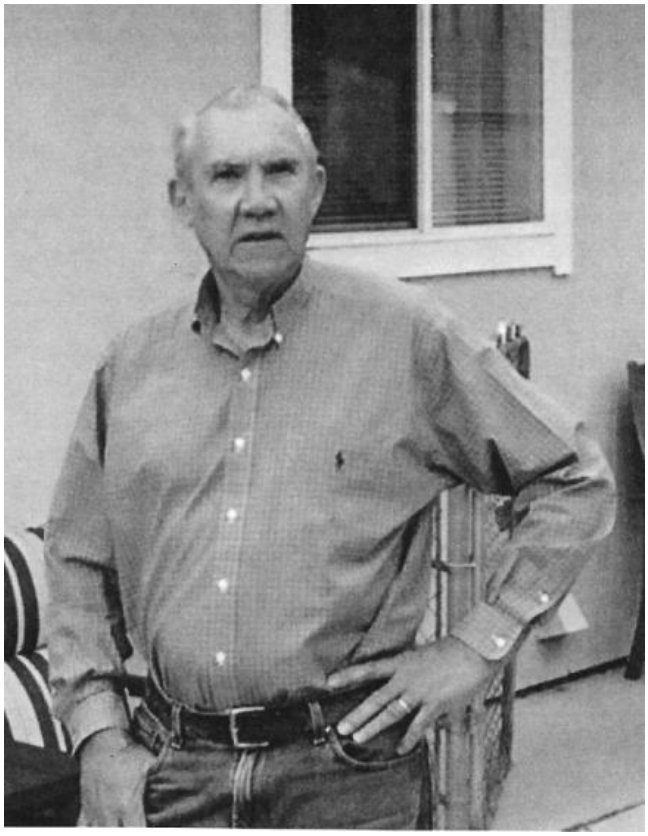
An Interview with
BILL
METSCHER

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada
Tonopah
2011



Bill Metscher
2010

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Valerie A. Brown, Debra Ann MacEachen, Robert B. Clark, Lynn E. Riedesel, Marcella Wilkinson and Jean Charney transcribed a number of interviews, as did Julie Lancaster, who also helped with project coordination. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Joni Eastley, Michael Haldeman, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people's names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Eva La Rue and Angela Haag of the Central Nevada Museum served as consultants throughout the project; their participation was essential. Much- deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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

—Robert D. McCracken
2011

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—RDM
2011

Robert McCracken talking with Bill Metscher at his home in Reno, Nevada, May 22, 2010, with Bill's wife, Judy Metscher, joining in from time to time.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Bill, I want to preface your interview with the notation that you have written a wonderful memoir of your life in the Tonopah-Goldfield area up through your graduation from high school. This is a valuable resource not just for family members but for historians who are interested in life in Central Nevada and also the American West in general. So I'd like to pick up with your story right when you graduated from high school. But first, Bill, could you tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

BM: William Joseph Metscher. I was born January 26, 1941, in the Miners' Hospital in Tonopah.

RM: What was your father's name?

BM: William Henry Metscher.

RM: When and where was he born. Do you know?

BM: Yes, he was born in Columbia, Nevada, a suburb of Goldfield, on June 26, 1908. The building he was born in later became the family's chicken coop. It was their home at the time.

RM: Could you tell us about your father and his background and who his parents were and so on?

BM: I don't know much about his parents. You would have to talk to Allen; he's got the whole family history; his wife's Mormon, and has researched it. But, anyway, his dad was a miner. Dad worked in the mines all his life, too, which was eventually what killed him. The silicosis that he contracted ruined his lungs and he couldn't breathe; his heart stopped, and that was it. They put "heart attack" on his death certificate, but silicosis is what killed him.

RM: When did he pass on?

BM: He died January 3, 1972.

RM: Do you remember any notable stories that he would have told of working life in the mines? Did he hit it big at one time or another?

BM: Well, actually, when he leased in the later years he did pretty well a couple of times; they had some pretty good shipments of ore. But leasing was a tough proposition; he made a good payday sometimes, but next time it could be months before he got another shipment out. It was a pretty tough life, actually, as far as making a steady income.

For years he worked for wages in mines, and he had some pretty interesting stories. He was working at the Deep Mines in Goldfield in 1926 when the power failed due to heavy snow that knocked out the lines over the White Mountains. They had just built a bulkhead in the mine about three weeks before, because they were afraid the power was going to go off and flood the mine. When the power failed, he was trapped on the 2,000-foot level, and the water built up behind the bulkhead—so much pressure that it was squirting streams like needles out through the little holes around the bulkhead doors. He said it was shooting ten feet down the drift, and they didn't know what was going to happen.

Eventually the power company got ahold of the Extension Mine in Tonopah—they had diesel engines as a backup for the Victor Mine, so they routed some of their power to Goldfield to rescue them. They couldn't climb up the shaft—climb up the ladders—because the acid in the water had eaten all the nails out of the ladder rungs.

RM: They were trapped down there?

BM: Exactly; they were trapped for 24 hours.

RM: They had a shaft that was 2,000 feet deep in Goldfield? I did not know that.

BM: Yes, the Deep Mines; and I think the Pittsburgh was almost 2,000 feet. The Deep Mines was trying to tap the Goldfield lode that was supposed to go east, but they never got to it. They found values but not enough to make money.

RM: Could they not get to it, or did it not exist?

BM: It didn't exist. Or they didn't find it if it did exist.

RM: So they sunk down 2,000 feet and then drifted east? Was that it?

BM: They drifted east and west looking for it. They had the 800-foot and 1,600-foot levels, and the bottom level was at 2,150 feet.

RM: So they encountered a lot of water?

BM: A lot of water. It was kind of funny, because they had so much water they were pumping that Buck O'Berg, who was raised with Dad and was about Dad's age, decided he was going to use the water to wash placer. There's placer ore below the Sandstorm Mine on the Tonopah side of the old Consolidated Mill. He dug a ditch by hand from there up to the Deep Mines to use that water to wash the placer and by the time he got the ditch done, he had the water for about a week before the Deep Mines closed down. He spent three years digging that ditch by hand. He was working another job, but spent all his spare time digging the ditch. You still see the ditch.

RM: Oh, what a story. Now, where were the Deep Mines relative to the hotel?

BM: The Goldfield Hotel? Looking directly east from the hotel, you would see the Florence Mine and beyond the Florence Mine up over the hill was the Deep Mines.

RM: How deep was the typical shaft in Goldfield?

BM: Probably about 1,200 feet.

RM: They weren't that deep.

BM: The ore didn't go that deep, but they tried to find it.

RM: How far down did the good ore go?

BM: Probably about 700, 800 feet. Different places different depths. The really good ore was from the surface to about the 400-foot level around on the Combination Fraction and in the Mohawk.

RM: Is there any further detail on the story about the guy that dug that ditch? [Laughs]

BM: No, he was just a friend of Dad's. When I was a kid he had a son, Keith, Philip's age, a year younger than me. And he had a daughter my age, Virginia, that was in my class. When we were going to school, they lived out at Gold Point. He was the watchman at the mill out there. The kids would come to Tonopah and stay during the wintertime to attend school. We got to know them fairly well because they were our age. Philip ran around with Keith quite a bit.

RM: How big was his ditch? I mean, what were the dimensions of it?

BM: It was probably three feet wide by three feet deep. It was a pretty good-size ditch.

RM: And he was going to use water they were pumping out of the mine?

BM: Yes, out of the Deep Mines. He was going to take that water and wash the placer deposit with it.

RM: Did he have some good placer out there?

BM: They had some good placer down below there in that wash, but it wasn't rich enough for a large-scale operation.

RM: So he worked three years, and then, bang, it was gone. [Laughs]

BM: It was gone. [Laughs]

RM: What other stories do you recall your father telling?

BM: There was the time he worked with his brother George right after he and Mom were married. They were gyppoing around before they took a lease in Goldfield, working here and there. They worked at the B&B quicksilver mine for a while.

RM: Where was that?

BM: Fish Lake Valley. At that time, the Lady Esther Company that made the makeup someplace down in Los Angeles had a talc mine over near Lida; it was between Lida and Fish Lake Valley. He and George [laughs] went out to the talc mine and went to work. He said it was really one of the scariest mines he ever worked in, because you'd always feel that talc moving a little. Shortly after he and George went to work, one day, they told the foreman, "It's going to come down. It's going to come down."

Of course, the foreman insisted it wasn't going to, and he and George quit. The next day the mine caved in.

RM: Oh, my goodness. Your father was raised in Goldfield, right?

BM: Yes, born and raised there. His stories of Goldfield are probably what influenced Philip and me to do a lot of things we did when we got older, like searching old houses and climbing mountains. All the stuff we did as kids. We picked up a lot of it from stories he told us that he'd done when he was a kid; things he'd been involved with. I was always careful not to tell my kids, because I didn't want them doing the same things. [Laughs] Dad had an "interesting" childhood!

RM: At what age did he start experiencing symptoms of silicosis?

BM: It probably started around 1940.

RM: So he would have been about 32 years old.

BM: Yes. Like I related in my book, around 1945-46, he would cough so bad they sent him to the hospital in Vegas—told him he had TB, but he didn't. In those days they always misdiagnosed silicosis as TB, and I think it had a lot to do with the way the industrial commission was under the control of the mine operators. They didn't want to classify it as a disability. Instead, they called it tuberculosis. That way there was no way that the mining companies were involved, and thus they avoided paying any damages for the guys that came down with it and died.

RM: Or have to clean up the mines.

BM: They fought that for years and years and years, clear into the '60s.

RM: So it was fraud, really. Fraudulent diagnosis.

BM: That's just the way it was in those days. If you had silicosis, you had TB, or you just lived with your silicosis.

RM: At what age did he have to give up mining because of the silicosis?

BM: In 1946.

RM: Oh, so he was 38 years old when he was incapacitated for his profession.

BM: Yes, right. Exactly. And it hounded him from then on. Never had enough breath. He'd poop out really fast. Too bad, too, because the same thing happened to his brother George. It killed him, too.

RM: At about the same age?

BM: No, George lived another ten to 12 years. I don't think he worked as hard as Dad did afterward. Dad couldn't mine anymore but he still had to work, and he held down some pretty tough jobs, where George just kicked back and let his wife work.

RM: What jobs did he have after he couldn't work in the mines?

BM: He had all kinds of jobs. He eventually wound up working for Cavanaugh Brothers driving one of their tank trucks and doing odd jobs—they had so many things going on in Tonopah those days. He was a jack-of-all-trades for them. His next job was working for Nye County. He was on the road crew for five, six years. Then he finally got a job as the watchman for the state highway department. That's where he finished up, and then he retired and died about six months later.

RM: Did he get the silicosis in the Goldfield mines? Were they bad for silicosis, too?

BM: All of them were. Yes, he got it there.

RM: Would there have been a way to prevent the miners from getting silicosis without shutting down the mines, like drilling with water?

BM: Oh, yes, they could do that, but in those days the companies didn't want to put up that much money, you know, for safety. They must have realized how bad it was; they just didn't want to do it. Young guys like Dad figured they were tough enough to handle it. Couldn't bother them. He said they wrapped wet rags around their face for protection.

RM: Did that work?

BM: It worked a little bit, I guess. It didn't work too well, though, because he died from the "dust."

RM: Yes. What was your mother's name? Tell me about her.

BM: Alexandria Novick Metscher. Novick is her maiden name. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, on October 27, 1911. Dad met her when he'd go to fights back there. Whenever there was a prize fight at Madison Square Garden, he and George would go back to watch the fights. Dad and Mom met through relatives and were married in Elkton, Maryland. They went to Elkton because they didn't want to wait to satisfy New York's residency requirements. That was in 1938. They had known each other for a couple of years, though.

At the same time, George married Alvina, a gal who was a good friend or possibly a relative of Mom's; then they drove out to Goldfield. She has been here ever since. She is a native Nevadan now, I guess. Kind of a native Nevadan. She passed away in Reno July 14, 2010, as a result of Alzheimer's. She was 98.

RM: What do you recall about her family, her mother and father? And how did they wind up in Brooklyn?

BM: They both came in through Ellis Island. Her dad had come over from Russia and her mother from Poland. They met in New York and married. When Mom was a young girl they ran businesses. They had a candy store and a grocery store. They finally settled down when he went to work as a glasscutter. It's kind of ironic, too, because as a glasscutter, he wound up with silicosis, which eventually killed him. He also made violins and taught music. In fact, I've still got one of the violins he made. I played a little when I was a kid but I was never any good at it. I didn't want to put the time into it to learn it very well.

RM: Did your mother ever talk about the adjustment? I mean, going from Brooklyn to Goldfield is a huge transition.

BM: Yes, she said it was quite an adjustment. It was one of those things that she just accepted. The part about Dad working in the leases and not having a steady payroll was the biggest adjustment. After a few incidents in Goldfield where they couldn't pay the bill until they shipped the ore and got the settlement—she almost got kicked out of the grocery store one time for not having the money to buy the groceries and milk for us kids—she said that she'd never, ever be in debt again, and, by God, she held to it. She was amazing.

RM: They were charging the groceries at that time? Just about everybody did in those days, didn't they?

BM: Yes, but she had an unpleasant experience. That's in my book, too.

RM: Okay. Then your mother and father settled in Goldfield, after they got married.

BM: Yes, they settled there, but before the war started Dad went to work in Sparks for the railroad for a while. Then we were in Alkali during the war years, and after the war, we moved back to Goldfield. We left Goldfield in ’47, because they wanted to go to Tonopah, where I could get into school and they could find steady work. In Goldfield, Mom could get temporary work, but she couldn’t get on steady because she was an outsider. In those small towns in those days—probably still the same in places—you couldn’t get on if you were an “outsider.”

RM: Even though she was married to a local guy.

BM: Well, that was part of the problem. There were a lot of single women in Goldfield, and with Dad and George being eligible bachelors; they didn’t like the idea of them going to New York to bring new brides. It made for some bad feelings.

RM: Did George move to Tonopah too, or did he stay in Goldfield?

BM: No, he stayed in Goldfield and worked for the railroad.

RM: Now, which railroad was that?

BM: The T&G, Tonopah and Goldfield. When the railroad folded in ’46, he picked up a job at the Hawthorne Ammunition Depot and worked there until his health started failing. Then he and his family moved to Reno, and Margaret—that was his wife—went to work for the IRS and worked for them for 30 years, 35 years, when she retired. His first wife, Alvina, died in childbirth around 1940. Margaret was his second wife.

RM: So you grew up in Tonopah and had your education there and everything, which you describe in detail in your book. What was going through your mind when you graduated?

BM: Well, I had already made my plans to go to college and study mining engineering. I attended UNR in Reno for three and a half years. I would come back in the summer and work at the Mizpah Garage for Hal Palenski. I did that—let’s see—two years. Kind of hard to keep track of these things anymore; old age is creeping up on me.

When I was a sophomore in college in 1960, Philip graduated and he also enrolled in UNR. I don’t know what he was studying—majoring in agriculture, I think—and he was there through my sophomore year. For the first two years I roomed in Lincoln Hall, and one of my roommates was Bruce Malone. He became a good friend. When Philip came up, the three of us hung out together. In the third year—that would be in ’62—we were all staying in Lincoln Hall.

In those days it was against the rules to have alcohol in your room. We were there for the first couple of weeks of the fall semester, and we were drinking in our room, and one of the kids squealed on us. We got caught so we got kicked out of the room. All three of us just figured we would do something else. Malone got a job in Reno working for the survey outfit, and Phil and I came home. We went to work for Walt Simmons, who we knew from the garage. Simmons was opening up a mining operation in Silver Peak at the old Mary Mine.

We went to work at the Mary Mine for the one semester. It was about three months I was off from school, then I went back and did the second semester. That gave me two and a half years of college. I went back for one more year and then things changed in my life. I got married and I never finished, but I was pretty close. I only needed a few credits to get my degree.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: Who did you marry?

BM: I married Judy Katz. She was born in Tonopah, too. Her dad, Sidney Katz, was stationed at Tonopah Army Air Field during World War II and met Gertrude Cardova's daughter, Betty Cardova, when she was working in Wardle's drugstore behind the soda fountain. They fell in love, were married, and Judy was born. After the war they moved to Southern California, where he was from. He was from the Los Angeles area.

They wound up in Long Beach, but Judy's grandma Gertrude was the telephone exchange operator in Goldfield and her husband, Art Cardova, did a lot of odd jobs around town. In later years, he was also the J.P. Around 1959 I ran into Judy, who was with her cousin Bernice Taylor. Betty Cordova, or Betty Katz, when she was married, had a sister, Thelma Dahlstrom. Bernice was Thelma's daughter. The two girls were close in age, and they'd run around when Judy would come up to stay with her in the summers.

I tried to date her that year but she wouldn't go out with me. I had better luck the next year, and before long we were going "steady." By '62 we were very serious. She graduated from high school in '63 and that summer we set a wedding date for September.

I went to work for Red Douglass at the Ford Garage. During the summer of '63 they were putting a new highway through town and were widening Main Street.

RM: Highway 95?

BM: Yes. They were setting back the fronts of most of the business buildings to accommodate the new four-lane street. They had to cut off the Ford Garage so much the business had to be relocated. This resulted in Douglass rebuilding on the southeast corner of Main and Cross, where the highway department shops had been located. In fact, he wound up with the property on all four corners, which he used for storage and car display, and he eventually put in the Richfield gas station on the northeast corner, where the original Midland was located.

Other results of the highway expansion in the area were the Kelly Hotel being moved to lower main street near the Kretschmer's Coca Cola bottling plant, the Kelly Garage losing about a third of its space, and the Y service station and Texaco station, with Steve Balliet's Pontiac dealership torn out, and Arthur Cox's hardware store and the Reischke store being moved.

The road work also eliminated the town's diagonal parking on Main Street and resulted in the rebuilding and narrowing of the sidewalks. Businesses, including the Mizpah Garage and Coke plant at the lower end of Main Street, suffered as much as those on the upper end near Midland Motors.

Anyway, it was through Douglass's son "Ali" (Allen) that I got the job as parts manager at Midland.

RM: He was Red Douglass's son?

BM: Yes, Red Douglass's son. He was a good friend. He let me know that John Martinez was quitting the parts department and moving to Reno. They needed a parts man at the new garage when they reopened. I talked to Douglass about the job and he hired me. I worked for him that summer helping tear the old place apart and relocate it to the new garage. Judy and I got married that summer. I knew I had a job, and I could . . .

RM: Afford a wife.

BM: Yes, I guess you could say that, but money was still very tight. Douglass, when he relocated, built a warehouse across the street beside the VFW Hall, to stash all the stuff he had in the old building. Actually, the warehouse was the shop building from the old garage that was moved across the street. His Ford garage is still there. I don't know what it is now, but it was a Ford garage for years and years. They used the back wall of the old highway shop as part of the building. Douglass built around the wall, and I went to work in a brand new place. Eventually we lost Jim Klapper, who was the service manager, so I was promoted to parts manager and service manager. Jim quit and went to work as a carpenter at the Tonopah Test Range.

I ran the parts department, and, when people needed repairs, they'd come see me. I would write the repair orders and assign the mechanics to the job for the shop. I did that until 1970, when I went to work at the Nevada Department of Transportation—NDOT—as a mechanic.

Judy and I were married September 7, 1963. Judy's grandpa was J.P. in Goldfield and married us in his home in Goldfield in the old Nevada Telephone-Telegraph Company building. While Gertrude Cordova was the telephone operator they lived in the apartment in the back of the telephone company building. When the telephone company finally went to dial phones, they gave the building to them. I think they lived in it so long, and she was a telephone operator for so many years, it was a way of showing their gratitude.

RM: Where is that building located?

BM: On Ramsey Street east of the corner of Ramsey and Columbia. It's near the old bank and the Goldfield Consolidated Mine Company office. All three buildings were built around 1906, '07, '08, when the town was booming. They're all stone buildings.

RM: And they're still there?

BM: Yes, they're still there. They're kind of kitty-corner across the street from the Elks Hall. You can't miss the place. It's got a plaque on the front that tells about the telephone company. Philip and I owned it for a while and used it as a rental and remodeled it. We had the building dedicated as a historical site and had the plaque installed. We thought it was neat to have an old building, until we found out how much it took to maintain the damn thing. [Laughs]

RM: It's expensive to maintain an old building?

BM: Yes, it is. All three buildings were joined together when they were built, so the roof on ours always leaked. And it had a pump in the basement. If you didn't keep the sump pumped enough to make sure the basement stayed dry, the basement would fill with about three feet of water. The water table is about where the basement is.

RM: The water table is that high in Goldfield? I had no idea.

BM: Yes. In our house on Fifth Avenue we had a well in our front yard. We had to stay away when we were little kids. Dad would tell us, "Stay away from that damn well." We learned the lesson; we stayed away from that well. But, yes, the water table across there is pretty high.

RM: Did they have a cloud of water in all the mines, then?

BM: It's funny, it seems like the water table there up on that flat where the town site's laid out is fairly high—the closer you get to the Malapais, the higher the water table gets. And as you go out toward the mines there is no water, so there must be some kind of dike or something that holds the water back.

But we had a hell of a time with that, because every time our pump would fail; we'd wind up with water in the basement. We tried renting it; we rented it a couple of times. One time we rented it to an outfit that made T-shirts and things they sold in Tonopah. They had a little joint on Main Street—I can't remember what the gal's name was now—and they skipped out on us. [Chuckles] We had to peddle all their stuff to get the rent money. She even left her false teeth behind.

It turned into a heck of a mess. Next we rented it to a mining company. They were promoting people with property near Silver Peak. They had laid out all these claims, and were selling them. It was kind of a weird situation. They would sell these claims all over the country, back East and the Midwest, mainly, with the deal that once you bought the claim, they, for a percentage, would take the ore from your claim and mill it for you. Of course, there was no ore on the claims. I think they called themselves "Federal Claimstaking." The whole history of it's in the Central Nevada Museum in Tonopah. We inherited all the records when they left.

They would place a sign on the mining claim, with the claim number and the party's name they sold it to, take a picture of it, and send it to the unsuspecting sucker. They kept duplicates and there were hundreds of the pictures. Funny thing was, you could tell by the background in the photos that they were selling the same claims over and over.

RM: Selling them twice, you mean?

BM: Yes. They were out on that flat southwest of Silver Peak where there's nothing but sand. [Laughs] And so they skipped out. Anyway, to make a long story short, we had to clean the place out again, get rid of their stuff, and sell what we could for the back rent they owed us. And we got all their records. It's a good example—if somebody ever wanted to do a story on it—of how these companies operated. There were dozens of letters from people asking about their claims, along with replies promising the ore was going to become profitable soon. After that we figured this was enough of this crap, so we sold the building.

RM: This is a side question. Going back to the guy who dug the ditch to get the water, why didn't he get water up there where it was close to surface?

BM: Because he probably couldn't afford to pump it down to his place. He was depending on getting it for nothing.

RM: Oh, I see. Whereas in the ditch it would have gravity to flow.

BM: Yes, free water. Goldfield's water table is funny; they've always had problems there with their water. Now it's pumped to town from the flat between Tonopah and Goldfield. The water was also really poor quality. They had a number of wells around town but it seemed they would run out quickly and it would take a long time to recharge again. It wasn't a steady supply.

RM: Was it surface runoff from the Malapais?

BM: It probably soaked into the alluvial, so in wet years there was more. In the early days they pumped it from Lida, but the pipeline froze during the winter of '38 and by then the county couldn't afford to repair it so they went back to the local wells. The setup they have now was financed by grants and is very dependable, with good-quality water.

RM: Now, you mentioned the house that you lived in in Tonopah and that there was a building next to it. Was it the hospital, or something else?

BM: In Tonopah? Johnny Anderson's house was next door to us in Tonopah.

RM: But you mentioned there was a big building. Was it a hospital?

BM: It was the county hospital.

RM: It was right next door?

BM: No, it wasn't right next door; it was over a little hill about a block west of us at the end of Magnolia Avenue.

RM: What would be there now? Or what part of town would that be in?

BM: It was torn down over time. There is one small house left that was the woman's ward when it was running. The rest of the site is a trailer park now.

RM: Tell me about Red Douglass. What do you know about him?

BM: Red was a good guy. I worked for him for seven years. He was very easygoing. He was born and raised in Tonopah. His dad was an electrician for the Tonopah Mining Company but he

had a problem investing in mining stocks, so they never had any money. Red gave me a stack of mining stock certificates for properties his dad had invested in; none of them ever made any money.

During the Second World War, Red was stationed at the Tonopah Army Airfield in the quartermaster corps and worked in the warehouse at the base. He started repairing furnaces—oil furnaces—for people and made a few bucks doing that. When he got out of the army when the war was over, he went to work at Midland Motors. I don't know who owned the Ford garage then. I want to say Richardson Lovelock, but I'm not sure.

Anyway, he went to work for them and eventually bought the place when they moved to Reno. It was the Ford dealership, and they had a Richfield gas station that consisted of a couple of pumps on Erie Main street. (Until Main Street was widened in '63, the section from the Y at Main and Florence Avenue South was called "Erie Main Street." The section that ran west from the Y (downtown) was designated as Main Street. Florence Avenue was U.S. Highway 6 and Erie Main was U.S. 95.) There was also a garage with a machine shop and a body shop for body and fender repairs.

As I mentioned, Red was a real nice guy. He was very easy to get along with. He was a little too easy, I think. I know when I worked for him, he could have been a millionaire if he'd wanted to be. He had an exclusive on car sales in Tonopah. He was the only real car dealership there. Hal Palenski was down the street selling Buicks, and of course Campbell and Kelly had the Chevy agency, but they didn't sell many cars; they would just order them if anyone wanted one.

Red was a funny businessman. People would come in wanting to buy a car, with something expensive in mind. I've seen him sit there and talk them out of buying a car that he could have made a pretty good profit on to something that was more suited to them. It would go something like this: "No, you don't need that; you don't need that. Here, we can save you money. You don't need a big car like that; there's all these other ones." He did the same on the used cars. People would come in, and he'd point them to the one that he thought they should have, not the one that they wanted. And he was right most of the time.

And if people didn't have the money, he would take trade-ins on almost anything. He took in a lot of old houses. When Judy and I first married, Douglass was selling mobile homes, on top of everything else. We ordered our house from him, a 10x60 Biltmore, and he sold it to us for cost. He didn't make anything on it, but that's just the way he was. Our trailer (mobile home) was supposed to arrive by the time we were married, but it didn't show up. We had cleared a lot beside Mom and Dad's house to set it up on.

I couldn't complain because he never made a penny on the deal. He was upset, though, and said, "Well, I got a good house you can stay in." It was a house that he had taken in as a trade on a pickup. [Laughter] He took it from Ivan McNett in Fish Lake Valley. It was a typical old house—you know, an old miner's house. It had a wood cook stove and an oil heating stove in the living room. He told us we could stay there until our place arrived, so Judy and I moved in. [Laughs] That was our wedding house, an old shack on Booker Street.

RM: Oh, my God, it was a shack?

BM: [Laugh] Yes. It's still there. It's been remodeled a few times. But it was kind of neat. I don't think Judy thought it was too neat, though. Here we were newlyweds, and the weather

was just starting to turn cold because it was September, so we had to use the woodstove to cook on and to heat the house. It was really a kind of different way to start married life. I think it was probably about how Mom and Dad started out; they cooked on wood, too. The only thing that was different was we had an inside toilet in our house.

RM: I just can't imagine the shock of your mother coming from Brooklyn to an outhouse.

BM: I guess that's what love does to you. They were older when they got married; both were in their 20s.

RM: How old was she?

BM: Well, she was born in 1911 and they got married in '38.

RM: So she'd have been 27.

BM: Yes, 27. That was old to start having kids in those days. In fact, when she had us three boys, people would ask why she was having children at her age.

But, anyway, back to this house—the funny thing about it was that later, when we got our house on Booker Street where Judy and I raised our family, it was right next door to that house that we started out in.

RM: Did the trailer ever come in?

BM: Yes, it came in, and we finally got it set up, and it was a pretty good little home for our beginning years. We got our second home from Douglass, too. It was originally his house, but he moved his family down the street about four doors into a large stone house that originally belonged to one of the mining company owners in Tonopah, a real nice house. When he moved, he rented out his old place.

It went through a series of renters. There was what was designated as an "electric fire" that destroyed the inside of the structure around 1968. At this time, it was being rented by Bill Cawletti and the source of the fire was probably the old "knob and tube" wiring from the old days. We were looking for a bigger place at the time and Douglass told me, "I'll sell you that house for the difference in what it's worth and what the insurance company will pay me on it." The difference came to $3,500. We bought the place and I rebuilt it.

RM: You raised your family in there.

BM: Yes. It was a good house, too. I didn't know much about building when I took it on, but I sure knew a lot about things when I got done. I made a lot of mistakes, but it all worked out; it served us well. When we moved we sold the trailer.

By then our family had grown. I'd built two rooms on the trailer, one for Judy and me, when Billy came along. Then when Lisa came along, I built another room on. When we sold the

trailer after we moved, I sold one of the rooms to Fred Ketten, who moved it up to another site, where it is still in use. And the smaller room is still there, but it's only used for storage now.

We sold the trailer to a guy at Coaldale. He moved it down there while he was working nearby. I don't know where it wound up after that. It just got too small for us. Add kids to the family and your house starts shrinking all of a sudden.

RM: As it worked out all three Metscher brothers stayed in the area, didn't you?

BM: Yes, all three of us stayed and we all lived in the same area. Allen wound up buying a house that was behind the Forest Service place a couple hundred yards west of where we were raised. The site was originally an incline mineshaft we played around when we were kids. A guy bought the property, filled the shaft in, and built a house there. When he moved, Allen and Candy bought his place and Philip bought the lots that my mom had up on the hill behind her house and built his house there so we all stayed in the same area until Judy and I moved up to Booker Street.

RM: When did your mom move over to Tonopah from Goldfield?

BM: In '47.

RM: To get the job—after your dad was diagnosed, right?

BM: Yes. She found the house in Tonopah. Dad didn't really want to move, but she couldn't get steady work in Goldfield and Dad was in bad shape. The house cost $25 and was quite an improvement over what we had in Goldfield. It was bigger and we had inside plumbing—no more outhouse!

We moved over and in her first job she was working in the Town Hall for Olivers. They were a couple from Goldfield that ran the Town Hall Café, part of the Town Hall Bar and Casino. She was the "pearl diver," or dishwasher. She had worked part time for Pete Breen in Goldfield. He liked her, so he put in some recommendations for her over at the Tonopah Courthouse, and she went to work in Margaret Booth's office. Margaret Booth was Margaret Henderson in those days; she hadn't married Booth yet. Booth was a mine operator who had a number of properties around central Nevada, and it was a "late term" marriage for both of them. He had been married and had a family earlier, but she had never been married.

RM: And what was Henderson's job?

BM: She was the auditor/recorder. Mom worked at the courthouse for over 30 years and was the family's breadwinner. Dad held down quite a few jobs when he finally recovered enough to work. They included a variety of part-time positions, mostly laboring, until he got steady work with Cavanaugh Brothers, his first job in Tonopah with any real benefits.

Some of those part-time positions included moving houses for Dave "Shorty" Roberts, who had a house-moving business; doing the same for Robert Campbell, who took over

Roberts's business when he relocated to Las Vegas; working for "Mac" McGowan as a jack of all trades; and working for "Brownie" Brown at the National Coal Company.

Dad worked for Cavanaugh for a couple of years, then went to work for Nye County on the road maintenance crew. He eventually wound up as janitor and night watchman at the Nevada State Highway complex a few doors west of his house. It was a good job—his health was going downhill because of the silicosis.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: How did you realize, or come by, your kind of mechanical skills?

BM: Philip and I always had a knack for building things. Since we were little kids, we always were messing with things—tearing things apart and building things. But I think my mechanical ability came from working on Model Ts. We started building Model Ts from parts we gathered in the desert. It was trial and error at first, but we learned fast. It was a natural progression to the more modern stuff.

RM: How old were you when you started on the Model Ts?

BM: I was 15, Philip was 14. We started on the Model Ts, because Lamont Jensen had one, and we wanted a car. Dad said no. We kept hounding him so much he said, "Well, why don't you build a Model T? There's parts everywhere; you can find parts everywhere." So we started gathering up parts; threw one together. Of course, we had arguments over who got to drive it so we built another. Then we figured out we could sell the extra parts to guys coming up from California looking for stuff so it became a business for us.

But back to Douglass. Douglass was a pretty nice guy to work for. He was married to Patsy Bowler. Patsy was the daughter of Walter Bowler, who was the J.P. in Tonopah. The Bowlers were originally from the Austin area—pioneer Austin people. They had property in Reese River, and at one time they owned the ranch at Peavine. I don't know how true this story is, but one of Patsy's relatives on the ranch was supposedly killed by the Indians there in the late 1800s. She was a redhead with long flowing hair, and the Indians hung her hair on the gatepost. Apparently they scalped her. As I say, I don't know how much truth there is in the story, but that is how Patsy related it to me.

Anyway, Patsy was Red's wife. She was a nice gal, too; a little high strung, but a real nice gal. I guess you could say she was kind of suited for Red. Red was kind of a different businessman. When I worked in the parts department I found it hard to work for him at times, because he'd let people charge too much. He'd put them on COD and next time they wanted something, I would tell them it was cash only so they'd go talk to him, and again he'd fall for any old story. Their bill finally would get so big I'd tell him, "Red, you've got to do something about these people; their bill is way too big now."

He'd tell them, "Okay, well, if you come in and make a payment on that bill, you can have what you need." So they'd come in, and they'd pay maybe 50, 60 bucks, depending on what the bill was. Get the bill down a little bit, and then they could charge again.

We always called it—the family, whoever it was that came in—their plan. Everyone who worked there knew what was going on and would joke, "Oh, they're on the Johnson's plan" if their name was Johnson. It meant that a Johnson, for instance, would come in, and they'd say, "See you the 15th when it's payday," or "I'll see you the end of the month." The thing is, the end of the month or the 15th never seemed to come.

If he'd collected all the bills he had outstanding when he finally sold the place, he would have been well off because so many people owed him so damn much money. He never really went out to get it back, and I think that was probably, in the end, what kind of did him in,

because the economy of Tonopah started to change. In the end, our paychecks were starting to come late, so that's when I gave it up and went to work for the Nevada Highway Department. He hung on for a little bit longer after that.

RM: When did you quit?

BM: It was 1970 when I went to work in the highway shop. They needed a mechanic, so I put in an application. I wasn't a real mechanic, but I figured I knew enough about mechanics that I could handle the job. Philip was working there as a mechanic already, and Sam Bates, who was the shop foreman, knew Philip was a good mechanic. He interviewed me, and I got the job.

Then Sam Bates retired, and P. P. Egosque took over as shop foreman. We had four mechanics, a welder, a helper who changed tires, lubed equipment, and cleaned up, and a couple of people in the parts department. Eventually, as the other mechanics quit or retired, I moved up and became the road mechanic. I was assigned a service truck and took care of the out-of-town breakdowns.

RM: Breakdowns out on the road?

BM: Yes, I'd go out on those. Or to the satellite stations like Blue Jay or Austin or wherever they needed a mechanic. I liked it because I was my own boss, but I had to be good enough to make the repairs. For instance, if they had a job laying down road somewhere and their spreader or a dump truck or one of the distributor trucks broke down, I had to be able to fix it. It didn't make any difference how you fixed it, you just had to get it going. From working on Model Ts I could patch almost anything back together. [Laughs] Unless, of course, an engine blew a rod out or something like that.

It was a perfect job for me later on when we started doing the Central Nevada Historical Society and Museum. I always carried the museum's 35 mm camera with me, and every place I went I took pictures for the museum files. So for all those years that I was the road man for the highway department, there are pictures in the museum files. If I saw things changing along the road, I'd take a picture—businesses, new sign going up, anything like that.

I also kept an eye open for things the museum might need. For example, if I was in Manhattan or some place, and there was some old mining equipment, I could talk to the owners about donating it to the museum. So I was able to help the museum while I was on the road for the state.

RM: They would send you out, and a piece of equipment would be broken down. How did you know what was working with it, and what did you do for parts and everything?

BM: Well, we had service trucks. You carried an assortment of stuff that you might need. After you did it for a while you had an idea what you should carry with you. Unless it was something major that you couldn't fix, there was always a way to do something. If there was a wiring problem, you could always jump a wire someplace to fix it. If it was a plumbing or hydraulic problem, I carried extra lines that would fit most things. There was always a way to fit

something together to get it working. It was very, very seldom I ever went out that I couldn't get a piece of equipment running again.

RM: What did you do about heavy equipment? For example, say you would have to raise the blade or lift up the grader blade or something like that.

BM: They usually had the maintenance guys there; if anything heavy had to be done I'd have them help me. You always had somebody. But they didn't want to shut jobs down. It got to the point in later years, as the jobs became more complicated—for instance, using the lay-down machine they'd use for laying down their asphalt, the loaders and hydraulic rollers and things like that—they couldn't even take the time for me to drive out. They'd just send me out at the job and I'd be available if there was a problem.

RM: Oh, you were on site?

BM: Yes, I was on site. For instance, if we had a job in Beatty, I'd go down and stay with the crew three or four days, a week, whatever it took, and just hope to hell I had the stuff to fix whatever broke. And usually I did.

RM: Did the equipment break down a lot?

BM: Not really, but when something broke down, it was usually something that was serious enough to stop everything. If I didn't have anything to do, which was a lot of the time, I'd check the brakes on the trucks and check the lights, things like that. I was always doing brake adjustments and other safety checks while waiting for something big to happen. Then when something big happened, of course I'd have to really go to work. It was pretty interesting sometimes.

RM: Did you go with them to stay on site very often? Were you away from home a lot?

BM: No, it was usually during the summer that they did most of it. Some of the jobs would be two-week jobs, but we came back on weekends. I wasn't away from home that long. Once they got going on one of those jobs, they got done fast. On these roads anymore, with the amount of travel you've got and the way the government money's involved, you've got to get in there and get it done.

RM: What would a big job be, for example?

BM: Oh, on overlay—that would be adding another couple inches of asphalt to maybe five miles of road—they'd order their oil and mix it with gravel, and lay it down with a spreader. The tank trucks from the refineries would come in with the hot oil and hook to the spreader and mix the oil with the gravel and lay it down.

RM: Kind of like a cement mixer?

BM: Yes. And when those guys with those tank trucks came in with that hot stuff, they didn't want to be sitting there with that oil cooling in their trucks. It's thick, and if you have to send one of those loads back because you're broken down, it costs a hell of a pile of money. They would have to reheat the oil to get it back out of the tanker.

RM: How did they reheat it in the truck?

BM: I don't know. They probably used steam or something. Anyway, I really like the job. That is, if there were no major breakdowns it was a no-pressure job. I never got to the point that I didn't like the work until the last three years, when I became the shop foreman. I didn't care for that because I had to stay in the shop all the time. Looking back, I couldn't have had it better. I was my own boss most of the time and there wasn't any of the pressure that gives one ulcers.

RM: When did you finally retire from the highway department?

BM: In 2000.

RM: What kind of an evolution did you see in the equipment and in the highways and everything? You were there 30 years, right?

BM: Yes. There was quite a bit of evolution in the equipment. When I first went to work there was a lot of junk because a lot of the equipment was old, and they didn't have the budget those days to replace things. There was some of that stuff that was pretty well worn out.

It was very seldom they would get anything new. It seemed like every few years they'd get maybe two or three dump trucks or a few new loaders or graders. Reno was the head shop, and that's where the equipment was purchased. Everything came from Reno. When we did get new trucks, we'd have to adapt them for the sanders, and we'd have to add the plumbing for the plows. We'd have to wire in special lights they needed. They'd come bare. We practically had to put the whole thing together.

But the last ten years or so I was there, they began to buy trucks completely set up. They'd bid them out in Reno. They probably ordered 200, 300 of them for all over the state. They'd take them into their shop and install the plumbing and set up everything for the sanders and plows and install any lighting they required.

The worst thing they had when I first went to work there were the sanders we'd use in the wintertime to spread the sand on the roads. They had gas engines on the back. [Chuckles] Those were the worst damn things in the world. They'd get wet, snow would pack on them, and they'd quit. Or the chain inside the sander that metered the sand out would freeze up. You'd be trying to work on one of those things, and it'd be dripping ice and water on you. On top of that, ice would accumulate on the light wires and short them out. The salt they mixed with the sand was hell on the trucks' wiring.

The engines on the sanders were air-cooled Wisconsin engines and actually held up well, considering the conditions they ran under. The plows on the trucks were hydraulic. They ran off the truck's hydraulic system, the same system that operated the beds when the tanks

were used as dump trucks. About the only problems we ever had with the plows were leaking hydraulic cylinders or leaking hydraulic lines. The sanders and plows were taken off the trucks when the storms let up and the roads had been cleared.

Of course, as I mentioned, by the time I retired, this wasn't a problem anymore. During the 30 years I was there, things changed a lot. It was the same with the graders and the loaders and rollers and everything. It got to the point where they were buying them in bulk, too, in units of, say, ten, 12, 14, and then distributing them to districts. In the last few years maybe we'd have to put a light on the top of them or put on maybe a few decals or something, but they'd usually be road ready.

As far as working on the roads, when I first went to work they didn't have any way of laying down the mixed asphalt, so they'd lay the gravel out on the road, close one lane down, and windrow the gravel, then they'd dump the oil on top and mix it up with the grader. Back and forth. When it was mixed good, they'd spread it out and roll it with the rollers; time-consuming. But with the new spreaders they just hook the oil tank truck to the spreader and keep dumping dump trucks of gravel into it, followed by the rollers. You can lay it down in no time. Gosh, they can lay ten miles of road in the time it took to do a mile when I first went to work there, maybe even more.

For years we maintained a fleet of conveyor belts and a shaker plant that the maintenance crew used to make the gravel for the road jobs. A crew would make the gravel during the winter at different pits around the district, making the material for the summer surfacing jobs. This kept me busy maintaining the shakers and conveyors. It was a constant chore replacing burned-out bearings and gaulded shafts damaged by the dirty conditions they ran under. The conveyors were equipped with gas or electric motors that also suffered under the adverse conditions.

By the time I retired, this was a thing of the past. The major jobs were done by bid by large construction companies. Due to the regulations involved when they made the material for the jobs, the state had them make enough extra gravel and sand for the small jobs maintenance did during the summer, and the plants we used for years were junked.

As things changed, the equipment got larger. When I started they had little loaders called scoopmobiles, three-wheel things. They were horrible little things. There was a small bucket on them that would hardly hold anything. And they were always breaking down; they had gas engines then. Now they get nice, heavy-duty John Deeres, Mitsubishis, or Cases, all brand-new equipment, top-of-the-line stuff.

In the later years they had a regular replacement schedule that they didn't have at first. And in the shop, when I first worked there, there was no real maintenance program. The maintenance crews were supposed to watch the mileage and tell you when they needed something.

RM: How often where they supposed to change the oil?

BM: You know, they were supposed to change it, in the old gas engine trucks, probably about every 4,000 miles. But when I was running the shop we went to repair orders and started keeping track of the mileage; and with computers to help us keep track, we'd get them in every 6,000 miles. We were supposed to go 10,000 or 12,000 miles, but I always went 6,000. The oil

was cheap and there was no sense in going over and burning up an engine or a transmission. They'd pop up on the computer when they needed service and we'd call maintenance. They would bring the unit in (truck, grader, roller, or whatever) and the guys from that crew would change the oil and filters and one of the mechanics would do the safety checks and other adjustments that were required.

Before, when maintenance was in charge of that, hell, people wouldn't keep records. By the time you got the truck in the oil was like tar. The program evolved into a top-of-the-line approach, like the big businesses. In fact, that's what the department was doing; they were copying these big trucking companies, using them as models to keep everything in good shape. And it worked. We didn't have any trouble with equipment for the last ten years I was there. As we phased these things in it got better and better and better. And it was actually good for the shop, because there was less and less work.

RM: Did you ever have jobs you just couldn't solve? "I just can't figure out what's wrong with this truck or car?"

BM: I'd start getting those. Yes. It was in the last years I was a mechanic. We could solve them eventually—it began when things started going computer. When they first started putting computers in the trucks, they weren't as reliable as they should have been. If you had a computer problem with one of those things, sometimes it'd take you days to figure it out.

RM: How did you do it? Were there steps you went through?

BM: We'd get the manuals and go through it a step at a time until we figured out what the heck was wrong with it. Sometimes it took a while, too. A lot of times you wouldn't have what you needed to fix it, either. The Internationals and some of the other trucks we were getting were so jumbled. They were just developing the systems, so one truck would come in with one kind of computer equipment on it, and then the models the next year would be altogether different. Every problem would be different.

RM: So you'd have to figure out what computer was on it first?

BM: Yes. Then you'd have to have the equipment to access the computer codes.

RM: Was the state highway department a good organization to work for?

BM: Yes, they were real good but they didn't pay much. When I quit the Ford garage I took a cut to go to work for the highway department, but it didn't take me six months and I was back up. At the state you had a guaranteed salary, guaranteed raises. And also they had sick leave, vacation pay, and retirement. I figured that the retirement would make up for what I lost by taking the job and, as you know, for the last ten years I've been retired.

I feel it was probably the best thing I ever did, because I didn't want to leave Tonopah. I was married, and I liked Tonopah. I didn't want a job where I'd have to travel. I probably could have become a mining engineer and made more money, but I wouldn't have been comfortable

traveling around like that. You have to go from job to job, and no telling where you're going to wind up. For some people that's fine, but it wasn't what I wanted.

RM: What was Red paying you when you were there?

BM: I was getting 400 bucks a month when I started. By the time I quit I think I was making about $500 a month. When I went to the highway department it was about $450, but it went up real fast with my step raises, once I'd been there a while.

RM: How did you see travel on Nye County roads, or your area's roads, over the years that you were there?

BM: It picked up quite a bit. [Laughs] On those jobs where they'd have a flag man, in the early days you'd have two cars, three cars. But, hell, it got to the point that US 6-95, between Tonopah and Coaldale Junction, you'd get lines of 40, 50 cars the last couple years I was a road mechanic. Travel went way up.

But by the same token, in the late '50s, when I worked in the Mizpah Garage, travelers would have to stop in Tonopah and get gas. They'd eat and stay around for a little while. Now travelers just buzz right through Tonopah. I don't think it helped the economy; I think it hurt it.

You can see how Tonopah went downhill. When Judy and I were first married there were stores for everything we needed. We had three grocery stores—Coleman's, Bird's, and Marty's Central Market. We had a hardware store, we had a couple of women's clothing stores, there were casinos, hotels, plenty of bars, and we even had a brothel. It was sad to see how that changed over the years. I think advances in the automobile contributed to the change, because people could travel faster and more comfortably. Locals could drive to Reno or Vegas more easily. They could go to Bishop, where there were more choices and things were a bit cheaper. You could drive up to Reno, spend the day, and come back. This was a chore in the early '60s. By the time you get to the '80s, '90s, hell, anything they wanted, they'd go someplace else and get it, so the local places folded up and the tourists driving through would stop for gas and nothing else.

RM: Ironically, your keeping the roads in good shape made it possible for them to do that.

BM: Yes, exactly. Another thing I see happening, which isn't really a help for the town, is the arrival of the fast food places. They make it more convenient for a person to pick up a quick meal, which is nice, but they are another nail in the coffin for the small businessman who would like to open a local restaurant. They can't compete. Sure, the fast food places create jobs—most are minimum wage—but the profits don't stay in town, they go to the outfits out of town that own them.

And if a traveler stops at one—and they're on the outskirts of town—they have less incentive to stop and look at anything on Main Street. They just speed out to their next destination. I guess the only bright spot is in their push to get going again, some leave a few extra dollars behind in the form of a speeding ticket. Of course, this results in giving the town another "black eye."

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: How did the cars improve? How did you see the change in the mechanics of a car from when you started off at Red's place to when you retired at the highway department?

BM: Well, they improved a lot. For one thing, the tires—the tires went from the old bias ply tires to radial tires over a period of years. They were just starting to come out with the radials when I quit the Ford garage. If you got 35,000 miles out of a set of tires, you were doing well.

RM: In '70?

BM: In the '60s. If you got 34,000 miles, that was good. And the cars' undercarriages—the chassis—changed. You always had to have your car aligned—at about 12,000, 14,000 it'd start wearing the front tires. Now you hardly ever have to take your car for alignment unless you hit a pothole or something. And, of course, the fuel economy and carburetion system, going from the old carburetors to the fuel injection, has improved.

RM: That made a big difference?

BM: Those carburetors were awful. Not only were they not economical, they took a lot of upkeep. If you had a carburetor problem, and you didn't know how to repair it; you had to take it in and have it done. It could prove to be an expensive proposition. It seemed like you had to get a carburetor overhaul every 50,000 miles or so. A lot of it was due to the gas—it wasn't unusual to get contaminated fuel. And the ignition systems—the high-energy ignition systems they've got on now changed everything. They increase mileage and are more dependable. For instance, spark plugs—12,000-miles then, now, 100,000.

RM: Back in those days, is it my imagination or not that a car with 100,000 miles was about used up?

BM: Yes, that's true. They have better materials and engineering now and they are lighter. They use a lot of aluminum and plastics now. They never used them much in those days. The engines now, with the new ignition and new fuel injection systems, are so much more efficient, and where you had heavy cast iron V8s in those days, now most cars have four-cylinder engines that run as well as those engines did. And they're more economical; they're more dependable. I'll tell you one thing, though—some of those old V8s would really go, but they sure sucked down the gas. You could practically watch the gas gauge drop before your eyes. If you got 15 miles to the gallon, that was great mileage.

RM: I had a '49 Mercury, a '50 Chevy convertible, and a '51 Packard convertible, and I never got more than 10 miles a gallon in any of them.

BM: If you got 15, you were doing really well.

RM: Yes, you had a high-mileage car. How did they get more mileage out of a gallon?

BM: It all has to do with the physics of the way the fuel is injected, the way the fuel injector shoots the fuel in, how the ignition ignites it.

RM: What difference did these changes in the car make for life in rural Nevada and specifically in Tonopah? First of all, there used to be gas stations all along the road.

BM: Yes, every little junction had a gas station. Coaldale, Silver Peak Junction, Warm Springs, Lida Junction—there was some type of service station every 50 miles or so. And most of the stations had a little eating joint or saloon connected with them. Then, with the higher-mileage cars and better roads, they could drive—I can't say they drive faster now, because we used to drive damn fast in those days, too—but drive farther without having to fuel up.

RM: They drive slower now, I think; or at least I do.

BM: Well, we're getting old; that's why we do. [Laughter] Most people still drive pretty damn fast. But I think the improvements changed everything. It put all these little gas stations out of business—Slim Riggs's place down at Scotty's Junction, Marjie Gyatte at Lida Junction.

RM: Warm Springs out there in Railroad Valley, Locks.

BM: Yes, all of them had a gas station. The cars run farther so people don't have to stop anymore, and all these little guys are gone; they're all gone.

RM: Yes, and what did it do to the mechanic business?

BM: Well, made it more complicated. I'll tell you what—I wouldn't want to go into it now. I wouldn't go into it again. The basic mechanic part of it—the taking things apart and putting them back together, like working on an engine or working on a rear-end or a transmission—hasn't changed. But it's the way you have to keep those running that's changed. You have to be computer literate. You have to be a technician now because everything is controlled by electronics. The shift patterns on the transmission are all electronic; the fuel injection is electronic. Everything in the car. The windows are electronic, the seats are electronic. And all of this is interrelated. If one thing doesn't work, you've got to figure that out to get it working again or everything is out of whack. I wouldn't do it again. I don't think I could, because I don't have the patience for working with the computer and doing the analyzing.

RM: In the old days the mechanic would listen to the motor and could tell pretty much what was wrong—or maybe take it for a little test drive. Between the two you could figure it out, couldn't you?

BM: Oh, yes.

RM: Now you've got to hook it up, don't you?

BM: Yes. You've got to hook it up, all right. You can hear an engine missing, but you damn well ain't going to find out why unless you hook it up. And this all has to do with the pollution laws, too. Each time they want to cut the pollution down they have to add something, change something. And each time they do that it makes it one step more complicated. They keep adding step upon step upon step. In the past, when I'd buy a new car I'd order a maintenance manual. When I bought that last Camry I took a look at their maintenance manual, and it's a maze of wiring diagrams. And I figure, "Well, hell. . . ."

You'd have to have special test equipment to test it. And they build these cars to be much more dependable now. If you have one of them that's going to fail—something's going to go haywire—it will happen right away. It's just like a dishwasher. When you buy it, if it's going to go haywire, it will within the first six months. If it hasn't by then, it will last for years. I found that out a long time ago: if something's going to go wrong with a new vehicle it will go wrong within the first 12,000 or 13,000, miles, maybe sooner. And then you can catch it; otherwise, it's going to last. It's kind of weird, but it's just the way it works. I guess sometimes it doesn't work that way, but 99 percent of the time, if it makes it through its first month or so it will go the distance.

RM: Another thing I would like to get a Nevada mechanic's view of: there's a difference in the gas now, isn't there? It seems as if it isn't as good. Is that right?

BM: I think so. I think you're right. They thin it with ethanol. You can look at the gas pumps. They have the decals on them: "10% ethanol." That doesn't have the octane that the straight gasoline had, and you just don't get the mileage or the power. I guess you could buy premium but it would be a waste of money. If the car is made to run on regular, they have them engineered well enough that that is all you need. The ones years ago had more octane, but of course that gas had lead in it.

RM: I have noticed—and I keep wondering if it's my imagination—when I buy gas in Tonopah at Giggle Springs, I get better mileage on that gas. When I buy gas in Vegas it will take three-fourths of a tank to get to Tonopah. When I buy gas in Giggle Springs, I can go to Vegas on way less than a half a tank.

BM: Yes, their gas must come from Southern California. Vegas has the pollution, so you're getting the pollution additives. Cut the pollution and you're losing your octane. Whereas this gas is coming up through Owens Valley and probably doesn't have as many controls.

RM: Have you noticed things like that about the gas?

BM: Yes, I have. They have certain seasons they put additives in, and you can't get anything else. So, until you're out on the road someplace and get some good gas, you are out of luck. I think you're probably right about that. I don't know, they get these damn laws, and they thin everything down, but I think most people don't notice the difference.

RM: Is there anything that you would want to mention about your career at either Red Douglass's or at the state?

BM: The one at Douglass's was an interesting job, and I liked it. The state was a 180-degree difference. It was just like turning around and going the other direction, with the security of the job, the working conditions. And the state had a better insurance policy.

I wanted to mention a few of the guys I worked with at the highway department. When I started there, there were a lot of these old guys on the maintenance crew. There were Elmer Offen, Bally Mitchell, Ted Leon, Jay Burkley, Ned Dillwith—guys who had been there for years. They were a generation, maybe two generations, older than I was. I watched all of them retire and die, and now I'm watching the generation that I worked with retiring. I guess I will start watching them die pretty soon. The oldest guy in the shop when I started was Sam Bates, who was the foreman. There were only two mechanics, my brother Philip and Prude Egosque. There were a couple I didn't get to know, but they were leaving; that's why I got the job.

The crew I eventually worked with, with the exception of Phil and Egosque, came after me. Most of the crew that came after me all stayed on until they retired, although a couple of others came on and stayed long enough to get transferred, which was their intention when they were hired. My crew of "old-timers," as I called them, were Tom Sorhouet, a mechanic; his brother Mike, who was our janitor, tire, and lube man; and Bill Wilson, who came on as a trainee under a program that was new to the state. Bill went on to graduate to mechanic and eventually shop foreman after I left. There was Leo Dwyer and Clem Thomas, both mechanics, and P. P. Egosque. P. P. was lead mechanic when I was hired and was shop foreman after Sam Bates retired. When he retired, Phil took the position, which later went to me. Our welders were Les Gipson ("Ching" to us), and when I left, Jess Alanis ("Kicker"), who was hired after Ching retired. Both were excellent welders.

By now, all of them are gone, all retiring—most with over 30 years. It was a great crew to work with. The only one left is Dale Boni, who started as a trainee and, as everyone retired, made it to foreman.

RM: So it's all changed that much?

BM: It's changed that much in the last ten years since I've been out of there. All those guys have retired. But I worked with some very interesting people.

Did John Campbell, when you talked to him, tell you about the volunteer fire department?

RM: No, he hasn't talked about that yet. Do you want to talk about it? Were you on it?

BM: Yes, I was on the volunteer fire department. Last night you told me you were talking to John. He was fire chief in Tonopah for a while. In addition, he built fire trucks for Nye County and sold trucks to other departments as well. I was a volunteer for 15 years. That was an experience in itself. In those days Tonopah had a paid department—a couple of guys on staff—so there was always somebody at the fire house in case something came up.

Most of the volunteers were guys that I went to school with, that over a period of years, worked their way into the fire department. A few of the guys I remember when Philip and I joined were Robert Limon, Bob Bottom, Ernie Longden, Joe Clifford III, Harry Hughes III, Mike Brawley, Tom Jeffrey, Dave Boni, and quite a few other kids that we had grown up with. We considered ourselves a select group; you had to be asked into it.

RM: Oh, you couldn't just go and say, "I'd like to join."

BM: You could, but we wouldn't let you in. We'd have to vote you in. We kept it pretty damn closed for quite a few years. There were guys that tried to get in that probably would have been okay, and—I don't know—for some stupid reason, we just never would let them.

It was kind of a fun thing. I loved the volunteer fire department because I liked fighting fires. I liked fires. Like most kids, I grew up following the fire truck when the town siren sounded—the bigger the fire, the better. The volunteers were on a phone system. When a fire call would come in, they'd get ahold of the telephone operator, and she'd flip the switch, and our phones would ring one long ring and wouldn't stop until someone answered. That way, you would know it was a fire call. Later we went to pagers, which weren't as intrusive. When you got the call, you grabbed your turnouts and headed for the fire.

I finally had to retire, because after 15 years I got to the point, when that alarm went off at 2:00 a.m., I couldn't get out of bed. I used to be able to jump right up and head out.

RM: Your turnouts are your fire gear?

BM: Yes. The turnout consisted of helmet, gloves, pants, and boots. I remember most of the fires I was on. My first big fire was when Florence Butler's house on Brougher Avenue burned. And it was arson—they caught the guy who did it. I don't remember what they did to him. But it was a shame, because it was one of those fine old stone homes from the early days, the 1907 period, and it totaled it out.

Every time we had a fire, we'd get paid $2.00 from the county. We'd put the money into our treasury. Whenever we had a fire, we'd have to go back to the firehouse, dry the hose, roll it, and restack it in the truck. It had to be stacked on there in a certain manner so you could pull it off fast when you were at a fire. Every time we had one of the cleanups, it would call for beer, so we'd pick up a couple of cases of beer, using the funds in the treasury, and [laughs] have a pretty good time rehashing the fire.

RM: Even if it was late at night?

BM: Sometimes, if it was a big fire. And it got me in a bit of trouble with the wife quite a few times. I'd go to a fire and come home about half-toasted [laughter] five hours later. And our volunteer meetings were the same thing. After we had our meeting, we'd pull out a case or two of beer.

The old firehouse at the north end of Brougher Avenue was a dirty, windy, cold son-of-a-gun in the winter. We'd have our Christmas parties there. We had some hellacious parties. It would be so cold (it was impossible to heat the place) we'd be all wrapped up in our coats,

freezing to death, but it didn't stop us from drinking and having fun. We had a lot of parties in the joint. The county finally remodeled the old Cavanaugh Brothers auto dealership and Main and Florence and turned it into a firehouse, which was quite an improvement.
Another big fire I remember was the Tonopah Club fire. That was a great fire. [Laughs] It was too bad, though, because they could have saved the damaged building. It wasn't the fire that hurt the building; we got the fire out. The Tonopah Club was three segments: two two-story buildings, with a three-story structure in the center. They were all nice stone structures that were built during the boom days.

RM: I didn't know that. And they just made one facility out of it.

BM: One big complex; they hooked them together. The one on the side toward the drugstore was damaged the most heavily. It was debatable if they could do anything with that. But the other two weren't damaged that badly; there was some minor damage, but they could have been reclaimed. What happened, I think, is that Scott Corporation, which was speculating on the construction of the MX missile program, was redoing the hotel, and they wanted that property for a parking lot. They got ahold of it and tore the damn things down, which was a shame because the historic district of Tonopah was torn down—one of the stupidest things I ever saw, but one of those things that happens. But that was a good fire.

RM: So Scott owned them?

BM: They bought them after the fire. I think Perchetti, Leroy David, Felix Traynor, and a couple of others were going to run the casino. I know Horace Campbell was in on that for a while.

RM: You mean, they were going to run the casino in the Tonopah Club?

BM: Yes. And after that fire, they sold out. I don't know who was in on it then; Perchetti could tell you.

RM: Perchetti had it for a long time.

BM: He could tell you the whole story. And John could probably tell you, too, because Horace was in on it for a while. He would probably have some interesting information. But that was one of the better fires I was on.

Another one was when the railroad depot burned. And that was another [chuckles]—you can't prove it, but I think that was an arson, too, to get the lot cleared. It was on property an outfit wanted to build a bank on that had connections to the boom the town was anticipating from the Anaconda moly mine at Liberty. Well, they owned the property, but people were saying, "Hey, that's a historic building; we want to save it." So a fire of mysterious origin solved the problem. But that was a good fire, too. That thing burned so hot and fast.

RM: What was the procedure in putting out a fire?

BM: When I first volunteered, it was get to the fire and drag the hose out, hook it up to the truck or hydrant, and put the damn thing out. But as the department grew and got more trucks, they tried to get a little more citified and broke us up into companies. We had four companies. I was a captain of one of them. You'd have three guys with you.

As time went on, they got air packs so you could go into the fires. I was never much for the air pack thing, because I never felt secure in them. I was always afraid that one would leak on me or something. But for a lot of people, that was their thing; they liked the air packs. I always liked the hose; I liked to be the nozzle man. I loved squirting the water on the fire, and the way you would change it from a straight stream to a fog. We'd go to Bishop, California, to the oil fire school every couple of years and learn how to fight oil fires—again, another big party.

RM: Did you ever have an oil fire?

BM: No, but we were ready if one ever happened.

RM: About how many fires would you have to respond to over the course of a month?

BM: Three, maybe.

RM: That many? Almost one a week, right?

BM: Yes. Some months you'd have quite a few, and some months you'd have one or two. I'd say they averaged two or three a month.

RM: And was there any particular time of day they tended to occur?

BM: The ones I remember the most were the night fires, probably because I had to get up and get out of bed. And they usually were bigger—I think because they had more time to get going before anyone noticed them. But I don't know if there was any particular time. John might be able to shed a little more light on that. I just wanted to mention the volunteers.

RM: Anything else on the volunteers? That's an important part.

BM: The thing that burned me out on the department was not only getting out of bed to go to the night fires, but it was getting too political.

RM: How so?

BM: Well, we let some new guys in, and it started changing the texture of the group. Of course, we didn't have a chance. The guys who had been there quite a while were quitting and someone had to replace them. It wasn't like a close family anymore. Then, when we got the Fleischmann grant for the museum, the volunteers got a Fleischmann grant for a rescue truck.

Once we got the rescue truck, it kind of threw dissension into our group. There was one faction of guys that wanted to run the rescue truck, and they didn't really welcome other people being on it.

Plus, the rescue truck took away the main thing that I joined for, which was fires. Even if you didn't man the truck, they were insisting you know the EMT stuff that I had no interest in. And, as I mentioned, the department started changing; the personality of the thing changed. You know how things like that go, they can go along for years one way, not that we didn't have troubles in amongst ourselves. We did.

There was one time we went to a water fight in Hawthorne. They had water fights and hose cart races on Armed Forces Day, and we'd have water fights on Jim Butler Day in Tonopah and invite them to ours. Anyway, we went to one down there and most of the guys drank too much. I was with Judy, so I didn't overdo. I've got a picture of it here someplace. A bunch of them wound up stopping at the whorehouse in Mina, the Lucky Strike, on the way back. From there, they wound up in the parking lot at Coaldale, fighting. Everybody was rolling around in the dirt. I don't know what the hell happened—it was just one of those internal things. And then somebody came along and tried to break the fight up, and everybody got after him. [Laughs] It was funny. Philip was in the mix-up.

Here is the picture of the guys coming back from the water fight in front of the Lucky Strike. Philip took the picture. This is when Francine ran the place. This is after they put the false front on it, too. And notice Francine, the madam, doesn't have any clothes on above the waist. These are some of our guys—Harry Hughes, Joe Clifford. That's John Campbell, Bill Wilson, Jimmy Wallace.

RM: Which one is Campbell?

BM: The second from the left. And Jimmy Joe.

RM: When did the department move into the place they're in now?

BM: Probably about 1980.

RM: When did you join?

BM: It had to be about 1970.

RM: And when did you leave?

BM: Oh, '85. That's when I pooped out on it. So we must have moved into that firehouse there about '80, because I stuck it out for about five years in that place.

RM: Where they get did their truck?

BM: The county bought it someplace. When John started making them, they started purchasing them from him.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Your brothers worked for the state highway department, didn't they?

BM: Yes. Philip was in the shop with me. Allen was on maintenance to begin with, and then he went to landscape, so he took care of the parks, which were at Salisbury and Miller's, and he maintained the lawn and shrubs at the district office.

RM: Maintenance was working on the highway itself? Maintaining the highway?

BM: Yes, there was the parks crew, which was Allen. He'd empty the trash cans around the places like Blair Junction and things like that, too. Then there was the maintenance crew and the paint crew that striped the highways and was responsible for the signs and road markers. And then there was the shop crew and the office. So actually there were six crews and the radio department.

RM: Was it special for you to be working with your brothers?

BM: Not really. In fact, Philip and I, because of the nepotism thing, made sure that we kept our jobs completely separate. We did what we were told, so there would be no question, and when he was the boss we made sure that there was nothing that could be taken as favoritism. Allen, of course, was in a different department, so it didn't make any difference. He was completely divorced from what we were doing.

RM: I would judge that you probably know as much or more about Tonopah history as anybody.

BM: Probably, right now.

RM: Yes. And I was wondering if you could talk about the evolution of Tonopah in your lifetime—how it changed, what brought about those changes, and kind of the big view of Tonopah history. Or if you want to throw in the other communities around there, that's fine.

BM: Yes, I think when I was a kid in Tonopah, in the '50s, it was all about whether you fit in or not. It took us a while—we had to go through a fitting-in stage. When we first moved to Tonopah, we [laughs] lived on the southeast end of town and didn't have very many local kids around that were our age.. We were okay because we got along fine with the few kids that were there. The big kids—when I'm saying big kids, I'd say teenagers, anybody 12, 13, 14 years old—were in their own social structure, so they didn't bother us little kids much. They would give us a bad time once in a while, but it didn't amount to anything.

We were all right until we started getting into fifth or sixth grade. Tonopah kids had kind of a social structure where there were three or four sections of town. If you were from our section of town, down to maybe Brougher Avenue, you were a different group of kids than if you were on the other side, towards T Mountain. And the kids across the lower section of town,

around the railroad yards, were a different group again. Up north of Florence Avenue there was another group of kids.

Well, we were fine as little kids. No one paid any attention to what side of town you were from; but as I said, when we reached 11 or 12, the kids from the far end of town started picking on me and Philip because they considered us outsiders from Goldfield, the same way Mom was considered an outsider in Goldfield when she moved out from Brooklyn. When we were young, our parents didn't have much money, so we dressed rather poorly—we looked kind of like bums. So they called us Okies, Goldfield Okies. One group was particularly bad and we had a little problem straightening things out with them. But by the time we were teenagers, everything had equaled itself out and we became part of the fabric of town.

The town itself was great for a young kid in those days. The stores had everything you might want. If we wanted to build a model, we'd go down and buy a model. If we wanted to go to the show, we could go to the show. There were two soda fountains and three or four restaurants where a teenager could get a burger and fries. We had all those things in those days.

But as the '60s arrived and Judy and I got married, things started to change. It was a subtle change. Like I said, the automobile had a lot to do with it. People were more mobile and Tonopah's central location wasn't a central location anymore. In the '50s, people had to come in from Round Mountain, Manhattan, and Goldfield and shop. Fridays were real busy in town, because folks would come in and go to the bank, cash their checks, shop, and go to the restaurants and so forth for their entertainment.

As I got older, you could see the change. The people weren't coming in on the weekends. They were able to get to other places easier. Because of this, a lot of jobs began disappearing. The Test Site was going. There were a lot of jobs at the Test Site, but the other jobs were disappearing. Every time a business would close, you'd lose jobs. It is the same thing we see happening here today. As those businesses disappear, the jobs disappear. And the mines—the mining was almost gone then, where in the '50s there were still a lot of mines running; not at Tonopah, but Round Mountain had a large placer operation and there was Newmont in Goldfield and Silver Peak and Manhattan were operating.

RM: There were?

BM: Oh, yes, they were mining. Out at Silver Peak there were a couple of mines running. There were mines at Round Mountain. And it was all helping the economy. By the mid-'60s, most of that had folded. And so, as the town changed, the social groups in it changed too, you know.

I think one of the biggest changes in Tonopah's social structure occurred when they brought TV in. They had all the bars downtown. God, there were—let's see—going down the north side of Main Street, in the '50s, there was the Mizpah; the Mizpah had its own bar. And then there was Georgie Boscovich's Wagon Wheel Saloon; that's two. And the Town Hall bar. Coming back up the other side was the Silver State Bar, the Ramona Hotel, the little Bank Club bar, the Pastime, Toni Buffum's—Tokyo Toni's—Coors Bar, the Rex, the Ace, the Tonopah Club, and the Antlers Bar. So that's 12 bars that were in town in the early '50s. By the end of the '50s, it was probably down to nine bars, but there were still a lot of bars.

Before TV came in, people like my parents, to socialize, would go downtown on Friday night or Saturday night and meet their friends in a bar—that was their social activity. Once TV was wired in, in ’64, people stayed home, and that, I’ll bet, cut the bartenders’ business in half, at least. There were the younger groups that still would socialize. In the ’60s, we’d go downtown and drink and dance with friends from time to time. The Pastime Club had live music and the Tonopah Club did, too. Even the Rex and Ace had music from time to time, and there was music at the Silver State. But it was nowhere near what it had been. By then, it had condensed down to only maybe four bars.

RM: Plus, you lost the social cohesion.

BM: Yes, all those people mixing together and getting along together. I know it stopped Mom and Dad from going down. They got TV, and they’d stay home and have a glass of wine and watch TV at night instead of going down to see how their friends were doing. So you can see the social scene in Tonopah changed.

Main Street changed because of that. Businesses would close because people were fanning out to different places. Judy and I witnessed what I see as the town’s downfall in the 36 years we were there. You couldn’t really put a finger on it, but I think it was the thing of people becoming more mobile. It hurt all the little guys in Tonopah, and they just couldn’t keep up anymore.

When we moved in 2001 and returned for a visit, you could go down Main Street after 8:00 p.m. and there would hardly be a car on the street, maybe two or three in front of the Ace. And it’s that way now. I saw it go from a lively town with everything you needed, where everybody knew everybody, to a place where you didn’t know who a lot of the people were. People would come in, and you didn’t get to know them because you hardly socialized with them. And as that changed, it changed the cohesiveness of the town, it changed the way people treat each other and react to each other. If you don’t know somebody, you’re not as friendly as you would be. It makes a lot of difference.

RM: You mean it deteriorated even more after TV?

BM: Oh, it did, yes.

RM: So it wasn’t just TV?

BM: No, it was mobility of people, the improvements in the auto that made it easier to travel. And I think, too, another thing—in the ’40s and ’50s, even the early ’60s, the women didn’t work. The wives stayed home and the women were able to maintain a closer social unity. Because of the economy and people’s need to “have more,” many households became households with both people working and the women didn’t have the time to maintain the social connections they had before. Now it’s almost mandatory for a man and wife to both work—you almost can’t make it if they don’t.

RM: And now most of the women work in Tonopah?

BM: I would think the biggest portion of them do.

RM: And you saw a deterioration of this through the years, even after you left?

BM: Yes, I've seen Tonopah deteriorate quite a bit since we left.

RM: In what sense?

BM: Well, in the sense that it's not the friendly town it used to be. If you go into one of the businesses, you don't know anybody that's working there anymore. I used to know everybody. Of course, maybe that's our fault for not being there for many years, too. You just have a general sense of feeling about the place, driving up and down the streets.

The town looks worse. You drive down the side streets, and it has a dead feeling. I don't know what it is. It just has that feeling. It's a cold feeling. And you know, if we notice that—although I guess we notice it a little more because we used to live there—you can be damn sure that people going through notice it, too. And if anybody pulls off and drives the side streets to take a look around, they will notice right away that things aren't very well maintained. It just doesn't feel alive. I don't know what the hell you do to change something like that. Cleaning up the streets and around the abandoned properties would be a start, and a little paint will go a long ways.

RM: I don't know how to change it, either. The only thing I can think of is to bring in some jobs.

BM: Not cheapo jobs—they have to be good jobs. They have to be jobs where a person can make good money and want to upgrade things. I think another thing that hurt Tonopah as far as the looks of town and the feel of the town itself is when they built all those Anaconda houses. A lot of people moved down to the new houses.

RM: And you think that hurt the town?

BM: I think that hurt the actual feel of the town—maybe not as far as business goes, but it hurt the feel of the town. People didn't have to live up in town and keep their places up; they went down there and bought the new homes. And when new people came in, they'd look around town and say, "I'm not living there. I'll buy one of the nice houses down there." That didn't help the basic physical town itself.

RM: Let's look at the macroeconomic side, too. You had mining, which was the basis of the whole thing. When did mining really start to diminish and peter out?

BM: It started petering out before the Second World War. The war shut central Nevada's mines down.

RM: The war shut the mines in Tonopah down?

BM: No, it didn't shut the mines in Tonopah down. The only ones mining then were the leasers, and they hung on.

RM: Because they were mining silver and they needed silver?

BM: No, they didn't need silver, they needed the silicon content of the ore. They kept them open for the silicon, not for the silver. The silver was a byproduct. All the precious metal mines, if they didn't have something else that was necessary to the war effort, were shut down.

RM: Didn't they have silica in Goldfield?

BM: Goldfield was altogether different than Tonopah. You look at the rock in Goldfield; it's more of a sulfide. That's why most of the old waste dumps over there have a yellow cast to them.

RM: It must have had high silica. Otherwise, they wouldn't have gotten silicosis.

BM: Oh, yes, the veins did, but they were narrow and the country rock is different.

RM: Oh, the shipping ore in Goldfield was lower in silica?

BM: Yes, a lot.

RM: Whereas the shipping ore in Tonopah had high silica, right? What did they need that silica for?

BM: I don't know, there was something they were using it for in the war effort. But that kept the mines open. When Dad leased in Goldfield before the war, they shut him down a year or so before the United States entered the conflict. After the war, he started leasing again; he went for a year or two. But everything was so high the guys couldn't come back in and reopen the mines and make anything. Power had gone up, fuse, powder, caps, transportation, everything. Plus, the railroad was gone. They were screwed; they couldn't ship.

RM: Is there still ore in Goldfield? Good ore, such that people could make a go of it?

BM: I think so. Yes, leasers could go in there again if the mines were in the condition they were in after the war, but they aren't. They are caved, the equipment is gone. They would have to start from scratch. Of course, look at the price of gold. With the price of gold now, I think a guy could make something there if he had the money to get started. The only problem is, everything is tied up by one company and I don't think they would want to go through the hassle of messing with leasers.

RM: I'm just wondering, if it were politically possible, which it isn't, whether they could just do open-pit mining in Goldfield.

BM: No, they tried that. Goldfield wasn't conducive to open-pitting.

RM: It was in little veins?

BM: Too veiny, yes, and Tonopah's the same way. When Hughes bought the property, that was their plan. They drilled the hell out of the area around the Mizpah Mine. They were going to open-pit the whole place but they found out there was absolutely nothing between the veins.

RM: There's nothing in the country rock, or it's diffused in the Round Mountain, I guess.

BM: Yes. That's what made the Tonopah Mining Park possible. We were damn lucky we got it. It was becoming a liability for Echo Bay. They had to make sure it was fenced and secure. I don't know if Perchetti told you about that—he was one of the guys that was in on it. Me, Perchetti, Philip, Judy Yates, Jim Anderson, and Ken Eason. We were the founders of the mining park in '94. Jim Anderson was a counselor at the high school. He's the one that actually went to Echo Bay, who owned the property at the time, got on their ass, and got them to donate that to us. If it wasn't for Jim Anderson, that mining park would be just a bunch of old buildings today. Probably all the equipment would even be gone by now. He was the one that spearheaded getting everything.

RM: How many acres did they get?

BM: Oh, God, I don't know, there are a couple of hundred acres up there now. They added some that Ira Jacobson donated that he had on the side of the mountain. I'm not sure how many acres it is, but it's a pretty good size.

RM: About what year was that?

BM: It was '94. Then we got some grants from the mining division to put up the fences, and we slowly rebuilt the stuff. It was a good thing Philip and I were in on it. We knew the history of the buildings. We knew what the transformer house was, which they made into the visitor center. We knew the relationship of it to everything else. We knew the history of all the mines because we'd studied their history and explored them. That's another thing. Philip and I continued to explore mines until about 15 years ago.

RM: Could that be done now, or would it be too dangerous?

BM: We tried to go down the Tonopah mines around 2002. John Livermore, a Reno mining man who was on the mining park's board of directors, wanted to see what it looked like. He was thinking of financing an underground mine tour if it was feasible. So we went down

through the stopes behind Klapper's house, across Florence Avenue from the Best Western Motel. When we were kids, they were our access to the mines. We took him down to the 200-foot level on the Silver Top. Places we used to be able to get into 20 years ago are caved solid so there's absolutely no way that, without millions of dollars, you could ever set up underground tours there.

RM: So nature has taken it back.

BM: And Echo Bay, when they got hold of the property, made a big mistake when they put concrete slabs over the top of the Desert Queen shaft. It cut off the ventilation. Before that, the shaft was in usable condition. That mine ran with leasers up through '52, '53, '54. After that, Roger Nicely's old man, Tom, had the property, and would use it to access the Belmont Mine workings. Well, when they capped it off, the air circulation stopped, and that timber rotted out. Now there's not a piece of timber in that shaft. It was a damn shame. With it, there would have been access to most of the district's underground workings under Mount Oddie and into the Belmont ground.

RM: Did it rot, or did the rats get it, or what?

BM: The moisture built up. No circulation. It couldn't keep dry, and the moisture in the air just rotted the timber out. Within seven or eight years, it was gone.

RM: Was the Desert Queen behind the Desert Queen Motel up there on that mountain?

BM: No, that's the Silver Top, the one close to the Best Western. The Desert Queen is the one up on the side of Mount Oddie where the mining park sign is. That was originally the main shaft of the Tonopah Belmont Mining Company. They used it until they sunk the Belmont Shaft east of Mount Oddie around 1909. In fact, when we were kids and we'd crawl through those mines, we found one drift that would get us to the Desert Queen, but we never went down to the level that accessed the Belmont.

I've got a set of underground mine maps of the Belmont. They are from a ventilation study done in 1926 that mapped the mine. They also include the Jim Butler Mining Company's workings. They indicate how important maintaining the proper air flow was.

RM: Was there a chance that you kids could have gotten lost down there and never come out?

BM: Yes, we almost got lost a couple of times. That's why we always carried extra water, matches, candles, and carbide. One time we got lost and ran out of water for the carbide lamps. This was before we knew better. We had to pee in the lamps for water.

RM: Now, that's a story. Tell me the details on that.

BM: Well, we went down the Silver Top into the Mizpah workings, and we got into some stopes under the glory hole; were probably at the 300-foot level. We were trying to get into the Montana Mine workings and we didn't realize how far in we were. We always marked the wall with an arrow when we came to a junction so we could find our way back out. The carbide lamps were great for leaving a little graffiti behind.

We didn't have any candles. This was one of our first trips, before we started carrying extra stuff with us. All of a sudden we're running out of light. We had some matches, but our carbide lamps were out of water, and we didn't know what the hell we were going to do, so we peed in them. Luckily, there was enough unspent carbide in the lamps to get us out of there. I'll tell you, on every trip we made after that, we always had water, carbide, candles. It's scary.

RM: It gives me claustrophobia just to hear the story. You do not know what darkness is until the light goes out underground. That's a great story. Well, back to the economy then—so mining in Tonopah was pretty healthy in the '30s?

BM: Yes, it was fairly healthy. There were a lot leasers working. It wasn't like it was in the '20s and the '10s when the big companies were operating, but there were lots of leasers working. There were leasers working in the Belmont till the fire burned it out.

RM: That was the end of the Belmont, the fire? They didn't fix it back up?

BM: No. Now, they had two fires there, one in 1911 that killed 17 guys, and then another one in '39, when the timber in the shaft burned out. Once that happened, they were done. And it was too bad, because quite a few leasers had a lot of ore in the underground bins ready to ship. The Belmont Mine fire put a lot of guys out of work. The majority of the leases operating at the time were on the Belmont.

RM: So that ore is still sitting down there?

BM: Yes. All through the '30s, the Belmont was leasing, the Tonopah Mining Company was leasing, Jim Butler Mining Company was leasing, the West End was leasing. So there was still a lot of activity.

RM: And those leasers were making a living.

BM: Yes, they were shipping the ore on the railroad. Getting toward probably '40, there were enough guys working to keep the economy going. And then when the war started, that did it. If it wasn't for the base down there keeping the railroad going, Tonopah would have dried up. There would have been a few miners working in the Tonopah Mining Company property, and that would have been it.

RM: By '40 or when they shut them down?

BM: When they shut them down. In '42.

RM: So they shut the mines down, but they didn't shut Tonopah down, you said?

BM: No, they let the Tonopah keep the leases. Of course, by '42 about the only leasers working were on Tonopah Mining Company ground. Actually, they would have had to shut down, too, silica or no silica. But as I said, their savior was the Tonopah Army Air Field. It kept the railroad alive; otherwise, it would have been abandoned as not necessary to the war effort and scrapped. Of course, it met that fate anyway after the war, and mining didn't come back.

RM: Was the leasing just the last gasp, or was it because a lot of guys had gone into the military? Or was the town just slowly dying?

BM: I think the town was slowly dying, but it would have taken a lot longer to die. It was still the supply point for central Nevada, and the courthouse was in Tonopah. But as I mentioned, the automobile was slowly chipping away at it.

CHAPTER SIX

RM: But as you said, then the airbase came along.

BM: Yes, and all of a sudden, the economy shot up due to all the guys stationed and training there. There were a couple of thousand guys down at the base all the time.

RM: And you said they kept the railroad going for the airbase?

BM: Yes. The railroad was running troop trains and hauling in aviation fuel. Once the base was shut down, there were no more shipments of personnel, there was no more shipment of fuel, so that was the end of the railroad. The mines didn't open again so there was nothing to ship.

RM: What was Tonopah like as the base closed and the railroad closed?

BM: Like I said, from a kid's perspective, it was a good town. The majority of the businesses were still there, people were still there. It had outside support from all the little towns using it as a central supply point. People came in from Silver Peak, Smoky Valley, Goldfield, Manhattan, and so forth to shop.

RM: Plus, it was a key spot on the highway from Reno.

BM: Yes. By then, people were starting to travel more.

RM: When did that begin?

BM: After the war the country just became more mobile. When I worked at the Mizpah Garage, 80 percent of our business was tourist trade. And it was a big business for the locals. We used to hand out cards for free ice at the Mizpah Hotel. There were only a couple of ice machines in town, and the Mizpah had one. All the service stations handed out "free ice" cards for the Mizpah. A lot of people stopped for the ice and ate. I imagine it kept the Mizpah going, or at least helped a lot.

RM: Did people have ice in their refrigerators? They had electric refrigerators in your lifetime, right?

BM: Yes, they were all electric.

RM: And they could make their own ice, right? So ice for you was not unobtainable.

BM: Yes, ours had a little ice tray, but the refrigerators didn't have the big freezers like we've got now. They had a little teeny, tiny thing with two ice trays and enough room to stick a couple of things in.

RM: Also, cars didn't have air conditioning then, and they had those things—I don't know what to call them.

BM: Yes, I've got one of those. You could fill it with ice and water and pull the string every once in a while to circulate the water. It acted like a desert cooler. The air from the moving car blew in over the wet pads and it cooled it a little.

RM: So that was another reason to stop in the old days.

BM: Yes, stop to rest, pick up ice, gas, and maybe stop in one of the restaurants for a bite to eat.

RM: Now, what was the economy like in the '50s? What was happening with Tonopah?

BM: I don't know, Tonopah was just kind of rolling along in the '50s. You could tell it was a small town. For example, there were only 14 kids in my high school graduating class. It was a small town, but it was an active town. Then in the '50s, the Test Site started creating jobs.

RM: That's right, because guys went to work at the Test Site. Did many guys go there from Tonopah?

BM: Yes, a lot of them went down to the Test Site, and a lot of them wound up at the Tonopah end in the '60s when they began developing and testing stuff there. A lot of people worked there for years and some of them had relatives that are probably still working there.

RM: The Test Site lasted for years, didn't it? It originally opened in '50, but would you say that it didn't have much impact on Tonopah in the first years?

BM: The main Test Site down there? Yes, it did, because a lot of guys from Tonopah went down there and took security jobs and construction jobs but they still maintained Tonopah as their home. Most would come back on weekends.

RM: From the first days of the Test Site.

BM: Yes, when they were hiring average people and not just bringing in military. As they expanded up to the Tonopah Range, local people got jobs there. It's a sad thing in some ways. It helped Tonopah keep going, but, in other ways, Tonopah became dependent on it. It's still dependent on it—there's nothing else there. It's worse now than it ever was.

RM: So from the '50s, and then into the '60s, what was happening in Tonopah?

BM: Well, from the '50s into the '60s, things were changing because, like I said, TV came in.

RM: When did it come in in Tonopah?

BM: Oh, I was in seventh grade when it came in, so it had to be ’53, ’54 when we first got TV. That was a big transition as far as changing the social life of Tonopah. All through, from the ’50s to the ’60s, it was just a lot of subtle changes, you know. Like I said before, it was easier for people to travel, easier for them to get away. They got away. The traveling public that was coming through town in the ’40s had to stop, usually rent a room and get gas and buy food, stop at a restaurant. By the ’60s, that had dropped off, too, because people could travel further on a tank of gas, and didn’t stop for other services.

RM: Would you say it just coasted along on an even keel at a lower level then?

BM: I’d say it coasted in the ’60s, and then it started going downhill again in the ’70s. You can’t really put a finger on it—it just started fading.

RM: Was there a reason for that?

BM: No work.

RM: Then in the early ’80s or so, Anaconda was active out there, and it seemed like it boomed a little bit.

BM: It did; the town was looking like it did in the late ’50s. During the construction stage, it really livened the place up because a lot of those guys that were in there with those contractors were drinkers and rowdy guys. They gave the bars a good run. And of course they had to buy groceries and everything else, so it gave everyone a little shot in the arm.

Then they dropped into their mining stage. As long as they were mining, they kept a good crew going so all the houses down in the Anaconda subdivision were occupied. Once the mine shut down and those people moved out, a lot of Tonopah people moved down there, so old Tonopah degenerated more.

RM: Also, Round Mountain was coming on strong.

BM: That didn’t have that much of an effect on Tonopah.

RM: But in the ’80s, they built the market, Scolari’s, and it was just packed, at least in the early ’80s.

BM: Scolari’s was good for the town in most respects; groceries became available at competitive prices. But it had its drawbacks, too. Smaller stores couldn’t compete with it, and as the town goes downhill, it will start hurting their bottom line. But they’ll try to keep it open if they can, I think—not because it’s their biggest money-maker, but just because Tonopah needs it. Unfortunately, with this economy the way it is, one of these days something could happen, and they could shut down. Boy, that’d be a hell of a blow to the town.

RM: Yes, it would; a big blow. So how do you see Tonopah now in terms of this model that we're building here?

BM: Well, I'll tell you, I see it as the most depressed I've ever seen it in my lifetime. Myself, I find it depressing physically and emotionally and I would guess it is economically, too. I think it's going to slide downhill a bit more, but it will eventually stabilize. It's facing the dilemma most small towns across the country are facing.

Hopefully, it will be able to retain its position as the Nye County seat, and that will create a stable workforce of county employees. Pahrump may eventually have something to say about that, but I think the "great recession" will put that off for a while in light of the number of housing foreclosures in the Pahrump Valley. The people who moved there for cheaper houses and have lost their jobs in Las Vegas won't be as vocal as they were for a while—they have other things to contend with now and the "trickle down" effect is going to change the political texture of the valley.

Another thing that will keep Tonopah stable is the situation with the jobs the locals have at the Tonopah Test Range, but if politics ever change for the worse and something happens to close it down, Tonopah will reel from the effects. In this recession and political climate, it is hanging on by a very thin thread.

And the lack of services such as doctors and dentists and other professionals is a negative for the town.

RM: What kinds of economic opportunity do you see coming to Tonopah that would create jobs?

BM: I really don't see anything coming. They talk about a lot of things. Hopefully, they may come in with that solar development, but to me that doesn't make too much sense. I would be more apt to see them putting wind generators in than solar down there, just because it's cheaper and doesn't take as much land and there's plenty of land in that valley. Of course, like with everything else in Tonopah, I won't believe till I see it. I've heard it before. It's like the airport. Since the '60s, there was always some "big thing" that was going to come in, and nothing ever did. You'd keep hearing these stories through the '70s. "This is coming, that's coming." Nothing ever came. Try as they might, none of the county's efforts to develop it have borne fruit. At least they keep trying.

RM: Do you see nuclear power ever coming in there?

BM: Tonopah? No. For one thing, nuclear power doesn't need to be in a place that's that isolated. It can be close to a city.

RM: If the people will take it.

BM: Yes. And the water—you can imagine what it takes to run one of those power plants, water-wise. It would take all the power you were generating to pump the water you needed to

run your power plant and you would have to install a distribution system to get the power to market. No, I don't see anything big happening in the future. Of course, maybe I'm a pessimist. I don't know. I saw so much of it before. Tonopah is a dreaming town; all these smaller places are, I guess, really. Every place wants something. They dream a lot. The trouble with dreams is you eventually have to wake up.

I don't know what they could do to build an industry there because it's so isolated. Nye County can't offer outfits big tax breaks because they don't have any real taxes to begin with. It's not like up here in Reno. It's kind of a tough situation, I think.

RM: It seems like a lot of the kids who grow up in Tonopah really do well in life, from this little town out there in the desert. Why is that? Look at your own son, Bill, how well he's done.

BM: I don't know. I think if you looked at it from the perspective of a big town, it'd be about the same. You just notice it more in Tonopah, I think, because there are so few people. By the ratio, if you studied it, it'd probably be the same everywhere.

RM: Do you have any stories that your dad would have told, or people you knew, or that you've heard?

BM: [Laughs] I don't know, Robert, there's a million stories, but nothing triggers anything right now. But there's one story of Goldfield, my dad, and mining. When he and his brother George were working for Eastern Exploration Company in the Claremont shaft, the company had one level of the mine that was producing some very rich ore. At the same time, the company was working on other levels trying to find more ore. Dad was working in the rich ore, and George was working in development down below. They wanted to get some of that rich ore but the mine had pretty good security. When you came out, if you were in the rich ore, you changed your clothes in the change room, and they kept an eye on you so you didn't get away with anything.

So they devised a plan where during the shift George would leave a couple of sample sacks someplace down the shaft. Dad would pick them up when nobody was around. (Of course, there were a couple of other guys in on the scheme, too.) He'd put the rich ore in the sacks, and then go over to the fan (ventilation) pipe and slide them down to George. George would get the sample sack, and they'd bring it over to Tonopah to the fence in the Butler Theatre. From the theater, the gold went to old man Robb's assay office. Later they'd come back and pick up their "assay results." They did pretty well for a while. They had a couple of months of some good paydays. [Laughs]

RM: Did you know Norman Coombs very well?

BM: Oh, he was a good old guy, pretty independent. He said what he thought—you've got to give him credit for that. We had an incident involving him. He gave the museum a map to the old cemetery. I don't know where he got it, but when we were restoring the cemetery, we couldn't figure out where a lot of the graves were. Then, here came Norman Coombs with a

map that was made in 1911. It had all the graves on it. I think when they were abandoning it, the Tonopah Extension Mining Company had the map made.

Norman was pretty sharp. Every time he came across something dealing with mines, he picked it up. He had a lot of maps, stock certificates, reports, and other information on the old mining companies. It was one of the best things that ever happened to us, because we were able to locate and mark a lot of the graves that weren't visible. With the map, we were able to witch them.

That was our first project as a historical society—to restore the old cemetery. What we did is we got permission from the guy in Reno who owned what was left of the Extension Mining Company property. I think he deeded the cemetery to the county. Anyway, we got what we needed from him to restore the cemetery. When we attempted to locate the graves, we didn't know what the hell we were going to do. I don't know how it came to Norman's attention, but he heard we were looking for a map and he showed up with a map of the site. We fenced three sides of it with chain link first. Then we put a picket fence up on the northeast side, the Clown Motel side. Of course, the Clown wasn't there then. The kids from the trailer park up the hill kept breaking the pickets out, so we put a chain link down that side, too. I think the picket fence we put there is still beside the chain link. They couldn't get to it anymore, so we left it that way.

But to find the graves, if you take two welding rods and hold them in front of you and walk along, when you come to the grave, they'll cross. You can go both ways over a grave and find out exactly where it is. We marked them out—God, dozens of them—that way.

RM: No kidding? You believe it?

BM: It works. You could try it, and it would work.

RM: Allen took us over to the Goldfield cemetery, and we tried it. Apparently it worked, but I don't understand why it would work.

BM: I don't know. I figure it's something to do with an electric disturbance in the ground, a change in the disturbed earth. [Laughs] This is the strangest thing, but when we were going to the Nazarene church up here, they lost their lawn water lines. They couldn't figure out where they were. They were digging holes and doing all kinds of stuff, and I said, "I'll show you how to find those lines." I got a couple of pieces of copper wire and bent them, and I walked across the lawn. I don't know if this is against church doctrine or not, but I found the lines.

They cross when you come to the pipe. It's a good way to find water pipes. We'd do that in Tonopah whenever we'd need to find a water pipe or something. We did that to find buried copper wires a couple of times down at the old base. They won't work for some people and there are others—very few I know—that instead of crossing, they turn out. It's kind of weird. It must be their magnetism in their body.

RM: That's really interesting. My dad claimed he could do it with gold, but I never saw it. BM:

I don't know how that would work. And if you get in a place like the old trash dumps, where there is a lot of metal, it won't work.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RM: Do you have any more thoughts before we move on to individual people?

BM: No, not really. They probably wouldn't let me back in town if they heard all my thoughts. [Laughs]

RM: I'd like to have you talk a little bit about some of the people. For example, I never was able to do an oral history with Bill Beko, but he's really an important figure in the history of the whole county. Anything you could tell me about him would be interesting.

BM: When we applied for the Fleischmann grant for the museum, I wrote the grant. I had the building specifications and everything. I'm not sure, because I don't have the actual proof, but when we submitted it I think he was instrumental in helping us get the grant because of his political pull. They had a lot of money, and they were giving it to a lot of places. We might have gotten it anyway, but I think that he put in a good word for us, so to speak.

And he liked Mom, from working all those years at the courthouse with her, too. When we got in a little bit of trouble a couple times, he ironed some of it over.

RM: Did you know Toni Buffum at all?

BM: Yes, I knew her pretty well, but not as well as Allen did. Allen knew her because he used to go down and talk to her all the time. She was a pretty nice little gal. All I know about her is she ran one of the joints in the line before the war. During the war, she enlisted. Then after the war, she came back and opened up the Coors Bar—that was her little joint on Main Street. Dad and Mom used to go in there once in a while.

RM: She wasn't doing prostitution out of there though, was she?

BM: No, it was just a bar. And I know she used to dress to a "T." Whenever she went out on Friday to the grocery stores or the bank, man, she was dressed up. She was quite the gal. And she was outspoken. If she had a thought on her mind, she'd tell you.

I remember when we were in high school, she opened a skating rink in the old USO building. It's the convention center now. She opened up a skating rink for the kids because everyone was complaining there was nothing to do in town. I think a lot of it was for the air force boys who manned the radar installation on Mount Brock. She had a soft spot for them, probably due to her military background. She had a little bar selling Cokes and hot dogs and stuff like that. It was pretty popular for a while, and then, just like everything else, it ran its course and she had to shut it down. But she was trying to give the kids something to do. I'd forgotten all about that. That was probably in '54, '55, '56. She ran the Coors Bar at the same time.

RM: Any more on Toni?

BM: I know she had her little jeep named Geronimo.

RM: Her mother lived here in town, didn't she?

BM: Her mother lived near her up on Water Street for years and years. I think she was here because of Toni.

RM: The red-light district on Saint Patrick Street was closed by the time you were . . .

BM: By the time I was old enough to know what was going on, yes, it was closed. They moved it up by our house, and then down to the "Trees," and then out to Bobbie's joint. It moved out to the Buckeye probably around '55, '56.

RM: What do you know about Bobbie?

BM: Not a hell of a lot. I know she ran the whorehouse. As far as her civic involvement, she would donate to almost anything. If you were selling tickets for a school event, she would always buy a few. She was good that way. And I guess she ran a pretty good joint out there. I "checked it out" a couple of times myself when I was in high school. She was there for a long time.

RM: Did you know Wellington Rogers?

BM: Yes, I knew Wellington. He had his little place down behind the foundry. He used to come in the Mizpah Garage all the time. If you asked him about the old days, he always had something to tell you.

RM: When you knew him, did he live at the place by the foundry?

BM: Yes. That was in the '50s and the '60s and '70s.

RM: The reason I ask is my dad, Robert McCracken, bought that place where my dad's shack is now from him.

BM: Well, he may have lived up there before we knew who he was. I became acquainted with him around '57, when I started working at the garage. He was a good friend of Les Harper, our mechanic.

RM: Did you know Bill Thomas at all?

BM: I knew his wife better than I knew him. I knew her because, when we were hunting for jobs when we were kids, we'd go around town asking people if we could clean their yards and pick their weeds, and she always had a job for us. All I knew about him was that he was the sheriff.

RM: I consider him one of the towering figures in Nye County history, but somebody told me that when he died, hardly anybody came to his funeral. Did you know that?

BM: No, I never heard that. Of course, I never paid any attention in those days.

Now, there was Mrs. Tanner—she lived down the street from us. I ran around with Keith Scott; she was his grandma. Her daughter Sue was married to Keith's dad, but they were divorced and he lived in Idaho. She babysat Allen when Mom worked at the courthouse and Dad was working. She was a real nice lady.

Mrs. Tanner had a couple of sons but I never did meet them. One was Glenn Tanner. And she had two daughters. Sue was Keith's mother and the other was Pat (Patricia). She was divorced, also. She eventually married Shag Tayton, the local forest ranger. When Keith was probably in seventh or eighth grade, Sue married Solan Terrell. I knew her through Keith, so I got to know Solan pretty well, which was kind of a lifesaver for me a couple times when I got in trouble. He was the J.P. and threw out a couple of tickets I picked up.

And then there was Nellie Benning, who lived up the street from Mrs. Tanner. She was a nice little old lady. We'd tease her when we were kids. Philip and I went down there one time and knocked on her door a bunch of times and yelled, "Open up in the name of the law!" Then we ran around to the back of her house when she came to the front door, and we knocked on the back door, "Open up in the name of the law." We did that a bunch of times, running back and forth. We didn't know it, but when we were at the back she snuck out the front and went up the street and got Dad. When we were knocking on the door, we got caught in the act. Of course, it led to a good spanking for both of us.

But what was worse, she was Josie Traynor's mother, and Josie Traynor was the town eccentric. I don't know if you've heard about Josie. Josie was quite the gal. She was married to Felix Traynor, who was the state mine inspector. He and a friend, Frank Horton, discovered the gold at Weepah that led to the Weepah gold rush in '27. Anyway, she had a tendency to fly off the handle.

When we gave Nellie a bad time, which was just little kid stuff, it turned out to be a big mistake, because Josie never forgot about it. Whenever she saw Philip and me downtown, she'd cuss us out. She had an old Chevy sedan and she had two little dogs, nasty little things, little pug-nosed characters that would run around in her car. If she saw us walking down the street she'd take a run at us with her car. One time, we were in the post office picking up the mail for Dad and she came in there and started yelling, "You damn communists. You're those communists. I know you're communists." For years, she hollered and screamed at us every time she saw us.

She was the same way with other kids. Ken Eason lived pretty close to her, and I remember him telling me that the kids in that neighborhood stayed very, very far away from her because of her outbursts.

As I said, she was married to Felix (Leonard) Traynor, who was the mine inspector. He was a nice guy. In fact, he was a partner in the Tonopah Club in the '60s. When I was working at Midland Motors he would drop by to visit with Red Douglass, a good friend of his. When the silver coins were starting to go out, he told me to go down to the bank and buy as many silver dollars as I could afford. He said, "Take $1,000, go down to the bank, and get a sack of silver

dollars (they were still in use) if you can. Because I'm telling you, save them now; it's going to be well worth it. I went in two or three times and got them," he told me. I didn't have any money; I couldn't afford $1,000 for a bag of silver dollars.

Anyway, supposedly Felix took those silver dollars to Montezuma—the mountain range west of Goldfield—and buried them up there someplace. Now, I don't know how true it is, but he didn't tell Josie where they were. And, by God, after he died she spent years up there in Montezuma walking around those hills, apparently looking for those silver dollars that he buried.

When we would go up to Montezuma to cut firewood, we'd see Josie driving around up and down the back roads. When we lived on Booker Street, we were a couple of doors west of her place. She'd be out in her yard yelling and hollering at Leonard, cussing him out; this was after he was dead. And when he was alive, she would get him downtown and give him hell. She'd go in the Tonopah Club and give him hell for no reason, or at least no reason that anybody could determine.

That brings up another Bill Beko story. When we'd go to Montezuma and haul wood, there's a place where you go up to the microwave station, then drop over a little ridge, and there was a lot of good dead wood in there. Beko knew where it was, and he was hauling a lot of it home for his fireplace, too. One time when we were up there—this was when he was a judge—some guy was there with a pickup. I had my load of wood and we met Beko, who was coming out with his load of wood. This guy parked across the road, jumped out, and said, "You guys, what the hell you doing up here? This is private property. You can't be on this road." Beko just stood there and looked at him—didn't say anything. "Well, I'm going to get a warrant against you. You're up here, this is all private property. You can't be up here. You can't be driving on these roads. They're private roads."

Beko stepped up and said, "What do you mean, private roads? Anybody can come up here."

And the guy said, "No, they can't. This is my property, and people can't be up here."

Beko said, "Well, you can't do anything about it."

And he said, "Why, you smart ass! What do you know about it? You don't know anything about it."

Beko said, "Do you know who I am?"

The guy said, "No, who the hell are you?"

He said, "I'm Bill Beko. I'm the Fifth Judicial District Judge." That guy's jaw dropped, and he turned around and got in his pickup and left, and we never saw him again.

RM: I'll be goddamned. That's a good story, Bill. So, do you think that silver is really buried up there?

BM: It could be. Traynor liked Montezuma and spent a lot of time up there. I saw him up there a few times myself.

RM: And now silver's worth $17 an ounce.

BM: Well, it must be up there because Josie never found it. It wasn't in any of her safety deposit boxes or around her place when she died, so it's probably buried up there someplace.

RM: She must not have used a metal detector.

BM: Well, she probably didn't know where to look. It's a whole huge mountain range and even searching the west side, where Traynor spent most of his time, would be a job. That silver's probably still up there. Everybody in town knew Josie, and most people stayed away from her. She could fly off the handle real easy.

RM: Were you kids into a lot of devilment?

BM: [Laughs] Yes. We were into everything we could be into.

RM: The kids nowadays don't know devilment like we did, because they're too supervised, and they live in these complex urban environments.

BM: Yes, and people won't let their kids out of their sight. It was a different time then, Robert. We had to make our fun. Philip, Allen, and I had parents that both worked, which was kind of unusual in those days. Usually the mothers stayed home to take care of the kids. So we had a lot of freedom. We also had Dad telling us his stories, which we would try to duplicate. And we'd come up with our own things, too. So we were into a lot of things.

RM: I think about some of the things we did, and it's a wonder we weren't killed, or didn't wind up in jail.

BM: When I was a teenager in Tonopah, driving around and drinking and so forth, the cops let you get away with a lot more than you could get away with now. If the cops stopped us and we had open beers in the car, they'd make us dump them. They'd have us throw everything we had out, and then warn us: "Go home. And if we see you again tonight, we're hauling you in." We'd go home like they told us to. We weren't causing a lot of trouble for them, really. They had more important things to do than worry about kids drinking. Although I guess maybe being in a small, isolated place, we didn't have as much problem with car wrecks and things like that as kids have nowadays. Now they have a different attitude, but it's a different time—what wasn't much of a problem then, is now.

RM: There are just so many more people, and it's so much more complex.

BM: Yes, it wasn't as complex then. They never did ask us where we got the booze and they never did say they were going to take us home and tell our parents. They just told us to get home.

RM: Do you have any more stories about old-timers?

BM: There was an old guy by the name of Johnnie Cambelik, who used to come into the Mizpah Garage and sit by the pot-bellied stove. He had a shack up in Midway Gulch, next to Sorensen's house. Summer or winter, he'd walk downtown to shop and do whatever he had to do, then stop at the garage on his way back up. He had arthritis so bad, his hands were just frozen; it was pitiful. They were frozen into lumps. He was English, and he was this little short guy. He came to Tonopah right after the discovery in 1900 and he had stories he'd tell us about the old mining camps.

Philip and I, on our days off, would load up a few beers and take him out to places like George's Canyon—out towards Stone Cabin, places like that—and he'd tell us the history of the mines, show us where things were.

He passed away after I had gone away to college. But he was one of these real old-timers that were around. Johnnie was here right from the start, and knew most of the history of Tonopah. He didn't know much about Goldfield, though. He'd never spent much time around Goldfield. He'd mined and prospected around Longstreet's Canyon, George's Canyon, Ellendale, Bellehelen, those camps.

He told us how he came down with arthritis—he was in George's Canyon prospecting. He said it was a cold wintry day and he sat down on a cold rock when his hands started hurting. I guess it cooled his whole body down. His hands were that way from then on. They were just kind of like clamshells, they were so bad. He could hardly hold anything between his thumb and his hand. I don't know how he got along.

He had kerosene lamps in his house, and he'd come down to the garage with his gallon jug to get kerosene. There were two or three other guys who lived in the gulch who would come down every couple of days and buy kerosene for their lamps, too.

A lot of the old-timers that lived on the north end of town would stop in the Mizpah Garage. One attraction was the old potbelly stove that was fired up during the winter. These old guys didn't have cars so they all walked downtown and back. In the wintertime they'd get in the habit of stopping in the Mizpah Garage and warming up by the pot-bellied stove. During the summer they'd stop in, too. There were chairs around there, and everybody would sit around and talk.

RM: Now, where is Midway Gulch?

BM: It's in the north corner of town. Take Corona Avenue from Main Street, and when you cross Water Street, Corona heads up a gulch. This is known as Midway Gulch; it took its name from the Midway Mine, which is nearby. That's where the first people that arrived in Tonopah settled. It was close to the mines. Many of those old guys lived up there. As more people arrived, they began to settle the level area where Main Street is now. The first red light district was located in the Midway Gulch area, too.

RM: Are the structures still standing?

BM: Some are. There is a row of cribs along Mineral Street. You can tell them by their construction—a window, a door; a window, a door; a window, a door. And the first jail was there, too, across from what was later the Progress Bakery.

RM: So that was the first settlement.

BM: Yes. I don't know if you've ever seen the first jail. There's a stone building; you can see the steel bars on the windows. They located the jail there because it was close to the saloons and the red light district. They didn't move the red light district across the street until, I think, 1914, or maybe a little before that. They relocated it to St. Patrick Street so they'd have it all in one place. St. Patrick Street became the official red light district. It was located behind the Big Casino, a large brothel and dance hall.

RM: I've just been over there. I had trouble finding John Campbell. I knew about where it was, but I wasn't sure which road to take.

BM: Well, I think his is Water Street, Corona to Water. If you turn the other way on Water Street, you'll see the old Progress Bakery, and on the opposite side of the street is a stone building. That was one of the cribs.

And there was a saloon building nearby that that fell down about 20 years ago, an old false-fronted place that housed the Red Ball Saloon. Pete Fabbi lived on Corona Avenue before you get up to Water Street. He owned the bakery. The family had the bakery for years.

There were, like I say, quite a few of those old characters. One old guy, John Green, was a gangster during the Prohibition period. He'd come in and sit by the Mizpah Garage stove. He was a real quiet guy. He always wore a spiffy little hat. He was a little short guy. Old Scott Mullins always told us, "Be careful talking around that guy. He has a reputation of killing a few guys. So don't ask him too many questions; just listen to what he has to say." Well, we were always careful, because Mullins knew what was going on and we trusted his judgment.

Scotty Mullins was another character. I worked with him at the Mizpah Garage. He would tell stories about the Big Casino. He said that every evening around 6:00 p.m. the trumpet player would come out front and play the trumpet. It was known locally as the "call of the wild." Scotty said they'd have contests where guys would butt their heads together. It was part of the entertainment of the night. They'd drink croton oil, and then, when they had to poop, they'd pull their pants down, and they'd run at each other and hit heads. And whoever squirted the stream the furthest won.

RM: Oh, my God! They did that at the Big Casino?

BM: Yes. Old Scotty was quite a woman's man in his day and he raced cars on Mud Lake in the 1900s, 1910s, the old-time "high wheelers." He was into everything and knew everybody. He, like Johnny, had arrived in Tonopah shortly after the camp was founded and spent the rest of his life there. He was a nice guy, a good guy to work with. He was very sincere. If he liked you and trusted you, he'd do anything for you. He said they had all kinds of different contests at the Big Casino and the other joints on the line.

RM: The Big Casino was gone by time you came on the scene, wasn't it?

BM: Yes, it burned down in the ’20s. Part of the buildings were rebuilt into a building that was used as auto storage by the Mizpah Garage.

RM: I thought the Big Casino was on the left, going down.

BM: It was. It was across the street from the Mizpah Garage; the Mizpah Garage was on the right. The Big Casino was torn down when they widened Main Street, and a Chevron gas station was built on the site. Jerry Forbes ran the gas station for a number of years.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RM: Bill, you're going to take us on a kind of memory tour of some of the businesses, is that right? Tell me what you're going to do here.

BM: Now, this would be 1970—just to get an idea of what was in town in 1970, and some of the information I remember about the businesses.

RM: And you're going to go through the 1970 telephone directory to jog your memory?

BM: Yes, and pick some of them out. Let's see, here's a good one. Airlines: Tonopah had Mustang Air Services. It was run by Rick Blakemore, who went on to become the Nye County state senator from our area. He was well known throughout the state. He had a little air service down at the airport. And he was a pretty nice guy.

But he was possessive of the airport. There was one incident that involved me, my future wife, Judy, and Bruce Malone. It was summer, Malone was in town, and the three of us were driving around in my '55 Buick, and we went down to the base. One of the big hangars down there had a bunch of airplanes in it, personal airplanes that people parked there.

We stopped and checked out a couple of the airplanes—looked at them, left, and were driving around the old streets at the airport. Well, the next thing I knew, Blakemore was after us. I guess he was wondering what we were doing. I took off because I didn't realize it was him, just some guy in a car shaking his fist at us. And besides, Malone and I were having a few beers and we figured maybe he wanted to race us.

We headed for the exit to go back to town. And, by God, he came after us. Then I heard pop, pop, pop. He stopped at the highway but we kept going. We passed the bridge coming up the hill, and the car overheated. In my hurry to leave the base, a heater hose had blown. We had been stopped five minutes when the cops pulled up in front of us and he pulled up behind us. Then he saw who we were, and it scared the hell out of him. I think he realized what the consequences could have been. We didn't know it till then, but he was shooting at us and there were three bullet holes in the back of the car! I don't know why he decided to shoot—maybe he thought we were trying to steal an airplane or something. Anyway, my car wound up with three bullet holes in the trunk. Scared the shit out of me, Judy, and Malone. He was very apologetic about it, but it was one of those things that could have turned into a disaster if he had hit us. In fact, for years after that he apologized every time he saw us.

RM: What kind of airplanes was he flying out of there? Do you remember? Were they single engine or what?

BM: No, some of them had two engines.

RM: DC-3s maybe?

BM: No, they were just little airplanes. It was a charter service. But anyway, here's another one: Fred's Body Shop. Fred Wilson ran the body shop. It was in the old Progress Bakery, but he

worked at Midland Motors when I was there. The body men at Midland worked on commission. Fred was a good body man, but like most of them I knew, he drank a bit too much. This eventually led to a falling-out between him and Red so he opened his own shop in the bakery building.

RM: I wonder if it was the paint or the chemicals.

BM: I don't know what it was; maybe breathing the pain fumes all the time had something to do with it, but most of them always seemed to have a little alcohol problem.

RM: I heard in the old days that alcoholism was an occupational hazard for painters.

BM: Well, that's probably why, because of the fumes.

RM: Where was the Progress Bakery?

BM: It was down on Mineral Street, down around the old jail in the first red light district, near the Midway Gulch area. Then there was the Mizpah Garage that Hal Palenski ran. I worked for him from '57 through '61.

RM: And what were they selling?

BM: They sold Buicks and GMCs. His showroom was next to the garage down on lower Main Street. He was a nice guy to work for, but he and his wife both had a problem with drinking that eventually cost him the business.

A year or so after I went to work for Douglass at the Ford Garage, Palenski went out of business, and Douglass bought up all the parts he had in stock when they sold the place at auction. I had to bring them up and put them into our parts inventory. It was too bad, because Fran and Hal—Fran was his wife—had a good business down there with the Mizpah Garage. Not only did they own the garage, but they had the Standard Oil bulk plant distributorship. So he was doing really well, but he just . . .

RM: Drank it up?

BM: Yes.

RM: And where was the Mizpah Garage located?

BM: It was on the corner of Main Street and Corona Avenue.

RM: What's there now?

BM: Just the empty building on the northwest corner of the intersection. Campbell and Kelly's old building that housed their Chevrolet dealership is on the northeast corner. It was

across the street from the Mizpah Garage, across Corona Avenue. So we had a couple of car dealerships down there. Another business was Kelly Auto Parts. The Kelly Garage, owned by Steve Balliet, was across the street from the Texaco station. When they widened Main Street, they cut the front off his garage, but he kept it going and put in a little auto parts store next to it. So there was the Kelly Garage and Kelly Auto Parts. It ran for quite a few years. His dad was Leston Balliet; he was involved in the development of Buckeye Mine in the 1910s. Leston was a mining promoter and had all kinds of mining interests going on in the central Nevada area. He promoted the Buckeye Mine, and they sank that shaft probably 1,400 feet looking for ore but never did find much.

RM: Never found a thing. But it was a promotion?

BM: Well, it wasn't a real promotion because they tried to find ore. They thought it was there.

RM: Why did they think ore was there?

BM: Well, some of the veins from Tonopah dipped down toward the Victor, the Merger, into that country, and Leston figured it would dip back his way, too. And they tried to find it. The Belmont Mine was in ore so they figured since the Buckeye was only a few thousand feet southwest of there, some of that ore came that way, too, but it didn't. The Halifax Mine was between the Belmont and the Buckeye, and they had a little ore.

The Halifax went down about 1,200, 1,400 feet, and they found some rich stringers. They shipped their ore to the Extension Mill and made a little money but not very much.

RM: Now, what was the theory on the Victor Mine? It was deep and down at the lower end of town, wasn't it? And what was the theory there, to pick the ore up really deep?

BM: Yes, and they did. They found some good ore, and it was deep. But when they finally had to shut it down, they couldn't pump the water anymore.

RM: There was too much water?

BM: Yes, too much water. They were pumping three million gallons a day.

RM: And it was hot, too, wasn't it?

BM: Very hot, a very hot mine. But they shut it down because they couldn't handle the water, and the price of silver dropped.

RM: So there's still ore in the bottom of the Victor?

BM: Yes. In the '70s an outfit came in, and they were going to open it back up. They pulled the shiv wheels off the headframe and set them aside—that's how we wound up with them at

the museum. Their plan of attack was to use a crane with a clamshell bucket to clean out what they assumed was a plugged section of the shaft about 30 feet from the collar. Well, they worked for about six, eight months removing muck and old timbers but didn't get anywhere.

RM: They never did get down, right?

BM: And you know what it would have been like if they'd gotten through it. It would have been nothing but an open hole anyway. In fact, it's probably plugged solid to the bottom. So that was, I think, the last mining promotion in Tonopah.

One mine people don't realize produced some good ore was the Tonopah King Mine, on the road out past the powder magazine. They had good ore in there that they were shipping in the early '50s. In fact, a friend of mine's dad, Ralph Dahlquist's dad, was working there. They went down the Tonopah King shaft to, I think, 500 feet, put in a crosscut, and picked up one of the veins that ran north. They shipped three or four carloads of ore to the mill in Silver Peak. For years, Leonard Traynor owned it. He was always trying to find somebody to reopen it. It was the last mine to operate and the last to ship ore in Tonopah.

RM: That's important information.

BM: Apparently in the early days they had ore with some good values because they cut the foundation for a mill into a nearby hillside.

Let's see, what other kind of businesses did we have in town? In the '70s there was only one barber shop left in town. When I was a kid there were three. Bob Williams had a barber shop and Tony Cassier had a barber shop. There was Al's Barber Shop in the building next to Clendenning's Department Store. So there were three barber shops. But the only barber shop left in town by 1970 was Bill Cannan's. He had taken over Bob Williams's shop that was next to the Butler Theater. Cannan went to work as an apprentice for Bob Williams when he got out of school in about '60, '61. He actually went to barber school, became a barber, and then worked with Bob Williams for a few years. Bob finally sold the place to him. Cannan's still in business. He has a barber shop up here in Sparks now; that's where I get my hair cut. He moved up here probably 20 years ago, 25 years ago, because things were getting so slow in Tonopah. He actually ran the last barber shop in town.

RM: Where do people get their hair cut in Tonopah now, I wonder?

BM: That's a good question. I imagine quite a few guys go to the beauty shops. When I was a kid, my dad always cut my hair. After I was married I would con Judy into doing it for me once in a while. Anyway, that's the story on Tonopah's barber shops in the '50s and into the '70s.

RM: What do you remember about Bob Williams?

BM: He had relatives that had the ranch at Hot Creek, east of Warm Springs, and he had racehorses for years. Bob always liked racehorses, and he kept a couple in the corrals at the old

dairy across the highway from our house. He'd take his horses to wherever they raced in those days, in the '50s, '60s, and '70s.

His wife, Gloria, had a beauty shop adjoining the barber shop, but by the '70s they went through a pretty rough divorce and Bob was left without anything. About all he had left was his collection of Indian baskets. He donated them to the museum. It is an original collection. Most were made by Hot Creek Annie, who lived in the Hot Creek–Tybo area.

You look through this book, and you see all these different businesses—for instance, building materials. The only building materials store it shows in the Yellow Pages of the Tonopah phone book in 1970 was one in Reno. But in the '60s we had the Verdi Lumber Company, which was owned by John Connelly. About '65, he sold out to Wallen Lumber Company. When Judy and I remodeled our house, I bought most of my building materials from them. But by 1970, no more lumber yard either; just like the barber shop, it couldn't make it. It's a good example of how things were changing.

RM: But then in the '80s, Fred Ketten came in and you could buy lumber up there.

BM: Right. Now, John Connelly's son Ed had a business making tombstones he ran in conjunction with the lumberyard. He quarried the stone at Orizaba, a mining camp in Smoky Valley that dated back to the turn of the century. The stone was aragonite; he cut it in blocks and hauled them to Tonopah. He was well known and his tombstones were sold all over the country. He was another victim of the demise of the town and he moved his operation to Reno around 1970.

RM: I remember his plant, yes.

BM: I've been out to the mine. There are some huge stopes where he took these god-awful size pieces of rock out. After he moved to Reno, he'd come down about once a year and spend about a month quarrying slabs for his business up there. In fact, his Reno tombstone plant is over the hill from where I live now. It's been for sale since he died, but apparently there have been no takers.

RM: Probably a lot of the stones in the Tonopah graveyard are his.

BM: He cut a lot of those stones. In addition to the aragonite, he used a lot of black granite that he imported. I think he did all the aragonite and black granite stones in the cemetery—anything dated from the 1950s through the 1990s.

Anyway, here are some other businesses. We had a pretty good Chinese restaurant, the Rex Cafe. It was kind of a plain place but they had good food. Judy and I would go down and have dinner once in a while. There was one occasion we went down—this is kind of funny. The restaurant was connected to the Rex Bar, which was in the same building. If you wanted a beer, you'd have to go in the Rex and get it yourself. Anyway, we went in and waited to put in our order. We sat there, and we sat there. I went and got a beer, and we waited a little longer. Finally, the waitress came over and said, "No Chinese food."

I asked, "Why no Chinese food?"

She answered, “No Chinese food tonight. Cook drunk.” [Laughter] We sat there a half hour or so, didn’t we, Judy? It wasn’t the cleanest place in the world, either. You didn’t want to look at the ceilings, they were covered with fly specks. But they had good food. [Laughs]

Then, of course, they had a couple of other restaurants. The one in the Mizpah Hotel was always a good restaurant. When Les Short ran the hotel, he had a buffet every weekend. They had some good food. And they had what they called their atomic steaks that were very good. I’d get a coupon for a free one from Short every once in a while when I worked at the garage. He passed them out to thank us for sending tourists to the hotel casino. They were $4.75 if you had to buy them. It was a pretty good deal. Amery Sorenson was one of waitresses in there, and she was a character herself. She had that Scandinavian accent and if she didn’t think the kids were eating their vegetables, she’d tell them, “Eat those vegetables.” It would get their attention!

RM: When did Short buy the Mizpah? Did he buy it with big ideas or just take it as is?

BM: Les Short bought the Mizpah in about 1955, ’56, somewhere in there, I think. He took it as it was. He cleaned it up and advertised it as the “Bright Spot of Tonopah,” with the “Atomic Shots where the fallout is terrific.”

Then there were the Belvada Apartments in the old bank building. In the early days it was an office building with a bank, saloon, and other businesses on the ground floor, but by the ’30s it had been converted to apartments. In the ‘70s Phil Evans had a drugstore where the bank had been. The bank relocated to a new building up the street in the ’60s. Phil Evans was a short, stocky guy and he ran the drugstore there for quite a few years.

He had his own booze label, “Tonopah Deluxe.” He sold Tonopah Deluxe brandy, Tonopah Deluxe vodka, and Tonopah Deluxe whiskey. We used to call it Tonopah fuel. That was in the late ’60s through the ’70s. It was a pretty nice little drugstore; they called it the Family Drug. But, like everything else, he was only in town about ten years. It seemed like none of the businesses made it any longer than that.

RM: Yes, the Family Drug. And before that, Bill, what was the building that’s right across the street from the Belvada?

BM: Austin Wardle’s drugstore was on the northwest corner. When I was in high school, his place was a hangout for the teenagers. He had a jukebox and soda fountain and he also had a cigar counter. You could always find him, if he wasn’t in back mixing up a potion for somebody—because he was a druggist, too—behind the cigar counter, talking to some old-timers. All the old-timers in town hung out in front of the place. There was a curb they sat on, and a couple of benches.

RM: Damn, I’d like to sit down with a tape recorder going there now. Wouldn’t that be cool?

BM: [Laughs] Yes. And up the street (south) of the Belvada, in the early ’60s, was the Tonopah Cleaners. Art and Marin Sorensen ran the Tonopah Cleaners. When the telephone company went to dial phones and built their new telephone office—I think that was probably in

’57 or ’58—Sorensen moved his cleaners from Main Street to the telephone company building that was on Saint Patrick Street behind the Belvada.

RM: And with crank phones you had to have the operator, right? Where were the operators, then? Across from the funeral parlor?

BM: The original phone company building was behind the Belvada. It was a two-story stone building. It’s still there. The operators were in there. Then, when they put in the dial system, they moved up to the corner across from the mortuary.

RM: My dad used to call us long distance from a pay phone inside there.

CHAPTER NINE

BM: Downs Department Store, owned by Ray and Enice Downs was also south of the Belvada. It butted up to the building's southeast wall. In later years, their son Gary and his wife, June, wound up with it. He had a pretty good selection of stuff in there but, like everything else in Tonopah, the prices were a little high. I can see why, because they had to bring everything in.

Up from there, there were a couple of little storefronts. Mary Ann Risley had an antique store in one of them, and further up the street was McGowan's. McGowan's was where the A Bar L is now. Old "Mac" McGowan and his wife, Hilda, ran that.

RM: Talk about what McGowan's carried.

BM: McGowan's carried everything. That's why he had the slogan, "House of 50,000 items" painted on the front. The name of the business was Tonopah Studio. One instance: when Dad was working for him, when we first moved to Tonopah, McGowan bought the contents of an old warehouse down the base, and my dad helped him move the stuff up to his warehouse—boxes of pencils and paperclips and all kinds of office supplies, all brand new. He probably got a pretty good deal on it. He bought it to sell in his store. He sold all kinds of little knickknacks, and he had hardware, and he ran a photo studio doing portraits. He also sold used furniture and household items. Campos bought the building and put in a clothing store in the 1970s.

RM: Did they put the post office in in your lifetime?

BM: It was in. They started in '39, and in '40 they had a grand opening for it. So it was right before the war.

RM: What had been there before, do you know?

BM: A bunch of little stores, just miscellaneous merchants. And, of course, the Elks building was next to the post office. When I was a kid, that's where Pete Peterson had a museum. It was in what was the old Antlers Bar. They were in the center of the building. On the east side of the museum was the power company office, where Milka Beko worked for years and years. Eunice O'Bryant also worked there; they were the office personnel. Eunice's husband, Howard, was the foreman for the power company.

On the post office side there was a little dress shop. The gal that ran the dress shop, for some reason, carried models. When we were kids, when we'd go down to Clendenning's store to buy our models and they were out, we'd go up to her store. She had model cars and model airplanes. I don't know why a dress shop had models, but she had them in there. And beyond the Elks was Coleman's Grocery Store. When did Coleman's burn, Judy?

JM: That was in 1968. Lisa was born; she was born in '68.

BM: Yes. Coleman's wasn't the only grocery store in town. There was Bird's across the street, and the Central Market was a few doors north of the Mizpah Hotel, but Coleman's was the

largest. Bird's was run by Joe Bird and his sons, Wallace and Robert. Emery Marty had the Central Market. Coleman's was on the corner of Main Street and Everett Avenue. Coleman's and the Elk's hall burned down, like Judy was saying, in '68. We had a big snowstorm the day before—I mean, two to three feet of snow. It was one of those snowstorms you get maybe once every 20 years.

After that fire they had to cordon the store off because of food in the ruins and the basement. The health department makes you get rid of it. You can't resell it; you can't do anything with it. It was a pretty bad fire. The fire department had to cordon it off and was in charge of keeping an eye on it, watching the place until they mucked it out and made sure all that foodstuff was disposed of. Well, someone found out that all the booze was stored in the basement, and it was all still in good shape. So needless to say, everybody in town that knew a fireman had free booze for a while.

RM: So the building that is there now and the building next to that have been built since.

BM: Yes. Those would have to have been built after the fire, so '69, '70, somewhere in there.
RM: Okay, go across the street now, where there was a Jerry's Restaurant.

BM: Yes, Jerry's Restaurant. That was about where Reischke's store and the Kelly Hotel and the Kelly Garage were. The lot across Everett nearest Coleman's was where Arthur Cox had his hardware store. Cox was an electrician, and he sold electric appliances. The Kelly Hotel was between Reischke's and the Kelly Garage. When they widened the highway, the hotel was moved down the street and relocated north of the Coca Cola plant. It's still there; it's the large two-story frame building south of the Banc Club.

RM: So Reischke's was the next place east?

BM: After Cox was Reischke, a vacant lot, the Kelly Hotel, Kelly Garage, and the VFW hall, which is still there. Reischke's was a small grocery store run by Alvina Reischke. At one time she had a soda fountain, too. The store was moved to Kingston Canyon, where it is in use again.

Her daughter, Erma, had a photo studio in an upstairs addition built on the back that faced Saint Patrick Street. She started taking photos around 1949 and took all our school photos. About the time she started taking pictures, McGowan closed his studio. Philip was given most of Erma's photo negatives years later and donated them to the Central Nevada Museum. We reprinted most of them so we have a great collection of people's pictures from around 1947 through 1960, when she quit taking them.

Now, if you crossed the street and came back down on the other side, you'd hit Midland Motors, the Texaco station, and the Y service station. Of course, all that was gone by 1970. That was all wiped out because of the highway.

On the corner where the fire station is now, Cavanaugh Brothers had their Chrysler-Plymouth dealership. And they sold Philco radios and TVs. Continuing down the street, the next business was the Tonopah branch of the First National Bank of Nevada, which relocated up the street around 1965 when they built a new building. Bird's Market was next to the bank.

RM: Talk about the Birds.

BM: The Birds were our neighbors. They ran a pretty good market; it was famous for the meats. It was a little pricey, too, but my parents always bought their meats there. They had a reputation for some of the best meat in the country.

RM: And Bob Bird was the butcher, right?

BM: Robert Bird? The old man, Joe, was the butcher, and Robert was one of the sons. There were Wally and Robert. Wally went on to become county commissioner for years, in the ’70s, ’80s. His brother Robert was a butcher after the old man died. At first he was more of an apprentice than anything, while Wally ran the store. Then when they finally closed down, I think Robert went to Salt Lake to be with family. Bird’s was originally in the building north of the Mizpah Hotel. They call it the hotel annex now. They moved up the street when Short remodeled the hotel entrance around ’62.

RM: Whatever happened to Wally?

BM: He passed away.

RM: Did the store last as long as Wally did?

BM: No, they closed down. It was one of those stores that failed in the ’80s, when Tonopah was going downhill. A lot of the stores were going out of business then. It seemed like the ones that the highway–Main Street widening project didn’t kill were killed by the economy around that time.

Then, on down the street from there was Roy Wolfe’s Desert Hardware. Roy had a pretty good hardware store there. He sold furniture, too. He had a lot of mining supplies. That’s where, when we were exploring mines, we’d buy our cans of carbide. It was 95 cents—I still remember that—for a one-pound can. And they sold sporting goods and things like that.

RM: And next to that was a clothing store, right?

BM: Yes, that was Roy Wolfe’s clothing store. His clothing store was originally down the street in the bank building near where Downs Department Store was later. He moved it up there after a women’s clothing store that was next to his hardware store burned. He mucked the lot out, added an addition to the hardware store, and moved his clothing store in there.

When I was in high school, I was a rebel of sorts. [Chuckles] I had my Block T sweater because I lettered track, and I bought it through his clothing store—he was the outlet for the Block T sweaters. I was probably a junior in high school, and I was walking down the street smoking a cigarette, and he came out of the store and jumped me, saying, “I’m taking that sweater back. If you’re a sportsman, you shouldn’t be smoking,” and raised hell with me. I thought he was going to take my sweater away from me. Then finally he calmed down, but it scared the hell out of me. I thought he was going to tear my sweater off. [Laughs]

Next there were a couple of vacant storefronts, and then Bob and Gloria Williams's barber shop, which then became Bill Cannan's barber shop. The Butler Theater followed them.

RM: Tell me about the theater and the role it played in your life.

BM: Well, there's a good story about that in my book.

RM: Who owned it?

BM: Marshal Robb, the Robb family. They owned it for years and years and years. Old man Robb owned it before Marshal took it over. Old man Robb was an assayer. For years he ran the assay office on Brougher Avenue behind the Belvada Hotel.

Beyond the theater was Naismith Insurance, which eventually became Titlow Insurance, then Eason Insurance. Naismith sold out to Titlow in the '50s, and then Titlow sold out to Eason.

RM: Where did the Easons come from?

BM: They were old-timers. Their family lineage goes back to the boom days of Tonopah. The grandma was one of the first women in Tonopah. I don't know what side she was on, but it was Kenny's grandma. They have been there for years and years.

RM: Had they been in mining and then switched to insurance?

BM: Well, no. What happened is Kenny Eason went to work in the bank in Tonopah after he got out of high school and did some military service. And from the bank, he went into the insurance business.

RM: And who was Titlow?

BM: Emerson Titlow. He was, I think, the Nye County senator for quite a few years. He was pretty well known around central Nevada.

RM: And did he go way back to the early mining?

BM: Not really. They went back to the railroad days. Emerson's father, or maybe it was his grandfather, R. S. Titlow, was the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad Company auditor in the '20s and '30s. Actually, they started out in Goldfield. That's where the railroad had its offices in the early days. I think Belle Lee, who was married to Ed Lee, was a sister of Emerson Titlow's. Ed Lee ran the Tonopah TV Company for years. What they did is, they found that they could pick up a TV signal out near Laundry Springs, north of town.

RM: Now, where's that?

BM: Five miles north. Follow Corona Avenue, which actually turns into a dirt road that heads out past the Summit King Mine. They said it was impossible to get TV into Tonopah, you know—one of those things. But a technician by the name of Sid Pickles swore you could pick it up. He found a mountain out there where they could actually receive Reno television reception. They put their antennas on the mountain, and received a Reno and a San Francisco station. They ran cable, or, as everyone in town said, they "piped it in." Then they sold stock in their company. Beko—with Ed Lee, Ray Downs, and a couple others—organized Tonopah TV. They sold stock in the company at $100 per share.

RM: What year was that?

BM: About '54 or '55. Bill Roberts just published the history of it in his column in the Tonopah Times (2010).

RM: And it was coming off that mountain out there. Was it a good signal?

BM: The Reno station KOLO (KZTV) was good. As a kid, I'd come home and watch the "Fireman Frank" show after school. That was my favorite program. I don't know what you would call it. I guess he was a comedian.

The Frisco station was debatable. Sometimes you couldn't see it, sometimes you could. Later on, they found they could get reception closer to town. When they first got the TV, everyone went out to watch it. There was a mine tunnel on the side of the mountain below their antenna. There was a steady line of cars coming and going.

RM: So there was a road out there?

BM: Oh, yes. The tunnel was a few hundred feet off the Laundry Springs road.

RM: Why did they call it Laundry Springs?

BM: Laundry Springs is also called Tonopah Springs and was the camp's first water source. That was where Jim Butler was camped when he discovered Tonopah. It got the name Laundry Springs because in later years, a laundry was located there. The laundry was run by a man named Masters in the '30s. For years and years they had a steam laundry out there. In fact, Tonopah's name was derived from the spring's name.

RM: The laundry used that water, right?

BM: Yes. The Crystal Water Company pumped it to Tonopah. The demand for water was so great they eventually went to Rye Patch for water. It was then that Masters had the laundry there.

RM: Oh, it wasn't Chinese?

BM: No, no. You can go out there, and there's the little hill where the laundry was. Walk around out in the brush and you'll find thousands of buttons. I guess they would fall off the people's clothes when they were running them through the laundry machines or whatever they did to them. They must have cleaned out the screens and thrown the buttons down the hillside. There are buttons everywhere. Most of them are mother of pearl buttons—no metal ones. They're deteriorating now. When they lie in the sun, the mother of pearl deteriorates. And there are little pins that look like safety pins with numbers on them.

RM: ID tags.

BM: Yes, that they put on the clothes when they washed them, apparently. There are lots of those lying around out in the brush. At least there used to be—20 years ago or 30 years ago.

RM: Is it a pretty big spring?

BM: No. They had a cattle trough out there that was probably an air receiver tank from a mine that was cut in half. It was about ten feet long. If you bailed the water out of it, it would take about a day and a half, two days, to fill back it back up again. Of course, it probably produced more water in the early days. The springs probably needed to be cleaned up.

RM: I wonder how it could supply Tonopah. They weren't using much, right?

BM: Well, they were using a lot, but they were hauling it in by wagon from Rye Patch, too, before they put the pipeline in. And they had water from the Halifax Mine that they were using, but it was poor quality.

RM: And the old sheepherders and everybody must have been using it, right?

BM: Oh yes, they camped out there.

RM: Were there other water sources in those mountains besides that?

BM: No. The only other spring I ever heard of was the one that was about where the Mizpah Hotel is now. That was there in the early days before Tonopah was ever a town. There was a spring right in that pass. But it was the only other water.

RM: Isadore Sara, Sr., called that pass, before Jim Butler discovered it, Mustang Pass. Have you heard that name before?

BM: No, but I know the sheepherders called the mountain—Butler Mountain, which is south of Tonopah, the one that had the radar on it in the '50s and '60s—Sawtooth Mountain in the early days, before Tonopah existed. And they camped at the base of it, where the town of Tonopah is now.

RM: Going back to Reischke's, what's on that spot now?

BM: I don't think there's anything there now. They tore down the motel and Jerry's Restaurant and the Copper Lounge that was in there for a long time.

RM: Now, you go on up, and you come to the sign—which is still there, I think—for the Ford Garage. Would that be the next thing going up the street to the southeast?

BM: Yes, we would cross the next street. That was Cross Avenue. The Ford garage was there.

RM: What was there before Red Douglass moved across there?

BM: A couple of run-down businesses and a couple of shacks. Robert Campbell moved them to the junkyard. He was going to use them for offices, but he never got around to fixing them up and they weathered apart. Beyond them were the highway department equipment shops, where the Ford garage sits now.

RM: Right where it is now.

BM: The Best Western motel sits where the Y service station, Texaco, Midland Motors, and the highway equipment yards were.

RM: Okay, but that's on the other side of the street.

BM: Yes, across the street. But the state highway facility was on both sides. The equipment storage yard was on the east side, and the highway shops were on the Ford garage side. And, like I told you before, the back wall of the Ford Garage was the back wall of the highway department shop.

RM: When did they move the highway yard?

BM: In '54. That's when they built it up by our house.

RM: When did they put the hospital in?

BM: They built the hospital in '54, too. They moved buildings from the old base in to remodel as the new hospital. The baseball field was where the highway shop and the hospital are now.

RM: By the baseball field, you mean the Mucker Field?

BM: Yes. That was nothing but a baseball field then; they didn't have high school football.

RM: Okay, Bill's showing me a map in his book now.

BM: Okay, here you are. This is our house. This is Central Street. This was the mine dump that was across from our house, California Tonopah Mine. They took out this mine dump and these houses—Tonopah Airfield Housing Complex—and put in the highway shop there. And the hospital is right here where the baseball field was. And now the baseball or football field is up here.

RM: And the museum is where?

BM: Right over in here.

RM: And you say your house is still there?

BM: It's still there, yes. Allen tore the sheds down, but the actual house is still there.

RM: Yes, okay. And where was Reischke's?

BM: It was way down here. Downtown. After the hospital was finished, they abandoned the old one that was a few blocks west of our house.

RM: What was it known as?

BM: It was the Nye County Hospital.

RM: And what was the other one called?

BM: The Miners' Hospital, but that had closed down in the late '40s. That was downtown on South Street between Bryan and Brougher. Here's a closer view of it. This is our neighborhood. This was the dump, and over here is where the highway shop went in. Right over here is where the hospital was from our house. This is a hill here. And the Nye County Hospital was right here. This is Magnolia Avenue coming off. It's straight now, and it goes right over here. And right there is where this road now is going down that hill, and the hospital was right in here.

RM: Okay. So, moving back to your original intent here, we were going northwest down Main Street.

BM: Yes, we were on the north side of the street. We came to Charlie Stewart's, which I covered in my book. Then on the corner Gerald Roberts had the Corner Store that was a soda fountain and newsstand, and he sold Philco television sets. In later years, Nadia Murphy bought it and ran it for a while as a soda fountain.

RM: About when would she have bought it?

BM: Gerald Roberts was there up to '60, maybe even after '60. But then when they tore down that whole area—the Butler Theater, Charlie Stewart's, and the whole corner there—and

they put in the Jim Butler Motel in ’79, that’s when Eason and Danny Robb were in together on it. Of course, most of the businesses were closed anyway. Charlie went out of business around ’60 and the Corner Store was gone by ’70. I think the theater shut down around ’72 or ’73.

RM: Oh, that was Eason and Robb’s deal?

BM: That was their deal. It was one of those buildings built in sections and stacked together.

RM: Yes. I remember when they built it.

BM: And that took that whole area from Cannan’s barber shop on down; they wiped out that end of the block. Everything was torn down except the barber shop, which was moved.

RM: And there’s the parking lot next to the Mizpah Hotel.

BM: At one time, there was a shoemaker shop in there. The Central Market and the Divide—Tonopah Divide Mercantile Company stores—were torn down in ’63 when Leroy David and Nick Barbarich put in the bowling alley. The bowling alley was there for quite a few years. It eventually became part of the hotel complex. They closed as a bowling alley in ’75. A new alley, Silver Lanes, opened on the edge of town on US Highway 6 in ’84 but eventually went under, too.

RM: Yes, Fun Palace they called it, didn’t they?

BM: I don’t know what they called it; they used a couple of names. It was the same building that was the bowling alley. Anyway, beyond the bowling alley was the newspaper office.

RM: Was that always right there?

BM: Yes, but it was rebuilt around ’54 as one of the first concrete block buildings on Main Street. They tore down the Town Hall Bar and Cafe, where my mom worked when we first moved over from Goldfield, and enlarged onto those lots. The Town Hall was kind of the swingers’ bar. They had all kinds of . . .

RM: A lot of action?

BM: A lot of action in that place, yes. They had a little casino in there.

RM: I have no recollection of that.

BM: It was a pretty popular place from about 1947, ’48 through ’51 or ’52, when it closed down. It was the place all the young people went. And they had a banquet room that the high school and all the sports teams held their banquets in. There are a lot of really great pictures of

it in the historical society files from the Erma Reischke negative collection. It was around the time she was taking pictures, and she took a lot of them there.

Erma came to a strange end. She married a guy that had an electrical contracting business late in life, probably her 50s. They moved to Vegas, and I don't know what happened to his business, but she wound up a bag lady, pushing her shopping cart up and down the street. I heard this from four or five people who had run into her around Main Street in Vegas.

RM: That is really a sad story.

BM: Yes, it's strange how these things happen.

CHAPTER TEN

BM: Back to the tour. Beyond the newspaper office was the Tonopah Reno Stage Line, a bus station. From there almost to the corner of Main and Oddie is where the Cavanaughs mucked everything out and put in their Main Street Service Station, which is now Giggle Springs, although they didn't go clear to the corner. There were ruins of a burned rock building on the last lot where Sipes put in a service station in the mid-'50s. And damned if it didn't, about three years later, catch on fire and burn. There were nothing but ruins there again for a long time. Finally, Cavanaugh bought that lot and leveled it off the rest of the way to the corner and expanded Main Street Service. Eventually Main Street Service folded up, and Fred Wilson converted it to a body shop. This was after he had his place down in the old Progress Bakery building.

Then you come to Oddie Avenue, and, across it, on the northwest corner, Frank Murnane had the Shell service station. Next was a 76 station, which Tom McCullough ran for a while. Hank Kniefel had it later. Tom Kniefel, his son, worked at the Test Site as a mechanic. He was probably seven, eight years older than me. He passed away not too long ago. He lived in Belmont after he retired.

Beyond it on the corner was Campbell and Kelly Chevrolet. And then, of course, the Mizpah Garage. Beyond the Mizpah Garage was the old Del Papa Store, where Mrs. Del Papa lived. She was a teacher in Tonopah for years, and her father-in-law ran the store years before. She actually lived in a house on the hill above the store. The store was a dugout; the front half of it was the store, and the back half was dug into the side of the hill.

When the highway and Main Street were widened, it knocked off the front of the Mizpah Garage, and it also knocked off the front of Del Papa's old place; you can see where they put a new front on it. That eliminated most of the building that wasn't dug into the hillside. There was a tunnel that led down from the house into the back of the store.

RM: So they could just, from their house, take the tunnel down to the store. How cool.

BM: Yes.

RM: Bambi had Mrs. Del Papa as a teacher.

BM: Oh, yes, so did Billy; so did I. Every time she'd see Billy getting in trouble, she'd say, "Don't give me any crap. I had your dad in school!" [Laughs] She taught probably four generations of kids, maybe more—a lot of kids.

And then beyond that was the railroad depot.

RM: Now, about the railroad depot: it was a coal yard in the '50s, wasn't it?

BM: No, the coal yard was downhill. It was the National Coal Company and it was owned by a man named Brown. He was killed in an accident around 1950 and his widow, Gladys, sold out to Clair Dahlquist. Dad worked for Brownie until he was killed. Gladys Brown worked for years at the Corner Store; she was the lady behind the soda fountain.

RM: I wanted to ask you about the bank. It was the Valley Bank, and now it's the Bank Restaurant or something.

BM: It was build during the MX speculation. The MX thing was similar to the Yucca Mountain project.

RM: Yes, it was very similar to Yucca Mountain in a lot of ways.

BM: It was one of these "political" things that never did go. Anyway, Scott put that bank in. But it wasn't there at first; it was up the street. After the depot burned, they built the bank.

RM: Okay, the depot was where the bank was.

BM: Yes, where that Banc Saloon is now.

RM: And next, then, was where you could get the coal?

BM: Yes, that was right down the street. There was kind of a hump there. And now there's an abandoned gas station there. In the '60s, '70s, Bob Murley ran it for a while. George Robertson, Jr., had it in the '80s and '90s. It went through a bunch of different people. It was one of those cut-rate gas stations.

RM: Yes, my dad even worked there for a time. Now, do you remember a guy named Art Trickey that lived at the coal place? This would have been in the '50s.

BM: I remember Art Trickey, but I don't remember him living there. He was a little, short guy? Yes, he was an old miner.

RM: He was related to Pete Peterson's wife.

BM: Lorena Peterson—he was married to her. Pete was her brother. She was a bareback rider—rode in the Wild West shows—and was a sharpshooter. She and Pete Peterson both were in the Wild West shows.

RM: And they had the M&M Mine.

BM: A cinnabar mine. But I don't remember Art Trickey living down there. He could have, maybe, after Dahlquist let the place go, but I don't remember that.

Then the road goes up the hill to the Shell Oil bulk plant. If you continued down the highway you would have come to a small building where there's a little strip mall and a car wash now. That was where the Department of Transportation driver's license office and the motor carrier office were. There was nothing on down from there. As you crossed the street to come back up, the first thing you would have seen in the '70s was Rich and Jane Logan's liquor

store. They were open from the early ’60s through the ’80s. It was similar to the “quick stops” we have today, but with no gas pumps.

RM: Yes, right, and now it’s like a skeleton thing there.

BM: Yes. Some guy was going to build a casino there. It was the typical “Tonopah dream” that you hear all the time. That’s all he ever got done.

RM: Just tearing part of that down.

BM: He didn’t tear anything down. Rich’s was gone by the time he started his project; that’s all he got up. It backed up to the old cemetery. I don’t know how you could put anything in there anyway because there’s not much room. And then coming back up that street is the Clown Motel and what was then a gas station.

RM: Now, what was at the site of the Clown before Perchetti built it?

BM: Nothing. It was open. But beyond it, coming up on the corner, was the gas station. It was one of those cut-rate places that went through numerous owners. Behind it was Northern Transportation, later Ringsby Truck Lines. They had their warehouse there and their offices. And across the street they had a house where the manager of the truck line lived. Further up is Rhines’s trailer park on the mine dump of the old Tonopah Extension Mine’s No. 1 shaft. That was across from the Tonopah railroad depot. Les and Dorothy Rhines put it in in the early ‘60s. They started out with a small trailer park next to the old depot.

Across the street on the northwest corner of Main and Knapp was the Tonopah Motel. It has been there for years. All the rooms are different because they hauled in small houses and joined them together to make the motel. They called it an auto court in the early days, and at one time each unit had a garage.

RM: That’s an interesting history in itself.

BM: Yes. It’s an old place. And then, of course, they built some new units along the Knapp Avenue side. Now, continuing across Knapp Avenue was the Check Motel. It’s an open lot now. The Check Motel was built in the late ’50s by Harold Long. Harold was the Four Square Gospel preacher, too.

Next was Leroy David’s L&L Motel. The name was derived from his and his wife, Leona’s, names. It started out as a small motel around 1950, and by ’54 he had torn down the Chinese New York Restaurant and Silver State Bar on the corner of Main and Oddie and enlarged the motel to take up the rest of the block. The office of the L&L is where Howard Hughes married Jean Peters.

RM: And that’s gone, isn’t it?

BM: That’s all gone. Okay, then came the Ramona Hotel on the southeast corner of Main and Oddie.

RM: And it was a big, substantial building, wasn't it?

BM: It's a substantial building. But the building on the east side is a frame structure, and was the hotel at Millers. They moved that up from Millers in the '30s. Of course, Millers became a ghost town by then, so they moved the hotel up and it became the Ramona Hotel annex. Lila Fuson and Dick Trueba, her brother-in-law, still own the Ramona. And then there was a little hole-in-the-wall place, the Bank Club. It was a small restaurant and bar that burned out.

Then there was a big block building that burned down in the '80s. For years, Glenn Jones had a jewelry store in there, and the Montana Cafe was there for years and years. It was empty when it burned. The next building was the Pastime Club.

RM: Was that always there in your lifetime?

BM: Yes, it was always there. It went through a variety of owners. When we were in high school it was a good place for us to buy beer because we could park in back. Keith Scott would always run in and pick it up. The Bank Club was a good place to buy beer, too, because they never asked for an ID. Scott looked old enough, anyway.

Beyond the Pastime was Clendenning's store, run by the Clendenning family. It was a department store. She had everything in there, clothing and things like that. And the basement was where the toy department was.

That building's still there. Next to that was Al's barbershop, Tokyo Toni's Coors bar, and another little storefront, Wong's Café, and the Rex Club. This section was destroyed by a fire in, I think, '60. Nick Banovich rebuilt the Rex and the Chinese restaurant. There were a couple of other places rebuilt in there, too.

RM: Oh, so the Rex Club was where Toni's bar was?

BM: Well, no, that section became Wong's Cafe. Nick Banovich was county commissioner when Dad worked for the county road crew and it was an unspoken rule that you cashed your paycheck in Nick's place, especially the single men. I guess he wanted them to spend a few dollars at the bar while they were there—that is, if they liked their job.

RM: Is that right?

BM: Yes, that was the way it was. Things like that are why Dad quit the road crew and eventually went to work for the state highway department as janitor and night watchman.

Next came the Ace Club, Tom McCullough's clothing store, and the Tonopah Club complex, and we are back where we started.

RM: What had been the origin of those buildings that became the Tonopah Club?

BM: The center one was always the Tonopah Club, the original Tonopah Club. The one on the north side, coming up the street, was a clothing store. I've got some checks from it dating from the 1900s. When I was in the fire department, one of the things we did as volunteers was fire-

planning all the commercial buildings, like the Tonopah Club complex. (Oh, Morrell and Hussey had the clothing store.) And when we'd go through the buildings, I loved going through the rafters and attics because we'd find old things that went back to the 1900s; that's when I found the checks. Anyway, that was the clothing store.

And then on the south side was a hardware store of some kind in the early days. Those three became the Tonopah Club. The club, the main section with the gambling hall, was always in the center, but the cafe moved from one side to the other—whenever they had grease fires in the café, they would move it one way or the other. Every time they had a fire in the Tonopah Club kitchen, somebody would joke, "Oh, 10,000 cockroaches killed." [Laughs] They'd move the kitchen to the other side of the complex and open it back up again. They had a nightclub downstairs for a while and a nightclub of sorts on the ground floor known as the Pink Elephant Room. That was there for quite a few years.

When I was with the fire department, we decided we'd fire-plan all these buildings so, in case we had a fire in one of them, we'd have an idea of the layout. We went through all the business buildings in town, and I drew the fire plans. We had a book that we filed them in that we carried in the fire truck. We'd review them floor by floor and mark where the power supplies were, the gas supplies, how to get in and out, and what was on each floor. It was a good thing we did them, because most of those buildings are gone now. We kept the fire plan book, and it's in the museum now. So all the floor plans of those buildings are still around. In addition to the buildings, we also did the bulk plants and gas companies. When we did the Tonopah Club, the Kendall rooms took up the top two stories of the club section.

RM: You could rent a room there?

BM: Oh, yes, they rented rooms upstairs.

RM: Were they selling sex or anything there, up the stairs?

BM: No, no, it was just a hotel.

RM: A lot of them didn't have windows opening to the outside, did they? They opened to the interior?

BM: Yes, on the second story, but the third story had outside windows.

RM: Did most of the multi-story buildings along Main Street have rooms upstairs that they rented?

BM: Some of them were offices. The Belvada was originally an office building. There were still offices in there until the war, when they started converting everything that was available to housing for the guys from the base who had families.

RM: Were they high-ceiling rooms in there?

BM: Yes, they kept the high ceilings.

RM: How big were the units that they made out of those offices?

BM: Oh, they were two-bedroom, one-bedroom; they were pretty good size.

RM: Were they nice?

BM: Yes, they were nice units. A guy that I worked with, John Strong, out at the Mizpah Garage, rented one with his wife, Mary.

RM: We were always living in shacks and everything, and I always thought it would be nice to live in there in those days.

BM: Yes. They started, I think, converting it to rooms a little at a time, probably in the ’30s.

RM: Was it a prestigious address at all?

BM: No, it was just an apartment building. When I was in school it was where a lot of the teachers stayed.

RM: Was there ever a Nob Hill, so to speak, in Tonopah or a neighborhood where the better-off folks lived?

BM: Yes. Everything from Bryan Avenue south to, maybe, Oddie on the side of T Mountain.

RM: Up where your house was, and going clear down to the castle.

BM: Yes, clear down to the castle and over to Bryan Avenue, which is where the old school was—that whole section down through there. There were also nice neighborhoods on the other side of town on Florence and Belmont Avenues. Some of the poorer sections were around the railroad yards and the Midway Gulch area. I can’t really say poorer; I guess you would call them “older.”

A lot of the Mexican and Indian families lived down around the railroad yards and in Midway Gulch, and a lot of the old retired miners lived around the Midway Gulch area. There was always the exception, such as Fabbi’s house and Sorensen’s house, but most were just miners’ cabins.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RM: Do you remember any political radicalism or anything among those old miners? A lot of them were old Wobblies, I think, like Bill Thomas.

BM: Yes, but, you know, that was way before my time.

RM: I just wonder if there was a remnant of it.

BM: I remember one remnant of it. I told you about Mrs. Tanner, who babysat Allen. Well, next to her was an old house. When we were kids, we always thought the old lady that lived there was a witch because of the way she dressed. Her name was Gori. Her husband, Joe, passed away, probably in the '30s. After she died, the house sat there for years. Nobody went around the place. I don't think they had any relatives. So, over a period of time, we got into the sheds and rooted around. Then we got into the house.

Her husband, Joe Gori, was one of the head guys in the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in Tonopah. I found a bunch of Nevada mining stock certificates with his name on them. I've still got a few of them. And I found paper material relating to his being the IWW and WFoM (Western Federation of Miners) representative to a lot of these congresses for the IWW and the WFoM meetings held in Utah and Colorado. I had a few of his IWW ID cards and other things related to the Western Federation of Miners, but all are gone now. He was apparently pretty active in the IWW in Tonopah. He was probably one of the leaders, as far as I can determine. But, you know, being a kid, I had sense enough to pick up some of this stuff, but a lot of it just didn't register.

Then Solan Terrell bought the property, tore the old house down, and threw everything in the dumps. It was all gone. He made a rental trailer lot out of the property. When Mrs. Tanner died, he leveled her place, too.

RM: I was reading Isadore Sara's oral history, which I did with him a long time ago up in Eureka. His dad was good friends with Bill Thomas, and I have a fascination with Bill Thomas. To me, he's kind of the last of the frontier sheriffs. And Sara and Thomas had a meat market in town. What do you know about that?

BM: I know where the meat market was. It was where the A Bar L store is. You can see it in some of the old Tonopah pictures of the street.

RM: So, it was where A Bar L is today?

BM: Yes, in that area. I'm pretty sure that was the one.

RM: How neat. Well, it turns out that Thomas came from Idaho, and he was an IWW up there.

BM: He might have been based in Coeur d'Alene.

RM: He was involved in that business with Big Bill Haywood. I was talking with my brother about it. My brother knows a lot about this. Haywood was framed in a murder up there and wound up going to Russia. My brother said he's one of two Americans buried inside the Kremlin, Big Bill Haywood. But it looks like Bill Thomas was in that IWW action up there in Idaho when that happened.

BM: Yes, and came down to Nevada. I read stories on that IWW massacre up there. That was a big thing for a while.

RM: That was a big deal, yes. So, Bill Thomas wound up down in Tonopah, and he formed a partnership with Isadore Sara. And then he was elected sheriff of Nye County. Then, I think, he ran his next term as a Socialist and lost.

BM: Yes, he did.

RM: The next time he took the "Socialist" label off and won. He won for the next—what—23 elections or something.

BM: Yes, he was sheriff for a long time.

RM: What are your recollections of Thomas?

BM: Oh, I just remember him as the old guy that was the sheriff.

RM: Do you remember what people would say about him or anything like that?

BM: I never heard anybody say anything negative about him.

RM: Yes. Over the years, in my interviewing with people, I heard nothing but really positive comments about him.

BM: Mom knew him from the courthouse, when she worked there. She was a friend of his. If she was still rational, she could probably tell us something. She would talk about him from time to time—"Sheriff Thomas was in today"—and, you know, she liked him. She thought he was a real nice guy. She had a lot of dealings with him when she was working in the auditor and recorder's office.

RM: She's probably one of the last people alive that would really have had some interaction with him.

BM: Yes. Too bad you can't talk to her. Damn, you see all those people get Alzheimer's, and all that is gone.

RM: Well, a lot of it, I think, is still there.

BM: They can't access it.

RM: They can't process it, yes. Bill, you were going to talk about the sheep camps in Tonopah.

BM: Yes. When I was a kid they would be between Divide and Klondike, and I never thought anything of it; I just figured that a certain time of the year, the sheep came. But in later years, when I started wandering around there, it seemed like after about 1950 they didn't come in anymore. I don't know whether it was the weather conditions that changed the grass—their feed for the sheep—or what happened, but they didn't seem to run them in there anymore.

Anyway, when we were kids we could find sites in the hills between Mud Lake, Divide, and Klondike where the sheepherders camped. You could always tell because there was a clear spot. And, although it's probably eroded away by now, there were always lots of sheep manure around—piles here and there. But the main tip-off was the wine bottles. There were always three or four one-gallon wine jugs lying around out in the desert near their campsites. I remember seeing the sheep wagons in the side hills south of Divide when we'd drive from Tonopah to Goldfield. Dad would say, "Oh, there's a sheep camp."

RM: In another discussion, you said that there were remnants of sheep camps in those Tonopah hills—Sawtooth Mountain and Mustang Pass and so on. That had changed from the early days.

BM: Well, I don't know if there were some from the early days. Up on the back of Sawtooth, or Butler Mountain, you could see evidence of sheep camps. They were probably from the '30s. I think if you explored east of Divide today, you could still find the evidence of some of the camps.

RM: And then you had Mrs. Banovich and others keeping goats, having their children herding the goats.

BM: She herded them herself—yelled at them in Serbian.

RM: How could you graze a goat on those hills around Tonopah now?

BM: I don't think you could. She would graze them between Highway 6 and Highway 95 where there were rock outcrops. They tore most of that out when they built the new highway through there in '63. She'd graze them there and in the hills to the east. She'd run them up in the hills in the morning and then run them home at night.

RM: That doesn't seem like it would be too practical now, does it?

BM: Well, I guess you could, if you could find something for them to eat up there.

RM: Weren't there others doing it, too?

BM: I don't know. All I remember was her, because she was so close to our house. And I know Loncars in Goldfield did.

RM: So those sheepherders were drinking wine?

BM: Oh, yes. That's one of the tip-offs. You always see a few gallon wine jugs lying around. I guess they ran the sheep down Ralston Valley and who knows where—over toward Ely, too. I remember when we were kids, we went out to Willow Creek. I have pictures of us in a sheep wagon out there—one of the abandoned sheep wagons was left. It was out in Stone Cabin Valley, almost to Little Fish Lake.

RM: Well, our hypothesis is that the climate has changed a little bit, that we're not getting the moisture down in the Tonopah region.

BM: Yes, and I fully agree with that. People hear you say that, and say, "Well, I don't know if they know what they're talking about." But I know when I was a kid we could sleigh ride on K.C. hill, usually from Thanksgiving through the first of the year and on into January and February. There was always snow, although I know we had warm Thanksgivings and even Christmases sometimes. Usually, the snow was heavy enough and cold enough that it stayed.

RM: Where's K.C. hill?

BM: The south end of Brougher Avenue. They called it K.C. because at one time the large building at the top was the Knights of Columbus lodge. Once the road got snow-packed, it stayed that way. Nobody would use it, because the kids were on it all the time. People just stayed off of it. They never plowed or sanded it.

RM: According to Sara, they grazed their sheep in the summer up north up, in the Toiyabes and the Toquimas and even farther north than that, up into Eureka and Lander County. Then they would move them down to the Tonopah area in the winter, because it was warmer. I never thought of Tonopah as being real warm in the winter, but I guess it was warmer than up north.

BM: It probably was, although Tonopah itself, being up on the north side of the mountain, always seemed to be colder than the surrounding area.

RM: Yes, so we're seeing what looks like . . .

BM: A warming trend and a drying trend. You can tell it's drier, too, because we don't get the summer thunderstorms we used to get. When we were kids, man, we had some great

thunderstorms, and even when Judy and I were first married, in the early ’60s. But they seem to have tapered off a lot since then, especially the cloudbursts.

I was reading an article and, from what I gather, the wetter winters would make the ground wetter, so when the summer came the moisture evaporating from the ground would precipitate the thunderstorms. Then they’d percolate on each other all through summer. You don’t have that anymore, because you don’t have those wet winters. And I actually see that. I can see it from when I was a kid until now. Of course, that has been 50 years.

RM: Yes. When you drive across central Nevada and you look out at the scenery and the sagebrush and everything, does it look drier to you in any given season than it used to? It looks desiccated, sometimes.

BM: It does. Especially north of Tonopah. When you get beyond Millers and go around that corner toward Blair Junction, that is a lot drier across there. It’s weird, because if you get a summer rainstorm, it just turns green instantly. But the bushes aren’t big, they’re little tiny things. Those bushes come right back to life. All the way down through Mina and Hawthorne it’s changed a lot.

RM: And when I drive south to Vegas from Tonopah, it seems like it used to be greener out across there.

BM: I don’t notice it going that way so much, because we never went that way very often. We’d always go north. And I could tell in the last 40 years, it’s a lot drier, not near as green up in that country.

RM: Yes. Do you have any other names on your list there?

BM: Let’s see here: Lambertucci’s. I cover them pretty well in the book. Oh, Mizpah Andy. We never talked about Mizpah Andy. He’s the little old guy that Short at the hotel hired as a kind of town greeter to advertise the Mizpah. He and his wife were both a little bit slow, I guess you’d say. They’d walk up and down the street handing out coupons for free nickels at the Mizpah casino. He had this old prospector outfit on, and his beard, and his burro. They were quite an attraction. I’ve had quite a few people ask me if I we had any pictures of them at the museum. Out of all the photos we have there, we don’t have any of them. Andy was a fixture up and down the street for years.

He had some great mining claims out at Divide. Now, with the exception of the Hasbrock, they didn’t have any ore on them, but they were patents. When they rerouted the highway from the bottom of the Tonopah Summit around Hasbrock Mountain in the ’70s to avoid a lot of the hills and straighten it out, his mining claims lay right where that highway was going. I’m not going to name any names, but a very prominent Tonopah man, a couple of them in fact, had him, as we used to say when we were kids, “railroaded” into the insane asylum so they could get hold of those mining claims and sell the right-of-way to the state highway department. They knew that highway was going to be laid out through there.

RM: But they had Mizpah Andy railroaded? Oh, my God almighty.

BM: They had him declared incompetent so they could get the claims.

RM: And what happened to his wife?

JM: He came back after that.

BM: Yes, he came back. His wife—I don't know what happened to her. I guess she died.

JM: He came back after a few years, after he was in the hospital, and he was . . .

BM: Never the same.

RM: That's horrible. How did he happen to have claims there? Were there any indications of anything out there?

BM: During the Divide silver rush of 1919, they located that whole country out there and patented every inch of it. The Tonopah Divide Mine was a big silver producer and the Hasbrock shipped some good gold and silver ore.

RM: You know, when I go south or north to Tonopah from up 95, I always take the old road.

BM: I do, too. I like the old road. It's getting worse and worse all the time, though. I always think of it as Judy's personal road. She'd stay in Goldfield in the summertimes, and I'd drive over. I'd get off shift at the Mizpah Garage and run home and eat and go to Goldfield. I burned up the road to see my sweetie. [Laughs]

RM: We had a guy working for us out at Reveille, and he drove from Tonopah to Beatty one time in, like, 57 minutes. [Laughs]

BM: That's going. Well, you know, in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, if you had the car that could do it, you could roll.

RM: He had a '51 Chevy with a '55 Chevy engine in it, something like that, and it would really smoke. [Laughs]

BM: Before they went to that 55-mile-an-hour speed limit, if you had a good car you could cruise along at 75, 80.

RM: Your only worry was cows at night.

BM: Yes, cows below Tonopah were a big killer. For years, they wouldn't fence that range, and there were hundreds of accidents. We knew a lot of people that were in wrecks down there.

RM: Did you know Roger Nicely?

BM: Oh, yes, I knew Roger. He was quite a mining promoter. I don't think he put in an honest day's work in his life. His dad, Tom, owned the Belmont Mine for years. He was a real nice guy, too. Roger lived off of his dealings. Roger always had some kind of a mining proposition going, and he was always hiring Pete Jagels to do the location work for him. Roger kept him and a few other guys busy doing location work. It kept Pete going, because Pete didn't want to work too much. He'd work when he had to. And if he wanted to go fishing or something, he'd stop everything and go. He was very independent—real nice guy, very independent. Yes, old Roger was involved in a lot of mining properties around town. He was quite a rounder at the joints, too.

RM: He was. I used to see him up at the Buckeye a lot.

BM: And he always had one of the gals hanging on his arm. He'd take one of them home until she got tired of him, or maybe it was the other way around, and then get himself another one.

RM: When I knew him, he drove a new Chrysler Imperial.

BM: He always had a Chrysler Imperial.

RM: He called it his pimp because it got all his money, he said. [Laughs]

BM: Well, he probably used it as part of his show—looked like the big businessman with it. He was quite a talker. Like I say, I don't think he ever did a day's honest work. But he was a nice guy. You know, if he liked you, he'd do anything for you. I remember he packed up an old Model T Ford cylinder head; it was right before he passed away. He told Philip, "I got some Model T parts I've been saving for you." He was always telling us he had Model T parts. So Philip went down there with him, and he gave him a Model T head and some other old junk that he had around for years and years.

Edward Spurr put out, in 1905, a geology book on Tonopah. Roger always would tell me, "I have the Tonopah and Goldfield books." (There was one on Goldfield by a man named Lawson. Both books are around 500 pages and are great histories of the districts. There are maps, photos, and descriptions of the mines and the underground workings.) He kept telling us, "I'm going to sell you these for the museum." And he would never do it. (Both are rare, especially the Goldfield issue.) Finally, he came up there one day and said, "Here. You want to buy these for the museum? What will you give me for them?"

You know, I felt sorry for him because I knew they were worth 100 bucks apiece, "Oh, I'll give you $200." And now they're in the museum library. We would have never got them

otherwise; those were some of the hardest books to get. I eventually found the Tonopah one for myself on eBay. I'd love to get the Goldfield one, but you can't find them for any price.

The last time I saw Roger he had gone downhill to a Yugo from his Chrysler and he was tethered to a portable oxygen tent. But I have to give him credit—he gave life a good run!

CHAPTER TWELVE

BM: There is one part of Tonopah's history related to the '60s, '70s, '80s and up that I want to talk about that very few people are aware of, and that's the trash-to-treasure aspect of the old dumps. When you drive out Knapp Avenue, it turns into the back road to Silver Peak. It meanders through a bunch of small hills, and you'll be driving through the old town dumps. What happened is around 1903 or '04, they started dumping the trash there. For acres and acres, they just dumped it wherever they wanted—piles here, piles there. They filled up a lot of the washes with trash. And then it sat there for years and years.

As time went on, they started disposing of trash in a regular fashion in different places around Tonopah. They filled old mine shafts and things like that. I would say it was the 1930s before they started actually disposing of it in a little bit better manner so the old dumps were abandoned.

Then in the late 1960s, when what I call the western bottle rush started, people began showing up in Tonopah looking for stuff. They discovered out those old dumps had a lot of good old bottles in them. Jim Butler Days had a lot to do with it, too—people would come to Jim Butler Days and dig bottles. I don't think that people in town realize how much, over the period of years from the '60s through now, that has brought into Tonopah. For instance, during Butler Days, groups would come down and just dig in the old dumps. And they still do today, except it's changed a little.

In those days, for about 10, 15, 20 years there, the people would come to dig the bottles. Not only Butler Days but all holidays, you'd see groups of them come to town, spend money, and camp out there digging. Well, that slowly changed as they went through all the trash and most of the bottles were reclaimed. Then, probably 20 to 30 years ago, people started discovering that if you screened the dumps you could find tokens, coins, and metals, things like that.

That's basically when I started screening them. It came about kind of by accident for me. I was driving around the mountain (Mount Brougher) one day and stopped. I was just walking around, looking at the dumps to see if there were any bottles lying around, which of course there weren't, and I happened to see an ash pile. I scraped around it a little, and I found—I think it was a 1905 50-cent piece. I thought, "Wow, there's got to be something else out here." So I went home and built myself a little screen. Then I went back out and screened the ash pile, and I found two more coins in it. I thought, "Wow, there's thousands of these old trash piles around here where they dumped loads of trash and burned it. And who knows what would be in there." I wore my little screen out right away, because I just used a light mesh.

RM: Was it like a window screen?

BM: Well, it was a little coarser than window screen, probably about quarter-inch mesh. At work they had some old gravel plant screens, so I got one of those and cut it to fit a frame with hinges on it, so I could stand there and shovel the stuff on, sift it, and dump it off. I screened those dumps for, probably, 20-plus years, right up to when I moved to Reno. And I can tell you, I found hundreds and hundreds of tokens from the old ghost towns, from Tonopah, from Goldfield. Coins, dimes, nickels, pennies. Not very many 50-cent pieces. I only found one silver

dollar, and I found one gold coin, a $1 gold piece. But I built a heck of a collection. My collection probably has over 700 Tonopah and Goldfield tokens in it, different ones. And I traded a lot of them, sold a lot of them.

What I'm trying to say is, not only I was doing this, but other people were coming in and doing the same thing. And they do it to this day, although they've got most of it screened out now. There are places, I know, that you can go and still find things, but I don't think people realize what a benefit it has been to Tonopah.

RM: Bringing people in.

BM: Yes, bringing people in. It's just one of those kinds of things you overlook, you know. I think it's a very important part of Tonopah's history.

RM: Yes, definitely. Were you the first one to screen?

BM: One of the early ones. About 1970. And I'll tell you, I went through a lot of material. There were a couple of washes where the stuff was about three, four feet deep for maybe 70 feet. I started at one end and screened clear through them. You would find places where you wouldn't find anything, but other places there was a lot of stuff.

I got to know some of the other people. There was a couple from Hawthorne, Harold and Georgia Jones, that used to come down all the time. They started about the same time I did. They built a fabulous collection of tokens and coins from out of there.

Luckily, it's one of those places where you could do that because it's not BLM ground. Anybody can go in there and screen it. I never did screen in Goldfield, but others did for quite a few years. It's BLM ground, and now you can't dig or screen there. If they catch you, they run you off, probably even give you a citation now. It's still an attraction in Tonopah. And I'll bet next Butler Days, you can go out and there will be people screening.

RM: Did people find a lot of good bottles?

BM: A lot of bottles, really good bottles, came out of there in the '60s and the '70s. I've got a few Tonopah Drug Company bottles I found. There are Tonopah Drug Company bottles in there, Tonopah soda bottles, and a lot of other different ones. A lot of purple bottles came out of there. In fact, when we were kids, we'd walk through the dumps and pick out the deep purple bottles and break everything else.

RM: One of the things I've wondered is how the trash got buried out there, because people would just throw their trash out.

BM: Well, they probably had a couple of wagons picking up some of the trash. And those guys would dump it off the edge of a wash and start filling the wash up. It just kept getting deeper and deeper and deeper. I don't know where they started dumping it after that, but the trash in those dumps would run through a period of about 20 years, 15 years. And then all of a sudden it cuts off. You can judge by the dates of the coins. And the newer stuff, from the '20s,

’30s—I don’t know what they were doing with that. I know when we were kids they used the old mine shafts around town.

RM: Any particular mines that you know of?

BM: When I was a kid, George Robertson was the garbage man. He had an old Studebaker dump truck and would use an abandoned mine as the dump. When it filled up, they’d cover the shaft and move on to another. I took pictures of each one of those shafts that I know is filled with trash, then I drew a map of them, and I put it in the museum files. That way, if, sometime in the future, some archeologist wants to come along and dig into those shafts, the map is there; they can find them. I think it would be a treasure trove of the trash of the ’40s and ’50s and ’60s.

RM: And it would be stratified by age.

BM: It would be. People would be able, 100, 200, 300 years from now, to get a good idea what life was like in say the ’50s because they’re dry mines. Nothing’s going to change. The only thing you’d have to be careful of is contamination—maybe some poisons or something somebody threw in the trash would get mixed in with it. Who knows, maybe a body even found its way into one of those holes.

RM: But probably even a lot of the paper would still be good.

BM: Oh, yes. In Goldfield a guy from Reno dug out that mine shaft a few years ago that the Goldfield Consolidated Mine Company office had dumped their stuff in, out in Jumbo Town: 100 feet between two levels—hundreds of bottles, cans, paper, everything—just like they threw it in. Excellent stuff. He’s been auctioning and selling a lot of it off. That would be the same thing. It’s just something that I thought had to be mentioned here.

RM: Yes, that’s important. What kind of productivity did you get? On a typical day, when you’d go out and screen, how long would you be out?

BM: I’d spend about two or three hours at a time.

RM: And, on average, what would you get in two or three hours of screening?

BM: Usually a couple of pennies, a couple of coins. I wouldn’t say pennies, because there are a lot of nickels and dimes, too. So, a couple of coins. And maybe one or two tokens, mostly from Tonopah, but from Goldfield and other places, too. When I was in the deep stuff in the washes, I’d get one or two bottles a day, too. I’d take those home, throw them on the shed roof. The ones that turned purple, I kept. And the other ones, I gave away to people.

RM: The ones you dug up were not purple. They hadn’t been exposed to sun.

BM: No, they hadn't been exposed, so what I'd do is lay them on the roof in the back of the house. And the ones that would turn purple started purpling up right away. Within a year or two, they were either pretty nice or . . .

RM: That's about how long it takes?

BM: No, it took about seven, eight years to get them a good purple, if they were going to turn a deep purple. Otherwise, they'd turn a light shade and just stop. It depended how much, I think, manganese they had in the glass. But it was kind of an adventure to dig out there, because you never knew what you were going to find.

I found some really neat stuff, like the old metal hotel key tags, the big ones shaped like stars, that they had so you couldn't put them in your pocket and wander away with them. I think the best thing I found out there is a Manhattan volunteer fire department badge; it's a combination deputy sheriff badge.

RM: Dating from what era?

BM: Oh, 1905, 1906, 1907, maybe. I also found a handful of Tonopah volunteer fire department badges from the same era. I kept a couple of these, an example of each one, and then I traded the rest of them off. But it was an amazing place, just an amazing piece of history out there.

RM: Has it been pretty well stoped out?

BM: I think it's been pretty well stoped, at least the real early sections. Now they've moved over into a couple of washes closer to town, washes where real deep stuff is. But that's all the newer stuff that they've been dumping from the '30s on. There's still a lot of stuff in there. Most people that are digging do pretty well, too, although I never liked it because it was too dusty. Not regular dust, but that burnt ash dust, and I don't think it is healthy to breathe. With that older stuff, all the dust is filtered out. But all in all, it was a very interesting place.

RM: Tell me a little bit about the market for that kind of thing.

BM: Well, there was a pretty good market for a while. For any Nevada token there's a good market, although I notice, from watching eBay, that the market has slipped quite a bit, unless it's a rare or unusual piece. But anything to do with a saloon, that says "saloon" on it, will bring a good price, no matter where it is from. The other tokens, general merchant tokens and the like, have slipped a lot, due probably to this economy we're in now. I think it will eventually right itself, though, because the people who are collecting them now are not the people who are digging them, they are the ones building collections by buying. In the early days, when I was doing it, it was all trading. Nobody sold any of them; we just traded with each other.

RM: When did there become a market for selling?

BM: Well, with eBay.

RM: So eBay created the market?

BM: There was a market before, but it had to be through the coin dealers and so forth, so it was limited. But eBay opened the market up, because they made it nationwide—worldwide. Anybody can look on eBay. So people all over started collecting, not only in Nevada, but elsewhere. The Nevada tokens, due to the mining history and pioneer history, are the ones that are the most desired.

RM: What were some of the saloons that issued tokens? Do you remember their names off the top of your head?

BM: Yes, there was the Bank Saloon in Tonopah. There was Walter Drysdale; he had a saloon. There was the Tiki Saloon, Balken Saloon, Torino Saloon, U&I Saloon. There was Tonopah Club, the Cabinet Saloon. I would say there are ten from Tonopah that have "saloon" on them, and more from Goldfield. There were a lot more from Goldfield because it was a bigger city.

RM: In the Tonopah dump?

BM: In the Tonopah dump, yes.

RM: Did the brothels ever issue tokens?

BM: Yes. The Big Casino had a whole series of them: 1 dollar, 50 cents, 25 cents, 5 cents. I put together the whole set.

RM: Was the Big Casino a brothel?

BM: It was a dance hall and a brothel. The dance hall was separate; the brothel was upstairs. The gals that danced—they were the dime-a-dancers, or whatever they were paid for a dance—those gals weren't the hookers. The hookers were the gals that were hustling the drinks. They rented the rooms upstairs.

RM: That's all really good information, Bill. Is there anything else that you think you should mention?

BM: Another thing I wanted to mention about the old dumps is that there were hundreds of old car bodies out there, many of them old roadster and touring car bodies from the '20s era. I guess when a lot of those old cars wore out, they would be taken to the dumps and left to be stripped for parts. Well, in the later years late '60s, an outfit came in with a crane equipped with a big magnet. They went out to the old dumps and sucked up the old car bodies and most

of the tin cans. That's why there aren't a lot of tin cans out there. They crushed them and the car bodies for scrap.

But before that, through the late '50s and early '60s, when I was in school, a lot of the kids were going out and picking up the old roadster and touring car bodies. They were the open cars that had the canvas tops, from, like I said, the '20s. They'd take a regular car, remove the body, and bolt the old body to the chassis. There were a lot of them running around town.

Keith Scott had a '49 Pontiac. We helped him take the body off and we found an old Dodge—I'm pretty sure it was a Dodge—roadster body. And he put it on the Pontiac chassis, making himself one of those hotrods. He wasn't mechanically inclined, so he didn't have it bolted on very well. He figured bailing wire would work just as well as bolts. He and Allen, my younger brother, were riding in it and came into the Mizpah Garage. Scott had had a couple of beers, and he was mad about something—I don't know what. Anyway, they pulled in to the Mizpah Garage and got a couple of dollars worth of gas. I was working there at the time. And he laid rubber down the street. By God, about ten minutes later, the ambulance went racing by.

Scott got down as far as the highway patrol station at the edge of town and ran off the bank. There were a couple of poles on both sides of the highway, iron poles, where they had a car count set up. He hit one of the posts and he went off the left-hand side of the road and into a large ditch in the Extension Mill tailings, and the body flew off the frame and he and Allen flew out of it. They hauled Allen to the hospital in a coma. It was a trauma for me because it was just a few days before I was leaving to go to the university in Reno.

Allen was in a coma for weeks. They even had Mom get the Catholic father to give him his rites, because they were afraid he wasn't going to make it. Well, fortunately, he pulled out of it. He had a few broken bones, and so did Keith. It was just one of those things—the carelessness, or the recklessness, I guess, of the kids in those days. It was tough on me, because I had to load my stuff on the bus while Allen was in the hospital in a coma and go up and register at the university. There was no other way to do it. Mom spent days at the hospital, sitting at his bedside. Then one day he just popped out of it.

The bodies were just stuck on a lot of the cars that were built up that way, wired on and bolted on with a few bolts. It would have been so easy for another kid to do the same thing, maybe even kill himself. After that, the kids kind of slowed down building them. It was the rage for a period of about five years. We had access to so many of those old car bodies. They were everywhere.

RM: And they were probably still in pretty good shape, right? Not that badly rusted or anything.

BM: Oh, yes, they were sitting out in the desert. They were actually in good shape, most of them.

RM: Did the kids paint them up or anything?

BM: Yes. They painted them; painted names on them. I think one of them was named "La Bamba." And some of the kids did real nice work.

RM: I wonder what ever happened to them then.

BM: Oh, I guess over the years they wound up back in the dumps, or up at Bob Campbell's junk yard.

RM: Did they soup up the motors or anything?

BM: Yes, they would make regular hotrods out of them. They were the forerunners of the rods you see today, where people have taken Model T bodies and things like that and made hotrods out of them. There are a lot of them at Hot August Nights, a yearly event in Reno. They were the forerunners of these things, but the guys that have them now put a lot more time and money into them and they all have safety equipment like seat belts. It's a bunch of old guys trying to relive their youth. For us, it was a form of entertainment, just another story related to the old dumps.

RM: I'm glad you mentioned it. How many would you say there were in town?

BM: A dozen.

RM: If a guy had one of those he had a little higher status than a guy who had a regular car, right?

BM: Yes, because it took work to build them, and most of the kids couldn't do it. So, if you had skill enough to make yourself one, you had status. They weren't anything you could drive around in the bad weather, but they were a lot of fun just to zip around the streets in. Phil and I didn't get into building them, though. By that time we were building up Model T Fords and were in a class of our own. No one else, except Ernie Longden, was able to compete with us.

RM: Did the girls like them? Would they prefer to ride with a guy who had one of those versus a regular car?

BM: Not necessarily. There was a "girl problem" in Tonopah anyway, because of the air force bringing in all the guys to man the radar on Mount Brock.

RM: Why don't you say a few words about that, about the radar station up there? I imagine a lot of people wonder what that is and when it began. I remember when one of the graders went off the side there.

BM: They started building it in '55. In fact, it's in the other book, too. The problem between the Tonopah guys and the air force was that they brought in all the single guys, and it diluted the pool of available girls in Tonopah. And a lot of them went on and married air force men.

RM: Do you remember when that grader went off the side?

BM: Yes. I remember all the blasts up there, too—every time they were going to blast—when they were putting that road in. It was really something. Everybody in town would be on hand to watch the blast.

RM: So that they started in ’55. And how long did the radar station last there?

BM: Way up into the ’70s or ’80s. It was supposed to be an early warning system. I don’t know how good it was. It kept those Russians on their toes, I guess. They had them all over the country.

RM: Where did the airmen live?

BM: They had housing. There was a base at the foot of the mountain; the buildings are still there. I think the school district owns it now. That’s where Judy taught preschool. Their little nursery was in one of the old buildings. And the county uses a few of them for storage.

RM: You mentioned the highway patrol station. That’s not there now, is it?

BM: Oh, no, that’s been gone for years.

RM: And where was that?

BM: Right where that little strip mall is when you come into town, the one that Leroy and Perchetti built across from the Clown Motel. They issued the driver’s licenses there, and, I guess, permits for truckers and things like that.

RM: And then later they moved up on the hill.

BM: Yes, years later. They were down there for a long time. They were in a couple of different places around town as time went on, but that was where I remember them starting out.

RM: Well, Bill, thanks for talking with me. You’ve given us a lot of great stories and good information.

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